

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Language learning is considered primarily a learner and learning oriented activity according to various studies in second and foreign language development in both natural and formal settings (Brown, 2001; Nunan, 1988a; Wright, 1990). In addition, learners' belief about language learning is one of the popular issues discussed in the field. More importantly, the role of the learner in the language learning process has received more emphasis in recent years.

It is likely clear that learners play greater roles in learning and teaching processes particularly in curricula based on a learner-centeredness ideology. If the learner's needs relating to the processes of learning are not well taken into consideration, the curriculum can not claim to be truly learner-centered (Nunan, 1988a, p. 177). As such, learners' preferences about the learning process including their views are "of critical importance to the success or failure of their own efforts to master a foreign language" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 394).

Though many teachers acknowledge the need to understand learners' preferences, they may not actually consult learners when conducting language activities. Teachers may believe that learners are not capable of expressing their wants or needs which include classroom activities used in their classes (Zohreh & Valizadeh). Besides, many teachers do not accept their learners as well as their great contribution to the language learning process (Allwright, 1984, p. 167).

Learners' preferences including views towards classroom activities, and teachers' awareness of those preferences and views do play a major role in influencing both decision-making processes and classroom behaviors (Spratt, 1999). In some societies with a top-down curriculum such as Thailand, roles of teachers and learners are likely rigidly drawn, and those of both teachers and learners at the College of Dramatic Arts are no exception. Therefore, it may be viewed inappropriate and acceptable to have learners participate and help decide the classroom activities.

It is likely that learners' preferences in language learning, including views towards classroom activities, and teachers' perceptions of those preferences, influence learning processes and success to certain extent. However, learners' learning preferences are possibly different from their teachers' perceptions. Conversely Thai school learners' learning preferences are not seriously investigated and learners are unlikely to be given a chance to participate and help decide the classroom activities.

Given this background, I undertook this study to find out learners' learning preferences, and perspectives of the teachers on these within the Thai context of English language learning. In other words, M.6 students' learning preferences and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences in language learning at the College of Dramatic Arts were investigated.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences at the College of Dramatic Arts.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there a significant difference between learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1) It is expected to identify the learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences.

2) The findings may help teachers initiate or select some new ideas and techniques to suit their learners' learning style.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1) This study was done with sample chosen from M.6 students of the College of Dramatic Arts in the academic year 2006. Respondents were chosen from a total

number of 194 learners in three programs which are Thai dance, Thai music, and western music, and there were six English teachers of the college who responded.

2) This study aims at investigating the learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences at the College of Dramatic Arts which operates in Thai context only.

1.6 BASIC ASSUMPTION

This study assumes that the expected outcomes of the learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences at the College of Dramatic Arts are different.

1.7 HYPOTHESIS

Learners' preferences in language learning and their teachers' perceptions of those preferences at the College of Dramatic Arts are significantly different.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERM

1.8.1 Learners' *likes or preferences* means that the learners either enjoy an activity or find it interesting.

1.8.2 Learning styles refers to the variety of ways learners take in, store, and retrieve information. They can give clues about how to best approach a particular task.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study consists of the following:

-An abstract which provides the overall information in the form of a summary.

-An acknowledgement which is the part for thanking those who help the researcher complete the independent study.

-Contents which reflect the chapters in the report.

-Chapter 1 which is an introduction including background and rationale, objective of the study, research question, significance of the study, scope of the study, basic assumption, hypothesis, definitions of terms, and organization of the study.

-Chapter 2 which is a review of related literature.

-Chapter 3 which covers a research methodology including populations and subjects, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

-Chapter 4 which is the results of the study including demography of the subjects, learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions and hypothesis test.

-Chapter 5 which covers a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

-References where all sources are identified.

-Appendixes which include questionnaire I and questionnaire II both in English and Thai.