

**Personality Traits of Thai Gen Z Undergraduates:  
Challenges in the EFL Classroom?**

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**Abstract**

It is believed that Generation Z's distinctive characteristics tend to challenge educators and employers in their organizations. To understand this cohort's traits or behaviors and know how to support this generation are key to the effectiveness of teaching, learning and collaboration with other generations. This study therefore aimed at discovering the personality traits of Gen Z undergraduates in Thailand by employing a mixed-method design. The participants in the study comprised 400 Gen Z undergraduate students at a university in Bangkok, Thailand. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire on a 4-point Likert's scale, which was developed based on the Big Five model (Goldberg, 1976) consisting of the 5 dimensions of personality: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and

conscientiousness. Tech-addiction has been proposed as another dimension of the model due to the prevalence of technology and social media at the present time. Likewise, a focus group interview with 5 students and semi-structured interviews with 4 EFL teachers were conducted. The findings revealed that of the six-personality dimensions, agreeableness was rated at the highest level whereas neuroticism was rated lowest. The personality traits of Gen Z seem to challenge educators in terms of classroom management and activity design. The implications of the study may contribute to EFL classroom practice.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Big-five personality traits, Thai undergraduates, EFL classroom practice

## **Introduction**

On many occasions, conflicts and tensions occur among people from different generations due to misunderstandings as well as a lack of perception and compassion. In educational institutions, we can find teachers who are dissatisfied with their students' behaviors which differs from that of their own childhoods. In workplaces, senior employees can complain about their younger colleagues who act differently from them, despite there being nothing fundamentally wrong with the young generation. Arguably, the gap between generations is the cause of misunderstandings. Strauss and Howe (1991, 1993, 2000) asserted that each generation shares their own "peer personality" and this leads to collective thought; for example, they are raised by parents from a similar generation and view their world differently from other generations. For this reason, people from different generations may not agree with these generational views. A report by Nielson Holdings Plc. (2018) further highlights that different generations possess their own unique behaviors and present unique challenges for others. Now, educators are facing the challenges of Gen Z (Ferrari, 2018) and developing tertiary educators' awareness of generational differences can help them

find and integrate the most appropriate pedagogical techniques to deal with Gen Z students.

Most students in tertiary education at present are marked as Generation Z (Gen Z) and they'll be entering the workforce soon, alongside the preceding generations. Overtaking the size of the Gen Y workforce, Gen Z has “new and different potentially disruptive expectations in studying and working” which require a new evaluation of formal educational institutions (Ferrari, 2018). Better understanding among generations may lead to better relationships in any context. In order to clarify and explain the typical characteristics of each generation, researchers have long attempted to investigate the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, and in this study, Gen Z's personality traits will be revealed to aid Gen Z in understanding themselves and their peers better as well as allowing other generations to realize and become better acquainted with the young generation.

Studies on Gen Z characteristics have been widely conducted in other countries, especially in the West. Most available research related to Gen Z has been published by westerners and is most likely for westerners. However, this research has been adopted for utilization in other contexts and some may even assume that the information or the results of these studies are generalizable to all Gen Z worldwide. We believe that Gen Z's characteristics vary globally, – specifically in this case in Thailand – and may have their own personality traits. This, in essence, means the many related factors and details described by researchers in other countries are not applicable to Thai Gen Z. In order to fill in the gaps, more research on Gen Z's personality traits in different contexts should be conducted.

Despite the numerous models of personality traits (e.g. Allport, 1937; Eysenck; 1947; Cattell, 1957; Goldberg, 1976; Bandura, 1977) that have been proposed over decades, some may have already become outdated. One of the most widespread models adopted by worldwide researchers is the Big five model (Goldberg, 1976). Research indicates that the Big-five personality traits are related to many other factors, including learning and

teaching such as foreign language learning anxiety (Dewaele, 2013; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), and attitudes toward foreign language learning (Pourfeiz, 2015). However, in the current digital era, it is undeniable that the Internet and technology have influenced and affected almost every aspect of our lives. Thus, by itself, the Big five model may not adequately describe the Gen Z cohort. People, regardless of their generation, have become addicted to the Internet and social media. So, we have proposed the technology and digital dimension and have included them in the questionnaire to complement the personality model and to reflect the lifestyle of people in the era. As most Gen Z are in educational institutions now, the authors have chosen to investigate the university students' characteristics using a questionnaire and focus group in which can the generation's views toward themselves can also be voiced. The results of the study, which reveal the characteristics of Gen Z students, may help describe the behavior of Gen Z and may be further applied by researchers and practitioners in many fields, especially for academic and occupational purposes.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the personality traits of Thai Gen Z students?
2. Are these traits of Thai Gen Z similar to or different from the Gen Z's traits described in previous research? How?
3. Do these traits of Thai Gen Z create challenges in the EFL classroom?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Who counts as generation Z?**

The first generation to have been born following Internet popularization (Strauss & Howe, 1991) and the first truly digital and global cohort who may find it difficult to recall a life without the Internet and smartphones (Kingston, 2014) is known as Generation Z. This cohort currently represents a world population of 23 million and is dramatically increasing (Salleh, et.al., 2017). By 2019, the number will reach 30 million (Tulgan, 2013). Several

scholars have tried to label Generation Z with diverse names such as Gen Next or Gen I (Igel & Urquhart ,2012), Post-Millennarians, iGeneration, or the Homeland Generation (Strauss & Howe,1991), Generation 2020, Digital Natives, Screensters or Zeds (Rothman, 2016), Net-Gen (Turner, 2015), or Gen Zer (Kingston, 2014 ), among others. Generational scholars typically label the last five generational cohorts as in the following table (Howe, 2014; Howe & Strauss, 2000 cited in Carter, 2018).

Table1: Generation labels and periods

<b>Labels</b>	<b>Periods</b>
1.Builder/Traditionalist/Wisdom Generation	mid to late-1920's to early to mid-1940's
2.Baby Boomers/Boomer Generation	mid-1940's to early 1960's
3.Generation X	mid-1940's to early 1960's
4.Millennial Generation	early 1980's to late 1990's
5.Generation Z	late 1990's to mid- 2010's

As can be seen from Table 1, Gen Z includes those who were born from the late 1990s to the mid-2010s. Demographers and researchers classically use initial birth years from the mid-1990s to early 2000s and final birth years from the late 2000s to early 2010s (Strauss & Howe,1991). Numerous studies assert that members of Gen Z are those who were born in the mid-1990s right through to the late 2010s (Bejtkovský, 2016; Eberhardt, 2017; Scripta, 2016; Turner, 2005). It appears there are no specific dates for when this generation starts or ends. For the purposes of this study, Gen Z are those undergraduates who were born between 1994-1998 and their personality traits are described in the next section.

### **Generation Z's unique personality traits**

Generation Z members were born into a challenging historical period, ranging from terrorism issues and world political uncertainty to environmental alarms (Turner, 2015). These influential factors have impacted on Gen Z shaping their unique and significant characteristics (Cater, 2018). Drawing on previous studies, the traits of Gen Z can be summarized as follows:

**Entrepreneurship and innovation:** According to Kingston (2014), Generation Z can be described as “entrepreneurial, innovative and passionate.” Similarly, Carter (2018) mentions that Gen Z are more financially conservative compared with the Millennial Generation. This generation knows how to make money via YouTube, mobile applications, Facebook, and has other technological proficiencies.

**Criticizer:** Gen Z are likely to reconsider, question and criticize everything (Töröcsik, et.al., 2014). As revealed in a study by Salleh et.al. (2017), Gen Z respondents also openly voice their criticism or disagreement often without proper judgement. This trait can result in their being impatient, slightly disobedient and in need of immediate gratification.

**Short attention span:** This characteristic is noticeably evident in Gen Z as they have grown up using the Internet and acknowledge the verbal and visual world of the Internet. Bejtkovský (2016) states that compared with other generations, this generation has limitations in attention span. Töröcsik et.al. (2014) suggests “simplification and getting to the point” should be key to creating information or messages for this generation.

**Instant gratification:** Living in an environment equipped with various communication devices at all times can lead Gen Z to expect instant gratification and become withdrawn and disengaged from society. They can also feel hurt or discouraged by either content or communication (Salleh et.al., 2017; Turner, 2015). This

can lead to the presence of the psychological issue termed “Acquired Attention Deficit Disorder” (Salleh et.al., 2017).

**Multitasking:** Gen Z tend to be good at performing multiple tasks at the same time owing to their lifestyle embedded within the explosion of media and communication. Turner (2015) states that the extensive usage of technological devices and social media applications can contribute to the expansion in multitasking behaviors among Generation Z. Likewise, Bejtkovský (2016) also supports the notion that Gen Z members are good at integrating themselves with technology and task switching.

**Lack of collaboration:** Various studies (Bejtkovský, 2016; Turner, 2015; Salleh et.al., 2017) point out that Gen Z prefer to work individually. Though they are considered to be smarter, more self-directed, and faster in terms of processing information compared to previous generations, they may not be team players (Igel & Urquhart, 2012; Töröcsik et.al., 2014).

**Lack of communication skills:** According to Turner (2015), with advanced technology acting as a go-between for individuals’ interactions, society has grown accustomed to being increasingly networked as individuals rather than socially embedded in groups. This tends to have caused a decline in face-to-face communication among Gen Z. They also have been criticized for having poor writing skills because of their growing up in an age of shorthand via social media (Kinston, 2014).

**Loyalty and open-mindedness:** Eberhard (2017) described the characteristics of Gen Z respondents drawing from Seemiller and Grace’s study and observing that this cohort’s members are likely to be faithful to friends, thoughtful towards others and towards social issues. They are also open-minded to differences and like maintaining very positive impressions of themselves.

The traits all mentioned above could shape Gen Z's behavior and differentiate them from other generations. In addition, their usage of technology and social media is another aspect to be discussed.

### **Technology and the Social Media Usages of Gen Z**

Born in the era of advanced and diverse technology and multimedia, Gen Z are stereotypically thought of as being comfortable with technology, interacting, and communicating in the connected world accounting for a significant portion for their socializing. One of the outstanding characteristics of this digital native cohort is their extensive usage of the Internet at a very young age (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Turner, 2015; Yadav & Rai, 2017).

These Gen Z members have a strong attraction towards online communication allowing them to contribute and remain connected via technology. This extensive use of technology also aids them in avoiding some difficulties in their offline lives or to find belonging—to fit in—by using distraction and the imaginary to fill the time and emotional spaces (Toronto, 2009 cited in Turner, 2015). Strauss and Howe (1991) also remark that Gen Z use social media and other sites to stay connected with friends and to make connections with new people with or without meeting them in the real world. Yadav and Rai (2017) categorize the outcomes of Gen Z's social media usage into six classifications: content contribution, information sharing, information usage, searching for facts and data, online participation and entertainment usability. It seems as if the extensive usage of technology and social media of Gen Z is for both academic purposes and entertainment. Generation Z view technology as their friend and a tool that can accelerate movement and the rapid delivery of information. To be physically involved with technology allows them to communicate and respond to the world anywhere and at any time (Salleh et.al., 2017). However, to access the digital world and limitless information easily without the ability to evaluate the information can result in various issues and negative

behaviors. Some researchers (Bejtkovský, 2016; Salleh et.al., 2017) recommend Gen Z need critical thinking skills in order to be able to evaluate the information on social media and the Internet.

The distinctive characteristics of Generation Z as mentioned can challenge educators and employers in their organizations. Thus, an understanding of Gen Z's characteristics, traits or behaviors and knowledge of ways to support this digital native cohort are crucial for both higher educational institutions and workplaces.

However, to study personality traits, most previous research has included the Big Five model of personality as a starting point. Therefore, this paper also initially employs this model in the study and so will elaborate upon it in the next section.

### **The Big Five model of personality**

Personality traits are a stable characteristic pattern of behavior, emotion, and thought which can describe individuals' behaviors in each situation (Costa & McCrae, 1989). Researchers have attempted to define and explain people's characteristics as well as suggest many concepts to study them. One of the popular terms related to the human personality or characteristics is the 'Big Five' which was coined by Goldberg in 1976 (Srivastava, 2008) and has been used interchangeably with the 'five-factor model'. The model has become dominant in illustrating human personality (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; O'Connor, 2002; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). According to Digman (1990) and Goldberg (1990), the five factors consist of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

Neuroticism (sometimes called 'emotional stability' in reverse) refers to a person's emotional stability and the tendency to have negative emotions. People who score high in neuroticism (or low in emotional stability) are likely to worry, have anxiety, be angry, insecure, and depressed while people who score low in

neuroticism (hence, high in emotional stability) are more relaxed, calm, and secure.

Next, extraversion is the broad term for sociable, active, energetic kinds of personality. Extravert people are more friendly, outgoing, and interactive while introverts are reserved, serious, and quiet.

Another dimension is openness to experience which refers to the extent to which a person will take risks and take an interest in new experiences. People who score high in openness to experience like to learn new things. They may have interests in the Arts, high curiosity and imagination, as well as high flexibility. On the other hand, those who possess low openness to experience tend to be conservative, traditional, and practical.

Agreeableness is the characteristic of being friendly, caring, cooperative, and tolerant. People with high agreeableness get along well with others. However, people with low agreeableness are more skeptical, competitive, and distant. The last dimension is conscientiousness. People who have high conscientiousness tend to be dependable, organized, disciplined, and reliable while those with low conscientiousness prefer flexible plans and do not like precise details.

It should be emphasized that these five terms should be perceived without positive or negative associations with everyday language, for example, agreeableness should not be considered a good trait since people who have high agreeableness can be seen as erratic and insecure. These five dimensions of personality are generally used by researchers from various fields to predict students' academic performance (Poropat, 2009) and job performance (Shaffer & Postlethwaite, 2012). However, in this study, we adopt the Big Five model to investigate the personality traits of Gen Z students in Thailand of which the results can further benefit the prediction of their academic or career performance.

With the aforementioned impacts of Gen Z's unique characteristics and the Big Five traits on students' behaviors and performances, it is vital to investigate the dominant and weak

traits in order to understand the characteristics of this cohort which can be implemented in ELT classroom practice. As explained by Chun, Dudoit, Fujihara, Gerschenson, Kennedy & Stearns (2015), the characteristics and learning styles of students can guide teachers in how to design the course or content and manage the classroom to meet learners' needs.

Therefore, the quantitative method was conducted in this study in order to acquire empirical evidence showing the dominant traits that represent Gen Z students. As Watt (2015) mentioned, quantitative approaches in researching teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) will obtain the same purpose as employing this method in the wider areas of education.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted using a mixed-method design to examine Thai Gen Z students' personality traits. The participants, data collection and data analyses used to obtain the results are explained below.

### **Participants**

The total number of Gen Z students studying in the university is approximately 20,000. As the number can be represented by the sample of 377, according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 400 undergraduate students whose ages or years of birth qualified them as Gen Z were recruited from all faculties and colleges. The sample comprised 288 female students, 106 male students, and 6 identified as LGBT students. The participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire given online via Google Form and 5 students voluntarily joined the focus group interview for further information and a better understanding of Gen Z students.

### **Instruments**

#### **Questionnaire**

To examine the Gen Z students' traits, a questionnaire consisting of 60 items which represented 6 personality dimensions

was first devised. The questionnaire was adapted from the widely recognized 44-item Big Five Inventory by John and Srivastava (1999). As the digital dimension was not included in this inventory, we proposed additional items which might reflect Gen Z's enthusiasm in using digital/online media and interaction. The 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was provided for the participants to evaluate themselves. The 60 items in the questionnaire were evaluated by 3 experts for content validity and the pilot questionnaire was presented to 37 students who were Gen Z students and none of whom later participated in the study.

After the responses were collected, SPSS was used to calculate the reliability, using Cronbach's alpha score. The scores and the results of the Index of Congruence (IOC) were used to consider which items should be kept in the questionnaire and which should be removed. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the pilot questionnaire was .804 and that of the adapted questionnaire was .77. As the items were categorized based on the dimensions of personality traits, each dimension's score was measured and the results are shown in Table 2 below. The table also presents the number of items left for each dimension and Cronbach's alpha score after some items were removed.

Table 2: Questionnaire: Cronbach's alpha score

Dimension	Pilot questionnaire		Adapted questionnaire	
	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Neuroticism	8	.822	6	.794
Extraversion	10	.754	8	.749
Openness to experience	12	.818	6	.828
Agreeableness	9	.279	7	.462
Conscientiousness	10	.717	6	.778
Digital	11	.825	8	.747

In total, the adapted questionnaire which was used for the sample of the study contained 40 items with a 4-point Likert's scale. The items were listed in a Google Form and sent to 400 participants who were required to rate their level of agreement to all 40 items on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) scale and supply personal information about their gender and faculty.

### **Focus group interview**

After we retrieved the quantitative results of the study, a group of 5 volunteer students joined in the focus group led by the researchers. They were encouraged to share their opinions and perceptions about their generation and the results we had interpreted from the questionnaire. The focus group took one and half hours and was recorded.

### **Statistical analyses**

In order to interpret the results, the responses were collected and calculated in SPSS version 21. The overall significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was used for every analysis. Firstly, some items' responses were reversed and the items were grouped into their particular dimension. Scores of the items in each dimension were calculated for the average score. Descriptive statistics were used to find the average sums for each dimension reflecting Gen Z students' personality traits.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

After the results are interpreted, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews on 4 Thai EFL teachers who had more than 3 years of experience teaching at university and were not from Gen Z. Some questions were prepared beforehand in order to learn about Gen Z's personality traits from other generations.

## **Results and Discussion**

***Research question 1: What are the personality traits of Thai Gen Z students?***

Frequency and percentage were used to determine the numbers of participants divided into three groups according to their gender. The analysis results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage classified by gender

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Male</b>	106	26.5
<b>Female</b>	288	72.0
<b>Others</b>	6	1.5
<b>Total</b>	400	100.0

Table 3 presents the number of undergraduate students of different gender. Of the questionnaire respondents, 106 were male (26.5 percent), 288 female (72.0 percent), and 6 other participants (1.5 percent).

To address the first research question, the personality traits of Gen Z students were analyzed by using descriptive statistics as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: The descriptive statistics of the personality traits of Gen Z students

<b>Personality Traits of Gen Z Students</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Levels of Agreement</b>
Neuroticism	2.49	0.44	6	Low
Extraversion	2.61	0.44	5	High
Openness	2.97	0.46	2	High
Agreeableness	3.01	0.35	1	High
Conscientiousness	2.91	0.31	4	High
Tech Addiction	2.96	0.42	3	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>0.40</b>		<b>High</b>

N=400

1.00-1.75	Very low
1.76-2.50	Low
2.51-3.25	High
3.26-4.00	Very high

Table 4 presents the personality traits of Gen Z students. The descriptive statistics for the overall personality identified by Gen Z participants (Mean = 2.83, SD = 0.40) show that the level of agreement was high for the overall traits. They reported having a level of agreement for each of the six personality traits with mean statistics ranging between 2.51 - 3.25. Agreeableness (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.35) was the highest scoring trait for the participants, and Neuroticism (Mean = 2.49, SD = 0.44) performed the lowest. It was not possible to confirm research hypothesis one that the Tech trait performs the highest among Gen Z students. It can be inferred from this finding that the dominant trait of this group of Gen Z is Agreeableness whereby the individuals can be considered warm, friendly and polite. These characteristics can have an impact on classroom interaction and activities. For example, students with high Agreeableness traits tend to avoid group conflict or competitiveness in the group, so this can restrict their confidence in raising their voice and lower their critical thinking skills. Therefore, teaching style and classroom management should be suitably crafted to students' traits by providing more interactive activities such as discussion, debate, and so on.

On the other hand, Neuroticism is the weak trait in this group. This implies that this group of students tends to have low levels of worry and anxiety. This sends positive signals to teachers because these students may have less negative thoughts and behaviors in the classroom.

In addition, based on the findings of the semi-structured interview from teachers on the Agreeableness of Gen Z students, all teachers agreed that most of their students tend to agree with others and get along well with their acquaintances. This is in accordance with Shih, Chen, Chen, and Wey (2013) who stated that students with high Agreeableness appeared to have positive relationships with their peers, and they were likely to avoid conflicts between groups. This could help ease difficulties when they have to cooperate in group assignments and time saving. As John, Neumann, & Soto (2008) argued, with a high level of agreeableness students seem to be cooperate and get along with

others. However, they discovered that some students who always agreed with others or relied on others tended to use less critical thinking skills and lack a sense of competition. This was also implied by Fraser-Thill (2019) who found that highly agreeable people might have difficulties in performing individual tasks and making decisions. Teachers also thought that it made some classes less fun than they should have been or even too boring. Based on this finding, this phenomenon can affect teaching and learning in the EFL classroom in terms of promoting enthusiasm, thinking skills, learner-centeredness, and creativity. Moreover, if students often show their high level of agreeableness, people may think this group of learners lacks interest or passion and confidence.

***Research question 2: Are these traits of Thai Gen Z similar to or different from the Gen Z's traits from previous research? How?***

As mentioned in Table 4, even though all traits were ranked as high, interestingly, Agreeableness was the most outstanding trait among the Thai Gen Z undergraduates, followed by Openness and Tech addiction. These findings are in line with Poropat's (2009) and Jongrachen's (2017) who found that agreeableness was a significant dimension correlating to academic performance and loving relationships among Gen Z participants. However, our findings do not apply to any specific aspects, but they can still represent Gen Z's personality traits in general.

Regarding the differences between Gen Z's traits found in this study and previous research, it was found that agreeableness appeared to be the most dominant dimension, which differs from the reviewed literature that has highlighted Gen Z's obsession with technology applications and online social media (Carter, 2018; Strauss & Howe, 1991; Turner, 2015, Yadav & Rai, 2017). This may be because Thailand has been recognized as a collective society (Wilhelm & Chaichompoo, 2016) where "people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetimes continue to protect them in

exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225). Friendship or relationships in the family are prioritized, and they do care for their friends and family and try not to let conflict happen. When a conflict or problem does arise, they tend to compromise and find the best solution. This can be shaped into collective persons. As for the results of the focus group interview, it was confirmed that most respondents agreed they had a high level of agreeableness and rarely had conflicts with others, especially with friends or family.

Even though it is reported by Stillman & Stillman (2017) that Gen Z are independent and competitive, we found that in our focused context, Gen Z students prefer to communicate and maintain good relationships with others. These different findings prove that Gen Z in different contexts possess different characteristics. Instead of learning from previous studies’ results, educators may need to be aware that their students have unique personalities in which they need to observe their students’ behavior in order to find suitable ways to manage their classroom.

***Research Question 3: Do these traits of Thai Gen Z cause challenges in the EFL classroom?***

To respond to this question, a focus group with students and interviews with teachers were conducted. It seems that teachers found EFL classrooms with Gen Z students quite challenging. The different generations and different traits were one factor causing difficulties in pedagogy. Let us illustrate this issue with two excerpts from our interviews with EFL Thai teachers.

***Question: Do your students’ personality traits challenge your teaching or EFL classroom practices? If yes, what are your solutions towards those challenges?***

**Excerpt 1**

*“I know that I’m challenged by the unique personalities and preferences of Gen Z students. They grew up in an age where they have consumed technology on a*

*regular basis. I have seen most of them have access to a mobile phone or tablet all the time. This gives me a difficult time because I'm not keen on technology and I have to incorporate online learning as much as possible in my classroom activities to suit their needs. Moreover, to be honest, most of my students are agreeable individuals. When I conduct a group discussion, most of them always agree with those who shared their opinion while some of them stay silent in the classroom. It seems that they do not pay attention to my lessons and are not interested in what we are talking about. Moreover, I can feel that they do not study their lessons well enough before class, and therefore they are not able to reflect their ideas in the discussion."*

**Excerpt 2**

*"Of course, they have challenged me. Sometimes they seem bored in my classes. I have to find new ways to get them back into the lessons. At least it's good that my generation is not too far from theirs, so we do share some interests. For example, I like to use technological devices and I show my students good applications and websites such as trustable electronic dictionaries. I think we cannot stop them from using mobile phones while studying, so I just use it with them. Many Gen Z individuals are more confident than my generation, but they still stay quiet when I raise questions. I have to think of topics that interest them, although the topics in the textbook are about school, food, or the workplace. In some classes, I talk about the slang that might sound rude for some teachers. In addition, according to my students' behavior in class, it is challenging to discuss with them topics they are interested in and have them prepare before attending my class. I also encourage them to respond to my questions or their peers' ideas as to whether they agree or disagree with their friends in order to develop their critical thinking."*

As can be seen from the teachers' interviews, all of them admitted that there were some challenges in their teaching practices. Regarding the challenges caused by agreeableness, some of the Gen Z students in the focus group shared that they

would like to have discussions in classes, yet Gen Z students who have higher Agreeableness tend to avoid active participation in discussion. That means some students might hesitate to share different views with their peers and eventually agree with the team leaders' opinions. Therefore, to provide a discussion in class, teachers cannot only propose this activity and leave students to have the discussion by themselves. Instead, they should act as moderators, engaging all students in raising their voices in the discussion, whether they agree or disagree with others.

In addition, as Gen Z claim that they are better than previous generations in terms of technology, teachers should shift from traditional pedagogical approaches to adopt technological integration to satisfy their students' preference. However, from the interviews with teachers, we found that EFL teachers saw the drawbacks of integrating technology in classes as students were sometimes distracted by technological devices and paid less attention to lessons.

As Thai Gen Z students are more open, teachers find it challenging to raise controversial issues, such as religion, sexism, politics, and sexual discrimination, in classes. One of the teachers from the interview said that he worked hard to select sensitive topics for class discussions, but he worried that they might be inappropriate within the Thai context. Surprisingly, he found that students enthusiastically gave their points of view on those issues. Therefore, we can conclude that Gen Z's personality traits cause some challenges for EFL teachers, but these challenges can be considered positive challenges as they lead to EFL classroom improvement.

### **Findings of the focus-group interview**

#### **Opinions on Gen Z and other generations' personality traits**

Regarding the opinions towards the differences between Gen Z and other generations, all interview respondents agreed that Gen Z were more confident in expressing their views on all issues and had better skills in technology and social media.

However, all of them agreed that the previous generations were tougher, more diligent and more patient than Generation Z.

### **Opinions on Gen Z personality traits**

In terms of agreeableness, most respondents agreed they had a high level of agreeableness with others especially with friends and family. They indicated that they rarely had conflicts with friends. Only a few participants tended to strongly disagree when the issues were associated with the family. Most of them reported that they were more relaxed with their close friends than with family. Regarding technology and social media usage, all of the participants owned cell phones and most of them had laptops. They indicated that using the Internet and social media e.g. Google Scholar, Google, YouTube or Facebook helped them in information searches for general, entertainment, and academic purposes and allowed them to be more selective. They further reported that this technology and social media helped them in their homework. They also preferred reading summaries of their interests from various resources on the Internet in order to better understand those areas. In terms of openness towards new things, most of the interviewed participants reported that they were not creative people. All of them tended to like keeping themselves up-to-date with hot issues or news on social media. Many liked to question and share their opinions as well as information via social media.

### **Suggestions for EFL teaching from Gen Z students**

All the respondents also suggested having a weekly lecture, and another week for information sharing and class discussion. Moreover, creating the classes by integrating technology devices, decreasing grade expectations but increasing more cooperative learning, and evaluating students from the process and students' development rather than the outcomes or products were considered preferable.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Sensing the changes in the world population, many scholars have actively attempted to explore the new generation's personality and the need to understand their ways of life. Gen Z has thus become the focus of academic interest and this study also helps contribute to teaching and learning in the Thai context. The findings revealed that Agreeableness was the highest trait followed by Openness, Tech Addiction, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Neuroticism, respectively. Agreeableness was ranked as the highest trait suggesting that this trait can have impact on teaching approaches and classroom management. This finding can benefit teachers in terms of course design, teaching methods and classroom activities to best suit the learners' traits.

In addition, the notions of Gen Z personality traits in the Thai and foreign contexts were compared and the results show that there are differences. Western Gen Z seem to be more independent and competitive while Thai Gen Z, as can be seen from this study, tend to avoid conflicts and be more collective. Moreover, there are some studies investigating Gen Z personality traits or characteristics which are identified as, for example, criticizer (Töröcsik, et.al., 2014), multitasking (Turner, 2015) and lack of collaboration skills (Turner, 2015). However, we found that those personalities or characteristics that were identified from the West might not be fully generalizable to the Thai context. Therefore, we should be aware that there are dissimilarities in these personality traits and findings cannot be fully adopted from other countries for use in our context. It is recommended that educators and stakeholders pay attention to Gen Z in their own contexts in order to effectively support their needs and provide the most suitable education for them.

All in all, the findings of this study also contribute to EFL pedagogy and classroom settings. It is crucial educators and material developers be aware of Gen Z's personality traits when planning classroom activities or designing teaching materials to suit learners' preferences. The use of new technology or social media should also be highlighted. Thus, educators should

integrate new technology in their pedagogy such as using Dropbox, Onedrive or Google Drive to share useful information, manage the classroom activities and assignments between the groups. This can facilitate both parties to successfully achieve their academic goals. Moreover, popular social media sites such as Facebook, IG and blog can be applied to communicate and share their ideas with others. This can help enhance students' interaction and motivation in learning and promote effective EFL classroom practices in the 21st century.

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