

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the information needed to carry out for this study. It is divided into six parts as follows:

1. Rationale and Background
2. Purposes of the Study
3. Research Questions
4. The Scope of the Study
5. Definitions of Terms
6. Significance of the Study

1. Rationale and Background

English has become an essential medium of modern communication at the international level. It is a tool for communication between different native tongues. In many countries throughout the world, English language broadcasts are shown on television on a regular basis. Additionally, there are a great number of professional papers published in English. Even academic papers which are published in other languages usually have English abstracts.

In this era of globalization, new technologies like the internet are expanding the boundaries of our worlds. Various kinds of information can be rapidly transmitted all over through a system of networks. It is generally accepted that a huge amount of resources and information are available on the internet (Kitao, 1996). Mccrum (2002) pointed out that in its first decade, internet activities have revealed the extent of English influence (80% home pages on the web are in English, compared with 4.5% in German and 3.1% in Japanese). As a result, in order to reap the benefits of the internet, a good command of English is required.

1.1 English in the Thai Educational System

Globalization has had a massive effect on the Thai educational system; English competence is required from the undergraduate to the postgraduate levels at

every university. Owing to the fact that English is a foreign language rather than a second language in Thailand, students have a limited opportunity to use or access English resources. For university students, English reading and writing skills are the keys to help them access a lot of international information such as textbooks, journals, newspapers as well as documents for academic purposes (Bratt & Mary, 1983).

Thai students are required to take the national entrance examination in order to enter a public university, on which they have to demonstrate a certain amount of English proficiency. For graduate school, students also need to take the TOEFL exam or another English test which, for example, requires some understanding of grammar and high-frequency vocabulary.

Research on English needs in the work place suggests that English curriculum in Thai universities cannot fulfill the English use demand in the workplace. Listening and speaking skills are the most important focus in workplaces, but these skills are not emphasized as much as they should be. Learners cannot overcome many difficulties for example, the interference of the mother tongue in terms of pronunciation, syntax and idiomatic usage, as well as having few opportunities to use English in their daily lives and feeling little responsibility for their own learning (Wiriyachitra, 2001).

The educational reform plan implemented in 1996-2007 concerned four main areas: school, curriculum, teacher and administrative reform. Life-long learning, according to the reform plan, should be promoted most. English language teaching and learning goal in Thailand are as follows (Wiriyachitra, 2001):

1. Establishing more international programs, there were 143 undergraduate, 205 graduate and 77 doctoral international programs instructed in English. Universities are encouraged to open more international programs in the near future.

2. Changing English teaching and learning in universities as follows:

- 2.1 Students need to take the English proficiency test designed by the Ministry of University Affairs. The scores will be used to consider university students admissions.

2.2 The scores from the test are used to decide whether the students should take a remedial course with no credit or take a compulsory English course.

2.3 Four compulsory courses are required for students who are not English majors. The four compulsory courses are two foundation courses; English for Academic Purpose (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

2.4 Before graduation, all undergraduate students have to take a National English Proficiency Test. Even though the results will not appear on their transcripts, they can be used in job applications and further studies in the country.

3. Self-Access Learning Centers (SALC) and IT should be promoted. There have been more than 46 SALCs set up in the country. The goals of setting up SALCs are to give students more control over content and to create a more collaborative learning environment. Teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, and universities are all required to take the e-learning course training. Also, English courses at many universities provide e-learning courses for students, so they can work on their own both in class and out-of-class.

In an attempt to control the quality of Thai education, certain standards have been produced as a result. These standards help indicate both the content and methods of education. The purposes of English language teaching are as follows: (National Education Act, 2002)

1. To enable the use of English specifically for communication, management in learning, further education and careers.
2. To search for effective ways of learning a foreign language and for one's own effective learning style.
3. To use English in searching for information relevant to other subjects in order to widen students' world knowledge.

The following approaches to the teaching and learning process are recommended:

- Linking knowledge gained to real life.
- Self-directed learning
- Group work, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and assignments

- Completing various activities and research collaboratively through project work

Obviously, English should be emphasized not only in communication but also in the cultural values aspects. If we read the goals of education critically, the Ministry of Education put a greater emphasis on enhancing the students' language competence by using approaches such as communicative tasks, role play, pair work, and a relaxed atmosphere (Naranunn, 2001).

In the last 15 years, there have been three very important learning methodologies suggested: the introduction of self access learning, task-based learning and e-learning (Thamraksa, 2003). Although Thai students are usually regarded as dependent and passive language learners, these methodologies encourage students to be on their own in language learning. To highlight the importance of promoting autonomous learning, SALC have been established in many institutes. Also, many universities have launched programs promoting independent learning and encouraging out-of-class learning (Kijsiripanth, 2006). Task-based learning focuses on the use of authentic language and meaningful tasks using the target language. E-learning courses can be delivered to students through computers or technology. Moreover, they give students the choice of what, when and where they would like to learn. That is, they enable flexible learning. Obviously, these three methodologies can serve the needs of and potentially influence teaching English in Thailand (Snae & Brueckner, 2008).

The end result of educational reforms and curriculum changes is to produce students with a good command of English. If this goal is not reached, it can affect the students in terms of job opportunities and higher education. The majority of Thai students, including Khon Kaen University students, still have problems with their English listening and speaking skills (Rujikietgumjorn, 1993). One of the major changes in English teaching in recent years is the shift in teaching methodology from a focus on form to a focus on meaning and comprehension. As Hymes (1971) suggested, the features of communicative competence should be integrated with sociolinguistic and contextual competence as well as grammatical competence. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which refers to the basis of the communicative competence, emphasizes that students should be provided with

meaningful practice, inputs, and a great deal of experiences in order to serve their communication needs (Canale, 1983).

1.2 Communication through Language

Some researchers (Hickey, 1991; Finocchiaro, 1989) agree that second language learners who acquired languages while taking part in language interaction containing comprehensible input and output have realized the importance of grammatical competence at a high level. As a result, alternative approaches such as grammar-consciousness raising, and a task-based approaches are suggested by Fotos and Ellis (1991). All new methods are based on the integration of grammar instruction with communicative language use.

Obviously, teachers are not simply language facilitators teaching the knowledge of linguistic systems. Teachers are supposed to create activities that can help students connect their own experiences to the classroom, so students will gradually become personally involved in the learning process. Teachers can help enhance the students' learning experience through meaningful context and activities.

Therefore, grammar instruction should be related to meaning, social-function and discourse in order to enable students to achieve efficient and effective communication in English (Wasanasomsithi, 2001). Both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency should be emphasized in the classroom.

A study by Cooper (1998), found that gerunds and infinitives, reported speech, and idioms were difficult for English learners because idioms are connected to specific cultural norms and activities. According to an idiom dictionary, idiom is defined as an expression whose meaning is different from the literal meaning. It refers to figurative meanings that can be obtained only through conventional use. It is generally accepted that in order to be successful in conveying messages, second language learners should understand both literal and idiomatic meanings. Larson (1984, p. 125) states that "Expressions of at least two words which cannot be understood literally and which function as a unit semantically are called idioms. They are special collocations which possess a meaning as a whole but the combination of meaning is hardly the same as the meaning of individual words".

Furthermore, the Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs compiled by Cowie and Mackin (1993) defined "idioms as a combination of two or more words

which function as a unit of meaning”. Idioms can also be found in various patterns. Mcmordie (1978) says that idioms can be very difficult for both non-native readers and speakers because the meanings of the combined single words are not the same as idiomatic phrase.

It can have a literal meaning in one situation and a different idiomatic meaning in another. It is a phrase which does not always follow the normal rules of meaning and grammar. For example, *cold turkey* can literally mean a turkey which is cold. However, the idiomatic meaning of *cold turkey* is to describe quitting something abruptly. So, it has nothing to do with the adjective *cold* or the noun *turkey*. Another example, *sit on the fence* can literally mean that one is sitting on a fence. However, the idiomatic meaning of *sit on the fence* is to not make a clear choice or be unable to decide regarding some issue.

Because of their complicated structure and unpredictable meaning, idioms are difficult for second language learners but they are very useful for language communication. It can be said that the second language learners who can use idioms effectively are proficient at English language to a certain extent.

Idioms can be found in all forms of discourse: in lectures, books or magazines, daily conversations, television and radio broadcasts and movie soundtracks. When watching movies or reading popular fiction, we come across lots of idioms. Movie soundtracks are recommended as a good tool to help improve students’ English competency in various skills. They show the true nature of communication in cultural context, in that they contain active vocabulary and also present conversations more realistically. (Noowongsri, 2004).

1.3 CALL as an Alternative Approach

Most Thai students are only exposed to English through textbooks. Thus, it can be said that classroom language learning is not enough. Textbook dialogues do not fully present real life conversations (Glimore, 2004). In order to enhance students’ competency, teachers should find useful techniques to facilitate student learning.

The National Education Act (B.E.2542), chapter 9, section 66, p. 19 states that “Learners shall have the right to develop their capabilities for utilization of technologies for education as soon as possible, so they shall have sufficient

knowledge and skills in using these technologies for acquiring knowledge themselves on a continual life long basis.”

To date, innovative technologies have been increasingly used to enhance English skills. There are many linguistics teachers working on how technologies can be used to develop English language learning (Kaewphaitoon, 2006).

It has not been easy to help Thai learners communicate in English at an international level because English has only been taught as a foreign language in Thailand. However, English teachers have been encouraged to use various approaches to achieve certain goals. The media has become a useful tool. It can fill up weaknesses in the language of students by providing them with a non-host language environment. It also provides a convenient virtual learning context, particularly on the internet, which allows EFL learners to study English any time, any where.

In the internet age, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is the main technological tool used for pedagogical applications. To students, computers are used as a tool to practice and develop their English. Since the emergence of the internet, the role of CALL has changed. Many internet connections are set up for various purposes (Kaewphaitoon, 2006): thus, the style of language learning can be interesting and effective for students (Prapphal, 1992). Since the difference in students' learning styles should be considered, a variety of CALL activities would probably be a more effective tool. According to Chambers and Sprecher (1983), CALL is very beneficial in developing language skills. CALL can be applied in many language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar. Furthermore, CALL can help promote autonomous learning via the constructivist approach. Besides, e-learning, which is a type of CALL, is also a good tool for promoting a native models of language use.

In most cases, e-learning is used to encourage learner autonomy. In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) within a classroom-based environment. But learning through e-learning can be an interesting alternative and can help learners become more independent. Some universities, like Khon Kaen University, support and provide reliable e-learning server such as Moodle. Also, the university has encouraged its lecturers to use the e-learning as part of its policy (Khon Kaen University Education policy in 2007-2011).

Unfortunately, there are few research studies on the use of computerized programs that instruct on idioms through communicative grammar lessons. It could be very beneficial to students if this kind of CALL program is constructed. Students would be regularly exposed to idiomatic expressions that are used in communication. This kind of CALL program can also enhance students' language competency. Thus, a study focusing on learning idiomatic expressions through the use of CALL program and e-learning through Moodle is worth pursuing to provide more insight into second language acquisition.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To enhance students' learning of idiomatic expressions from the "Friends" series through a CALL program.

2.2 To study students' opinions toward the learning activities on the CALL program.

3. Research Questions

3.1 To what extent can the CALL program help students learn idiomatic expressions?

3.2 What are the students' opinions toward the learning activities in the CALL program?

4. Scope of the Study

4.1 The contents of the CALL program focus on idiomatic expressions which are derived from the "Friends" series, season 10.

4.2 The target group was 27 English minor students who enrolled in course 411201, "English for Minors," in the 2009 academic year.

5. Definitions of Terms

5.1 The *CALL program* in this study refers to a learning activity using offline and online programs consisting of watching video clips of a television series as language input, practicing exercises (multiple choice, matching situations and sentence construction), and completing end-of-episode quizzes.

5.2 *Students' learning of idioms* refers to the scores students obtained which reflect their ability to use idiomatic expressions.

5.3 *Idiomatic expression*: refers to idioms used in the "Friends" series.

6. Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to bring about three main advantages. First, it is designed to enhance students' idiomatic use. Another advantage is to create an alternative method of idiomatic instruction. The rest is to innovate a multimedia program on idiomatic expression for in-class and out-of-class learning.