

# The Changing View of Thai Deaf on Spoken Thai

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**Traditional Thai Deaf culture** which is shared by deaf and non-deaf members of the Deaf community is not commonly bound by a geographical area nor ethnicity but a shared identity and values, and most importantly, a **common language-- Sign Language.**

**Speech**, the language of the majority hearing people, **is neither appropriate nor encouraged in Deaf community.** This perspective of the Deaf distinguishes “Deaf” from the audiological defined “deaf” which includes people of varying degrees of deafness. (Woodward 1972, Padden 1980 and Geertz 1973 in Gregory 1999, Padden and Humphries 1988).

In 2005, Padden and Humphries, wrote about **the change in the perspective and use of “voice” among the Deaf in the U.S.** “...As Deaf people have moved from separate lives within their communities, to lives in front of others, their management of voice has changed as well. **They use voice to say different things now, to explain themselves and to participate in different ways...**” (Padden and Humphries 2005: 101).

Today, hearing people as well as  
spoken language have become an  
integrated part of the life of the  
American Deaf.  
(Padden and Humphries 2005)

A recent study on Thai deaf school students between ages 5 to 18 years in the Bangkok metropolitan and proximity shows surprisingly significant statistics of positive attitudes toward learning spoken Thai.

A comparison between deaf adults over 18 years and the younger group indicates a rising trend of positive attitudes toward spoken Thai.

Tumtavitikul & Ng, et al. CSUN2012.

Up to 73% of a sample population of 539 younger generation Thai deaf showed willingness to learn and communicate in spoken Thai.



A Total of 147 adults over 18 years of age, 80 from the National Association the Deaf in Thailand (NADT) and another 67 from Ratchasuda College (RSC), all together about 49% show willingness to learn spoken Thai in various degrees from ability to accurately pronounce words to speaking Thai with near native speakers' ability.

The results give support to teaching and encouraging spoken Thai to varying degrees alongside with Thai Sign Language (Thai SL) to the new generation of the Thai deaf.

At present, there is a lack of research and systematic data on the deaf population regarding their means of communication with other deaf, hearing people, their own family members, and society.

Tumtavitikul & Ng, et al. CSUN2012.

There is also, a growing concern that other means of communication besides varieties of sign language are needed between the deaf and the hearing, especially in emergencies when life is at stake.

Obstacles for better communication skills for the Thai deaf are multivariate. **Total communication in Thai Deaf schools is not totally successful** (Lertsukpraset, et al. 2010).

**Literacy rate** is only 10% among the deaf population and 20% of deaf children go to school (Ethnologue 2009) although 12 changing to 15 years of education is compulsory and fully subsidized by the government (Kitchtham 2012, Maneesint 2011).

There is still a huge gap in  
Communication between the deaf  
and society at large.

**Thai Sign Language**  
(Thai SL) is an effective  
means of communication **if**  
**translation is provided.**

Tumtavitikul & Ng, et al. CSUN2012.



Hearing people who know Thai SL are but few. An interpreter, live or digital is necessary. A Thai SL dictionary, hardcopy or digital offers limited assistance (Tumtavitikul 2009)

When such mediators and tools are not present, other means of communication are necessary for intelligibility between the deaf and the hearing.

**What other means non-digitally?**

Writing is one most common  
and another is **speech.**

It is of our interest at the Rajnagarindra Institute of Linguistics and Cultural Studies (RILC), Kasetsart University to understand the functioning level and social well-being of the deaf population in Bangkok Metropolitan and proximity.

We have embarked on a research project to study the profile and background of the deaf in Bangkok Metropolitan and proximity. This project comprises various baseline studies to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the deaf population in the specified area.

The baseline study seeks to explore the profile of the deaf school student and adult population surveyed, and their desired learning needs, type of communication and utility of spoken language.

The survey comprises of the following categories:

- Information on recreation (how and where do they spend their free time)
- Mode of communication with their deaf friends, hearing friends, and family members
- Type of desired learning needs in communication
- Usage of hearing aid and indication of assistance needed
- Socio-economic profile

**In this present study, we focus on communication profile of the subjects surveyed. In particular pertaining to their attitudes toward spoken Thai.**



**It is our stand that  
every deaf person  
has the right to learn Thai SL  
and that Thai SL is to be  
preserved and cultivated.**

It is hoped that information obtained will assist researchers and policy makers to assess the need for **more services or assistance to be provided for the deaf population--** in particular, with respect to oral communication in various degrees and methods.

Also, to examine how to **better facilitate the deaf population in this specific area of communication skills to the realization of their full potential for their well-being and contribution to society.**

# Methods

## Objective

to survey the attitudes of different groups of Thai deaf on Spoken Thai in Bangkok Metropolitan and nearby provinces.

# Subjects

**Group 1: 147 deaf adults over 18 years old;** 80 members of the National Asso. of the Deaf in Thailand (NADT) or in regular contact with NADT, and 67 students at Ratchasuda College (RSC)-- The college for the disabled.

**Group 2: 539 deaf students between the ages of 5-18 years** from 17 deaf schools; from Kindergarten to High school, in Bangkok metropolitan and nearby provinces.

# Tools

**Two** separate **questionnaires** were designed; one for the school students between ages 5-18 years and the other for adults over 18 years.

The information elicited in the **questionnaire** pertaining to this study **for adults over 18 years** was drawn from the following questions:

- What is the **degree of** your **hearing loss**?
- What are you doing now? (occupation/employment)
- What is your **educational level**?
- What is your **gender**?
- What is your **age**?
- When did you **begin** having **hearing loss**? (at what age)
- How did your hearing loss happen?
- If you know **Thai Sign Language**, when did you **start learning** it?
- **If you have an opportunity to learn to speak Thai, what level of spoken language would you like to have? (correct pronunciation, necessary words, normal speech, and others (specify))**

The information elicited in the **questionnaire** pertaining to this study **for students 5-18 years** old was drawn from the following questions:

- What is your **age**?
- What is your **gender**?
- In which **grade** are you **studying**?
- At what **age** did you **start to use sign language**?
- What is your **degree of hearing loss**?  
(total loss, little hearing, middle hearing)
- Do you **use** a **hearing aid**?
- **Are you willing to learn to speak Thai?**
- Is your **mother deaf**?
- Is your **father deaf**?
- Does either **one or both** of your **parents use SL**?



# Data collection

## Pilot Study

A pilot study on 30 adults over 18 years was conducted at the NADT with the help of Thai SL interpreters. The questionnaire used was the first version of the questionnaire for the adults used in the actual study. Some modification on the questionnaire was made after this pilot study.

# Adults over 18 years of age

Data collection was made during July-August 2011 at **NDAT** from **80 Thai deaf** either members of NDAT or in regular contact with NDAT.

During the same period of time,  
data was also collected at **RSC**  
from **67 undergraduate students.**

**Altogether, data was collected  
from a total of 147 adults.**

# Students 5-18 years old

Data collection was also made between July-August 2011 from **17 deaf schools** and schools that accept deaf students **in Bangkok metropolitan and proximity.**

**Students** participating in the survey were of **3 educational levels:**

- **Kindergarten (K)1-2**
- **Primary (P) 1-6**
- **Matthayom (M)1-6**

M1-6 is comparable to middle and high school, grades 7-12, in the U.S. system. The Matthayom level includes Vocational schools which are comparable to M4-6 levels.

# Statistical analysis

**Bivariate Analysis:** Pearson Chi-Square analysis was used for each of the independent variables (IVs) capturing demographic information such as gender, age, level of education, etc., and the dependent variable (DV) which is willingness to learn to speak Thai (Yes/No) for the school students, and willingness to learn to speak Thai at all different levels of speech combined for the adults.

**Multivariate Analysis: Logistic Regression** was then performed on multiple independent variables (IVs) and willingness to learn to speak for the adults as dependent variable (DV), both NADT and RSC combined, and for the school students ages 5-18 years old separately.

# Results

## Adults over 18 years of age

In the **pilot study** conducted at the **NADT** of 30 adults of whom **75% were aged 45 and above**, resulted in **23%** of the population who **were willing to learn to speak Thai**.

The 147 adults who participated in the actual study; 80 from NADT and 67 from RSC did not include the previous 30 adults in the pilot study.



The key question asked was “If you have an opportunity to learn to speak Thai, what level of spoken language would you like to have?” with four choices in the answer: (a) able to pronounce the words correctly, (b) able to speak necessary words or phrases in an emergency, (c) able to speak like a hearing person, and (d) others \_\_\_\_\_.

The participants who chose answer (d) indicated unwillingness to learn to speak Thai. All other answers indicated different levels of willingness to learn to speak Thai. Combining all the answers from different levels of speaking, (a), (b) and (c) together, we have willingness to learn to speak Thai in various degrees vs. unwillingness to learn to speak.

**Bivariate statistical analysis** for **adults over 18 years** of age shows that:

- **gender** ( $\chi^2_{(1)}= 6.35$ ;  $p= .012$ ,
- **age** ( $\chi^2_{(3)}= 56.5$ ;  $p<.01$ ),
- **age at start learning Thai SL** ( $\chi^2_{(3)}= 7.90$ ;  $p=.048^*$ ),
- **age of hearing loss** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 14.74$ ;  $p=.001^{**}$ ),
- **level of education** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 75.11$ ;  $p<.001^{**}$ ),
- **degree of hearing loss** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 20.31$ ;  $p<.001^{**}$ )

are statistically **significantly associated with the willingness to learn to speak Thai.**

**For adults over 18 years of age, an overall percentage of willingness to learn to speak Thai is 49.2% .**

**Multivariate analysis** was carried out to determine which variables could be associated with the willingness to learn to speak Thai. A **logistic regression model using the entry method** was performed **on all adults** from both NADT and RSC combined, a total of **147 deaf**, **with gender, current age, age at hearing loss, age at start of learning Thai SL, level of education, and degree of hearing loss as IVs** and willingness to learn to speak Thai as DV.

According to the model, the **log of odds** of the **willingness to learn to speak Thai** was observed to be **statistically significant**:

- **related positively to a person with college education** ( $\beta=2.97$ ,  $s.e.=1.42$ ; Wald's  $\chi^2_{(1)}=4.4$ ;  $p=.036$ ),

- **and with a little degree of hearing loss** ( $\beta=4.31$ ,  $s.e.=1.36$ ; Wald's  $\chi^2_{(1)}=10.1$ ;  $p=.001$ )

- **and related negatively to someone who is aged 38 to 67** ( $\beta=-2.64$ ,  $s.e.=1.03$ ; Wald's  $\chi^2_{(1)}=6.5$ ;  $p=.011$ ).

# Students 5-18 years of age

A total of 539 students participated in the survey, 395 students **(73.3%)** **indicated their willingness to learn to speak Thai** and 144 (26.7%) were unwilling.

**Bivariate analysis** for students showed that:

- **gender** ( $\chi^2_{(1)}= 4.54$ ;  $p= .033$ ),
- **age** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}=12.64$  ;  $p=.002$ ),
- **education** ( $\chi^2_{(3)}= 16.0$  ;  $p=.001$ ),
- **degree of hearing loss** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 24.0$  ;  $p<.001$ ),
- **proficiency in writing Thai** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 9.43$  ;  $p=.009$ ),
- **usage of hearing aid** ( $\chi^2_{(2)}= 28.49$  ;  $p<.001$ )
- **one or both parents using sign language** ( $\chi^2_{(1)}=6.61$  ;  $p=.010$ )

are statistically significantly associated with the willingness to learn to speak Thai

It is interesting that **matthayom (M1-3 and M4-6) students** (comparable to middle and high school in the US system) **have lesser percentage of willingness to learn to speak Thai (63.3% and 71.3%)** than Kindergarten and Primary students combined (70.8% and 80.9%).



**Primary students have the highest percentage of willingness to learn to speak (80.9%).** This seems to coincide with a decrease in percentage of willingness to learn to speak among students ages 13-18 years old (68.2%) from students ages 7-12 years old (82.6%)

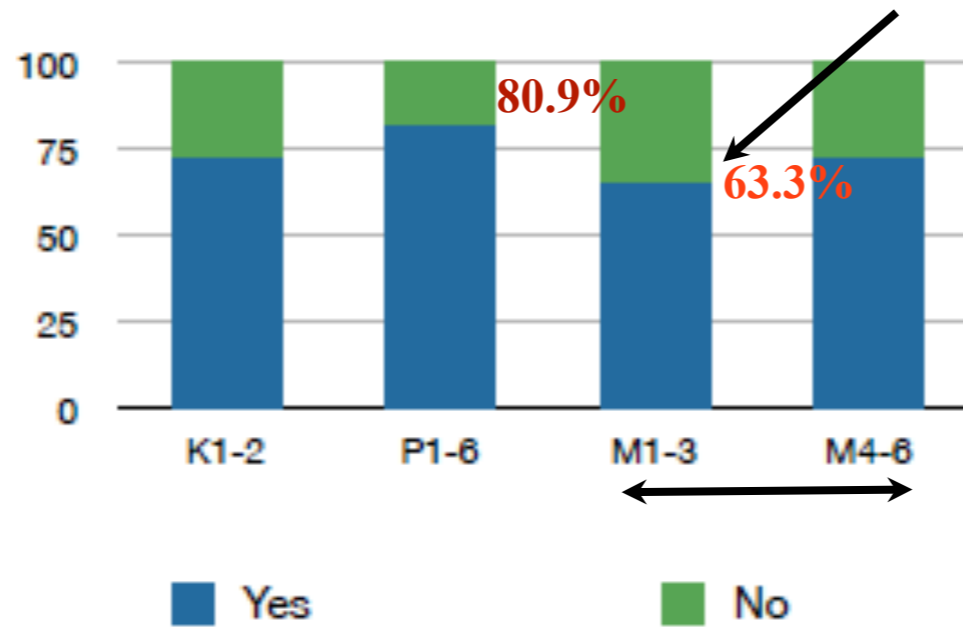


Figure 1: The percentage of willingness vs. unwillingness to learn to speak Thai of Deaf between 5-18 years old by Level of Education (K = Kindergarten, P = Primary school, M = Matthayom school)

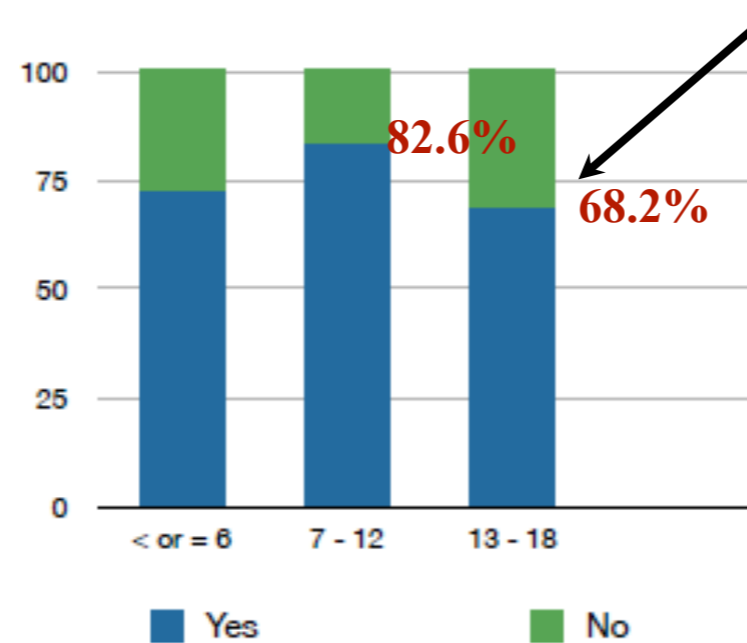


Figure 2: The percentage of willingness vs. unwillingness to learn to speak Thai for Deaf between 5-18 years old by Age group

Moreover, out of 539 **students**  
**5-18 years** old, 325 (60.3%)  
reported using hearing aids, and  
**81.5% of the hearing aid users**  
**indicated willingness to learn to**  
**speak.**

Among 489 students who reported their degree of hearing loss, 250 students (51.1%) who were **profoundly-to-severely deaf (reporting total loss)**. Among these, **63.6%** indicated their **willingness to learn to speak.**

Of 168 students who reported either one or both parents using SL, 66.7% showed willingness to learn to speak whereas **77.2% of the other 364 students whose parents do not use SL showed willingness to learn to speak.**

The statistics seem to indicate a desire to communicate with the hearing by means of speech.

## **Multivariate statistical analysis:**

A logistic regression was performed on multiple IVs; **gender, age and level of education, degree of hearing loss, usage of hearing aids, either one or both parents using SL, father is hearing impaired, mother is hearing impaired, proficiency in reading and in writing, and willingness to learn to speak Thai as DV** for school students ages 5-18 years.

According to the model, the **log of odds of the willingness to learn to speak Thai** was observed to be **statistically significantly related:**

- **positively** to students **with little hearing loss**

( $\beta=1.17$ , s.e.=0.32; Wald's  $\chi^2(1) = 13.4$ ;  $p < .010$ )

- **or middle hearing** ( $\beta=.97$ , s.e.=0.35; Wald's  $\chi^2(1)$

=7.80;  $p=.005$ )

- **and using hearing aids** ( $\beta=1.29$ , s.e.=0.27; Wald's

$\chi^2(1) = 23.6$ ;  $p < .010$ )



Interestingly, it was found that **only the degree of hearing loss and usage of hearing aids showed significant association with willingness to learn to speak for the school students 5-18 years old when multiple variables were taken into consideration.**

# Discussion

In bivariate analysis, **age** is **significantly associated** with willingness to learn to speak Thai in both Deaf **adults over 18 years** old from NADT and RSC combined and for school **students ages 5-18 years**.

**The overall percentage of willingness to learn to speak increases from 49.2% in the adults over 18 years to 73.3% in the younger school students and This indicates a trend in the younger Thai Deaf on willingness to learn to speak-- a positive view.**

It is interesting that for **school students** ages **5-18 years**, the **peak of willingness** to learn to speak for educational level **is at the primary school level** and the **percentage of willingness to learn in matthayom school students (M1-M6)**, especially students in M1-M3 level, **decreases** (fig. 1). It is also observed that the **percentage of willingness to learn to speak decreases starting from 13 years old onward** (fig. 2).

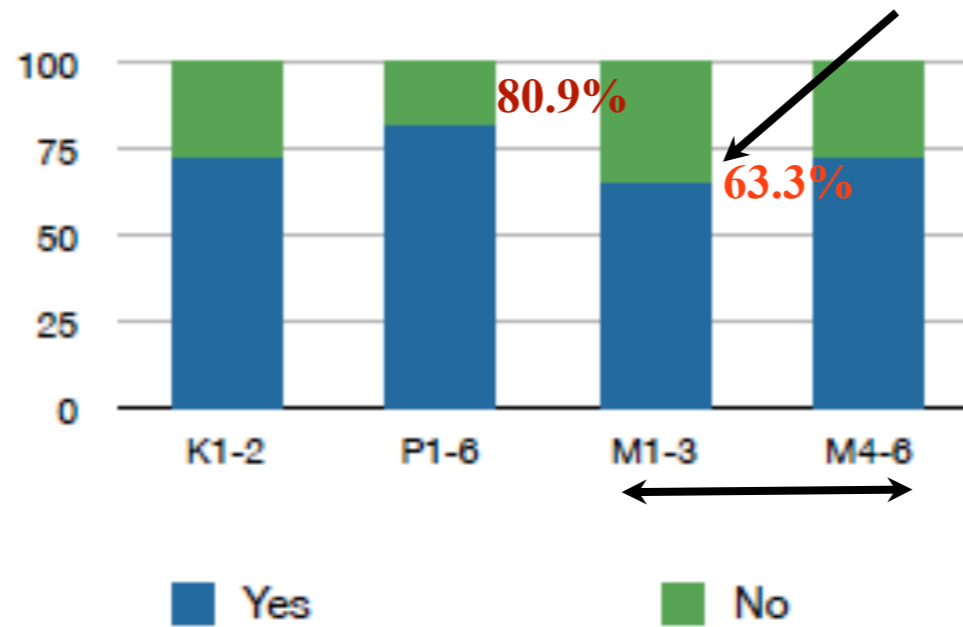


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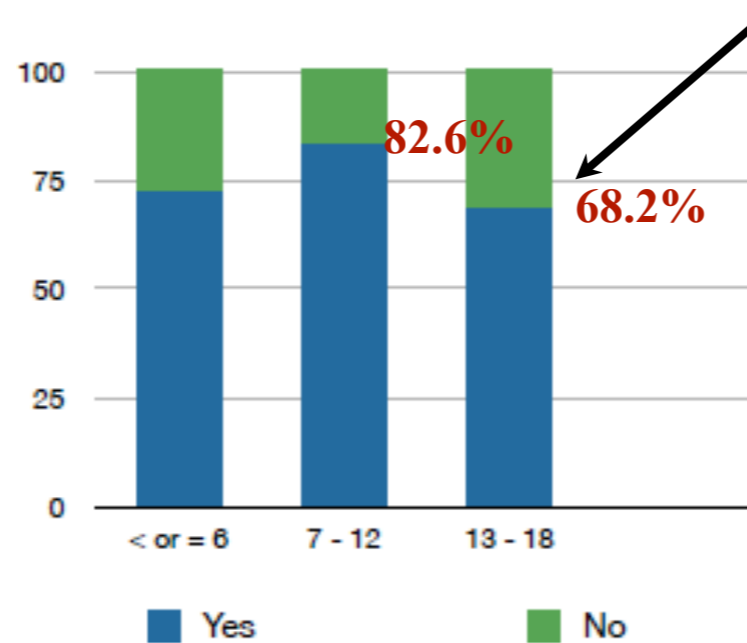


Figure 2: The percentage of willingness vs. unwillingness to learn to speak Thai for Deaf between 5-18 years old by Age group

**Facts:** Previous research on success rates of deaf children in schools indicate a **higher percentage of students dropping out of schools after primary 6.** Those who continued on to matthayom level were but a few who had **literacy proficiency** higher than the **primary school level**-- this includes deaf students in higher educational institutions (Wittayawej and Thestim 2005).

**Bi-lingual education in deaf schools aimed at Thai SL and spoken language resulted in many students who can neither sign the “standard SL” well nor speak. The academic environment in deaf schools does not seem to facilitate second language learning (Puongkeo Kichtham, Personal communication)**

As a result, a **vocational curriculum is being planned for matthayom schools for the deaf** in substitution of the present one (Puongkeo Kichtham, Personal communication).



**The school experience may itself discourage students in second language learning, especially when the language is a spoken language.** This may be a possible reason for the decrease of willingness to learn speech for deaf in mattayom school whose ages are around 13-18 years old.

However, in a broader picture, the younger deaf population between 5-18 years shows twice as much a degree of willingness to learn to speak when compared with the older ones over 18 years.

Finally, from the **results of a logistic regression with multiple variables** on demographics and variables associated with deafness, it was found that **adults who are older shows a negative statistical significant association with the willingness to learn to speak.**

**And degree of hearing loss and usage of hearing aids are positively significantly associated with willingness to learn spoken language for students 5-18 years old.**

This may be interpreted that **age in general seems to inversely contribute to willingness to learn to speak-- the younger the more willing.** However, **when degree of hearing loss and usage of hearing aids are taken into consideration, what really are indicatives of willingness to learn is whether or not they can hear sound-- hearing is always necessary but not sufficient for speech.**

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Students with better hearing show more willingness to learn to speak than those who have a lesser degree of hearing, as well as hearing aid users versus non-users.

Speech therapists have testified that even with residual hearing, it is possible to learn speech with a good rehabilitation program and the full support of family member(s).

The most vulnerable deaf students are those in matthayom deaf schools, between M1-M6. Most of these are not able to sign the standard SL well nor speak intelligibly.



# Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a positive view of Thai deaf toward spoken Thai, especially in the younger generation in Bangkok and proximity. A non-traditional view seems to be taking place among the Thai deaf--the urban Thai deaf, toward speech as they are more open and receptive to the language of the hearing.

With the availability of internet access, Thai SL has spread more rapidly than ever before and more Thai people are becoming aware of it as a natural language today. Deaf people have become more integrated in the society and are unavoidably encountered with hearing people in their daily life as they are taking jobs with hearing employers and working among the hearing people.

The implication is that as a desire to learn to speak is high; 73.3% for school students and 49.2% for adults, facilitations towards oral communication at all levels should be given a higher priority for the Thai deaf, young and old, along with Thai SL

**As much as a hearing person  
can be bi- or multi-lingual, so  
can a deaf person be able to  
speak Thai and become bi- or  
multi-lingual.**

In addition, as the implication of the statistical analysis shows that ability to hear is indicative of willingness to learn speech in the student surveyed.

It has been studied that deaf children, even with minimal residual hearing are able to develop oral communication provided that early detection and intervention is properly provided, followed by a good rehabilitation program (Lertsukpraset, Kasemkosin, Cheewareungroj, and Kasemsuwan 2005, 2010).

**For the next generation, early detection programs** such as hearing screening for hearing impairment in early childhood, starting as early as before 3 months old and no later than 2 years old, **should be implemented as a standard public healthcare practice of the national health policy** (Olusanya, Luxon, and Wirz 2003, Gell, F.M. et al. 1992).

Tumtavitikul & Ng, at el 2012

Quality speech rehabilitation programs should be made more accessible and available for the Thai deaf population at large in actualization of the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act 2007.



**Above all, Thai SL should be taught, preserved, and cultivated.**



Tumtavitikul & Ng et al. CSUN2012.

**Thank You**

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Tumtavitikul & Ng, et al. CSUN2012.