

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and significance of the problem

With the rapid development of ESL teaching in non-English-speaking countries, English teachers have become more aware that the exclusive use of either the traditional grammar-translation method with little active use of the target language or the communicative approach which stresses meaningful communication rather than structure use, does not suit all English teaching situations. Based on this pedagogical awareness, Rao Zhenhui called for EFL teachers in China to "modernize" their English teaching by introducing traditional teaching structures in contexts that are communicatively oriented so that learners will learn appropriate grammar analysis and, at the same time, become familiar with appropriate language usage in real-life communication. In doing so, learners will become more spontaneous and flexible in correct manipulation of the target language system as they acquire both linguistic competence and communicative competence (1).

Oral communication is very important in the language learning process. In today's language classrooms, a considerable emphasis is placed on oral activities in which learners use the language they have learned to communicate with each other. Through research findings, ESL teachers have become aware of the potential use of technology in language classrooms to improve students' listening and speaking skills. Moreover, some ESL research studies suggest that integration of technology in general can improve academic performance, enhance motivation, and promote learning (Ringstaff and Kelley 7), others even argue that multimedia technology can provide authentic cultural contexts and can help promote students learning interests (Kramsch and Andersen 31).

Jakobsdottir and Hooper's study (43) used a modified Total Physical Response method to gauge elementary students' listening skills, allowing students to select buttons and graphics on a computer screen in response to the commands given. They

found that providing a congruent text with spoken words facilitated acquisition of listening skills, at least for elementary students. Moreover, Brett (qtd.in Moore, Graham and Lee 39) examined the usefulness of multimedia technology over simple audio and video equipment in promoting listening skills and concluded that multimedia could appeal to different modalities and hence may deal with different learning styles more effectively. In addition, Ehsani and Knodt (54) reported that computer-mediated communication can provide a controlled interactive speaking practice and help learners develop the ability to engage in a meaningful conversation in the target language, the speaking skills closely linked to communicative competence. According to Wang (18) there needs to be some effective ways that not only can help learners get acquainted with English speaking in situations they are likely to meet in the real world. Furthermore, learners need to be taught certain patterns in communication instead of having to rely mainly on scripts.

Galloway is a strong supporter of using multimedia to improve the speaking skills of second language learners. He argued that a means which can enhance the speaking and listening skills of ESL students is through integrating technology into language teaching. He claimed that second language learners experience an extreme amount of anxiety and often feel more comfortable speaking to computers than in face-to-face situations. In other words, they can feel more comfortable practicing pronunciation without feeling embarrassed by their errors. Moreover, when oral production is supported through the use of visual aids or grammatical mistake, students are able to practice more effectively and confidently (Galloway 2).

Recent research has shown a boom of interest in using computers for foreign language teaching and learning. One main reason is that it corresponds to a major education shift from the teacher-centered classroom towards a learner-centered system where a learner is in control of the lesson content and learning process. According to Fotos and Charles (24), learners are expected to be active participants in the learning process and to be less dependent on a teacher and have more freedom to experiment on their own with a natural language in natural or semi-natural settings. In Chinese-speaking classrooms, Zhao (19) claimed that computer-assisted instruction can give the learners motivation, confidence and freedom to manipulate their learning program. This is because the flexibility and learners' control offered by technology

provides opportunities for learners to choose linguistic input that fits their needs at their own pace, thus enhancing the possibility of incorporating input into their interlanguage system. In studying the viability of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the Korean Secondary EFL Classroom, Cheon (23) also found that Korean learners do engage in appropriate meaning negotiation for their foreign language development through task based synchronous CMC.

As stated by Ur (120), of all four key language skills, speaking is deemed to be the most important in learning a second or foreign language since it includes all the language skills. In Thailand and elsewhere in the world, the speaking skill is very important for ESL learners if they want to perform successfully and effectively in this competitive world. Thai students have spent many years studying English, but they still cannot use it to communicate effectively. Several factors have been found to explain why Thai students cannot speak English despite years of studying. Among these are the number of students in a class, teachers' heavy teaching loads, their insufficient English language skills and native speaker cultural knowledge, inadequately equipped classrooms and educational technology, and university entrance examinations which demand a tutorial teaching and learning style (Wiriyaichitra 2; Khamkhien 184). In addition, learning English in Thailand is a rote memorization of new words and the sentence structure with a limited chance to practice speaking English in or outside the classroom. Students respond to teachers only when called upon and the learning atmosphere is individualistic (Pawapatcharandom 2). As a result, students are shy to speak English for fear of not speaking properly or not being grammatically correct (Saisudjai 2; Mahawan 1; Sombatyanuchit 1). One particular group of ESL learners who need individualized attention in order to succeed in the classroom is students who have limited English proficiency (LEP). According to Watson (60), LEP students are those who have not attained minimal proficiency in academics and oral language in English. Upon first entering into the mainstreamed classroom, many LEP students are shy, embarrassed by their accents or scared by a new environment and many immediately withdraw from class participation. Better approaches of instructive learning, therefore, need to be provided for these students. As suggested by Parte (2), an effective way to meet the needs of LEP students is a computer. The computer, when used as the foundation

of instruction, is a unique tool that can provide teachers with an opportunity to produce a richer learning environment for their LEP students. The versatility of the computer affords the instructor the opportunity to enhance learning, either by using prepackaged programs containing related course content or by customizing programs specifically intended for LEP students. LEP students now, often have the opportunity to choose the language or presentation mode, (e. g. have the text only or hear the text and audio combination in any language that they wish), which is needed for optimal comprehension of the concept being presented.

According to Kitratirattana (12), the use of computer technologies and their relative effectiveness in the areas of listening and speaking has been neglected to some extent in research. In Thailand, some research has been carried out regarding the development and synthesis of research on Computer-Assisted Instruction in English Learning in Thailand during 1985-1999, all of which used Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) to enhance grammar, structure, vocabulary and reading.

According to Lee (3), CALL is based on constructivist principles of instruction design which supports personal discovery, individual needs and self-directed learning. As it focuses on learning rather than instruction, it can be used to facilitate the language learning process and reinforce what has already been learned in the classroom. It is an effective remedial tool to help learners who require additional support because CALL provides professional student-centered materials in an electronic form (e.g. photo, sound, music, video, bilingual dictionary, a grammar book, a word processor) which allows learners to work on their own pace toward their learning goal. Additionally, CALL materials offer both interactive and individualized learning styles for learners to make their own choice of learning. In other words, students can choose to have interaction between students and/or the learning text. Above all, CALL offers unlimited opportunities for students to tirelessly practice and develop their listening and speaking skills as well as self-instruction strategies for life-long learning. It is, therefore, justifiable that this research will be conducted regarding the application of CALL to help students improve their speaking and listening skills.

From the researcher's English teaching experience, it is acknowledged that different students have different speeds for developing their listening and speaking skills. Proficient students usually spend a short period of time whether to explore English language and practice their conversation, listen or answer questions. However, at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School, Chiang Rai, the researcher has found that most students have achieved a low level in English listening and speaking abilities and are slow in developing their English knowledge and skills. The researcher has observed that these students are not able to follow the content within a regular academic session. Even though they try hard and concentrate on the lessons, they still are not able to produce their own speech and answer the questions in the listening session. Not only are they unable to answer oral questions in the class and create even simple phrases or sentences, but they are also distressed to perform their own conversation with their partner who is also a slow student as a proficient student is usually annoyed to be their partner. Apart from the researcher's observation on the poor performance of the students, an informal interview conducted with a group of slow students at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School in an attempt to find out the reasons for their ineffective English listening and speaking abilities revealed that poor development of English exploration and an inadequate practicing of listening and speaking are among the key responses. The findings also showed that some students knew certain English vocabularies, but they did not know how to combine them to form sentences for communication. Helpless with the learning failure, most of the slow students added that their parents could not afford a private tutoring fee and they found English was too difficult for them to master despite their desire to speak English fluently. As a result, they became passive learners and remained ineffective in English listening and speaking abilities.

As proficient students could advance satisfactorily, it is the researcher's concern to help the slow students enhance their English listening and speaking. A number of research and journals on educational technology based on using computers for learning development, for example, using a computer with LEP students, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in the Korean Secondary EFL Classroom, Computer-assisted Instruction in English Learning in Thailand during 1985-1999 (CALL), and Computer-assisted Instruction (CAI) in the EFL setting as a

teaching tool suggests to the researcher that CALL could be efficient in helping the slow students at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School. The researcher believes CALL will make the slow students enhance their listening and speaking abilities which will, in turn, encourage them to communicate with foreigners, at least on a Basic English level of conversation. Through CALL, the students will have an opportunity for the language exploration with an individual learning style where they can work on content according to their own preference and proficiency levels and also they will be exposed to realistic language situations through listening to authentic dialogues, telephone calls and video clips. Thus, the effectiveness of Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) is assumed in enhancing English listening and speaking skills of Mathayom Suksa 4 students at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School, Chiang Rai.

Therefore, this study will focus on investigating whether CALL enhances English listening and speaking skills of Mathayom Suksa 4 students at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School, how CALL enhances their English listening and speaking skills, and also how CALL motivates them to develop their English listening and speaking skills.

1.2 Purposes of the study

The purposes of this study are;

- to investigate the effectiveness of Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) in enhancing the English listening and speaking skills of the students and
- to find out motivation of the students through CALL.

1.3 Scope of the study

This study was narrowed in the following ways.

1.3.1 Target group

The group of 20 students was randomized from 50 students who had the score of English Foundation Mathayom Suksa 3 in the second semester of 2010 academic year that lowered than grade 2 (<65points from 100 points) and needed a remedy program. The simple random sampling was used by drawing lots of the names

of only 20 students from the total of 50 students so as to match the number of the students with that of the 20 computers in the sound laboratory.

1.3.2 Content

The content focused on listening and speaking activities selected from the Discoveries Program: Basic 1 (speaking and listening mode).

In the listening, the focus is on listening comprehension and understanding dialogues in different situations emphasizing language patterns and vocabulary used with the practice of pronunciation and intonation.

In the speaking, the focus is on practicing pronunciation and intonation, repeating after listening to dialogues, memorizing language patterns and vocabulary used in different situations, communicating in pair without reading scripts and producing their own dialogues in certain situations.

1.4 Definitions

1. Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) is the use of the English Discoveries Program: Basic 1 (listening and speaking mode). There are four topics for speaking mode: situations in street, hotel, restaurant, and office and there are three topics for listening mode: radio programs, answering machine messages, and video activities. Moreover, the students need to post their video clips after learning each lesson on the S.W.K. listening-speaking English class weblog.

2. The effectiveness of Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) in enhancing English listening and speaking skills of the students means the development of listening and speaking skills of the target group is satisfactory at the significant level of the t-value tested at 0.05 with the mean of the post-test higher than that of the pre-test.

3. The students are 20 randomized students who were studying at Mathayom Suksa 4 at Samakkhiwitthayakhom School, who had the scores of English Foundation Mathayom Suksa 3 in the second semester of 2010 academic year lower than grade 2 (<65points from 100 points).

1.5 Benefits

The study will benefit as follows;

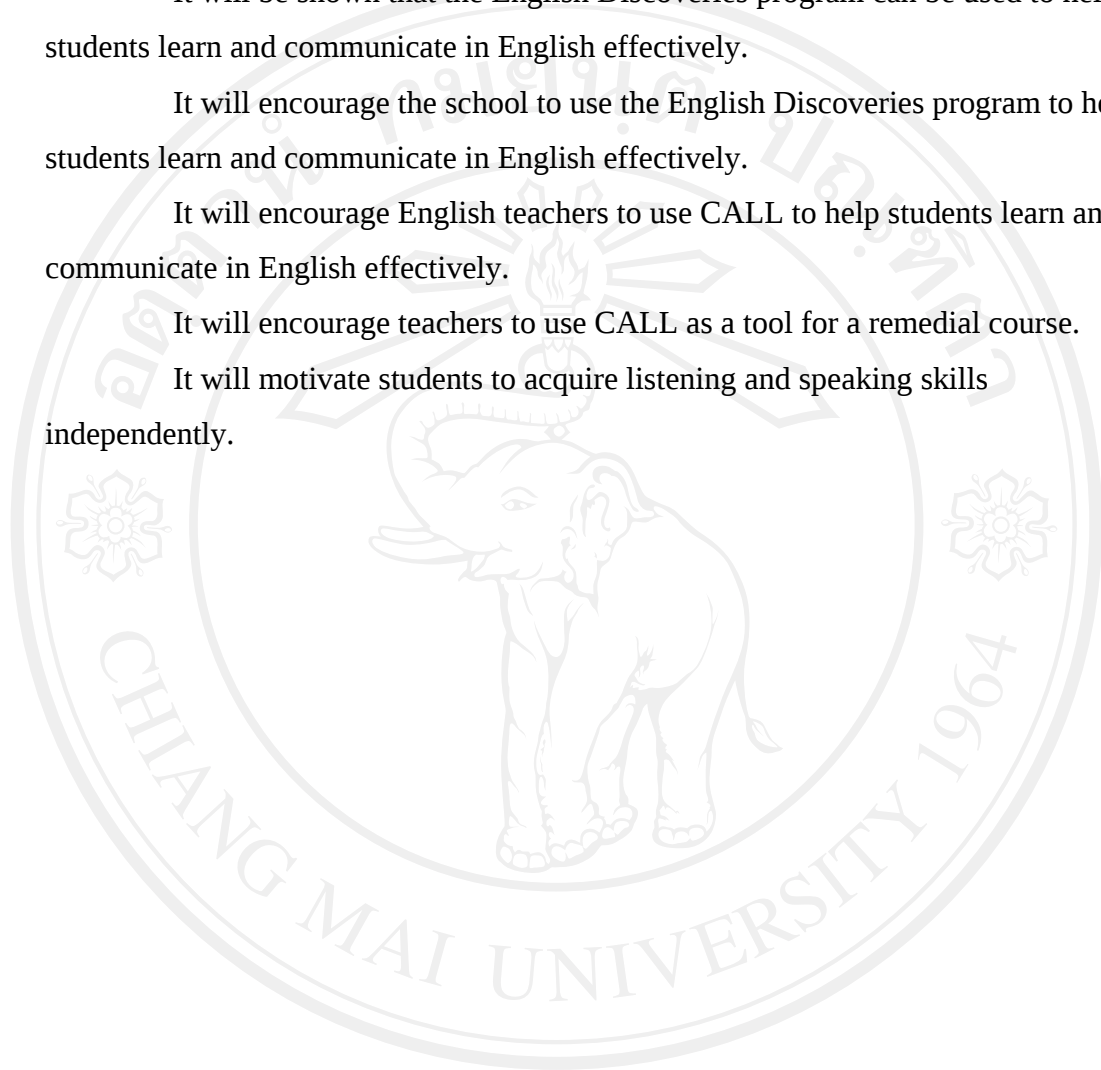
It will be shown that the English Discoveries program can be used to help students learn and communicate in English effectively.

It will encourage the school to use the English Discoveries program to help students learn and communicate in English effectively.

It will encourage English teachers to use CALL to help students learn and communicate in English effectively.

It will encourage teachers to use CALL as a tool for a remedial course.

It will motivate students to acquire listening and speaking skills independently.



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