

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

English has played an important role in Thailand for a very long time. Thai people use English for education, business, technology, and so on. English is not only used as a native language in English speaking countries, but also used as an international language to communicate among people in most non-English speaking countries. Brown (2000) states that English now, the major world wide lingua franca, is the subject of international debate as policy makers struggle over the legitimization of varieties of English.

In Thailand, English is included as a subject in foreign language that is compulsory for all grade levels in schools. At the university level, all freshmen are required to take a fundamental English course and can take a further course as a selective subject.

Tha-It Suksa School is an Islamic private school. It is located in Pakkret District, Nonthaburi Province. All of the students and teachers are Muslims. It can be said the school is the first school in central Thailand which uses an Islamic study curriculum. Generally, the curriculum is widely used in Islamic private schools in the south. The school was established in 1970 and students studied in *Pondok*, an old traditional curriculum, which is mostly used in the south. Subjects in this curriculum are about Islamic religion. After students graduate, they go to further their study in Arab countries such as Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Most of them want to be religious scholars, *Imam*; religious leaders and also religious teachers. It can be said that the school is a boarding school. Initially only males were accepted to study in the institute. A number of students come from every region, especially central Thailand as well as foreign countries such as Myanmar and Cambodia.

In 1996, the school expanded to have Lower and Upper Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2535 while *Pondok* is still used. It can be said the school is the first school in the central region which uses an Islamic study curriculum. Generally, the same curriculum is widely used in Islamic private schools in the south. Both males and girls are accepted to study in Matthayomsuksa grade 1. This curriculum consists

of two groups of subjects; general subjects and religious subjects. The students will get a certificate of M.3 or M.6 after they graduate. At the early stage of using the curriculum, there were many parents interested in this kind of curriculum because they had not sent their children to the south at all. In 2002, Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544 became compulsory throughout Thailand and the school started to use this curriculum. In 2004, Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546 was introduced in line with Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544, and Prathomsuksa grade 1 students were accepted to study in the same year.

In academic year 2006, there were around 1,100 students. Most students come from Nonthaburi, Pathumthani, Bangkok and some of them come from the south. They are classified into 2 groups according to the curriculum. The first group of students is studying in *Pondok* which is the first curriculum of the school. There are more than 50 students. They always study non-formal education to get the M.6 certificate. The second group of students is studying two curriculums, Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544 and Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546. In general, in Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544 they are in Prathomsuksa 1-3 (primary education grades 1-3), Matthayomsuksa grades 1-3 (secondary education grades 1-3) and Matthayomsuksa grades 4-6 (secondary education grades 4-6). For Prathomsuksa 4-6 (primary education grades 4-6), it will be started in the next academic year, 2007. In Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546, they are in Lower Islamic Study grades 1-3 (*Ibtidaiyah*), Lower Islamic Study grades 4-6 (*Ibtidaiyah*) and Middle Islamic Study grades 1-3 (*Mutawassitah*) respectively. However, some of students in Matthayomsuksa grades 4-6 will be classified in Lower Islamic Study grades 4-6 (*Ibtidaiyah*) if they have never studied in an Islamic study curriculum before.

In Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546, Malay and Arabic are subjects I in the Language group. At Tha-It Suksa School in the academic year 2006, Arabic was required for all students in either the Science-Math or Art-Language program, while Malay was required for Art-Language program students only. However both of the two languages were used as a medium in other subjects.

It has been noticed that students always pay attention in Arabic more than English. They also admire Arabic teachers who mostly graduated from Egypt, while English teachers did not graduate from English speaking countries. Moreover there

learning achievement of Arabic was higher than English. The researcher is interested in attitudes towards learning English compared with Arabic so this study is made to research these attitudes.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this research study is to investigate the M.5 students' attitudes in learning of English compared with Arabic.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is conducted to survey M.5 students; in particular, its objectives are to find out the answers to the following questions:

1.3.1 What are the attitudes that students have towards learning English and Arabic?

1.3.2 Are these attitudes different? How?

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Attitude: refers to the students' response in a positive and negative way concerning the learning of English and Arabic.

Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544: refers to a curriculum which is compulsory for educational institutions in elementary and secondary level throughout Thailand.

Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546: refers to a curriculum which contains contents of Islamic study used in most Islamic private schools and goes along with Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544

Students: refers to students who studied in M.5 at Tha-It Suksa School in the second semester of the academic year 2006.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 POPULATION AND SUBJECTS

The population was 121 students studying in Matthayomsuksa 5 at Tha-It Suksa School in the second semester, the academic year 2006. All of them were taking Basic English course (ENG32101) and Basic Arabic (ARA25101) for students

studying in lower Islamic Study grade 5 (*Ibtidaiyah*), or Basic Arabic (ARA32101) for students studying in middle Islamic Study grade 2 (*Mutawassitah*). The whole population would be used as subjects for this study.

1.5.2 INSTRUMENTS

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to investigate subjects' attitude towards learning English and Arabic. The Thai version of the questionnaire was written to reduce the problem of misinterpretation by the subjects. The questionnaire would be divided into 3 parts as follows:

Part 1: The subjects' personal information

Part 2: The subjects' attitudes towards learning English and Arabic
(using 5 point Likert scale)

Part 3: The students' opinions and suggestions
(using open-ended questions)

1.5.3 DATA COLLECTION

To collect data, the questionnaire would be distributed to subjects in the middle of March 2007. All of the questionnaires would be returned. Then, the completion of the data will be checked to verify the information and assigned codes for entry into the computer.

1.5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data would be analyzed by a SPSS/PC program. After scoring the tests and verifying the questionnaire, they would be calculated frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation (SD).

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 Teachers can make use of the findings from this study by improving and adjusting the English course to make it more appropriate for the students.

1.6.2 The findings can be used as guidelines for teachers in order to establish positive attitudes among students towards learning English.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study of a survey of attitudes towards learning English compared with Arabic of M.5 students at Tha-It Suksa School in Pakkret District, Nonthburi Province, is divided into five chapters as the following:

Chapter 1: Introduction- it deals with background, research questions, objectives of the study, definition of terms, scope of the study, significance of the study and organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of literature- it includes an overview of attitudes, Basic Education Curriculum B.E.2544, Islamic Study Curriculum B.E.2546 and overview of Arabic language.

Chapter 3: Methodology- this part explains the research methodology used in conducting this study. It includes the subjects, the materials, the data collection and the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results of the study- it reveals the results of the research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations- it gives a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.