

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The world is changing so fast that English is on its way to keep up. The role of using English as a second language has been of key importance over the past decades especially in today's world of global communication, which brings together more people who are turning to use English as the means of communication. As English becomes more and more important, learning about anything in the future is undoubtedly creating more demand for learning in English.

Having recognized the importance of English, various educational institutions have prompted Thai students to develop their English proficiency in four skills with the intention that they can effectively and fluently use English in their real life communications. However, it has been found that Thai students rarely use English outside their classroom as English is normally used as a foreign language in Thailand. Additionally, most university students whose major is not English have a limited time to study it as they may study only a few English courses throughout their whole undergraduate program. All of these factors accordingly result in the lack of opportunity and environment to practice what they have learned in class in their real life situations. Thus, the traditional English language learning which relies on teacher-centeredness or classroom-based learning alone may be insufficient to have students successfully acquire and master the target language.

With such realization, the classroom gradually becomes learner-centered and the teachers who normally direct the learning are forced to adapt to their new role of facilitators in the classroom. Learner autonomy is set as a goal for both teachers and learners. For this reason, independent learning or self-directed learning, which provides the opportunities and experiences necessary for students to become capable, self-reliant, self-motivated, and life-long learners, has become more important in English language learning since it encourages motivation, curiosity, and self-confidence, as well as developing attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to make responsible decisions and take actions regarding students' own learning.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the reasons to establish the self-access learning center (SALC) at Thammasat University was to promote independent learning among students who enroll in Fundamental English Courses. They are required to attend the SALC in order to practice their English skills outside the classroom as well as complete assigned tasks. Thus, this survey is aimed at reporting the attitudes of Fundamental English Course II students towards using the SALC for their English language learning at Thammasat University during semester 2/2006 in order that teachers and those officials involved in managing the resource can better encourage and enhance students' independent learning, as well as lead them to achieve mastery of English and be able to use it proficiently in their further studies and their careers.

This study intends to find out the answers to a set of questions as follows:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards using the SALC in English language learning after completing the Fundamental English Course II?
2. How do the students perceive the value and usefulness of the SALC in their English language learning?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are the following:

- 1.3.1 To survey the attitudes of Fundamental English Course II students at Thammasat University towards using the SALC in English language learning.
- 1.3.2 To find out the problems and comments that the students have in using the SALC in their English language learning in order to provide the appropriate materials to suit their requirements, improve the facilities, and better facilitate their use of the resources.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms of this study are the following:

1. **Fundamental English Courses:** refers to English I, II and III courses in which all students are required to study depending on their university admission test scores of English language knowledge.

2. **Fundamental English Course II students:** refers to first-year students who enroll in Fundamental English Course II at Thammasat University during semester 2/2006.

3. **Attitudes:** refers to the students' ways of thinking towards the use of the SALC in their English language learning. These could be both positive and negative.

4. **Teachers:** refers to instructors who teach Fundamental English Courses at Thammasat University.

5. **Officials:** refers to staff and management of the SALC at Thammasat University.

6. **Self-Access Learning Center (SALC):** refers to the learning center for students to practice their English skills outside the classroom according to their abilities, interests, and needs. It is located in the Audio-Visual Center of Rangsit campus, Thammasat University and has 4 rooms at present, including a reading and writing room, a computer room, an edutainment room, and a listening room (sound lab).

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study principally aims to survey the attitudes and satisfaction as well as the problems and comments of Fundamental English Course II students regarding the use of the SALC in their English language learning at Thammasat University during semester 2/2006.

The study covers the subjects who were first-year students and enrolled in the Fundamental English Course II at Thammasat University during semester 2/2006. The subjects were randomly selected from students in various faculties and various classes of the course.

There are some basic assumptions that the researcher acknowledges in this study as follows:

- This study assumes that all subjects have experience in using the SALC in their English language learning.

- This study assumes that all subjects will honestly answer every questionnaire item according to their attitudes towards using the resource.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 This study will reveal the attitudes of Fundamental English Course II students at Thammasat University towards using the SALC in their English language learning. Such findings from this study will probably be useful for teachers and those officials involved in managing these resources to make such resources as well as the available materials more appropriate for Fundamental English Courses students.

1.6.2 The findings can also be used as guidelines for teachers in order to establish positive attitudes among students towards using the resource.

1.6.3 This study may pave a way towards further research regarding how to make independent learning more successful.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of “Attitudes of Fundamental English Course II students towards using SALC at Thammasat University” in this paper is divided into five chapters as follows:

1.7.1 Chapter 1 clarifies the objectives behind the study, the significance of the research problems, and the operational definitions of the related terms.

1.7.2 Chapter 2 consists of a number of studies and works which provide the background for the study. A review of relevant literature is intended to demonstrate different ideas corresponding to the overview of attitudes in language learning, self-directed learning (SDL), self-access learning (SAL), and self-access centres (SACs).

1.7.3 The methodology used in the study is shown in Chapter 3. It includes identification of subjects, questionnaire description, and statistical measurements.

1.7.4 Chapter 4 reports all findings from the study and their statistical analyses. The research questions are also answered in this part.

1.7.5 Chapter 5 provides a conclusion of the study and discusses any interesting issues as well as recommendations related to the study.