

## **Communicative language teaching for Thai EFL students and classroom silences in English medium instruction**

**Chatchawan Chaiyasat**

*Ramkhamhaeng University, Thailand*

**Arthit Intakaew**

*Rajapark Institute, Thailand*

The subject of psychological and sociocultural factors influencing English language learning has attracted a great deal of pedagogy researchers' attention. The purpose of this experimental research was to investigate Thai EFL students' silence in the classroom during the pre-and-post implementation of the communicative language teaching approach in an English-medium instruction program in a Thai university context, and to explore the underlying reasons behind this phenomenon. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 53 first-year students at an autonomous public university where English is employed as a medium of instruction. A mixed-methods approach to the collection and analysis of data was employed. The findings suggest that the level of silence shown by the students in the classroom environment after the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach had been implemented, was lower than the level of silence experienced in the class prior to the CLT approach being implemented. The significant reasons regarding the students, the teacher, and the Thai cultural concept behind this decrease in students' silence, and the pedagogical implications of that result, are discussed.

### **Introduction**

The paradigm of English language teaching methodology, now termed the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, has provided an alternative approach to English language pedagogy in the EFL classroom context (Richards, 2006). The reason behind this English language teaching approach might be because the English language is seen as relevant for communicative purposes in business correspondence and interactions in a wide range of occupations and industries, ranging from education, public relations, healthcare, and the hospitality and service-related industry (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Particularly, in non-native English-speaking countries, learners of the English language aim to use English for their career development and a better understanding of communication when dealing with international interlocutors. It is generally acknowledged that the English language plays a crucial role in educational purposes and has become essential in the study experiences of Thai university students to seek knowledge, share ideas, discuss study topics, and create a shared understanding of global cultures and visions.

Administration of Thai university affairs has been overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) since May 2019 when it was formed out of the Ministry of Education's Office of the Higher Education Commission. The 1992-2006 educational policy of the Ministry of Education indicated that English is considered an international language to be taught widely in Thai higher education

institutions to foster communication with foreigners and to gain in-depth knowledge from overseas countries, particularly the countries where English is spoken natively by the majority of the population (Lourdes, Bautista & Gonzalez, 2006). To produce sufficient graduates proficient in English to meet the demands of the workforce, the Office of the Higher Education Commission promulgated in 2011 the educational policy for Thai higher educational institutions, that the English language is a compulsory inclusion in the curriculum of all university programs as a fundamental course in all majors in all Faculties (OHEC, 2011).

The status of the English language in the Thai educational system appears to be a significant factor in gaining international recognition of Thai higher educational institutions. Moreover, increasing the popularity of English or offering international programs that apply English as a medium of instruction in the classroom is likely to be a normative belief among executive committees of all Thai universities in the hope that their universities will achieve better world ranking following this policy and practice (Lao, 2015). Importantly, increasing international programs can be a promotional strategy to gain international student enrolment, and this phenomenon has become a key factor in promoting the educational business of the country in future decades (Adnett, 2010). By following this practice, it can be seen from the implementation of the number of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) and learning agreements signed between Thai universities and international counterparts, that this strategy has trended upward over the past decade (Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Thailand, 2017). OHEC (2011) showed a total of 2,543 MoUs have been signed by Thai universities with overseas higher education institutions.

With this substantial growth in English classroom instruction and international programs, evidenced by the number of MoUs, it is clear that the English language now is an important inclusion in the Thai higher education system. However, the teaching and learning of the English language in Thailand appear to be problematic. The role of instructors and learners, the instruction methods, learning materials, course syllabi, and methods of assessment all are contributing factors to this problematic situation. While the majority of Thai students have been studying the English language from kindergarten up to upper secondary levels, 12 years of compulsory education, it seems that they cannot use English for communicative purposes effectively, particularly in the classroom context in which English is used as a medium of instruction to create mutual communication and classroom discourse between instructors and students.

### **Student reticence and silence in the classroom**

It has been observed that Thai students in English language classes often remain silent and are reticent in their participation, due to many factors such as students' limited vocabulary, physical condition, psychological attributes, the roles of instructors, teaching methods, peers, and classroom atmosphere (Chaiyasat & Intakaew, 2022). Many linguists and pedagogy researchers have argued that the major causes of this phenomenon in EFL classrooms appear to be related to three major dimensions of classroom activity: the students, the teachers, and the traditional culture of particular contexts (Wang, 2019). The

significant factors causing students' silence and reticence in EFL classrooms include students' lack of confidence, individual personality traits, and lack of linguistic competence (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004). Tang et al. (2020) provided a clear definition of silence, indicating that "silence denotes the intentional absence of contribution to on-task classroom discourse" (p. 2) which represents a non-verbal human behaviour. Further, it has been indicated that the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre, 2007) seems to be an overlapping notion of classroom silence. Closely looking at the previous literature, the study of WTC originated within the field of communication studies (Pawlak et al., 2016) and has been further developed from the concept of unwillingness to communicate (Burgoon, 1976) and shyness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). Those students can be considered silent students when they do not actively participate in on-task classroom discourse.

Because the role of students in the classroom setting appears to be strongly related to the perspective of the traditional culture of a particular educational context, the topic of the cultural impact on EFL students' reticence and silence in EFL educational contexts has gained greater attention from scholars in recent years. The ideology and culture of Confucianism, for example, have been considered for their influence on EFL students in the Chinese university context (Liu, 2002; Wang, 2019), and the sensitivity of Japanese cultural norms that influence Japanese EFL students' classroom silence (Banks, 2016; Harumi, 2011; King, 2013). In the Thailand context, there has been a survey-based study on the types of social and cultural influences on university students' silence in English classrooms (Intakaew, 2012). To date, few if any studies that have used the experimental research design to integrate the silence concept with the Thai cultural dimension, and the application of the CLT approach have been conducted, especially in the university context where English is the main language of instruction. To fill this gap, the purpose of this current study was to identify and analyse the levels of silence among Thai EFL students and to explore the effect of the use of the CLT approach on that situation. The study sought to address the following four research questions:

1. What are the differences in the levels of Thai EFL students' silence during the pre-and-post implementation of the communicative language teaching approach?
2. Do demographic backgrounds affect the levels of Thai EFL students' silence?
3. What are the underlying reasons behind the levels of Thai EFL students' silence?
4. What are the attitudes of Thai EFL students towards the communicative language teaching (CLT) classroom?

### **Thai cultural dimension and Thai EFL learners' classroom behaviour**

From an anthropological perspective, Hall (1976) conducted research focusing mainly on different communication patterns from a cross-cultural perspective. Based on his work, direct or indirect communication patterns were always used in the cultural dimension. Hall (1976) distinguished the cultural dimensions that influenced the two communication patterns including low and high-context cultures. To be more specific, low-context culture characterises cultures in which information is communicated in a direct manner in which a more direct and explicit approach to communication is valued. High-context culture,

however, places an emphasis on implicit messages and the context surrounding the communication. Thai, as with almost of Asian societies, heavily relies on high-context communication in which collectivistic, indirect, relationship-oriented, circular, and verbal communication styles are patterned (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede et al., 2010). Interestingly, the high-context culture pattern of the Thai context has influenced Thai people's behaviours as can be seen that almost all Thai students always pay respect to their teachers with the idea that the teaching profession is a highly respected career in Thai society. This idea is in line with Rhein (2013), proposing that "this is often seen within the unusually high level of personal esteem or social deference (referred to as *geng-jai* in the Thai language) given to members near the top of the hierarchy or those who otherwise have the senior status" (p. 43).

### **Implementation of the CLT approach in the Thai EFL classroom context**

Littlewood (2014) claimed that a communicative approach opens up a wider perspective on language. It also should be noted that language for communication cannot be considered only in terms of its structures (grammar and vocabulary), but also focuses on the communicative functions that students can perform when they want to communicate with each other. Therefore, a CLT approach proposes that a teacher should be aware that it is not enough to teach learners how to better understand the structures of the foreign language. Teachers should also teach students using exposure and extensive use of the target language as a means of communication during classroom sessions (Chang, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

As English language teaching methodology affects Thai learners' behaviour, in particular, the CLT approach emphasises changing the role of students from passive learners to being more independent and active learners, while at the same time, the role of teachers has been changed to be as counsellors and facilitators, focusing not only on the language but also on being supportive of learners in their learning process (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Relying on the CLT approach, language structures play a less important role than language functions (how to do things with words). Therefore, teachers should focus mainly on speaking and listening, and preparing activities rather than teaching explicit grammatical rules or form-focused instruction (Littlewood, 2014), or as more explicitly stated by Ellis (2001), form-focused instruction that is "intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (p. 2).

## **Method**

### **Participants and research context**

Our study employed a purposive sampling technique to recruit 53 first-year students from two sections of the intensive English course, who had a score lower than 45 on English admission tests. At the time of data collection, these participants were studying at an autonomous public university in the northernmost province of Thailand using the English language as a medium of instruction for all programs, except nursing and law programs. According to Macaro (2018), English-medium instruction (EMI) is defined as "the use of

the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 19). In this EMI context, translanguaging (García & Li, 2014) has been adopted to some extent to encourage students to use the English language based on their whole linguistic repertoire. Optimising students’ learning of academic subjects through English-medium instruction and supporting the use of the L1 in classes to enhance students’ comprehension and reduce difficulties in classroom interaction, are unique pedagogical approaches for this university.

Exclusion criteria included already having a score on international standardised tests such as IELTS or TOEFL. The participating students in this study majored in various fields such as computer engineering, cosmetic science, nursing, sport science, public health, and management. They were required to study the intensive English course as a prerequisite course before the commencement of their first semester of study. Intensive English is an English remedial course intended to equip all freshers with English skills to cope with English-medium instruction curricula. The course was conducted every day for three weeks, lasting three hours per day. Based on the requirements of the course, students were required to attend at least 80% of the classes to be eligible to take the final examination.

### **Instruments**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection were used in our study. We adopted Intakaew’s (2012) questionnaire as the basis for our survey questionnaire, which was divided into two parts, consisting of (1) the participant’s demographic information, and (2) the survey of students’ behaviours and attitudes in answering questions and speaking to express their ideas and opinions in English intensive classes. The 26-item survey questionnaire was styled as a five-point Likert style scale (namely: strongly disagree=1; disagree=2; neutral=3; agree=4; strongly agree=5; or, where appropriate: never=1; rarely=2; sometimes=3; often=4; always=5). The survey also included semi-structured interview questions with the objective of this instrument being to encourage participants to express their opinions and to freely discuss their attitudes and perceptions regarding their silence in the English classroom. The survey questionnaire was carefully constructed to ensure the reliability and validity of the content, based on the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) procedure. The researchers asked five experts in the fields of educational measurement and evaluation, educational research methodology, and teaching English as a foreign language, to validate the questionnaire. All of the items had an IOC average above 0.5.

Before distributing this questionnaire to the 53 actual participants, the researchers conducted a small-scale trial with 40 students who were not actual participants in the study. It was found that this survey questionnaire had an internal consistency reliability coefficient of Cronbach’s alpha at 0.79, indicating a high level of reliability: values of 0.7 and above are normally considered to be a good level of reliability (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009). For the semi-structured interview questions, the researchers asked English native speakers to check the grammatical structure and the content ambiguity. To ensure full understanding of all questions in the two research instruments, both written in English

and Thai language, as the participants were Thai nationals and the majority of them possessed a low level of English language proficiency. Using the bilingual English-Thai language version avoided any confusion and misunderstanding of the question items and questions in the semi-structured interview questions.

### **Ethical concerns and confidentiality issues**

Before distributing the questionnaire and conducting the interviews, formal approval and permission were obtained from the Dean of the School of Liberal Arts. Approval was gained from the University Research Ethics Committee, and all participants were provided with full information regarding the purpose and intended publication of results, and all provided written and signed informed consent forms. The participants were also advised that they may withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty or any impact on their academic results. All data and personal details gained from demographic backgrounds referring to participants were deleted after analysis; their names and surnames were not revealed and all personal details were kept confidential. Pseudonyms such as R1 (Respondent 1), R2 (Respondent 2), were also given when analysing the qualitative data using direct quotations from participants. Importantly, all data collected from these research instruments were also destroyed within one year after the research team finished writing up the full text of the research.

### **Data collection procedures**

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques were employed in subsequent steps. In the first phase, researchers distributed the survey questionnaire to the 53 participants on the first day of the class. The second phase was the intensive English course based on the syllabus which was taught using the CLT approach. While the goal of this teaching approach is to encourage students to communicate in the English language as much as possible, we introduced English linguistic forms such as grammatical rules of present simple tense and language. The teacher taught the students how to use those language patterns in different functions, emulating real situations.

The topics that were included in the course syllabus and hands-on classroom activities, included scenarios such as asking for help, buying and selling, healthy eating, enjoying your meal, sports, interesting people, family life, a bad day, getting a job, business matters, planning a vacation, traveling abroad, emotions, eating out, making excuses, and buying tickets. These topics were designed to teach students a wide range of vocabulary and expressions for real-life and daily-basis communication through group discussions and role-play activities, consistent with the ideas proposed by Dos Santos (2020) that “the CLT approach is a methodology for discussion and role-play activities” (p. 105). Importantly, it should be noted that the grammar-translation teaching approach was not the main focus of this course, but the CLT approach was applied throughout the courses to encourage students to speak English as much as possible. After the questionnaire that had been distributed on the first day had been analysed, the different levels of silence from each student were classified. Researchers then randomly selected 17 participants from those who had the highest level of silence ( $n = 11$ ), a moderate level of silence ( $n =$

35), and the lowest level of silence ( $n = 7$ ), based on the results of the descriptive statistics, for semi-structured interviews. The randomly selected 17 participants were regarded as adequately representative of all the participants.

Interviews were scheduled at convenient times for the participants, with each interview lasting from 30 to 50 minutes. These semi-structured interviews were constructed to elicit the respondents' ideas regarding the underlying reasons behind their levels of silence in the English language classroom. To ensure the content validity of the data, the interview transcripts were sent back to the respondents for correction and revision. After the courses, in the second phase of the procedure, the same questionnaire was distributed to the 53 participants. The researcher was thus able to assess and compare the levels of silence of each student before and after the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach.

### Data analysis

The pre-and post-course survey questionnaires were analysed quantitatively using IBM *SPSS Statistics Version 20*. Descriptive statistics (mean, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation) were calculated and tabulated and one-way ANOVA was employed to compare the means of the levels of the silence at the two different times, pre-and-post the CLT approach. Qualitative techniques were also applied to the semi-structured interviews. The responses from the qualitative part, which were in Thai, were transcribed and then translated into English. The English translation version was then coded and organised using the qualitative data analysis tool *NVivo 1.0* software program to strengthen the findings gained from the quantitative part. At this stage, the researchers read the text of the qualitative data, line by line multiple times, to extract the relevant information and to identify the recurrent salient units. Finally, the researchers coded and grouped these units into thematic categories, relying on Braun and Clarke's (2006) five steps of the thematic analysis procedure: (1) familiarity with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) defining and naming themes, and; (5) producing the report.

### Findings

The findings of this study were presented in two parts including (1) levels of students' silence in an English classroom divided by their different backgrounds before and after the implementation of the CLT approach and (2) the levels of students' silence before and after the implementation of the CLT approach, were compared. Further, the data from the qualitative part were also analysed to complement the quantitative findings of the study. The factors affecting the students' levels of silence in the intensive English classrooms were highlighted.

As illustrated in Table 1, the levels of students' silence decreased when the CLT approach had been implemented in the intensive English course. Once the CLT approach was implemented in the course, the levels of students' silence declined, now 3 students indicated a high level of silence, 32 students a moderate level of silence, and 18 students a low level of silence.

Table 1: Comparison of the levels of students' silence in intensive English classes

Levels of silence	Pre-CLT implementation			Post-CLT implementation		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
No. students	11	35	7	3	32	18

Note: The sample size for each experiment was the same participants with a total number of 53. The level of silence was categorised according to the descriptive statistics (mean score).

Table 2 indicates that the majority of students demonstrated a moderate level of silence in English classrooms in any demographic. Specifically, students with different groups, genders, fields of study at the university, types of high school, types of previous programs from high school, and types of languages used at high school reported a moderate level of silence in English classrooms.

Table 2: Levels of students' silence according to their different backgrounds before and after CLT implementation

		Pre-treatment of CLT				F (sig.)	Post-treatment of CLT				F (sig.)
		No. (pre)	Mean	S.D.	Levels of silence		No. (post)	Mean	S.D.	Levels of Silence	
Group	Section 34	28	3.14	.51	Moderate	.111	28	2.75	.57	Moderate	.026
	Section 77	25	3.10	.39	Moderate	(.741)	25	2.77	.50	Moderate	(.872)
Gender	Male	17	3.00	.49	Moderate	1.630	17	2.80	.52	Moderate	.105
	Female	36	3.17	.43	Moderate	(.208)	36	2.74	.55	Moderate	(.747)
Bachelor programs	Social sci. and humanities	30	3.10	.46	Moderate	.041	30	2.74	.55	Moderate	.067
	Science	23	3.13	.46	Moderate	(.841)	23	2.78	.53	Moderate	(.797)
School types	Public school in city	25	3.11	.43	Moderate	2.419	25	2.68	.53	Moderate	2.109
	Public school out of city	16	3.21	.50	Moderate	(.061)	16	2.90	.55	Moderate	(.094)
	Private sch.	10	3.00	.29	Moderate		10	2.78	.37	Moderate	
	Educ. opportunity expans. school	1	3.92	0	High		1	3.46	0	Moderate	
	Vocat. school	1	2.19	0	Low		1	1.61	0	Low	
Program types	Science-maths	32	3.13	.45	Moderate	2.553	32	2.77	.52	Moderate	8.635
	Arts-language	17	2.97	.42	Moderate	(.066)	17	2.65	.58	Moderate	(.005)
	Arts-maths	3	3.68	.25	High		3	3.24	.17	Moderate	
	Arts-soc. sci.	1	3.46	0	Moderate		1	2.88	0	Moderate	
Curriculum types	Regular (Thai)	50	3.16	.43	Moderate	7.783	50	2.81	.50	Moderate	1.065
	English/Internat.	3	2.45	.44	Low	(.007)	3	1.93	.34	Low	(.373)



Table 2 shows very small numbers in two of the School types (1 in Educational opportunity expansion school; 1 in Vocational school); also in two of the Program types (3 in Arts-mathematics and 1 in Arts-social sciences); and also one of the two Curriculum types (3 in English/International) also shows very low numbers. These low numbers limit the scope for many "within type" comparisons, but it could be noted that a pre-CLT to post-CLT trend was found across all of the types recorded in our collecting of the demographic data (Table 2).

Tables 3 and 4 compare the silence levels of students before and after receiving the treatment of the CLT approach, using a t-test for the dependent sample group.

Table 3: Comparison of mean scores and standard deviation of students' levels of silence, pre-and-post treatment (N=53)

	Mean	Std. dev.	Std. error mean
Pre- CLT treatment	3.1176	.45455	.06244
Post- CLT treatment	2.7656	.53921	.07407

Table 4: Differences in mean levels of students' silence before and after receiving the treatment

	Diff. in means	Std. dev.	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the diff.		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre- and post-implementation	.3520	.3798	.05217	.24727	.45665	6.746	52	.000

The results indicate that the difference between the means of levels of silence before and after the implementation of the CLT approach (0.3520) was statistically significant ( $t = 6.746, p = .000$ ).

From a close examination of the participants' qualitative data, there are many interesting issues affecting the level of their silence in English classrooms which are worth mentioning to supplement the findings from the analysis of the quantitative data. When asked about respondents' participation in hands-on activities in an English intensive course, almost 70% of student-respondents pointed out that they did not actively participate in in-class activities because of a lack of confidence, the feeling of excitement, limited knowledge of English vocabulary, and fear of giving the wrong answer or speaking English incorrectly. The interview responses indicated that these factors caused them to remain silent when the teacher asks them to voluntarily answer the questions or express some opinions on certain study topics, as revealed in the following excerpts:

I participated in some activities and answered some questions. Due to my limited knowledge of vocabulary, I need some time to understand the content and think about the answer. Sometimes it takes a longer time for me to understand what the teacher just said. (R1)

I rarely participated in activities if the teacher did not call my name. I was too excited and I did not know English vocabulary. (R3)

I participated in activities a little because I do not have the confidence to answer the questions. I was so afraid of giving an answer incorrectly and I sometimes did not know how to order words in English sentences. (R5)

Further, when asked their reasons for remaining silent in the class, the majority of respondents (80%) expressed that the major factors causing their silence in the English language classroom included the teaching techniques, the role of teachers, the roles of classmates, personality characteristics, psychological factors (the fear of losing face, the shyness, lack of confidence), anxiety over being criticised and commented on by peers, limited knowledge of English vocabulary, incorrect use of grammatical structures and sentences. These interview statements from student respondents illustrate these points:

I think I keep silent because I am afraid of making mistakes in terms of grammar. In my opinion, I think this idea came from the teaching and learning of the English language in Thai traditional schools in which Thai teachers of the English language always focus on grammar rules. When I make a mistake, I will feel shy, embarrassed, and seemingly lose my face. (R5)

When I speak some wrong words or use English incorrectly, it seems that classmates stared at me and treated me like an idiot. It makes me feel not confident at all. (R9)

I sometimes do not want to answer questions and express my ideas because my English vocabulary is quite limited. I do not know how to give an opinion in English sentences. (R17)

When asked what types of in-class activities students mostly prefer, 70% of the respondents expressed that they prefer to work in groups. It seems that they understand the tasks or assignments easily when working in a group because all members always help each other and explain some details when they do not understand well. Importantly, group working might help to lessen their levels of anxiety and silence compared to individual work or giving a presentation alone. The views about the preference for activity types in the English language classroom, especially in terms of the benefit of group work, are evident in the following interview extract:

I prefer to work in a group because when I work in a group I have friends to discuss the assigned tasks and help each other. When I do it alone and give a presentation alone, it seems to me that I feel so shy and anxious. (R4)

Asked about taking an intensive English course in which the CLT approach had been implemented, 90% of the respondents opined that they feel relieved from anxiety about learning English. Some respondents also highlighted the way that the teacher asked them questions several times, increasing their confidence to use English for in-front-of-the-class presentations. Interestingly, some respondents indicated that the teacher for this class is a very friendly and approachable person to students. This means that the teacher plays a very important role in creating an enjoyable English language learning atmosphere. This

can cause students to dare to speak more English in the classroom. The following excerpt indicates satisfaction with the CLT classroom.

I think the teacher in this class is so kind and friendly. This makes me feel comfortable speaking English. In my high school experience, some teacher was very serious. This caused me not to dare to speak English or answer questions. I like the relaxing classroom atmosphere and all the classmates are friendly and help each other to learn the lesson or do activities. (R10)

## Discussion

This study explores the levels of silence of Thai EFL students upon commencing at a university where instruction is based mainly upon the English language. The focal point of this study was to examine whether and how such a CLT approach may affect the levels of Thai EFL students' classroom silence and the factors of such Thai EFL students' silence.

The results from the questionnaire indicated that the level of silence of the 53 student-participants decreased after the CLT approach was implemented in an intensive English course. At the end of the intensive course applying the CLT approach, 18 participants had a low level of silence after the implementation of the CLT approach as compared to 7 participants having a low level of silence on the first day of the course. It can be assumed, therefore, that the CLT approach played a significant role in reducing the level of silence of the participating students. This correlation may be because students in an environment using communicative language teaching techniques learn and practise the English language by interacting with their classmates and instructor as much as they can in the classroom. Importantly, the instructor taught the study topics outside the realm of traditional grammar-translation techniques, to enhance students' communication skills in all types of in-class activities where the English language was principally used as a medium of instruction and communication. In so doing, students felt less anxious that the instructor did not intend to correct their grammar at every single error so they tended to speak more English and participated more in the classroom. These overall findings of the study aligned with the study by Cheng (2015), in which English-only instruction was advocated to train students' communicative competence to improve their oral skills and boost effective interaction for learners from preschool education to higher education in Taiwan. Interestingly, Cheng (2015) also pointed out that students had positive learning attitudes and became more active learners after the communicative language teaching techniques had been adopted in the classroom.

Looking at influences from the participating students' demographic backgrounds on their levels of silence, the findings suggested that students who finished high school from the regular program in which the Thai language is principally used as the medium of classroom instruction were likely to have a greater level of silence than students who finished the high schools from English-and-international programs where the English language was mainly used as a medium of instruction. The assumption, therefore, is that students who finished high school from English-and-international programs seemed to have a lot of exposure and so more opportunities to use the English language for

communicative purposes, than their counterparts in predominantly Thai language schools. Because English is used as the medium of instruction for a particular course or for a full program which had the same direction as Schmidt-Unterberger's (2014) conceptualisation of English-medium teaching in higher education, subject experts use teaching methods typical for the discipline in which all lectures, courses, and activities held in English without an explicit language focus. In so doing, English-medium learning students seemed to familiarise themselves with acquisition and mastery of discipline content knowledge through the English language as a medium. So, this might be one of the factors that enables their relatively low level of silence and it seemed that they participated in class by answering questions and discussing study topics in class more actively, compared to Thai-regular program students who had less exposure to English language and less experience in using English for classroom interaction. These findings accord with previous observations implementing communicative language teaching techniques for Thai EFL classrooms, which have shown strong positive results, such as a high level of English-speaking performance, less of the anxiety that leads to being silent, and learners' positive attitudes and satisfaction towards CLT classrooms (Suttanon, 2018). These positive results of the implementation of communicative language teaching techniques in EFL classrooms appeared to be in the same direction as the works carried out in Cheng's (2015) Taiwan EFL context and Yoon's (2004) Korean EFL context, suggesting that CLT has been widely accepted as an effective way of teaching in ESL and EFL contexts.

As regards students' specific views on the underlying reasons behind their levels of silence in the intensive English language classrooms, more than half of respondents agreed in having similar ideas such as the lack of confidence, feeling of excitement, limited knowledge of English vocabulary, and fear of giving the wrong answer or speaking English incorrectly. These findings seem to be consistent with the studies on willingness of Thai EFL students to communicate in English in the classroom, conducted by Pattapong (2015) and Karnchanachari (2019). Causes of students' reluctance to speak English language in the classroom were complex issues that corresponded with individual personality traits, ineffective classroom behaviours such as being shy and being afraid to lose face, a lack of confidence, inadequate linguistic competence, and a fear of negative evaluation from making mistakes.

These findings seemingly affirm Hofstede et al.'s (2010) concepts of high and low power distance cultures. Specifically, Thailand is described as a society with high power distance in which the superior who has power and authority more often makes decisions without the subordinates' participation. People in societies with a high-power distance are more likely to follow a hierarchy where everybody has a specific position and does not require further justification; while at the same time, high-ranking individuals are highly respected by their subordinates. In other words, this high-power distance influences the behaviour of people in that particular society. We can see from the high level of personal esteem or social deference, which is referred to by the term *grewng-jai* in the Thai language, given to those senior-status members at the top of the hierarchy, whatever that hierarchy is, but includes teachers and students (Rhein, 2013).

As we can see, the teaching profession is one of the most highly respected careers in Thai society to which Thai students tended to pay respect. The teacher has the authority to control the class and any questions or criticism raised by students against the teacher's idea are likely to be considered an inappropriate manner and behaviour in the classroom context. In the hierarchical structure of Thai society, the teacher is described as a person of superior status and the student as being of inferior status, which is reflected in the classroom interaction.

Another concern that is worth discussing here is being afraid of losing face. This corroborates the findings in the studies by Karnchanachari (2019) and Pattapong (2015), which revealed that fear of losing face is considered to be one of the main obstacles preventing students from using English in class. Students were afraid of how others might insult them when they used incorrect English grammar and sentence structures, which seemed to relate to the issue of face-saving. These findings also echo Griffiths et al.'s (2014) study on Confucian heritage culture in East Asian countries that have influenced Chinese, Japanese, and Korean learners' behaviours in being afraid of losing face by making mistakes, owing to the concept of collectivism or social harmony.

## **Conclusion and pedagogical implications**

This experimental investigation has contributed to the role of communicative language teaching that facilitates students to be more motivated to learn and speak English in class, especially in contexts where English is the medium of instruction and communication. The findings from this study also shed light on the problems causing students' reluctance to speak English in class. The underlying reasons behind this Thai EFL classroom behaviour, based on the findings from this study, emerged from relevant, contextually-related variables regarding individual, social, cultural, psychological, and emotional aspects, as well as teachers and teaching techniques. It was noticeable that most students had positive attitudes towards communicative language teaching classrooms and such teaching techniques likely decreased their level of silence in the English medium instruction classroom context. As the expected outcome of English language learning is the ability to use English for communicative purposes in an effective way and in various situations, English language instructors should be aware of teaching technique that enhance learners' speaking skills in English class.

It is recommended that the authorities, English language instructors and language program providers in English medium instruction higher education contexts should pay close attention to factors noted in this study causing learners' reluctance to speak English in class. Specifically, as we can see from student respondents' views, inadequate linguistic competence and limited knowledge of English vocabulary might not be the sole factors affecting EFL students' silence, reluctance to participate in all in-class activities, and willingness to speak more English in class, but Thai cultural practice in classroom interaction is likely to lead Thai EFL students to be passive learners who are expected to listen and pay respect to the teacher by paying careful attention to the lesson quietly, not asking too many questions and not directly challenging teachers' ideas in the classroom

with their own views. Facilitating Thai learners of English with an enjoyable classroom atmosphere, meaningful teaching approach and technique, friendly guidance and consultation over learning-related concerns might be the most appropriate classroom teaching practice in the EFL classroom context that teachers of the English language should take into consideration. Our findings directly benefit teachers who may have different teaching techniques than Thai EFL students who are not familiar with using English as a medium of instruction and communication in the classroom context.

## References

- Adnett, N. (2010). The growth of international students and economic development: Friends or foes? *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(5), 625-637.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680931003782827>
- Anderson, J. (2020). 'Buying in' to communicative language teaching: The impact of 'initial' certification courses on the classroom practices of experienced teachers of English. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 14(1), 1-14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2018.1471082>
- Banks, S. (2016). Behind Japanese students' silence in English classrooms. *Accents Asia*, 8(2), 54-75. <http://issues.accentsasia.org/issues/8-2/banks.pdf>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Burgoon, J. K. (1976). The unwillingness-to-communicate scale: Development and validation. *Communication Monographs*, 43(1), 60-69.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757609375916>
- Chaiyasat, C & Intakaew, A. (2022). Why keep silent? Voices from Thai EFL students in an English-medium instruction university. *Asian Englishes*, 25(3), 485-498.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2022.2080426>
- Chang, M. (2011). EFL teachers' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in Taiwanese College. *Asian EFL Journal*, 53, 17-34. <http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/PTA/Volume-53-mc.pdf>
- Cheng, W.-W. (2015). A case study of action research on communicative language teaching. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Mathematics*, 18(6), 705-717.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09720502.2015.1108075>
- Dos Santos, L. M. (2020). The discussion of communicative language teaching approach in language classrooms. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 7(2), 104-109.  
<https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2020.72.104.109>
- Ellis, R. (2001). Introduction: Investigating form-focused instruction. *Language Learning*, 51(S1), 1-46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.2001.tb00013.x>
- García, O. & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9781137385765>
- Griffiths, C., Oxford, R. L., Kawai, Y., Kawai, C, Park, Y. Y., Ma, X., Meng, Y. & Yang, N. (2014). Focus on context: Narratives from East Asia. *System*, 43, 50-63.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.12.013>
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.  
[https://monoskop.org/images/6/60/Hall\\_Edward\\_T\\_Beyond\\_Culture.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/6/60/Hall_Edward_T_Beyond_Culture.pdf)

- Harumi, S. (2011). Classroom silence: Voices from Japanese EFL learners. *ELT Journal*, 65(3), 260-269. <https://doi:10.1093/elt/ccq046>
- Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. J. & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill. [3rd ed.] <https://www.mhprofessional.com/cultures-and-organizations-software-of-the-mind-third-edition-9780071664189-usa>
- Intakaew, A. (2012). *Types and explained variables of university students' silence in English classrooms: A grounded theory building from mixed methods research*. Unpublished masters thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.
- Kaplan, M. R. & Saccuzzo, D. P. (2009). *Psychological testing: Principles applications and issues* (7th ed.). Wadsworth: Engage learning. <https://au.cengage.com/c/psychological-testing-principles-44-applications-44-and-issues-9e-kaplan-saccuzzo/9781337098137/>
- Karnchanachari, S. (2019). An investigation into learners' willingness to communicate in English in the classroom: A study of Thai EFL students in the Thai and international programs. *REFLECTIONS*, 26(2), 83-106. <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/reflections/article/view/241757>
- King, J. (2013). *Silence in the second language classroom*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9781137301482>
- Lao, R. (2015). *A critical study of Thailand's higher education reforms: The culture of borrowing*. London: Routledge Critical Studies in Asian Education. <https://www.routledge.com/A-Critical-Study-of-Thailands-Higher-Education-Reforms-The-culture-of/Lao/p/book/9781138575868>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques & principles in language teaching* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (2014). Communication-oriented language teaching: Where are we now? Where do we go from here? *Language Teaching*, 47, 349-362. <https://doi:10.1017/S0261444812000134>
- Liu, J. (2002). Negotiating silence in American classrooms: Three Chinese cases. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 2(1), 37-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708470208668074>
- Lourdes, M., Bautista, S. & Gonzalez, A. B. (2006). Southeast Asian Englishes. In B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru & C. Nelson (Eds.), *The handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 130-144). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470757598.ch8>
- Macaro, E. (2018). *English medium instruction: Content and language in policy and practice*. Oxford University Press. [https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/linguistics/oxford\\_applied\\_linguistics/9780194403962](https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/linguistics/oxford_applied_linguistics/9780194403962)
- MacIntyre, D. P. (2007). Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(4), 564-576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00623.x>
- McCroskey, J. C. & Richmond, V. P. (1982). Communication apprehension and shyness: Conceptual and operational distinctions. *Central States Speech Journal*, 33(3), 458-468. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510978209388452>

- Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Thailand (2017). *Education in Thailand*.  
[https://www.bic.moe.go.th/images/stories/pdf/EDUCATION\\_IN\\_THAILAND\\_2017.pdf](https://www.bic.moe.go.th/images/stories/pdf/EDUCATION_IN_THAILAND_2017.pdf)
- OHEC (Office of Higher Education Commission) (2011). *Foreign students in Thai higher education in 2010*. Bangkok, Thailand: Office of Higher Education Commission.
- Pattapong, K. (2015). Complex interactions of factors underlying Thai EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English. *PASAA: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning in Thailand*, 49, 105-136.  
<https://www.culi.chula.ac.th/publicationonline/files/article/bbXRuZ33UjMon121749.pdf>
- Pawlak, M., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, A. & Bielak, J. (2016). Investigating the nature of classroom willingness to communicate (WTC): A micro-perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(5), 654-671. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815609615>
- Promtara, N. & Suwanarak, K. (2018). Thai students and teachers' perceptions of learning and teaching English through the communicative language teaching approach. *NIDA Journal of Language and Communication*, 23(33), 23-43.  
<https://repository.nida.ac.th/handle/662723737/5805>
- Rhein, D. (2013). The workplace challenge: Cross-cultural leadership in Thailand. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 41(1), 41-55.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305295693\\_The\\_Workplace\\_Challenge\\_Cross-Cultural\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Thailand](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305295693_The_Workplace_Challenge_Cross-Cultural_Leadership_in_Thailand)
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Singapore: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/Richards-Communicative-Language.pdf>
- Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/approaches-and-methods-in-language-teaching/3036F7DA0057D0681000454A580967FF>
- Schmidt-Unterberger, B. (2018). The English-medium paradigm: A conceptualisation of English-medium teaching in higher education. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(5), 527-539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1491949>
- Suttanon, C. (2018). *An investigation on using activity-based learning to enhance English speaking ability of primary 3 students in a private Bangkok school*. Masters thesis, Thailand Thammasat University. [https://digital.library.tu.ac.th/tu\\_dc/frontend/Info/item/dc:142791](https://digital.library.tu.ac.th/tu_dc/frontend/Info/item/dc:142791)
- Tang, X., Wang, Y. & Wong, D. (2020). Learning to be silent: examining Chinese elementary students' stories about why they do not speak in class. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 33(4), 384-401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1715999>
- Tomlinson, B. & Dat, B. (2004). The contributions of Vietnamese learners of English to ELT methodology. *Language Teaching Research*, 8(2), 199-222.  
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168804lr1400a>
- Wang, M. (2019). Analysis of classroom silence in English class in Chinese universities. *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2(1), 54-64.  
<https://doi:10.25236/AJHSS.040024>
- Yoon, K. (2004). CLT theories and practices in EFL curricula: A case study of Korea. *Asian EFL Journal*, 6(2), 1-16. <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/main-editions-new/clt-theories-and-practices-in-efl-curricula-a-case-study-of-korea/>



### **Appendix A: Nine-item questionnaire of behaviour in English speaking and levels of silence in the English language classroom**

1. I am very weak in English. Therefore, I rarely dare to speak in class.
2. I don't know English expressions well enough. So, I don't want to speak English.
3. I'm not good at English grammar. When speaking, it is not well composed.
4. I couldn't understand the content while the teacher was lecturing. So, I couldn't think of how to answer or speak.
5. I have problems with English pronunciation and accent. Therefore, I don't want to speak English in front of friends and teachers.
6. I always answer the teacher's questions in class.
7. I always ask teachers questions in class.
8. If the teacher has asked a question and I don't have the knowledge to answer it, I won't speak.
9. If I don't understand the teacher's question, I will be quiet and not speak.

### **Appendix B: Seventeen-item questionnaire of the attitudes towards English speaking and levels of silence in the English language classroom**

10. I feel afraid to speak English in class.
11. I feel confident speaking English in class.
12. I feel shy when speaking English in class.
13. I feel nervous when speaking English in class.
14. I feel very afraid of losing face when I have to speak English in class.
15. I feel pressured when I have to speak English in class.
16. I don't want to confront the teacher when I am asked to answer the questions.
17. I feel bored studying English so I don't want to say anything.
18. I prefer to listen carefully to the teacher instead of talking.
19. Sometimes I don't answer or speak because I am listening carefully and thinking about what the teacher is saying.
20. Sometimes I already know the answer but I'd rather my friends answer.
21. Sometimes I already know the answer but I want to listen to my friends' answers first and see if they match mine. It is a way to check answers from friends.
22. I often do other activities that are not related to the English subject I study, such as doing homework for other subjects, reading comic books, reading magazines, etc.
23. I like to talk about general matters with friends during class.
24. I like to sit quietly and then let the teacher teach or lecture continuously.
25. I think not answering the teacher's questions or keeping quiet is the way I pay respect and honour to the teacher.
26. I chose not to speak in the room as a sign of politeness and respect.

### **Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions**

1. How many years have you studied English? Do you like studying English?
2. How do you think about your English studies?
3. What level do you think your English skills are?

4. Please tell us about your experiences participating in English classes. You can share your experiences at the secondary school level or from an intensive English course.
5. How do you prepare for speaking or doing activities in front of an English class that uses communicative English teaching methods?
6. How do you feel when speaking in an English class that uses communicative English teaching methods?
7. What do you think is the important factor that makes you want or not want to participate in discussions or speak in English classes that use communicative English teaching methods?
8. What types of speaking or discussion formats help promote speaking in our classrooms, such as whole-class discussions, group discussions, standing and speaking in pairs, or standing up and answering alone?
9. Do friends, teachers, or the atmosphere of the room have an impact on how you speak or express your opinions in English class?
10. Do you have any tips or good methods that you would like to recommend to friends about speaking English in class?
11. How involved are students in class?
12. Who talks more in class?
13. For the friends in the room who don't often answer or speak, what do you think about them?

**Chatchawan Chaiyasat** is a lecturer at the Institute of International Studies, Ramkhamhaeng University (IIS-RU), Bangkok, Thailand. Also, he is a PhD candidate in Human Resource and Organization Development (International Program) at the Graduate School of Human Resource Development, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok, Thailand. His research interests are discourse analysis, metaphor study, corpus linguistics, English for specific purposes, cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural management, human resource development (HRD), business ethics, leadership, corporate sustainability and responsibility, equality and diversity, training and development, and employee well-being.  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1882-5997>  
Email: [chatchawanchaiyasat@gmail.com](mailto:chatchawanchaiyasat@gmail.com)

**Dr Arthit Intakaew** is currently a lecturer at the Department of International Language Teaching, the Faculty of Education, Silpakorn University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. His research interests are English language teaching, English for specific purposes, language testing and evaluation, research methodology, psychometrics, quantitative and qualitative research, mixed-methods research, passenger ground service, research methodology in airlines business and tourism management, and tourist guides.  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6533-3485>  
Email: [frenchkid390@gmail.com](mailto:frenchkid390@gmail.com)

**Please cite as:** Chaiyasat, C. & Intakaew, A. (2023). Communicative language teaching for Thai EFL students and classroom silences in English medium instruction. *Issues in Educational Research*, 33(4), 1323-1340. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier33/chaiyasat.pdf>