

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

In the era of globalization where access to and privilege of information is vital, English plays a very important role in a process of communication. In countries where English is used as a second language, English is no longer a tool for learning about Western ways of thinking and living. Instead, it has become a tool for sharing and exchanging ideas among speakers of different cultures. This change in the role of English as an international language has become necessary for countries where English is not a native language to prepare their population to become competent English speakers in order to be able to participate effectively and fully in the world.

English has long been viewed as important to the development of Thailand and has been a mandatory part of the national education curriculum for more than a century. The English teaching and learning methods in Thai schools, however, have remained far from achieving their goals as Thai students still have very low levels of English language ability. The director of the Higher Education commission's English proficiency development centre, Dr. Achara Wongsothorn (2005), reported that Thai students came eighth in the nine southeast Asian countries rated by TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), scoring on average only 201 on the cumulative 300 scale. Of the six countries in the region rated by the multiple-choice TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), Thai students ranked fourth overall with an average 524 of the full 990. Dr. Wongsothorn added that results of English tests in 2002-2005 university entrance exams also reflected Thais' poor English skills, with scores as low as 30-40 out of 100 and that the poor results would seriously affect the country's competitiveness in the global market (*Learning Post*, Bangkok Post, August 2005).

Although various factors such as educational administrators and learners' commitment are involved in successful language learning, teachers have been largely seen by the Education Ministry to hold responsibility as it told a seminar that most teachers still clung to old and outdated teaching methods and lacked efficient techniques and that the problem existed mostly in small schools, where heavy workloads prevented teachers from improving themselves. In addition, the ministry's Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment reported it had conducted quality checks at 17, 562 schools across the country, or 49 per cent of all educational institutes. Of the schools assessed, 39.2 per cent provided satisfactory instruction with a student-centered approach, and only 13.5 per cent impressively arranged activities to promote creativity and analytical and problem-solving skills. Thus, under the vision and leadership of Education Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng, a national educational goal has been set to bring about significant changes with the first priorities being developing children's analytical abilities and life-long learning as well as improving teachers' abilities (www.nationmultimedia.com August 17, 2005).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of the teaching strategies used in English language classrooms among English school teachers. The focus of the study was to explore the current strategies for teaching English vocabulary used by primary school teachers at Sacred Heart School, Chiang Mai.

1.3 Method

A set of questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The respondents were 15 Thai Primary school teachers teaching English at Sacred Heart School, Muang district, Chiang Mai Province.

The questionnaire was composed of 2 parts:

1. Respondents' educational background, experience, professional development, current duties and responsibilities
2. Respondents' English vocabulary teaching strategies

1.4 Educational and Application Advantages

It is hoped that the results of the study can be used to evaluate and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the English vocabulary teaching strategies used by primary school teachers at Sacred Heart School, Chiang Mai and ascertain their competence in line with their professional development and the provision of the national educational reform.



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