

## L2 CONFIDENCE DEVELOPMENT OF ELF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TAIWAN

Hanna Panggabean<sup>a</sup>, I-Chung Ke<sup>b</sup>, Alemina Br. Perangin-angin<sup>c</sup>

(<sup>a</sup>hannapanggabean15@gmail.com; <sup>b</sup>ichungke@saturn.yzu.edu.tw; <sup>c</sup>alemina@usu.ac.id)

<sup>a</sup>*Politeknik Unggulan Cipta Mandiri Medan*

*Jalan Bambu I No.102, Durian, Medan, North Sumatera 20235, Indonesia*

<sup>b</sup>*Yuan Ze University*

*No. 135 號, Yuandong Rd, Zhongli District, Taoyuan City, Taiwan 320*

<sup>c</sup>*University of Sumatera Utara*

*Jl. Dr. T. Mansur No. 9, Padang Bulan, Kec. Medan Baru, Medan,  
North Sumatera, 20222, Indonesia*

**Abstract:** Second Language (L2) confidence is considered an affective variable for L2 users to claim ownership of English. However, the findings of previous studies could not be generalized to international students in a non-English-speaking context like Taiwan since English mainly functions as a lingua franca among individuals with diverse first languages. This study investigated three international students' development of L2 confidence while they were studying in Taiwanese universities. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted on personal background, experiences, critical events, and personal evaluation of their L2 confidence. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and then analyzed in thematic narratives. Specific situations that affected this dynamic L2 confidence development were identified and probed deeper. The findings showed that the three participants seemed more confident in an English as Lingua Franca (ELF) community where local students were absent. Native Speaker (NS)-norms still dominated their English journey, and their confidence level greatly hinged on their NS-based proficiency. The ideology of following the NS English model threatened L2 confidence in ELF interactions. Furthermore, the participants' perception of their nonnative speaker (NNS) identity might make them less confident. The findings contribute to the pedagogical implications for L2 learners, users and teachers.

**Keywords:** L2 confidence, English as a lingua franca interactions, intercultural communication, Global Englishes, nonnative speaker identity

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Globalization, along with English as a global language, has impacted the interactions and communication across languages and cultures. Taiwan is no exception, as it promotes English to connect with the international community. Taiwan has invited excellent international students to study in Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D. programs for many decades under a scholarship scheme. It is unavoidable that English is primarily used as a means of communication among students and the wider community.

Most international students are active English users since their arrival and residence in Taiwan, whereas local students still perceive English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, due to the emphasis on 'internationalization' in higher education in Taiwan, local students are likely to be triggered and motivated to activate their English use in the future. Drawing on our own experiences, in interactions between local and international students, those using English as their second language (L2) appeared to exhibit a high level of tolerance when dealing with English that may be broken or influenced by a first language (L1). On the other hand, L2 English users encountered challenges in their interactions with native speakers (NS), including issues related to accents, speaking style, word choices, and a pace of speech, which sometimes complicated their comprehension.

Related studies revealed that L2 English confidence is a dynamic process depending on L2 users' situations (Edwards & Roger, 2015; Rahmah, 2017; Xu, 2011). Xu (2011) pointed out that L2 users perceived increased and decreased L2 confidence in self-nominated interactive events and internal self-image. According to Rahmah (2017), L2 confidence is "shaped under the influence of external factors such as power relation, where they feel that they may not be the legitimate speakers of English." In contrast, Edwards and Roger (2015) argued that L2 confidence development is followed by a willingness to communicate (WTC) as a cyclical interaction. They noted that seeking a 'high risk' communicative context might stimulate L2 confidence development.

However, previous studies focus solely on investigating L2 English confidence from the participants' lived experience in English-speaking countries such as Australia and America. Meanwhile, English is mainly used in Taiwan by people who cannot speak Chinese and do not share the same native language; in other words, English is used as a lingua franca (ELF) in Taiwan (Fukui & Yashima, 2021). More than recent findings are needed to explain L2 English confidence in ELF contexts like Taiwan. L2 English confidence plays an integral part in L2 users' English journey since it is a predictor of gaining success in communicative competence and involvement in the L2 community. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its aim to investigate three international students by focusing on the students from Asian countries who treat English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a model in the learning process. The study compares the participants' language journey before and after studying and living in Taiwan to determine their L2 English confidence in an ELF context.

To explore the process of gaining L2 English confidence, the following questions guides the researchers in analyzing the experience data.

- R1: How does L2 confidence develop while international students as ELF users study in Taiwan?
- R2: How do they perceive themselves in terms of linguistic identities when they encounter different situations?
- R3: How does the participants' L2 confidence relate to their linguistic identities and language use in ELF settings?

This study explores the factors determining L2 confidence when the participants interact with locals and foreigners in English, their perceptions of their linguistic identity when using

English in different situations, and how they develop their relationship with English through various communicative events. Furthermore, this study also examines the impact of the participants' perceived linguistic identities on their L2 confidence trajectories.

### **L2 Confidence and ELF**

L2 confidence issues have been discussed implicitly for years, among other affective factors. Generally, it is considered a key predictor in determining the achievement of L2 proficiency. For most situations, L2 confidence demonstrates positive results through contact and possible self-construction (Sampasivam & Clément, 2014). L2 confidence is also developed when people define English, invest interests and concerns in English use, and conceptualize English conceptions (Norton & Gao, 2008).

Furthermore, L2 confidence is a part of a psychological process which is reflected from evaluating a high rating of one's ability, having a high self-appreciation toward self in terms of English communication and willingness to communicate. Other than that, having an active English learning attitude, real interactions with foreigners, and an ability to speak English accurately and understand English conversation also play important roles as basic components in developing L2 confidence (Sampasivam & Clément, 2014; Wu, 2017; Xu, 2011). Xu (2011) defines L2 confidence as a social phenomenon of L2 learning as an individually dynamic, continuing, and accumulative investment process. Additionally, L2 confidence is a better predictor for socio-cultural and academic adaptation which assists international students to gain successful intercultural communication competence (Yu & Shen, 2012).

The previous studies have defined L2 confidence specifically that it could develop across time and space during the learning process, revealing that L2 confidence helps improve language proficiency and communicative competence. L2 confidence also develops through three integrative model dimensions: richness, self-involvement, and cultural depths. In Hetrovicz's (2021) study, NS-L2 learners' interaction could stimulate L2 confidence when their richness and self-involvement were high. However, it turned out to be different with Heritage Language (HL) learners who were graded to receive lower richness yet higher in self-involvement. The role of the interlocutor indeed affected the capacity to train the target language and reflect on their self-perceived ability.

Other than that, L2 confidence could be obtained if L2 users have a growth mindset because its learning orientation is to see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and expand (Ozdemir & Papi, 2022). However, it should be supported by the environment since some situations reported that interacting with native English speakers made them feel under pressure (Rahmah, 2017; Xu, 2011). Thus, the issue of L2 confidence needed to be given a great deal of attention for L2 users to develop L2 confidence in their English usage. However, prior studies mostly focused on the participants who studied or lived in English-speaking countries oriented to the NS norms in English usage. Therefore, this study might result in different ways on L2 users who engaged in ELF practices in Taiwan.

Historically, ELF was not the first term used in applied linguistics studies. Jenkins (1996) introduced ELF term in the mid-1990s as the alternative to English as an international language (EIL). ELF refers to situations in which speakers with a different first language use English as a

choice to mediate communication and it occurred as a consequence of globalization (Seidlhofer, 2005).

ELF prioritizes meaning over form. In ELF interactions, L2 users could negotiate meaning to avoid miscommunication and re-establish understanding (Kaur, 2011). ELF users provided some cooperative strategies to support each other. Kalocsai (2011) stated that ELF speakers “involves repetitions, paraphrase, confirmation and clarification practices, and the use of multilingual repertoires” (p. 115) as a part of the meaning-making and communicating process. Tolerance of errors they might encounter in communication assisted L2 users in learning from the other interlocutor to amend the lack of understanding and for the continuity of communication.

In studying L2 users’ beliefs about how L2 learners learned to be ELF users, Ke and Cahyani (2014) showed that NNS students (Taiwanese and Indonesian) were aware that NS-standard grammar forms and norms were not substantial in intercultural communication. Besides, they prioritized intelligibility over accuracy. All this evidence might occur because they were not driven to be native-like. ELF settings reinforced L2 users’ identity of being international and assisted them in not perceiving English as one monolithic unity, but merely distinguished by the variety of Englishes (Lazaretnaya, 2012). As Fiedler (2011) claimed, ELF was not only a language of communication but also a language of identification. L1 native culture could help ELF users to express themselves more creatively and innovatively in a confident way. In this notion, they could deliver their L1 cultural-specific content and L1 grammar features such as accent, special idioms, metaphors, terms, and expressions in communication.

Moreover, English as Medium Instruction (EMI) curriculum in higher education seems to facilitate the increase of L2 confidence through existing affordances, perceived affordances, affordance engagement, and agency (Kim et al., 2022). Martin-Rubió and Cots (2018) also supported that the combination ELF environment and Danish-specific lecturing method significantly improved L2 confidence. The lecturers allowed the Spanish international students to participate actively and informally during discussions. It made them realize their English use improved and contributed to meaningful activities. Most importantly, language use in the ELF setting helped to develop L2 users’ identity by seeing their “nonnativeness” as an advantage, equal to “native” usage, and claiming the liberating and empowering experience. Once they perceived nonnative English identity positively, their L2 confidence would increase and develop (Seilhamer, 2015; Sung, 2020).

On the other hand, L2 confidence was acknowledged as the source of control over linguistic knowledge when having an intercultural community in ELF setting. This study noted that maintaining English variation was an intention to depart from ENL English norm and led them to create inclusive space in ELF community (Lee & Kim, 2020). Furthermore, ELF context applied in ELT setting influenced Thai students' perceived L2 confidence and English fluency. They concluded that associating English with native speaker norms was impractical because every person could represent their national identity and culture (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021).

Prior research exposed that most L2 users who studied in an English-speaking country found it difficult to speak English confidently, so they remained quiet. The pressure increased when they could not engage in the conversation naturally. They felt inferior toward the English

as a native language (ENL) community because they did not have a sense that nonnative speakers could claim the same position as a legitimate speaker of English. Meanwhile, L2 confidence was achieved when they gained voice and power within L2 community which predominantly comprised NNS English speakers, serving as a source of support to their language usage (Edwards & Roger, 2015; Rahmah, 2017; Xu, 2011).

Unlike the prior research, this study investigated L2 confidence in ELF settings. Since many studies revealed that ELF users commonly deployed cooperative strategies (Fiedler, 2011; Kalocsai, 2011; Kaur, 2011; Ke & Cahyani, 2014; Lazaretnaya, 2012; Seilhamer, 2015), negotiated meaning and tended to apply non-standard native form, ELF environments might have both positive and negative influences on the dynamic process of L2 English confidence development.

## **METHOD**

The present study investigated L2 users' experience developing L2 confidence in ELF settings. The study participants' criteria included being an Asian student who uses English as a foreign language in their home country and whose English language level was higher than their Chinese language level which was determined before the interview. They were all international students pursuing Bachelor's and Master's degrees of different majors and were scholarship awardees. The participants selected for the study had lived in Taiwan for at least one year with the consideration that within the timeframe, they might have undergone the process of increased and decreased L2 confidence.

Six ELF students were selected for the study based on maximum variation sampling to capture. They described the heterogeneity of participants' central themes that help document the uniqueness of the great diversity of the data and evaluate a common pattern within the variation of a small sample (Patton, 1990). The participants were three females and three males from Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, Mongolia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Their majors were in Tourism, Business, Industrial Engineering, Applied Linguistics, and Digital Learning and Education.

Due to limited space, we only report findings from three key participants here. Table 1 provides the background information of these three participants.

**Table 1. Key Participants' Background**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Living Duration</b>
Daniel	22	Male	Bachelor	Korea	Tourism	2.5 years
Erin	20	Female	Bachelor	Mongolia	Business	2.5 years
Rini	24	Female	Master	Indonesia	Industrial Engineering	1.5 years

### **Data Collection**

In order to collect information about how L2 confidence developed when the participants lived in Taiwan, how they perceived themselves when they encountered different situations in Taiwan, and how L2 identity and L2 use affected their L2 confidence, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview. The advantages of conducting interviews were that the researchers could present a strong link with the participants and witness the conscious and unconscious forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, including the physical and emotional responses that might contribute to the study (Aurini et al., 2021). Further, it allowed the researchers to elicit additional data if the answer was incomplete, vague, or out of topic and let the participants provide the extended answers in a conversational format (Mackey & Gass, 2021).

For the interview guide, the researchers adapted the interview questions from prior studies conducted by Edwards and Roger (2015), Rahmah (2017), and Xu (2011). The interview inquired about several aspects such as the participants' background and past experiences in their home country, including their hometown, age, English proficiency level, the time duration of learning English, the expectation of studying in Taiwan, and their perception toward their English use. It was then followed by inquiring about critical events in the participants' lives to see the role of interlocutors in interaction and to identify their reaction of feeling anxious, inferior, or confident when communicating with other ELF speakers. Finally, the researchers also inquired about the participants' evaluation of their confidence, such as expectations of their English usage in the future, their position as an English user, and their reflection on their achievement. The interview guide was comprised of 16 questions. Before data collection, the researchers conducted pilot interviews to organize and test the interview questions. The questions were modified if the interview questions were ambiguous and difficult (Chenail, 2011).

The interview was conducted within 1-2 hours separately for each participant. During the interview, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and guaranteed that the participants' privacy and identity would be kept confidential. The interview was conducted in English, except for the interviewee who speaks Indonesian, the first author's native language.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview recordings were transcribed and then analyzed by adopting cross-story narratives. The participants' life stories were constructed to explain their background and experiences chronologically, along with the quotation of the participants' statements. The researchers employed open coding, one technique of grounded theory principle that establishes the concept by labeling the data into conceptual pieces (Böhm, 2004). Therefore, the data was coded by labeling the situations of the participants' confident and unconfident states. The researchers also carefully interpreted their confidence by figuring out their oral communication (paralanguages like intonation, volume and speed, and cultural references) and facial expressions during the interview.

Hence, the researchers interpreted the factors behind the situations through thematic coding and, thus, discussed them further in the participants' stories. Thematic stories were organized to better explain the factors affecting L2 confidence. This type of analysis helped to answer the

research questions. Furthermore, international students had the same opportunity to learn and train their Chinese ability since the universities facilitated them with a one-year Chinese course. In this case, Chinese language is commonly treated as a third language (L3) or an optional language during their stay. Therefore, their confidence in Chinese would not be accounted as the factor to be analyzed (Fukui & Yashima, 2021).

To enhance the credibility of the interpretation of the participants' experiences, the final analysis was returned to the participants as a form of member checking. Member checking is considered an effective validation tool to confirm the researchers' interpretation by allowing the participants to accept or deny the portrayal of their live experience (Candela, 2019). This process was obtained through reflective participant collaboration and repeated confirmations, which helped the author evaluate and avoid the subjectivity of the interpretations (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Motulsky, 2021).

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the result analysis, the interviews conducted in English were quoted verbatim to account for the claim of the narrative data. In the meantime, the contextual translation was applied and quoted to the interview data conducted in Indonesian, involving a standardized approach to avoid distractive accounts of meaning.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

Each participant's story is presented first before discussing their L2 confidence development.

#### ***Daniel's Story***

Daniel, a Korean student studying Tourism in Taiwan, explains that his past English experience in Korea did not prepare him for real-life communication. In the interview, he mentioned that his previous English learning focused on grammar and vocabulary practices. Due to his perceived less usage of English in his home country, Daniel felt unconfident as he declared, "I wasn't really confident to speak out in English...I didn't put any effort to improve English in Korea."

Daniel came to Taiwan to pursue his degree, influenced by his aunt's recommendation. Initially, he struggled to adjust to classroom activities. He felt he needed more communicative competence in academic settings. He stated, "I was worried and I was nervous whenever I did my presentation in front of a lot of people, as a student who even never get a lot of opportunities to practice English before." This perspective led him to feel unconfident, especially when giving presentations. Daniel's experience highlighted the need for improved English communication skills in academic settings.

As Daniel realized that his major required speaking as a core skill, he was motivated to socialize with international students, particularly native speakers (NS) of English. He found that interaction with NS helped him improve his English communication skills and gain L2 confidence as he declared, "I just naturally practice English in this international college with a lot of foreign friends (both NS and NNS). That was learning, that was English lesson for me like

naturally”. Even though he faced difficulties understanding conversation with NS, Daniel could maintain his confidence through gradual improvement as he indicated, “It wasn’t really easy to express detail feelings to the native speakers because I couldn’t really get what they’re talking about. Their English is really fast as native speakers. But, I didn’t lose my confidence because naturally, gradually, improving”. Daniel felt that his difficulties were part of the learning process to improve his understanding of NS-speaking English.

This situation was reinforced when Daniel learned Chinese at Mandarin Learning Centre and felt comfortable making mistakes due to the support of his peers. “I was challenging myself, to improve my English basically, and then, I were mindful for joining this class, learning Chinese, so, I didn’t get shameful even though I made mistake,” he expressed.

However, interactions with NNS with lower English levels inhibited communication and threatened his L2 confidence when interacting with Japanese and Chinese guests as a hotel concierge.

“I just unconsciously, naturally, follow their talking styles, like dealing with native speakers, my English is also following their style, my English while I’m speaking with them, my English is getting better. But, with person who can’t really speak English, I also unconsciously, follow their style, and then, I don’t know what to say, sometimes stuck what to say, I don’t know how to say, how to explain it, like that, so, somehow, sometimes, I’m more confident with dealing with native speakers.”

From the excerpt, Daniel found that he gained confidence in his speaking ability when dealing with NS because he unconsciously followed their talking styles. However, it did not occur when talking with NNS, who needed help with expressing English utterances, requiring him to adjust his English speaking style. Interacting with NS and NNS appeared to affect Daniel’s confidence development in using English as an L2.

Daniel’s journey toward NS English model was influenced by his interactions with international students who speak English as closely as NS. Daniel admired NS’s accent, which might determine a claim of confidence when getting closer to NS’s speaking style.

“Of course I’m influenced by my friends. I think my accent, my pronunciation, the way how, how the way I talk was influenced by my friends, one of my best friends was from close friends, he also from international college from his country, so, his accent is also like a native, so, I was also learning from him and naturally got influenced by him.”

Related to other aspects of using English, Daniel revealed that he felt unconfident with his English grammar when submitting writing assignments. “For grammar, I’m still learning and I’m not really confident,” he expressed. He regarded grammar and accuracy as the aspects of showing the quality of his performance in class and other formal activities, which might hindered him for claiming his confidence in academic settings.

In summary, concerning his L2 confidence, Daniel felt unconfident at first in using English in his home country, Korea, as he perceived his English to be insufficient for communication. However, his confidence began to improve significantly in Taiwan, as he actively engaged with diverse group of English speakers while studying in a Tourism program. Nevertheless, Daniel continued to struggle with confidence when it came to English speaking and writing in academic



contexts, such as during presentations and working on written assignments. He also revealed unconfident feelings towards NNS when interacting with Japanese and Chinese guests as a hotel concierge. In Daniel's evaluation, he stated that his English fell short of NS English standard, implying that he still aspired to achieve a level of English proficiency in line with this model. Daniel's experiences highlighted the importance of continuous improvement in English skills and his perceived need to strengthen his confidence by following NS English model.

### ***Erin's Story***

Erin, a Mongolian student studying Business in Taiwan, developed a connection with English through her hobbies with American classic books, movies, and music. Her admiration for American culture motivated her to learn English through solitary activities, as she declared in the following excerpt.

"I really really want to read books in English. Not just any books. The classic one, specially like all classic one, hmmm, back in 19th centuries you know, watch American movie and I also listen a lot of American music. So, you know like; I think the culture was what a reason."

However, Erin faced difficulties in English communication since her learning strategy was merely by preparation and memorization, making her unconfident of language mistakes, particularly grammatical and pronunciation errors. "I was kinda shy, I felt nervous and uh but, I always try my best you know and I sometimes, I would like to use wrong grammar, or pronounce words er incorrectly", she expressed.

Having finished high school in Mongolia, an American English teacher recommended Erin to take a bachelor's degree in America. However, the scholarship opportunities available then were to study in Taiwan. As Erin believed that America's influence over Taiwan might lead Taiwanese to be used to interacting in English, she applied for the scholarship to study in Taiwan.

After being accepted for a scholarship, Erin initially felt unconfident in her English and expected the university's new environment to represent the NS English model. This led her to feel afraid and worry about her English-speaking performance. In the following excerpt, she emphasized that language mistakes were inappropriate for an English speaker.

"Hmmm, when I first came here I think I felt nervous. Because I wasn't really comfortable with my English skill you know. Like I didn't know how good or how bad I was. I just uh I felt nervous whatever I said the sentence. I would've had to rethink that again what just I say uh said like did I say wrong? Did I pronounce it right? Ya, I would be worried a lot."

Moreover, an idealization of American English as a standardized norm was attached to her expectations of Taiwan education. Since her major was taught in EMI, she expected Taiwanese lecturers to speak English like NS, as indicated in the following excerpt.

"I expected a lot you know like I didn't know much about Taiwan but since I know that every course was being taught in English and then every Prof would be like just like an American [laughing] I don't know. Like they would be speaking language- English fluently."

The situation showed otherwise when she encountered communication issues with local students due to language barriers.

“I would like to use English because of most of them also in English... Bachelor program, so, they uh... like a low average level of English. Some of them had better English and uh you know like::: we would like::: they would understand me. The problem is that they didn't really good at expressing themselves in English so, that's the problem arises.”

The above excerpt indicates that Erin's English interaction with local students was not always as successful as she expected. Therefore, she had little engagement with local students in class and outside the classroom.

Due to the problem, Erin mainly interacted with Mongolian students and other international students. In ELF interactions, she encountered English varieties that were relatively new to her English journey, as shown in the following excerpt.

“I would say that uh... well actually I have few Mongolian friends in here, so, So, I use Mongolian a lot than what I'm expected actually. I mostly spend my time with them rather than other Taiwanese students. So, I use Mongolian a lot... I use English a lot because of my foreign friends, I mean, by foreign friends I mean like not Taiwanese students.”

Erin's attachment to American English was strong before. However, she started to have an increased awareness of English varieties, especially concerning different accents. She said, “Native speakers had their clear accent, and it's easy to understand but, nonnative speakers uh don't do have clear accent. I have to pay close attention to them when I'm speaking to them.”

The English varieties Erin encountered in Taiwan enlightened her understanding as she challenged herself to identify different English accents. She started to accept her language mistakes as she is an Asian and English is not her first language. “To me, it's normal because I know that I'm not as native speakers. I'm normal to make mistake... But, I looked like Asian and it's obvious that my second language... they would just forgive me for my mistake,” she expressed. ELF environment, particularly involving international students, appeared to support Erin's L2 confidence, as her friends did not care about her language mistakes; instead, they merely focused on the meaning delivered in the conversation.

Erin's perspective differed when dealing with local students as she expressed self-dissatisfaction with her language mistakes. This is shown in the following excerpt.

“But, Taiwanese students would like expect me you know. And I'm a foreign student, I have to speak up a lot better than them. And I find it makes uh... hmm... simple mistake. I feel like uh kinda disappointed of myself. I mean, they're trying to... better their English through my help and then, I would feel that I'm not helping them.”

The designation of "international student" compelled Erin to embody the NS English model, given that she predominantly used English, following Chinese, in ELF interactions. This made it challenging for her to break free from NS English learning orientation.

In summary, Erin lacked confidence in her English grammar and pronunciation skills in her home country, primarily because she had limited opportunities to use English there. Her idealization of American English as a standard was linked to her hobbies and admiration for American culture. She held the belief that her NNS English was inadequate for effective communication, which hindered the development of her L2 confidence. Nonetheless, despite making language errors, she started to value the diversity of English and the various accents encountered in Taiwan. However, her attitude toward her NNS English became strained when interacting with local students who frequently categorized international students as NS, placing her confidence in ELF interactions at risk.

### ***Rini's Story***

Rini, an Indonesian engineering student pursuing a master's degree in Industrial Engineering and Management, initially faced challenges with English due to a lack of motivation and limited exposure to the language in Indonesia. She experienced a lack of confidence in her linguistic skills, particularly in terms of grammar and accuracy when communicating in English, as indicated in the following excerpt.

“Actually, I don't feel confident with my English because it was not good and when someone ask me to speak, I translate from Indonesian language to English language, I don't use grammar, so I can't speak accurately. So, I feel I was lack in English.”

Rini decided to study in Taiwan to get a scholarship and learn Chinese, which she believed would help her overcome her language barriers. Despite her initial fear of speaking English, Rini decided to cultivate confidence in her English language skills. She recognized that English was essential for supporting her academic and social life, particularly when interacting with foreigners, as she stated below.

“At first, of course, I didn't feel confident. I was afraid if I don't know what people say. I was afraid, but, I should say something. Because if we don't talk, they won't know what we're thinking about. So, whether you want it or not, I have to speak in English. Even if we feel afraid, don't feel confident, but I should be confident. It's a must”

Furthermore, in Taiwan, Rini had increased opportunities to engage in ELF interactions, even though she encountered occasional misunderstandings and communication challenges. For instance, when she intended to invite her friend to join her for lunch, her message was mistakenly interpreted as offering food, as she asked, "Do you want to eat?" In another instance, while conversing with her Latino friends, she struggled with the correct pronunciation of a word, asking, “What is the title (/titel/ instead of /'tɪdl/)?” It was only with the help of her other friends that she was able to convey the correct pronunciation. Interacting with Latin American and Taiwanese friends gradually helped her improve her English, and she began to view herself as an English user. “For English, I think I am just an English user”, she declared.

During her studies in Taiwan, Rini underwent a change in her perspective regarding the diverse varieties of English. This shift led her to prioritize effective communication and meaning

over adhering strictly to standard forms. She expressed this change by saying, "I don't use any standard to speak English." In the ELF community, she felt at ease because she did not feel pressured to conform to the NS English model. She also did not mind using English that might have been translated from her L1 in her English communication, as she stated, "I enjoyed talking with foreigners as long as we understand what we're saying."

In summary, Rini's limited motivation to practice English in Indonesia led to her lacking confidence in her English skills, primarily because she felt it was not sufficient for effective communication. This made her feel self-conscious about her language mistakes. However, her experience in Taiwan transformed her outlook on English usage and her capacity to utilize her English language skills to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultures. Despite her initial apprehension about speaking English, she has come to recognize the significance of English language in both her academic and social life, ultimately nurturing her confidence in using English in ELF interactions.

## **Discussion**

This section discussed the findings concerning how the participants' L2 confidence developed, how they lived and studied in Taiwan as ELF users, how they perceived themselves in terms of linguistic identity as NNS English speakers, and how they built their relationship with English in ELF environment. Three factors appear to influence the participants' L2 confidence, namely, (1) the need for engagement in L2 community and academic setting, (2) L2 user's ideology of NS model, which is reflected in the participants' perception of their identity when using English, and (3) NNS' perceived identity which affect their journey of developing L2 confidence.

### ***Factors Affecting L2 Confidence in ELF Interactions***

Based on the participants' stories, all participants seemed to develop L2 confidence in complex manners. In particular, Daniel showed a significant development of L2 confidence in speaking English compared to the other two participants. He invested plenty of effort in socializing with others particularly native English speakers. This active engagement helped Daniel to achieve his goal of being 90% native-like, indicating that the closer his English to native speakers, the greater his L2 confidence might be.

It is slightly different with Rini and Erin, who have had less talk and would only initiate a conversation if it was necessary. In this case, Rini's potential for developing L2 confidence is evident in her willingness to take risks, such as inviting someone for lunch using L1-translated language and asking about a song's title with unclear pronunciation. Similarly, Erin displayed a readiness to communicate when she took charge of leading a group discussion with local students, even though miscommunication could occur. Erin's willingness to prepare, share, and express ideas within the group contributed to her rating her English-speaking confidence as "comfortable." Engaging in this activity allowed her to showcase her English proficiency.

The finding was comparable to Edwards and Roger's (2015) study which showed that L2 confidence tends to develop when individuals actively seek control in "high-risk" communicative situations, such as theatrical training for stand-up comedy. Similarly, Daniel

appeared to exert control over his English proficiency by emulating the NS English model, particularly by building strong relationships with mostly American native English-speaking friends. This approach helped him boost his L2 confidence and enhance his English-speaking skills. On the other hand, Rini enjoyed taking risks with her NNS English as a means to foster friendships with her multinational colleagues. Also, Erin showed a sense of responsibility to communicate in academic settings since her English skill was superior to handle tasks in such contexts.

Daniel's finding showed a notably different level of L2 confidence development in ELF settings. He demonstrated a strong willingness to engage in the ELF community because ELF environments foster a supportive English-speaking atmosphere for practical language use. Similarly, Rini experienced an increase in L2 confidence as she actively engaged in English conversations in Taiwan. Among the three participants, she was also the only one not overly concerned about adhering to the NS English model. In her case, she felt that her English skills were adequate for effective communication, despite acknowledging some deficiencies in accuracy and grammar. Her frequent conversations with American Latino friends with an NS-centered ideology motivated her to improve her language ability. On the other hand, Erin, who appeared to be quite concerned about her NNS English variety, found herself in situations that necessitated negotiation and compromise when communicating in ELF settings. These experiences ultimately contributed to the development of her L2 confidence within the ELF community.

The findings of the study supported Kim et al. (2022) who emphasized the significance of social-environmental affordances in shaping the perceived growth of L2 confidence in Hong Kong. These include EMI affordances, multilingual affordances, intercultural communication affordances, and ELF communication practices. Similar to the participants in the study, such affordances facilitated L2 users at Hong Kong University to incorporate their distinctive linguistic and cultural backgrounds into their ELF interactions. These experiences helped them shift their perspective from strictly adhering to the NS English model to adopting a more pluralistic view of English into their communication resources.

### ***Compromising the Belief in NS Norms***

The findings suggest that the participants' English improvement was attributed to their L2 confidence development in ELF settings in Taiwan. ELF settings in Taiwanese universities provide routine English class activities such as presentations, group discussions, written project assignments, reliable internet facilities to study and communicate, and English gatherings on campus. This required the participants to use English frequently in written and spoken communication with diverse communities. This strengthens other ELF studies which found that ELF settings would boost L2 confidence because cooperative strategies, negotiated meaning, and non-standard native form were commonly used in a conversation among ELF users (Fiedler, 2011; Kalocsai, 2011; Kaur, 2011; Ke & Cahyani, 2014; Lazaretnaya, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2005).

Additionally, ELF settings also contributed to the participants' enjoyment and continued enhancement of their L2 confidence. In Rini's case, a cooperative strategy among ELF speakers emerged, creating an environment that allowed for improvement and reduced the likelihood of

miscommunication. However, a central issue that could potentially hinder the development of L2 confidence was identified. Interactions with individuals who had lower-level English proficiency, particularly local people who held higher expectations for international students, especially in terms of representing NS English, had the potential to pose a threat to L2 confidence development.

All participants, except Rini, appeared to follow NS model in their journey of English usage. This ideology likely influences the mindset of many English learners in Asian school settings where American English is established as the standard norm in the English learning process. As noted by He and Zhang (2010), Hodgson (2014), Jodai et al. (2014), Snodin and Young (2015), and Tajeddin et al. (2018), learners in these contexts often find themselves comparing their English proficiency to that of native English speakers and perceiving themselves as inferior to those whose native language is English (ENL speakers), even when they frequently use English in ELF community. In this case, Seilhamer (2015) points out that ownership is important to empower L2 users' position in the L2 community. In accordance with this theory, the participants in the study tend to disavow their ownership of English because they see themselves as NNS who do not have legitimacy over English. This perspective applies to most participants, except for Rini, who prioritized conveying meaning in her English communication rather than strictly adhering to the NS model.

Furthermore, most participants still perceived NS English as the standard level that can determine their position in ELF community, especially in their interactions with local students. It is noted from the participants' stories that miscommunication and language mistakes were key factors that made them more self-conscious with their NNS identity. They tended to view NNS English usage as incorrect, which signaled their linguistic shortcomings, particularly when interacting with local students. From this standpoint, developing L2 confidence appeared challenging. Nevertheless, by actively participating in engagements, interactions, and activities while embracing their English ownership, irrespective of their NNS identity, they could take significant steps toward enhancing their L2 confidence.

Conversely, engaging with international students who offer support and cooperation can strengthen the participants' acceptance of their NNS identity within the given L2 community. Rini, who confidently embraces her NNS identity, demonstrated both courage and motivation to improve her English skills. She viewed her linguistic deficiencies as communication challenges to be overcome. These suggest that ELF settings may have assisted Rini in understanding the practical functions of L2 English in various aspects of English language use.

### ***Accepting NNS Identity as a Legitimate English Speaker***

Daniel, Rini, and Erin experienced the shifting role from being EFL learners in their home country to becoming ELF users in Taiwan. This transition and their intensive engagement in L2 community might contribute a major influence on their orientation in learning and using English. This in turn shaped their perceived linguistic identity. It underscores the idea of their perceived English ability and their role in language use can significantly impact their development of L2 confidence (Norton, 2018).

In this case, Daniel and Erin (except Rini) continued to wonder whether their NNS identity reflected a legitimate English speaker. They were aware that their school system in the home country applied American English in the curriculum with the conventional teaching methods. This method was designed to pass the school examination or English test with restricted English-speaking practices. This might shape especially Daniel and Erin's perspectives to start admiring and following NS English model, except for Rini who did not initially prioritize English yet, and she was aware of her linguistic deficiency.

After living and studying in Taiwan, the participants started to challenge their NNS identity through the various interactions and engagements in ELF community. Interestingly, Rini gained a more stable state of confidence compared to her peers since she had achieved a target language level which is primarily for communication. In this case, Rini successfully earned the ownership of English and accepted her NNS identity as a legitimate English speaker. Meanwhile, Daniel and Erin seemed to renegotiate their NNS identity in certain circumstances, mainly when interacting with NS and local students.

Contact with native English speakers appeared to threaten the participants since they perceived that NS had the power to correct and evaluate the participants' English abilities through the given speech cues, eye contact, gestures, and other meaning-bearing forms. This finding supported Xu (2011) that NNS-NS interaction might lead to having a strong sense of powerlessness of not being a legitimate English speaker since NS naturally had the authority. Interestingly, communication with local students also tended to lead Daniel and Erin to feel unconfident. The label given by the local student seemed to give them pressure in performing English as NS, significantly when they shifted to "simple English". The simplification method of communication was regarded to be an indication of ineffective communication. It thus strengthened their belief to reach the ENL level as a higher hierarchy in English to be naturally and professionally accepted in L2 community.

Meanwhile, accepting NNS identity helped Rini to be flexible and adaptable when approaching communication in ELF interactions because it allowed her to focus on a mutual understanding instead of her language barrier. This finding supported Kim et al. (2022) which suggests that ELF environment promoted inclusive and effective communication. This, in turn, enabled L2 users to boost their L2 confidence, cultivate pragmatic skills for intercultural communication, gain an appreciation for the diversity of English varieties, and adapt successfully within the L2 community. Within the ELF community, Rini was able to portray herself as a competent English speaker because she did not rigidly adhere to NS standard forms but instead prioritized meaningful exchanges that were readily understood. This approach significantly contributed to her development of L2 confidence and facilitated her seamless acceptance within the ELF community.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study reveals that participants' L2 confidence in ELF community is influenced by several factors, including willingness to communicate, the academic environment they find themselves in, and motivation to improve their English proficiency. It delves into issues such as the need for active engagement in ELF community, the inclination to adopt NS norms, and the

perceived NNS identity, all of which can potentially erode the participants' L2 confidence while studying in Taiwan. In the realm of standardized English, NNS English variety are often relegated to a subordinate position. This paradigm tends to hinder individuals like Daniel and Erin from fully embracing themselves as legitimate English speakers. In contrast, Rini stands out as an exception, having confidently claimed ownership of English by embracing her NNS identity. Additionally, language hierarchy also affects L2 confidence, with American English being accorded higher status than Chinese by local peers, which can lead to labeling the participants as English speakers who wield a more valuable form of the language than the local variety. This illusion can engender anxiety among ELF users. Moreover, a mindset geared towards emulating NS-like proficiency tends to impede participants from truly enjoying their English interactions. Miscommunication is often viewed as a linguistic shortcoming, further exacerbating feelings of inadequacy in ELF interactions.

As a result, the study suggests that L2 users should not be preoccupied with their NNS identity during interactions; teachers should design English curricula that promote frequent use and appreciation of diverse English varieties, and present certain pragmatic skills in English communication. The teacher is also suggested to accept the student's language mistakes as a part of the learning process and treat individuals of varying English proficiency levels with equal appreciation. In conclusion, future studies should consider a broader array of factors that influence L2 confidence, including engagement in different settings, levels of English proficiency, cultural backgrounds, and multilingual environments.

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