

## What Really Stops the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thai Learners Answering Questions in EFL Classrooms?

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### Abstract

This research aimed at 1) studying students' opinions regarding answering questions in English classrooms, 2) examining students' problems towards answering teachers' questions in English classrooms, and 3) finding out teachers' opinions and strategies used to elicit students' answers. The participants of this study were 346 EFL tertiary students enrolled in English courses of General Education department from all year level and programs in 5 faculties. Four English teachers with over two years of teaching experience in English courses offered by General Education department also volunteered in an interview session. A 5-Likert scale questionnaire and structured interviews were employed to collect data. Data were analyzed by means of mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation (S.D.), and percentage (%). It was found that the overall mean score of students' opinions regarding answering questions in English classrooms was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ). "I like the questions that create a friendly classroom atmosphere." was rated at the highest level ( $\bar{X} = 4.64$ ). Regarding the students' problems with answering teachers' questions in the classroom, the overall mean score was found at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.25$ ). Item 2 "I cannot catch up with the questions and am afraid of giving incorrect answers." possessed the highest mean score of  $\bar{X} = 3.62$ . The results from the interviews revealed that the teachers do not engage with teacher-centered model but promote equal opportunities for the students in classroom interaction.

**Keywords:** *Classroom Silence, Problems in Answering Questions, EFL Classrooms*

### 1. Introduction

Silence in the classroom is a true threat that disrupts learning processes. This silence can block processes of learning and eventually create one's habit that will affect in long-term period (Zhouyuan & Min, 2016; Hanh, 2020). In this paper, silence refers to reticence or a very rare interaction between a teacher and a student especially, in the classroom where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). It is undeniable that questioning and answering questions in EFL classrooms has long been problematic. This not only leads to lost opportunities but also reflects one's ability when English is used as a medium to convey or discuss things in a certain event.

For many decades, scholars had sought to shed the light on this issue of what and why EFL learners keep silent in class and avoid asking and answering questions. The results from previous studies revealed that these obstacles probably arise from two main factors:

Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and differences between Western and Eastern cultures. Tsui (1985, as cited in Akarapisit, 2014) proposed that poor language proficiency and low self-confidence are significant issues of foreign language learning anxiety. Learners are afraid of using incorrect language structures, anxious of giving the wrong answer, and being ridiculed by classmates, causing embarrassment and lessening the courage to answer questions. This is confirmed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in 1986. They defined Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (p. 128). They added that FLA arises from three main sources: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

In addition, teachers’ impatience in waiting for answers, giving insufficient wait-time for them to propose answers, only engaging with traditional teaching methods, giving negative responses, and giving the students unequal opportunities also play a weighty role that can affect learning process and the classroom atmosphere. Some scholars, Grobler and Van der Merwe 1995 and Sottipolanun, 2018, proposed that classroom climate is teachers’ responsibility. To be a professional teacher, it requires to be more open to new things or any changes in order to update teaching methods. The teachers should not occupy their time in the class only to give lectures; any activities such as discussing, or questioning and answering should be involved. Providing the students sufficient time in joining any activities, particularly wait-time in the questioning and answering session is a must for the teachers. Rowe (1972) who invented the concept of “wait-time” claimed that the teachers are required to wait in silence for 3 or more seconds after proposing questions and positive outcomes will happen.

With respect to the differences between Western and Eastern cultures (Cultural Factor), Chaudron and Wu (1988, 1991 as cited in Rongsa-ard, 2003) proposed that students rarely asked questions and voluntarily answered the questions in English classes in Hong Kong because of the customary practices that most eastern children are taught to listen to adults. Such behavior means paying respect and acceptance of an adult's opinion. Petress (2001) found similar cultural reasons for silence among EFL students in China because of their regard for teachers as “authority” and their desire for conformity. Moreover, the culture of ‘humility’ is one of the eastern values that has been cultivated and ingrained in society for a long time. However, such factors for students’ silence have been proposed in the research for many decades.

As we are now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where English is interestingly emphasized and promoted in every level of education and Thai students spend more of their spare time on English learning, do the two factors still influence Thai learners in questioning and answering questions in this era? This is a point in time that classroom interaction between a teacher and a student (particularly questioning and answering questions) is imperative. Interaction between teachers and students in EFL classrooms is a golden opportunity for the students to practice and sharpen their skills in the target language since they are lacking chances to use and hear that language outside the classroom (Rohmah, 2010; Faruji, 2011; Zhou & Chen, 2020). Questioning and answering questions, therefore, is one of the important approaches for teachers to elicit the student’s ideas and attain participation. The

more participation happens, the better classroom climate will embrace as students will learn better when they view the learning climate in a positive or supportive way. To make it possible, Fraser and Treagust (1986) have proposed seven consistent dimensions that can build the tertiary positive classroom climate: 1) *Personalization*: the teachers should provide chances for student-to-teacher interaction and expresses concern for students' welfare; 2) *Involvement*: the teachers need to encourage active student participation in class; 3) *Student cohesiveness*: the students have empathy for one another and help each other; 4) *Satisfaction*: students enjoy and feel belong to the class; 5) *Task orientation*: class activities are clear, supportive, and well-organized; 6) *Innovation*: the teachers employ unique teaching methods, activities, or assignments; and 7) *Individualization*: students are allowed to make decisions and treated differentially based upon their interests and abilities. If these seven principles can actually or interchangeably happen in the classroom, positive interaction between teachers and students will increase. Thus, the students will feel more comfortable to pay attention in any classroom activities, particularly in Q&A process. Once this process works well, it will indeed help learners to build knowledge and understanding, expand their cognitive skills, create constructive debate, inspire students to communicate in real-life settings, and ultimately help foster lifelong learning habits (Ra-Ngubtook, 1999; Astrid et al., 2019).

Despite the obvious benefits of classroom discussion, from the researcher's experience of teaching Basic English courses (English 1, 2, English Conversation, and English for Daily Life) and classroom observations, the researcher found that the teachers have been still confronting with passive classroom, where students do not participate in answering questions in class or show slight responses. This is the case even though the teachers open up opportunities for everyone to participate. In fact, some students often ignore responding to a question by choosing to remain silent though they understand the question and know the answer. Instead, they only roll their eyes and use minimal facial expressions. As a result, the teachers feel frustrated, classroom climate becomes negative, and learning is impaired. In order to address these problems and to bring enthusiasm into the class, the researcher, hence, attempted to investigate what really stops Thai learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century answering questions in EFL classrooms. Teachers' teaching approaches were also examined in this study through interviews in order to find out their opinions and strategies used in the classroom to achieve student's participation as the teachers play a vital role to assist students' learning and to encourage classroom interactions leading to communicative competence (Tharawoot, 2017).

## **2. Research Objectives**

The objectives of the present study were as follows:

- 1) To study students' opinions regarding answering questions in English classrooms
- 2) To examine students' problems towards answering teacher's questions in English classrooms
- 3) To find out teachers' opinions and strategies used to elicit students' answers

### **3. Research Questions**

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the learners' opinions regarding answering questions in EFL classrooms?
- 2) What exactly are the learners' problems in answering questions in EFL classrooms?
- 3) What are the opinions of the teachers as regards teaching strategies and the common ones they particularly use to elicit students' answers?

### **4. Research Methodology**

This qualitative and quantitative research employed a set of questionnaires and structured interview in the data collection. This part of this paper is divided into 4 sections: participants, research instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

#### **4.1 Participants**

A number of 3,202 undergraduate students studying at a public university in the south of Thailand enrolling in English courses offered by General Education department in the first semester of the 2019 academic year from 5 faculties, which are Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Architecture, and Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology, were the population of the study. To determine appropriate sample size, Krejcie & Morgan (1970) method was employed to target the participants. From the total amount of the population which were 3,202 undergraduates, the number is considered in range of 3,500 (N), equivalent to 346 (n) according to the Krejcie & Morgan's table. The participants in this study, therefore, were 346 students who enrolled in English courses of General Education department from all year level and programs in 5 faculties. They were later selected purposively in data collection procedure. In order to obtain 2-way data, the teachers were also required to participate in interview session for their opinions towards asking questions and approaches employed in the classroom. 4 English teachers with teaching experience of at least 2 years in English courses offered by the General Education department volunteered in this study.

#### **4.2 Research instruments**

The research instruments used to collect data were a questionnaire and structured interview. The aims of using the questionnaire were to yield broad results regarding students' opinions of asking questions in the classrooms and their problems that incur the classroom silence. Questionnaire items used in the present study were modified from the previous research by Rongsard (2003) whose study on students' attitudes towards answering questions. The original questionnaire comprised 60 statements, of which 13 items to assess students' opinions of teaching and learning in classroom, and 47 items to measure problems of teacher-student interactions. To create a reliable questionnaire, 8 students who enrolled English courses offered by General Education department were also asked to participate in a focus group interview. Both original questionnaire and results from the focus group interview were then synthesized and utilized to build the questionnaire items according to the research purposes. After the aforementioned stage, the first draft of the questionnaire having 15 items to measure students' opinions on answering teachers' questions and 15 items to find out what makes the students in the 21st century reluctant to

answer questions in the classroom were tried out with 20 similar populations. The participants from both focus group interview and pilot test were omitted in the actual data collection. From the pilot test, only 3 items in students' opinions on answering teachers' questions were discarded due to its redundancy and vagueness. After finishing these procedures, the questionnaire was examined for correctness and content validity by three experts in English language teaching field to rate the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) for confidence. The validity of the questionnaire was found at 0.85. The actual questionnaire distributed in this study consisted of 3 parts: Part 1- basic information about the respondents which includes gender, age, and relevant university department; Part 2- opinions on answering teachers' questions in the classrooms (12 items); and Part 3 - student's problems in answering questions in EFL classrooms (15 items). All indicators both positive and negative statements were provided with five choices of responses: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

Regarding the structured interview which contained 7 open-ended questions, its aims were to seek for the teachers' opinions towards asking the questions and investigating their approaches in encouraging the students to answer the questions. Each question was also determined by the three experts as it suited with the purpose of Research Question 3.

#### 4.3 Data collection procedure

This study was conducted during the first semester of the 2019 academic year. A set of questionnaires was administered to 346 undergraduate students. In this stage, the researcher explained the objectives and instructions in Thai to the students. They were allowed to complete the questionnaire with 30 minutes. To avoid interference, they were not allowed to consult their classmates. The interviews were also undertaken during the first semester of the 2019 academic year. In administering the questionnaire, the researcher sought help from the teachers handling English courses in General Education department such as English Conversation, English 1, English 2, English Writing Skill, and English for Daily Life.

#### 4.4 Data analysis

The data attained from the questionnaires and structured interviews were statistically analyzed according to the research questions formulated (Section 3. Research Questions). To answer Research Questions 1 and 2, mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation (S.D.), and percentage (%) were run to analyze the data which were presented in tabular form.

5-Likert scale was also used to range each item average as the following criteria (Srisaard, 2002).

<b>Level</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
4.51-5.00	Highest
3.51-4.50	High
2.51-3.50	Moderate
1.51-2.50	Low
1.00-1.50	Lowest

Regarding the interviews, it was transcribed and categorized to be fit in the research purpose and the data were then interpreted and analyzed by using content analysis which was presented in a descriptive manner to answer Research Question 3.

## 5. Results and Discussions

As described in Section 2 (Research Objectives), the purposes of this qualitative and quantitative research were 1) to study students' opinions regarding answering questions in English classrooms, 2) to examine students' problems towards answering teachers' questions in English classrooms, and 3) to find out teachers' opinions and strategies used to elicit students' answer. The total results obtained from 2 research methods were statistically analyzed and transcribed which are subsequently reported below.

### 5.1 Basic information of the students

Most of the respondents (51.2%) were female while 48.8% were male. Their ages were between 21-24 years old. 59% of them were studying in 4-year program (weekday program). 51 respondents (14.7%) were from accounting program. For the other programs, their respective percentage were as follows: Hotel program 13.9%, Electrical Engineering 13.3%, Industrial Management 11.8%, Telecommunications Engineering 9.2%, Electronic Engineering 7.8%, Industrial Engineering 7.2%, Production Engineering 6.4%, Food and Nutrition 5.5%, English for International Communication 2.3%, Mechanical Engineering 2.3%, Petroleum Technology 2.0%, Electronic management 1.4%, General Management .9%, Marketing .6%, and Mass Communication Technology 6%.

**Table 1.** Results of Students' Opinions on Answering Questions in the Classrooms

<b>Students' opinions on answering questions in the classrooms</b>	<b>Mean <math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Level</b>
1. I think that answering questions can help classroom activities more interesting.	4.21	.700	High
2. I think that the positive interaction between teachers and students can encourage me to answer questions.	4.40	.696	High
3. I think that a lecturer should focus on giving lectures rather than asking questions.	3.46	1.013	Moderate
4. I like teachers who give extra points when I answer questions.	3.75	.997	High
5. I like warm-up questions.	4.05	.791	High
6. I prefer to ask teachers rather than being asked.	3.56	.965	High
7. I like exam guidance questions.	4.48	.638	High
8. I like questions that help me review lesson key points.	4.49	.678	High
9. I like questions that check my understanding.	4.36	.709	High
10. I like questions that create a friendly classroom atmosphere.	4.64	.632	High
11. I think that asking questions regularly will foster my learning.	4.20	.776	High

<b>Students' opinions on answering questions in the classrooms</b>	<b>Mean <math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Level</b>
12. I think that asking questions can encourage me to practice thinking process.	4.31	.750	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.16</b>	<b>.465</b>	High

Table 1 showed that students' overall opinion on answering questions in the classrooms was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ). Considering each item, it was found that the top five possessing the highest mean score were "I like questions that create a friendly classroom atmosphere." ( $\bar{X} = 4.64$ ), followed by "I like questions that help me review lesson key points." ( $\bar{X} = 4.49$ ), "I like exam guidance questions." ( $\bar{X} = 4.48$ ), "I think that the positive interaction between teachers and students can encourage me to answer questions." ( $\bar{X} = 4.40$ ), and "I like questions that check my understanding." ( $\bar{X} = 4.36$ ). Considering the top three items having the lowest mean score, it revealed that "I think that teachers should focus on giving lectures rather than asking questions" possessed the lowest mean score of 3.46 among all items, followed by "I prefer to ask the teachers rather than being asked." ( $\bar{X} = 3.56$ ), and "I like the teachers who give extra points when I answer questions." ( $\bar{X} = 3.75$ ), respectively. The findings imply that classroom climate is imperative. The atmosphere, mood, and aura of the classroom the students are in can directly affect their mood and reception to the teachers' classroom instructions. If the classroom has a friendly atmosphere, learners will be more open to the teacher. Also, since they do not feel tension, they will have little to no inhibitions in terms of sharing their thoughts and ideas. The students will acquire knowledge when they feel the learning climate positive and supportive, in other words (Dorman, Aldridge & Fraser, 2006). Negative climate, on the other hand, can decrease classroom interaction even though they have ideas or know the answer of that question. Apart from this, types of questions and teacher's questioning are also essential to raise the students' attention (Shanmugavelu et al., 2020). The students will either answer or ignore questions depending on teacher's questioning. If the question is within the students' interest or is a hint for exam guidelines, classroom interaction will significantly increase.

**Table 2.** Results of Student's Problems in Answering Questions in EFL Classrooms

<b>Student's problems in answering questions in EFL classrooms</b>	<b>Mean <math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Level</b>
1. I think that asking questions too often makes me uncomfortable and fearful.	3.28	1.095	Moderate
2. I cannot catch up with the question and am afraid of giving incorrect answers.	3.62	.986	High
3. I am nervous and anxious when answering the questions.	3.55	.998	High
4. I hardly answer questions because I am afraid of committing grammatical errors.	3.60	1.020	High
5. I think I lack knowledge about the content/lesson being reviewed to us by the teachers.	3.40	.995	Moderate
6. I know the answer but I lack confidence to answer it.	3.36	1.013	Moderate

<b>Student's problems in answering questions in EFL classrooms</b>	<b>Mean <math>\bar{X}</math></b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Level</b>
7. I have a problem with English pronunciation which ruins my confidence in answering questions.	3.47	1.104	Moderate
8. I am afraid that the question I ask or answer I give will not satisfy the teacher.	3.06	1.091	Moderate
9. I am afraid of losing my face or being recognized as an unwise person when answering questions incorrectly.	2.92	1.209	Moderate
10. I prefer learning by listening and thinking more than answering questions.	3.29	1.019	Moderate
11. I do not want to be outstanding and/or be considered as a boastful person by my peers.	3.19	1.140	Moderate
12. I have had bad experiences in answering questions, e.g., teachers use negative responses or gestures that ruined my confidence.	2.77	1.209	Moderate
13. I think that some friends enjoy answering questions, so I don't have to answer the questions anymore.	2.84	1.107	Moderate
14. I think that the cultural expressions or behaviors of the Thais affect me in answering questions.	3.45	1.046	Moderate
15. I think that answering questions in English courses is too difficult.	2.91	1.016	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>.733</b>	Moderate

Table 2 showed that the overall result of student's problems in answering a question in EFL classrooms was at a moderate level ( $\bar{X}$ ) = 3.25. Considering each item, it revealed that the top three possessing the highest mean score regarding student's problems were "I cannot catch up with the question and afraid of giving incorrect answers." ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.62), followed by "I hardly answer questions because I am afraid of committing grammatical errors." ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.60), and "I am nervous and anxious when answering the questions". ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.55). Interestingly, "I think that cultural expressions or behaviors of the Thai people affect me in answering questions." ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.45), which has been concerned by Chaudron (1988) as one of the problems, was merely rated at a moderate level. As a result, it indicated that "Foreign Language Learning Anxiety factor" has still been problematic for EFL learners. This is due to they have been lacking chances to expose English outside the classroom or using English for communicative purposes and also their non-proficiency in English. These can increase their anxiety and decrease self-confidence when English is used to discuss things in the classroom (Tsui, 1996 & Petress, 2001), showing that Thai EFL students are still engaged with low confidence and English proficiency when speaking or answering questions without preparation though they have been studying English for ages (Chinpakdee, 2015; Inkaew, 2020). Considering cultural factors, it was just rated at a moderate level as aforementioned. This implies that the barrier for EFL classroom interaction built by cultural factors is smaller. Roongrerngsuke (2020) stated that this is because some Thai values have been slightly changed since education from the West is more open and desired from a new generation of Thais for the past several years. By these opportunities, Thai students nowadays have more sweeping visions, are creative, dare to think out of the box, challenge



the old beliefs that have been proven to be imprecise, and express different opinions from the elders. To conclude from the results, Thai students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still influenced or affected by Foreign Language Learning Anxiety which refers to low English proficiency and lack of confidence when using in English.

#### 5.2 Results of teachers' opinions and strategies employed to elicit students' answers

This part discussed how four English teachers elicit answers from their students and also their opinions towards asking and answering questions.

##### **Question 1: How often do you ask questions in the class?**

*Teacher A:* "Always! Each of the students will have more than one chance to answer a question. I believe that this will help them review the lesson and be more enthusiastic".

*Teacher B:* "I regularly ask questions in the class as it is one of the learning processes".

*Teacher C:* "I ask students questions regarding the lesson all the time especially during input and discussion".

*Teacher D:* "I always ask questions because I think asking and answering questions is vital".

From the findings, it showed that teachers realize the importance of Q&A process in the classroom as one of the strategies that can foster the students' understanding.

##### **Question 2: What kinds of questions do you usually ask: Open-ended or closed-ended questions?**

*Teacher A:* "I usually start with an open-ended question in order to raise the issues that they are going to study so that they can prepare themselves. After that, I use a closed-ended question to go into the details".

*Teacher B:* "I use both. Open-ended is used when I want to get a broad perspective of the students and closed-ended questions are asked when it is directly related to the content of the lesson".

*Teacher C:* "It all depends on the subject. For my course where it is all about discussions, open-ended questions are good to use because it encourages further discussions".

*Teacher D:* "I use both but it depends on the subject".

In this case, the findings showed that they use both types of questions but for different purposes. The questioning strategies being employed are based on the difficulty of the course. Goals or objectives are set aside and the types of questions are selected based on the objectives.

**Question 3: What motivation do you have for your students to answer questions?**

**Teacher A:** *“It starts from the agreement between my students that every class there will be asking and answering question sessions. These help them understand the lesson and become more enthusiastic rather than concerning the extra marks. I also encourage them all the time before and after answering questions by using positive words no matter they give correct or incorrect answers”.*

**Teacher B:** *“I try to guide the students a correct answer to help them expand their ideas and apply to their own answer”.*

**Teacher C:** *“Additional points, bonus, extra marks, etc., all boils down to grades”.*

**Teacher D:** *“I often tell them that it’s graded will get their attention and can encourage them to answer. But not true to all students though”.*

The findings revealed that giving extra marks is still popular among the teachers as one of motivational aspects. Heikkinen and Kukk (2014) claimed that extra marks can motivate the students to learn and gain better results. She also agrees that the students deserve to get some extra marks when answering questions during the lectures.

**Question 4: If your students do not answer the questions or answer them incorrectly, what are your approaches?**

**Teacher A:** *“This rarely happens in my classes because it is the agreement between us. In case of giving an incorrect answer, I always encourage them by using positive responses to reduce their embarrassment”.*

**Teacher B:** *“I solve problems by providing guiding questions to students or changing questions for them to create a better understand of the issues being asked”.*

**Teacher C:** *“It all depends. If it is a graded discussion, for instance in my course where they are needed to give their opinion on certain topics, and after given ample time to research and think through and a student or a group of students refuses to answer or perform the activity, this scenario really disappoints me. So, I make sure that I let them know my feelings and that I will tell them know that I will not hesitate to give them a failing score if they continue doing so. If it is incorrect, I’ll ask a follow-up question or two to help the student”.*

**Teacher D:** *“I give a follow-up question to clarify the previous question”.*

The results from the interview indicated that the teachers have different strategies if students do not answer questions or give incorrect answers. Some may indicate their disappointment at incorrect answers or explain the question again. Some may use a follow-up question and encourage the students when they give incorrect answers. These will depend on the individual teacher’s techniques and methods. Stachowiak (2014) stated that techniques used by the teachers should be varied. It is a must to be calm and gentle if the students do not get the point of the questions or answer it incorrectly. The teachers’ duty is to re-explain the idea or clarify it by giving an example or a follow-up question.

**Question 5: What do you think if your students answer questions by using incorrect grammar?**

*Teacher A:* “If the sentences the students answered can exactly convey meaning as their intent, it’s fine for me. But I might tell them that it is better to adjust some grammar errors by giving them an example of the correct one”.

*Teacher B:* “I’m Ok with it. If I know their ideas whether they understand the lesson, I achieve my goals”.

*Teacher C:* “As long as the grammatical error doesn’t hinder the total meaning of the sentence then, it is acceptable”.

*Teacher D:* “Minimal incorrect grammar that does not impede the meaning of the sentence is acceptable”.

The results showed that grammatical errors during answering question are acceptable if the message is understandable as what the student intended.

**Question 6: How long do you wait for a question to be answered?**

*Teacher A:* “Immediately or no more than 1-2 minutes in case I have already explained the lesson.”

*Teacher B:* “It depends on the types of questions. If it is short closed-ended, the students will have only 1-2 minutes to answer”.

*Teacher C:* “I throw the question first for everyone, then ask for a volunteer, and then call students whom I think have some ideas. If there are students who are not paying attention, I’ll call them first and then reveal the question. In this case though, I don’t expect an answer. My purpose for doing so is to get their attention and to set the mood, and to show everyone that when you’re in my class, you have to pay attention. However, if the student has an answer then well and good”.

*Teacher D:* “I always ask the question first, and wait for any volunteer to give them time to think, after a while if nobody seems to volunteer I’ll start calling names”.

In this case, allowing time to answer questions depends on its difficulty. The amount of time teachers pauses between asking a question is essential. In this study, teachers A and B use similar strategies. They allowed the students more than 1-2 minutes to formulate an answer if that question is difficult. Rowe (1972) & Illinois (2021) proposed that in giving an answer the students need at least three seconds to comprehend a question, consider the available information, formulate an answer, and begin to respond which consume time. Meanwhile, Teachers C & D preferred to wait for the volunteer and gave them time to think.

**Question 7: What do you think if the students answer the questions by producing incorrect English pronunciation?**

*Teacher A:* “Mispronunciation is a common matter. I always give them positive responses and ask them to repeat that word or sentence after me. I do it immediately”.

**Teacher B:** *“I think it is very normal because the students are from different majors”.*

**Teacher C:** *“I think, it’s ok. Native speakers also mispronounced words sometimes. How much more for ESL or EFL. I, however, correct them by repeating the words using the correct pronunciation”.*

**Teacher D:** *“Acceptable! In some cases, where I could make out the word from the context, I’d repeat it to model and show how it should be pronounced. In other cases, where the mispronounced word is totally incomprehensible, I’d give choices of words, and the student could point out which of the words s/he was trying to say”.*

In this case, all teachers agree that mispronunciation can normally happen. From the interviews, the teachers will correct their students by repeating the words with correct pronunciation.

The results from the interviews revealed that the teachers did not stick to the traditional teaching method as one of the methods causing students’ silence. The teachers provided opportunities for the students to ask and answer rather than spending their time only giving lectures which correspond to ‘*Personalization*’, ‘*Involvement*’, and ‘*Task orientation*’, three of the seven principles to create the tertiary positive classroom climate proposed by Fraser and Treagust in 1986. In regards to the teachers’ strategies to elicit students’ answers, types of questions, open-ended and closed-ended questions, which are normally found in the EFL classrooms, were utilized according to the goals of the course and its difficulty. Another strategy to motivate the students, the teachers offer extra marks as a complimentary wishing to attain participation which revealed positive results from the previous study by Heikkinen and Kukk (2014). From the interviews, Teacher A & B allowed the students more than 1-2 minutes to formulate the answer in case they were asked a difficult question which is considered sufficient (Rowe, 1972). Meanwhile, Teacher C & D preferred to wait for the volunteers. In case the students did not answer questions or give incorrect answers, most teachers used follow-up questions to encourage the students and to avoid embarrassing them. Regarding using incorrect grammar and pronunciation while answering questions, the teachers do not view these matters as a big problem. These mistakes can generally happen with EFL learners (Safrida & Kasim, 2016; Ramasari, 2017). To resolve these problems, the teachers in this study used a correct form strategy. The results above obviously indicate that the teachers do not adhere to the teacher-centered model or occupy most of the time giving lectures because they report giving opportunities for every student to question and answer. They also motivate their students by giving extra marks, providing sufficient wait-time for answers, and ignoring relatively minor grammatical and pronunciation errors.

## **6. Conclusions**

This section discusses the results derived from 2 sets of instruments: a structured interview method and 5-Likert Scale questionnaire. The findings showed that “I like the questions that create a friendly atmosphere.” was rated at the highest mean score of 4.64.

Meanwhile, “I cannot catch up with the question and am afraid of giving incorrect answers.” garnered the highest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.62$ ) as the main problem of answering a question. The teachers also view Q&A process as one of the strategies that can reinforce the students’ understanding. They are not also obsessive about the need for a teacher-centered model as they recognized the importance of fostering teacher-student interaction.

#### 6.1. Students’ opinions on answering questions in the classrooms

The overall result of students’ opinions towards answering questions was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.16$ ). Considering each aspect, it was found that the top three items with the highest mean score were “I like questions that create a friendly atmosphere”. ( $\bar{X} = 4.64$ ), followed by “I like questions that help me review lesson key points”. ( $\bar{X} = 4.49$ ), and “I like exam guidance questions”. ( $\bar{X} = 4.48$ ). These findings were in accordance with Akarapisit (2014) who investigated Students’ Attitudes in Answering Teachers’ Questions in 135-301 International Business English. Her results revealed that the overall mean score was at a high level ( $\bar{X} = 4.11$ ). “Students like exam guidance questions”. garnered the highest score which is in the top three of the current research. Likewise, Chaiwong (2013) found in her study that the students like teachers who ask questions which give out the exam hints. The results, thus, pointed out that positive classroom climate is crucial regarded as primary need of the students. Yazdi, Ghanizadeh, and Mousavi (2019) asserted that good classroom atmosphere encourages learners to be more assertive, as the wall between teacher and learner is smaller. This must not only happen from the first step that the teacher enters the classroom but must be maintained throughout the year. In addition, the findings showed that students are still interested in asking and answering questions depending on teachers’ questioning. If the question is directly helpful to them, especially exam guidelines, the students will pay more special attention. This is due to Thai education system has been still focusing on summative assessment (Todd, 2019). Some English courses in the current study, for instance, obsess more than 50% of total scores with the test, thus causing learners to worry about their exams and scores.

#### 6.2 Student’s problems in answering questions in English classrooms

Concerning the students’ problems in answering questions, the overall mean score was found at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.25$ ). The top three having the highest mean score were “I cannot catch up with the question and am afraid of giving the incorrect answers.” ( $\bar{X} = 3.62$ ), followed by “I hardly answer questions because I am afraid of using grammatical errors.” ( $\bar{X} = 3.60$ ), and “I am nervous and anxious when answering the questions.” ( $\bar{X} = 3.55$ ). The results correspond with previous studies by Rongsa-ard. (2003) and Thaharavanich (2009). They found that the major problem causing students' confidence in answering a question was that “Students are unable to catch the question, feel anxious, cannot give a correct answer, and also don't know how to use the language form correctly.” These results demonstrate that “Foreign Language Learning Anxiety” as proposed by Tsui in 1985 is still a worrying phenomenon in the EFL classroom. The findings that showed the decades-old problems were identified in the past few years by Nuypukiaw (2018). She studied factors affecting English language learning anxiety level of 1st year students. One of her research results similarly revealed that the students are afraid of not being able to answer questions

in English and if it consumes a lot of time to think of the answer, they will feel more anxious and stressed.

In addition, Asif (2017) found the problems of Saudi EFL learners were likewise afraid of making mistakes in the class because they lacked English vocabulary. These indicated that EFL learners' problems are still associated with linguistics and anxiety. It can be seen from the top three problems found in this study that the students encounter language skills problems, especially listening skills and language structures as the students were unable to catch up with the question and were afraid of producing grammar errors. Furthermore, students' lack of confidence and anxiety during answering questions were also found. It can be claimed that answering question seems like a minimal public speaking test in which the audiences show expectations in the answer. These add up to the students being nervous. The findings of this research are consistent with research by Horwitz et al. (1986), which found that learners were more likely to have a fear of foreign language communication including concerns of being assessed negatively when giving incorrect answer. However, it is noticeable that "I think that cultural expressions or behavior of Thais affect me in answering questions" ( $\bar{X}=3.45$ ), which had been considered by Chaudron (1988) as one of the problems, was merely rated at a moderate level. This might have resulted from values change: the new generation is no longer tied to old values but dares to express opinions that differ from the elders (Roongrerngsuke, 2020). It indicated that Eastern cultures or behaviors factor concerned Chaudron in 1988 does not have much impact on the students' learning behavior in this era. As a result, only "Foreign Language Learning Anxiety" is still problematic for Thai students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 6.3 Teacher's opinions and strategies employed to elicit student's answers

All teachers agree that asking and answering questions in English classes are necessary to check students' understanding. The questioning strategies the teachers use are based on the difficulty of the course. Goals and objectives are established and the questioning strategy is selected according to the objectives. In order to obtain participation from the students, some teachers report that giving an additional point is the best approach to motivate them as it can be a potent motivating agent. However, one of the teachers stated that this approach still doesn't work for some students. This is because different students respond to different forms of encouragement (Chakraborty, 2015). Considering situations in which students' answers are wrong or no students answer, the teachers use different strategies depending on one's style, for instance, expressing feelings, restating the question, giving samples or resemble answers, and encouraging the students. The length of time for answering the questions is due to the level of difficulty and each teacher's strategy but giving enough wait-time for the students is crucial (Rowe, 1972).

Importantly, all teachers agree that using slightly wrong grammar and mispronouncing some words are acceptable if it does not impede the meaning of the utterance. In some cases, the teachers will correct students by repeating the words using the correct pronunciation and rearranging the sentence to help them with grammar errors. These strategies are in accordance with the findings of Carranza (2007) and Teba (2017) who found that the technique mostly used by teachers to correct the errors made by the students was to

rephrase the students' response in the correct form. It can be concluded the teachers in this study are not accustomed to the teacher-centered model as three of the seven principles to create the tertiary positive classroom climate suggested by Fraser and Treagust in 1986, 'Personalization', 'Involvement', and 'Task orientation' were found. The results from the interviews, however, could not intensively specify each of the teachers' questioning strategies. It is suggested that the teachers' questioning strategies should be carried out for further study as appropriate strategies can improve the level of students' ability.

In summary, this study has provided interesting results that "Cultural Factors" cannot be held responsible for classroom silence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but that "Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Factor" is a major factor. Addressing such a longstanding problem is hard work for a university teacher wishing to foster interaction and student engagement. To do so requires building students' English proficiency and confidence, creating a harmonious classroom atmosphere, improving teaching methods and questioning strategies, giving the students more exposure to English, and providing positive feedback on their answers are very worthy. In addition, utilizing today's technology or applications as they are now in the students' interest is another fruitful way for the teachers to break classroom silence. These will be a strong reinforcement of students' interactional competence (Wang & Tahir, 2020). The present study highlighted what really stops Thai students answering the teachers' questions in English classrooms. Due to the fact that this research was carried out with a large number of participants, an in-depth study with a smaller sample-group should be examined in order to attain more insight. An investigation of the functions of student-teacher interaction in EFL contexts in Thailand should be also conducted. To examine how both teachers and students deal with classroom interaction and to fill the current gap, an experimental study that can demonstrate both teachers' questioning strategies and students' learning strategies should be prioritized for further study.

## 7. The Author

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