

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Language is recognized as a significant tool for communication. It is also a medium to reach every branch of knowledge and information in the modern age. Presently, few would disagree that the English language is one of the dominant languages, as it plays an important role in every facet of life. English is certainly one of the world's most widely used languages.

People around the world are using English either as a first language, a second language, or as a foreign language. It is estimated that English is spoken by more than 300 million people all over the world, and it has official status in over 60 countries. Estimates also suggest that at least 150 million people use English fluently as a foreign language, and three or four times this number with some degree of competence (Wierzbicka, 2006). The English language is the native language of many countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, and Australia. Not only is English used by many people as a medium of communication in non-English speaking countries, but the English language is also used for several purposes, including international air traffic control and it is the chief language of international publishing, business, and science and technology, and more so in educational areas. In the modern world, it is hardly surprising that knowledge of the English language is necessary and beneficial to all.

Thailand, like many other countries, is experiencing a rapid increase in the use of English in the Information Age, although Thai is the native and official language. In recent years, the English language has more influence on Thai society because of the effects of globalization. Because of its massive influence, the Ministry of Education has pushed the English language to be both a compulsory and an elective subject in the national educational curriculum of Thailand.

According to the Basic Education Standards, B.E. 2544 (2001), foreign languages are placed in the Basic Education Curriculum to enhance students' interest in learning foreign languages. Thus, students will gain a positive attitude towards

learning a foreign language and be able to communicate more fluently. This benefits them in furthering their education, as well as later in their careers. Students will also be able to understand more about other cultures, and be able to relate Thai thinking and culture to the world more creatively.

With further effort, the Ministry of Education has recently allowed Thai public schools to operate bilingual education, officially named English Programs (EP), in order to satisfy the needs of parents and community as well as to develop and enhance Thai students' English skill proficiencies.

According to the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), it is stated that education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potential. In addition, local administration organizations shall have the right to provide education at any or all levels of education in accordance with readiness, suitability and requirements of the local areas. Most importantly, education shall put an emphasis on knowledge and skills in mathematics and languages, with emphasis on proper use of the Thai language to ensure that all Thais receive continuous lifelong education of quality and are capable of learning and self-development to their fullest potential.

Regarding the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), the Department of General Education operated the "English Program", based on the Ministry of Education's curriculum in the secondary level. The objectives of conducting the English Program are as follows:-

- to enhance the student's English skills and proficiencies
- to encourage teachers, instructors, and school staffs to have lifelong self-development
- to promote the educational development of a school
- to be a model of other EP schools

The English Program requires conducting classes in English except for some subjects concerning Thai language and culture, Thai history, or Buddhism. Presently, there are several schools under the Department of General Education that operate an "English Program," such as Yothinburana, Bangkok; Sa-ardpadermwittaya, Chumporn; Makutmeungratwittayalai, Rayong; Samakkeewittayakom, Chiang Rai,

and Woranareechalerm, Songkla, among others. English Programs have been continuing to gain popularity throughout the nation in recent years.

In 2004, Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School received a permit to operate “the English Program”. All subjects are taught in English except Thai language and culture. The program required that only native speakers of English, or experts in some particular subjects like Thai language or Phetchaburi Study conduct the classes. The program policy is not only to promote personnel development in operating learning process and performance, but also to encourage student-centered methodology, to enhance moral discipline and ethics of students, and to provide atmosphere and environment for learning and teaching.

Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School, the model English Program school under the office of the Basic of Education Commission in 2006, is the first school in Phetchaburi that operates the English Program at the secondary level. The school has been operating the English Program for four years. A lot of students in the English program are widely perceived successful. Some of them continue their studies abroad, in places such as the USA and Norway.

In recent years, there have been several investigations on attitudes in teaching-learning English in a standard educational curriculum program in Thailand. Nevertheless, studies regarding teaching-learning English on the “English Program” are still rare. There has never been a research program focusing on the English Program in Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi. The author therefore would like to conduct the study, investigating attitudes, and comparing three aspects between M.1, M.2 and M.3 students regarding the English program in Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The research questions:

1.2.1 What are attitudes of Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School students towards learning in the English Program?

1.2.2 Are there any different attitudes of students for each level towards the English Program?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Objectives

1) To survey attitudes of students towards studying in the English Program (EP)

1.3.2 Sub-objectives

1) To investigate and compare if attitudes towards the English Program among M.1, M.2 and M.3 students are different or not; and

2) To describe characteristics of students who have either positive or negative attitudes toward the English Program (EP)

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 The study was done with subjects at the lower secondary level, M.1, M.2 and M.3, at Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School in the academic year 2007. The total number of subjects was 147.

1.4.2 The study aims to survey attitudes of students towards studying in the English Program (EP).

1.4.3 The study also focuses on a comparison of attitudes towards the English Program among M.1, M.2 and M.3 students.

1.4.4 Basic Assumptions

1.4.4.1 The study assumes that all subjects will answer questionnaires with honesty according to their feelings as well as experiences towards studying in the English Program.

1.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 This study is limited to M.1, M.2 and M.3 students in Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School, academic year 2007 studying in the English Program only.

1.6 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY/DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

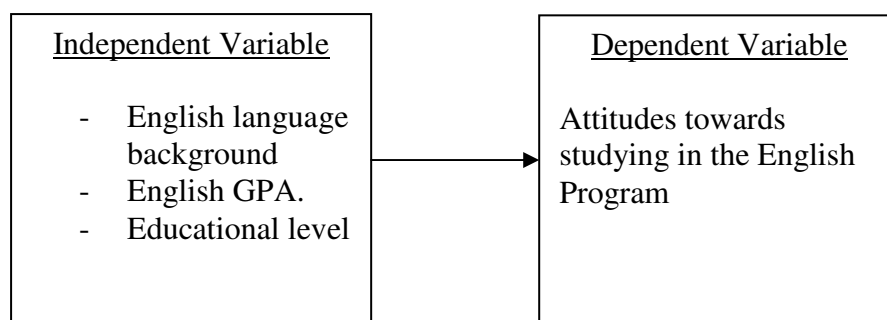
Independent variables:

Factors include personal background, English language background, English GPA, and educational level of the students since they are expected to affect different attitudes.

Dependent variables:

The dependent variable of this study will point to the attitudes towards studying in the English Program. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of a study of the attitudes of Benchamatheputhit Phetchaburi School students towards studying in the English Program



The definitions of the terms of this study are as follows:

1.6.1 Attitudes

refers to the opinions and feelings that students have towards studying in the English Program in terms of the school program, learners, teachers, textbooks and supplementary materials, classroom conditions as well as measurement and evaluation

1.6.2 Students

refers to the M.1, M.2 and M.3 students who are studying in the English program in

Benchamatheputhit School, Phetchaburi, Thailand in academic year 2007.

- 1.6.3 Educational level refers to the level of study that Benchamatheputhit Phetchaburi School students are learning; i.e. M.1, M.2 and M.3
- 1.6.4 English Program (EP) refers to the learning and teaching program conducted in the English language, except for some subjects such as the Thai language and culture in Benchamatheputhit Phetchaburi School, Thailand

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.7.1 The study will provide useful information regarding attitudes and opinions of M.1, M.2 and M.3 students towards studying in an English Program (EP).

1.7.2 These findings will be a primary resource for teachers and administrators in the English Program at Benchamatheputhit School to develop more in terms of the program, teachers, textbook and supplementary materials, classroom conditions, and evaluation of the courses.

1.7.3 These findings may help lay the groundwork as well as enhance further research of any other researchers.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of “Attitudes of Benchamateputhit Phetchaburi School Students towards studying in an English Program (EP)” is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 presents an introduction regarding the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, scope of the study, limitations, framework of the study and definitions of terms, significance as well as organization of the study.

Chapter 2 covers a review of the relevant literature and previous similar studies.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study including the details on subjects, materials, procedure, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 shows the result findings of the study.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion of the study, discussion, and recommendations for further study.