

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Significance of the Problem

In accordance with the rapid changes in this age of globalization and information technology which affect social and economic conditions of the world, it is essential for Thailand to develop the quality of human resource to be ready for global competition. It is also necessary to adapt itself to current changes using the curriculum development as an important mechanism in the development of human potential. This is because the curricular programs in educational management could be used as an indicator in the knowledge and learning experience of the learners to achieve the aim of education. Phupan (2003, p. 16) cited that curricular program was the core of education and it was the indicator of the progress of the country. If any country has appropriate and modern curricular programs, the people are likely to have good quality and high potential. Educational reform causes changes in various aspects particularly curriculum reform and learning reform focusing on learners after the proclamation of the National Education Act of 1999. The Thai government determined a policy on the educational reform in order to push the immediate changes and development in accordance with the time condition as set in the constitution. The National Education Act also concludes that curricular programs and learning through learning process at all levels of education must be reformed to focus on the educational network in each level. The highlight of education reform for quality development of learners is the learning content, learning strategies, and software management rather than school buildings and hardware budget. All Thai people should be provided with life-long education in order to accumulate their intellectual wealth leading to the country's development. Teachers have to change their attitudes and be able to design learning process focusing on learner-centered instruction. Moreover, an agreement of the meeting on "Educational Reform" held on 1-5 August, 2002 at the government house revealed that all schools or educational institutions must use new curricular programs and facilitate the learning process in accordance

with the educational reform as much as possible. For higher education reform, curricular programs should be flexible for quality development of all graduates. Furthermore, the cooperative network development among universities and local institutions should be actively promoted. Seemahasarn (2003, pp. 7-9) stated that the curriculums in all levels of education must be always improved or developed in order to be up-to-date and appropriate to the global social conditions particularly in higher education. Universities or educational institutions need to develop academic quality to reach the international standard. Therefore, the Ninth Educational Development Plan for Higher Education (2002-2006) determined the policy on the promotion of the internationalization of Thai universities. The educational plan supports the universities to improve their curriculums and learning content focused on broad knowledge of the students. Wiriyawechakul (1997) stated that one thing that was important to the development of internationalization higher education was the students' English proficiency. Jareonwongsak (2000) agreed that English was very important to students since most learning materials, journals, and other textbooks were in English. Thus, the excellence in students' English proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is an important aim of higher education. (Srirat, 2004, p.1)

Rajamangala University of Technology is an educational institution providing higher education focusing on the development of manpower in each occupation which conforms to the National Social and Economic Development Plan. All universities should produce graduates with competency in English. This will serve as a tool for their academic and professional purposes. In addition, English can be a tool for effective communication. Thus, English courses are offered to students both as compulsory and elective subjects for tertiary education. English 1 is a course in General Education group for the first year of undergraduate students of Rajamangala University of Technology. All students must take this course either in the first semester or the second semester. The course objectives are to develop students' skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students are also expected to be able to use general English in speaking, finding topics and main ideas of what they are reading, using appropriate structures in writing short paragraphs and develop positive attitudes toward the English language. Indeed, there is a course description for each

English subject so that the teachers and concerned personnel can use it as a guideline for classroom activities and learning evaluation. Thus, it is like a master curriculum developed from the main campus and all campuses have to follow. The Educational Reform Act for higher education in 1999 upgraded Rajamangala Institute of Technology to comprise 9 universities since January 8, 2005. Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) is one of the nine main universities consisting of 6 networking campuses located in the Northern region of Thailand: Chiang Rai, Nan, Chiang Mai, Lampang, Tak, and Phitsanulok. All of these campuses help one another on educational management and development in accordance with the National Education Act. Hence, it is a good opportunity for RMUTL to develop the curriculums together with the cooperation of RMUTL network. This truly reflects the campuses' and the learners' needs for effective learning in the same region. In addition, the teachers of each course have a chance to work together closely and continually in order to make the curriculums more beneficial to the learners. Karnjanatangeenont (2004) cited that the connection among the networks was necessary for the success of the academic collaboration. At the initial stage, RMUTL used English 1 in the pilot project in order to develop connection among the networks. Sinlarat (2003, p.27) suggested that the first step in having the network connection should start with only one subject. The establishment of the network is considered a principal policy on the teachers and the academic development of RMUTL. Chiang Mai campus acts as the core of networking for development of RMUTL. The RMUTL network considered English subject as essential and important for students in higher education. The reason for the development of the English 1 curriculum is that English 1 is a fundamental and compulsory subject that all undergraduate students of each campus must take. Thus, it is a pilot study leading to the curriculum development of other subjects or programs of RMUTL so as to be appropriate and up-to-date with the situations of the current teaching and learning.

Based on the researchers' teaching experience and the results of the interviews conducted with teachers of English 1 in the previous academic year, the researcher found some limitations of the curricular programs concerning their application. That is, Those limitations included some teachers could not develop students' critical thinking and learning strategies in accordance with constructivism. Moreover, the

teaching and learning process of English 1 could not facilitate the learner English communication at satisfactory level. The results of English 1 mid-term and final examinations of the first year undergraduate students of RMUTL in 2004 showed that the students had a low level of English ability wherein an average score was lower than the standard criterion (60 percent). Based on the needs survey among the learners' learning English 1, the number of hours in learning English 1 is appropriate. However, the size of the class should not be more than 30 students. Moreover, teaching and learning activities should be provided both inside and outside the classroom and classroom activities should be in various forms which allow the learners to use English skills as much as possible. Classroom activities should focus on learner-centered process and the learning content should be relevant to activities and technology in daily life or current business. This conformed to the study of Angwattanakul (1992 cited in Wiriyaajitra, 2003, p.3) on Thai students' English skills. She concluded that Thai students in all levels of education had lower level of English skills based on the standard criterion. This also conformed to the study of Winitchaikul, et.al.(2002) on the appropriate approaches to the English language teaching and learning in the General Educational curriculum of Chiang Mai University. It was found that Thai students in the higher education level had a lower level of the development of English language skills based on the standard criterion and their English ability was at unsatisfactory level which does not meet the needs of entrepreneurs.

Another necessary reason for the development of the English 1 curriculum is directly concerned with the learners' learning experience determined in the National Education Act of 1999 which is the first Education Act on education of the country for educational reform. This is considered an important change in education. The National Education Act determined many educational changes aspects which aimed to encourage learners to have genuine learning experience. Thus, learner-centered learning process is an important core of the educational reform. This could help the learners develop their potential and know how to continually seek for knowledge all their life. The educational institutions and teachers throughout the country are also encouraged to facilitate the learning process and use measurement and evaluation as determined in the sections 22-30 of the National Education Act (The Committee of

National Education Office, 2000, pp. 9-11). The National Education Act of 1999 stated that learners are the most important factors based on educational psychology and they should be able to learn and develop themselves. The Act also emphasized knowledge, ethics, learning process, and learning integration in which educational institutions and concerned agencies prepare the curriculum that encourages the learners to be able to develop themselves naturally. This is an important principle of the curriculum administration focusing on learner-centered process and making learners happy to learn.

Therefore, the educational institutions at all levels must implement the policy in order to truly achieve the educational development purposes. This begins with a reform focusing on the development of the learners as the center of learning, the development of curricular program as well as teaching-learning process. These are essential tasks for teachers and concerned personnel who must work with quality under the philosophy of learner-centered instruction. Teachers must always believe that all learners are able to learn and develop themselves and they should be encouraged to develop naturally. The reform must also conform with the learners' needs, communities, and society. Although there are individual differences among learners, the learning process must promote all learners to be equally developed on physical, intellectual, emotional, and social aspects. Thus, the implementation of innovation and the selection of learning styles as well as various teaching methods must base on the appropriateness and relevance to learning content and conditions of the learners. The teachers play important roles in encouraging, suggesting and giving moral support. They learned together with the learners in new situations. This could create an atmosphere that promotes learning conditions suitable for the learners' needs. One important thing is that teachers must encourage their learners to use critical thinking skills by using task-based activities. That is, the learners must work together on planning, selecting their working methods, discussing, implementing and evaluating information until they are able to obtain new knowledge that can be applied in their real life (Seemahasarn, 2003 pp. 24-28).

A study of Winitchaikul, Wiriyachitra and Chaikitmongkol (2002, p.25) proposed that an effective teaching-learning method suitable for current age should focus on learner-centered instruction and it should give the learners' experiences in

using English language for communication. Classroom activities should resemble learners' real life experiences and meet their needs or interests. According to the concept and principle of learning process focusing on learner-centered instruction, certain characteristics were found to be an important indicator for learner-centered instruction, such as, those that encouraged the learners to learn by themselves and also apply what they learned in their daily life. The learners also have active roles in the learning process in terms of physical, emotional, social and intellectual participation.

The researcher realized that the learning process focusing on learner-centeredness is the most appropriate for teaching and learning English as a second language. This conforms to the social age of learning particularly on learning process for the students in the higher education level when they have readiness and maturity for concept development or higher level thinking skills. These students have basic knowledge or previous experiences on language which can be drawn for language use. They can also choose the strategies suited to them for learning or constructing knowledge. Another aspect is that the students in the higher education level have the characteristics of high responsibility and leadership and they also have goals in learning, such as, to pursue their study or to work. This contributed to their desire to know how to learn or find knowledge independently whereas teachers act as facilitators suggesting on how to think, do, solve problems and improve themselves. This truly makes them fully develop themselves and succeed on learning through various activities they participate. In addition, students in the higher education level have a high level of intellectual development in which they can participate in learning activities that promote their thinking, analyzing, and evaluating skills. They also realize the value of group roles toward their learning experience and others. Thus, they are likely to have readiness that contributes to successful learner-centered instruction. They can also apply their knowledge to actual situations and to adjust themselves to their environment. This is a true principle of the learner-centered instruction.

According to the theoretical concepts concerning with the learner-centered learning process, it was found that this learning process must conform to learning principles of which each one has theoretical concept as a basis. The following are the principle theories supporting the learner-centered learning process.

1. Cooperative Learning Theory is the basis for learning process in which the learners must be responsible for their learning. They have participation and interaction among their groups. Johnson (1994) stated that this theory focused on interaction among learners. They help one another in learning from the activities provided for them to consult and work together. Learners' accountability could promote their better learning and social skills. The learning process in this theory focuses on the development of learners' problem-solving skills and responsibility as well as group cooperation. The learners are considered the most important learning source and they have to participate in teaching-learning activities. The learning process could be in the form of activities and participation in every step. This involves the participation in determining and preparing the content, learning activities, giving opinions, continual evaluation and improvement of the lesson plans. The learners can learn best through the experiential learning. The cooperative learning helps the learners construct and acquire knowledge, ability, interest, and thinking skills. The teachers have to provide the learners with the opportunity to show their potentials.

2. Metacognition theory is relevant to the thinking approach supporting learner-centered learning that provides learners with learning strategies as tools for finding knowledge. Knuth & Jones (1991) defined the metacognitive strategy as a self-thinking process and learning arrangement. The learning process based on this theory promotes the learners' thinking skills and trains them to use various learning strategies. Based on this theory, learning can occur when the learners realize what learning strategies they can apply to their learning and practicing language skills. When the learning strategies are included in teaching-learning activities, the learners will acquire the language learning strategies and the content of the language at the same time. Clouston (1997) stated that the learning strategy practice promoted the learners' learning. Besides, the learners will be able to improve their learning strategies that are suitable for them (Morley, 1993). Oxford (1990) proposed that the self-directed learning strategies are very essential to language learners. Metacognitive strategy develops the learners' skills and abilities in the target language. Moreover, it helps the learners be active, confident and responsible in their learning. In conclusion, Metacognitive strategy promotes the learners' learning and acquisition of the learning methods suited to them and also eliminates the learning obstacles.

3. Constructivism Theory is the basis for the learning process that helps the learners construct, understand and discover knowledge by themselves. Bruner (1997) stated that Constructivism Theory was the theory of acquisition based on learners' participation in the process of solving problems, analytical thinking and learning activities. Learners construct their own knowledge by examining their own ideas, beliefs and knowledge. They adapt and combine their newly obtained knowledge with the existing knowledge they have had. Based on this theory, the learning process focuses on the opportunities for the learners to express their attitudes and opinions. They can learn from others and know how to solve problems. This kind of learning supports higher level thinking. It also helps the learners be able to construct the body of knowledge by continuously practising their critical and self-assessment skills. Learners have opportunities to link their existing knowledge to the new one from the activities provided in order that they can construct their own knowledge and self-learning.

4. Constructionism Theory is developed from constructivism theory. Wortham (2001) cited that practices of education were typically linked to an assumptive network, that was, a shared discourse about the nature of human beings, their capacities and their relationship with the world and each other. In the case of education, constructionist ideas have taken many forms over time and been used in quite different ways. Berger and Luckmann (1966) used social constructionism to represent a particular form of social phenomenology, linked to a structural conception of society. While their concern with the social basis of knowledge remains robust in the present account of constructionism. Wortham (2001) also stated that views of construction have played an important role in more recent deliberations on pedagogy, it will prove useful to explore the differences between social constructionism and radical constructivism. The radical constructivism of von Glasersfeld (1988) is strongly influenced by Piagetian theory and has much in common with cognitive orientations to education in general. Unlike, social constructionism emphasizes on knowledge as an accurate reflection of the world. Knowledge is actively received either through the senses or by way of communication.

In many respects social constructionism finds a much closer ally in works that can be termed social constructivist. Social constructivism would also be represented in the educational work of cultural psychologists (Colte, 1998, Seeger et al., 1998, Wertsch & Toma, 1995) and is exemplified in much of the recent writing of Jerome Bruner (1996). Social constructionism is quite congenial with such inquires in the importance place on the social sphere. In a certain sense, both look at human knowledge or rationality as a byproduct of the socius. In both cases, the relationship precedes the individual. And, while the specific role of the teacher is different, both view the relationship between teacher and student as pivotal to the educational process. Thus, the Constructionism Theory focuses on the promotion of the learners' relationship and social skills. Learners have opportunities to acquire thinking skills and use them for creating the tasks using the appropriate media and technology. This promotes the learners' creativity to do something new and meaningful to them. This conforms to Ausubel's meaningful verbal learning (1963) which is the learning principle that helps learners apply what they have learned in their real life and construct a new body of knowledge. Cobb (1994 cited in Sirithavee, 1996, p.38) stated that constructionism learning had not been the fossilized process. Learners could construct the knowledge by adapting their surrounding situations in order to explain the new knowledge or the things they were studying. Then, their acquisitions were associated with teacher-learner relations and their surrounding environmental situations influenced on the learners' learning. The learning activities based on this theory help the learners to integrate previous knowledge with new knowledge and construct their new body of knowledge. These activities included brainstorming, questioning strategy, analyzing, discussing, and problem-solving. They focus on creative, flexible, and fluent thinking. Besides, they promote the learners' confidence. They provided the learners with the opportunities to think and use previous experiences for analyzing and discussing. This develops the learners' empowerment through the learning process based on the relational characteristic of constructivism, social constructivism and constructionism..

The researcher was interested in preparing the learning process based on the concept of those theories focusing on learner-centeredness for English 1. The researcher developed the Learner-Centered Innovation (LCI) in the form of the lesson

plans with the cooperation of RMUTL network. It aimed to develop classroom action research for quality English curriculum development using LCI. This research is also a pilot study leading to the curriculum development of other subjects and also the academic coordination among the RMUTL campuses in the form of networking for developing the potentials of the learners and teachers of all those campuses.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this research were as follows:

1. To develop the English 1 curriculum using Learner-Centered Innovation with the cooperation of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna network;
2. To study the results of using Learner-Centered Innovation;
3. To study the opinions of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna network toward the Learner-Centered Innovation curriculum implementation.

Scope of the Study

Population

The population of this research was the first year undergraduate students of RMUTL enrolled in English 1 course in the first semester of the 2006 academic year.

Content

The content included in this research was the investigation of basic data needed for the syllabus development of English 1 course, the surveys of problem conditions and learners' needs, the learning process condition of the teachers teaching English 1, the learning content obtained from course description, the course objectives of English 1, the learners' needs in learning English 1, the selected learning methods focusing on learning strategies and learner-centered process based on Cooperative Learning Theory, Metacognition Theory, Constructivism Theory and Constructionism Theory, the preparation of LCI lesson plans which was Learner-Centered Innovation, the implementation of the English 1 curriculum and the evaluation of the English 1 curriculum implementation.

Definitions of Important Terms

1. Development of English curriculum refers to the process of the curriculum development of English 1 which is a fundamental-compulsory subject in general education for undergraduate students of RMUTL. The process comprises six procedures: 1) the establishment of key persons in the development of the English 1 curriculum; 2) the investigation on basic information needed for the development of the English 1 curriculum; 3) planning the development of English 1 curriculum and designing the Learner-Centered Innovation of English 1 curriculum; 4) the implementation of the English 1 curriculum; 5) the evaluation of the English 1 curriculum implementation; and 6) the application of evaluation results for improving and developing the English 1 curriculum.

2. Learner-Centered Innovation (LCI) refers to a learning process focusing on learners' participation in the determination of objectives, content, learning styles and learning assessment by using information obtained from needs analysis on the English 1. In the learning process, the learners take part in teaching-learning activities emphasizing the learners' characteristics on the English language skill ability, studying by themselves, learning with others and constructing the body of knowledge. They are expected to be able to assess themselves through experiential learning, using learning strategies and thinking skills for finding solutions, summarizing, selecting learning strategies, self decision-making and applying what they have learned in new situations. The LCI learning process comprises 3 steps: presentation, practice and production.

3. Results of using Learner-Centered Innovation refer to the results of studying as follows: 1) the study of the learners' learning behaviors focusing on learner-centered characteristics consisted of participation, cooperation, conclusion on the body of knowledge, selecting of learning methods, making decision and self-evaluation obtained from a learning behavior evaluation form; 2) the study of the learners' English language skills: listening-speaking, reading and writing for daily-life communication and further study. There are two types of evaluating learners' English ability --one before and after using LCI (through pre and post tests) and the other is the on-going evaluation (through English skill evaluation forms and rubrics for listening-speaking skills, the achievement test for reading skill and the rubrics for

writing skill); and 3) The study of the learners' attitudes toward learning English language after learning (through self-evaluation forms and learning logs).

4. The cooperation of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna network refers to the collaboration and coordination among the teachers teaching English 1 who become key persons of the network. Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna comprises 6 campuses: Chiang Rai, Nan, Chiang Mai, Lampang, Tak and Phitsanulok. The teachers participated in the process of curriculum development which started with planning for curriculum development, implementing curriculum and assessing the outcome after implementing the curriculum. The whole process was supported by administrators of all network campuses.

Expected Application

1. The English 1 curriculum will be used for developing the learners' desired knowledge and English language skills in accordance with the objectives of the English 1 curriculum of undergraduate students of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna.

2. The Learner-Centered Innovation will help the learners acquire the English language skills, positive attitude towards the English language learning and English proficiency. All of these are relevant to the education management of the National Education Act of 1999.

3. The outcome of the curriculum development will be the guidelines for the curriculum development of other subjects or other levels of education. Moreover, it will serve as a guideline for the effective curriculum development by the establishment of network for coordination of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna and the ones in other regions of the country.

4. The results from this study will provide guidelines for teachers of English as a foreign language to develop their teaching and change their roles in LCI class as the facilitators and also provide guidelines for researchers for further study on the curriculum development of other subjects of other different levels of education.