



AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN A THAI UNIVERSITY

Watcharaphong Soongpankhao

Faculty of Liberal Arts
Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakorn
Bangkok- THAILAND
watcharaphong.s@rmutp.ac.th

Abstract

This qualitative case study investigated how local Thai teachers identified, classified, and corrected mistakes the students made and how the teachers dealt with those mistakes that would reflect and correspond to their teaching situations in the so-called EFL classroom. Specifically, this study explored EFL teaching in a provincial university in Thailand. It focused on 6 Thai EFL teachers, selected through a typical sampling. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The interview protocol consisted of four general domains: the pedagogy, teaching materials, evaluation, and general points of view toward EFL teaching in Thailand. Salient findings revealed that English education required dedicated efforts from the teachers and learners. Teachers played the roles of input providers, mistake correctors, and coaches simultaneously. Dealing with the participants' challenges in classroom, each teacher employed individualized techniques using his/her knowledge and experiences.

Keywords: Thai EFL; teachers' multiple roles; teaching challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Learning and teaching second language involves efforts of both teachers and learners. Issues relevant to second language teaching and learning are voluminous. Given that this study aims to investigate how teachers identify, classify, and correct mistakes the students produce, the review covers only certain aspects, including SLA theories, English language teaching methods, teachers' beliefs, and previous studies.

Previous studies

In 1998, Borg conducted his qualitative research on teachers' pedagogical systems and grammar teaching in an English language institute in Malta, a Mediterranean centre for TEFL. His study aimed to explore the nature of the pedagogical systems L2 teachers utilize in determining the role and nature of grammar teaching in their classroom practice. The data came from pre-observation interviews with a male native speaker of English with over 15 years experience being involved in TEFL and 15 hours of his classroom observations.

His data were organized around the teaching behaviors concerning grammar work. There were five strategies that the teacher used for working with grammar: analyzing students' grammatical errors, encouraging students to refer to their L1: using explicit discussions of grammatical issues: eliciting the grammar rules through the class interactions, and using practice activities. The participant also revealed that there were conflicts about varieties of teaching and learning issues. Although he believed that traditional grammar teaching probably does not enhance students' communicative ability, he employed such approach for some reasons. For instance, it makes students aware of grammatical errors as well as enhances students' self-correction. It should be noted that, according to Borg's study, the external forces (e.g., the school society, parents, classroom and school layout) did not appear to interfere with the participant's pedagogical system. However, he was influenced by internal factors or the course of instruction itself.



When it comes to the EFL teaching of Thai context, the beliefs of Thai EFL teachers have been reviewed. Kantapat (2003) examined beliefs of two Thai male teachers of English language toward their career and the method of teaching English in their classroom. The participants were both male from different universities. Teacher A has been teaching English for over ten years and Teacher B has over six years of teaching experience. The semi-structured interview approach was adapted in this study.

The responses of each participant were categorized into major themes which are 1) becoming an English language teacher, 2) being an English language teacher, 3) beliefs about teaching methods/teaching effectiveness, 4) becoming a dedicated teacher, and 5) looking into the future: five year ahead. The results show that the participants were satisfied with their careers. They were well prepared and qualified for the career as teachers of English. Although different methods were believed to be suitable the most for their students, they shared the same objective in teaching of English. They were aware of the current theories of SLA in their teaching.

Dujduen (2007) explored pedagogical knowledge of Thai EFL teachers concerning its consistency with the existing theories/hypotheses of SLA. Semi-structured interviews with six English reading for Academic Purposes teachers are analyzed using selected SLA theories as a framework. As for the results, five salient themes emerged from the interview data: 1) explicit grammar instruction; 2) source of materials; 3) L1 use in reading classroom; 4) roles of teacher and students; 5) perceived effective EFL teaching. The first four themes concern the participants' teaching experiences in reading classes and the last theme is related to their opinions on effective EFL teaching. The results indicated that teachers' pedagogical knowledge is compatible with certain SLA theories and hypotheses. It also revealed that participants' styles of teaching cannot be neatly classified into the two common dichotomies: the traditional versus communicative methods, and focus on form versus focus on form instructions.

Based on the literature review described above, it appears that more research should be conducted that investigates how Thai teachers of English at a teachers college outside of Bangkok have come to understand challenges and opportunities inherent in their teaching profession. The context of situation they were in should inform current SLA theories, especially those that deal with instructed SLA. This study represents the development in that direction.

To achieve the purposes mentioned above, a research question is addressed:

1. What challenges do the participants have in teaching English?
2. How do they deal with their challenges?

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the previous section, this study was designed to explore how Thai EFL teachers deal with their teaching situations. The questions explored in this research center around the challenges the participants face in the EFL classrooms and how they deal with such challenges. The questions beg for specific types of data. As known to all researchers, different types of data require different methods of collection. This study investigates what challenges the participants involved in the EFL class encounter; the most suitable type of data is definitely the one which the researcher has to elicit from the participants. Challenges vary from one person another. Each person encounters different difficulties and the difficulties do not lend themselves easily to simple observation. One simply has to elicit them from the informants. Although elicitation can be done in many ways, the most appropriate for the current study is an in-depth interview based on semi-structure questions designed beforehand. However, the in-depth interview led me to several questions that I've never thought of before. The procedure in gathering the data in this study is provided in the following sections.

Research Site

The research was conducted at Kamphaengphet Rajabhat University, Kamphaengphet, Thailand. Because the study was intended to be qualitative in nature without any aims of proposing any generalization, the in-depth interview of teachers was employed. The nature of questions required only answers from a few informants selected by the process of purposive sampling. I conducted 6 semi-structured interviews with 6 EFL teachers.

All were EFL teachers who have been teaching English in various courses at the selected university. Three of the informants were female and three were male. The years of teaching experience range from 2 to 20. The table below shows each informant's backgrounds.

Table 1: Pseudonym and Demographic Information of the Interviewees

Participants	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Class taught
1. Teacher A	Male	8	Academic Writing
2. Teacher B	Female	20	Business English
3. Teacher C	Female	2	English for Research
4. Teacher D	Male	11	Linguistics
5. Teacher E	Female	7	English for communication and study skill
6. Teacher F	Male	3	Grammar writing

Questions

As stated above, the semi-structured interview was used in face-to-face interviews in order to allow the researcher to acquire in-depth information. To achieve the purposes of this study, 18 open-ended questions were employed. The interview questions consisted of four general domains: the pedagogy, teaching material, evaluation, and points of view toward EFL teaching in Thailand. The informants were asked what problems they faced in the EFL class and how they dealt with such situations. The actual questions can be found in Appendix 1.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. However, the transcripts were not translated word by word. The answers were classified and the information was presented in the form of a table so as to make it easy to understand.

In this study, selected Second Language Acquisition theories, as described in the previous section, were used as the theoretical frameworks to make sense of the data. The results are discussed in the next section.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

As stated in the last chapter, the semi-structured interview was employed to obtain the data. This chapter focuses on data analysis. As can be seen in the methodology chapter, 18 questions were asked in this study (Appendix 1). Each interview question was designed to cover a different domain. That is, questions 1 to 6 were asked to elicit the answer regarding pedagogy. Questions 7 - 11, on the other hand, led to answers related to teaching materials used by each informant. As far as the domain of evaluation is concerned, questions 12-14 were created to induce relevant answers. Finally, questions 15 – 18 elicited information regarding the point of views the informants have toward the EFL teaching in the Thai context. The domains stated can be summarized as follows.

Table 2: Summary of questions in relation to each domain

Q	Question Contents	Domain Related
1	What are the main problems found in class?	Pedagogy
2	How do you deal with such problems?	
3	If you could choose, what kind of students would you like to teach?	
4	Do you emphasize grammar teaching?	
5	Do you teach the pronunciation?	
6	Do you use the integrated approach?	
7	Which language has been used in teaching?	
8	Do you use your own book or commercial text?	Teaching material
9	Did you teach all chapters?	
10	Do you have extra handouts/materials for your students?	
11	Were your students forced to read the extra reading?	
12	Did you write the exam question yourself?	Evaluation
13	What is your exam format?	
14	When evaluating your students, would you test them all skills?	
15	Why Thai children have low English proficiency score?	Points of view toward EFL teaching in Thailand
16	When is the most appropriate period for a child in acquiring the additional language?	
17	The effective English teacher should be Thai of native speaker?	
18	Should English be mandatory for Thai students?	

The first three domains concern the informants' teaching experiences in their classes and the last domain is related to their opinions toward the EFL teaching in the Thai context. I begin with pedagogy.

Pedagogy

According to questions 1 and 2, the informants were asked the question, "what are the problems found in class?" and "How do you deal with such problems?" The answers to question 1 emerged into four themes which were a) low English proficiency score (N=5), b) narrow vocabulary (N=3), c) the low motivation (N=1), and d) inappropriate course syllabus. The answers to question 2 can be seen in three salient themes; a) contributing classroom activities (N=3), b) review basic grammar all over again (N=3) and, c) using sarcastic strategy to increase students' motivation.

According to the answers, low proficiency score encompasses low proficiency in all basic skills. The informants stated that when students performed poorly, they performed poorly in all basic skills. That is, when their vocabulary is not good, their listening, speaking, reading, and writing scores are all low.

Teachers A, C and F stated that their students did not possess enough vocabulary. Often times, they were asked about the meaning of the basic vocabulary but they could not give correct translation. As such, they failed to write well. Misspelling seemed to be the most obvious indicator of not having adequate vocabulary. In addition, certain inappropriate words were used. For example, a word used in an informal situation was used in a piece of writing which required formality. Teacher A, for example, provided a comment on the poor proficiency score as follows,

"The students understand what I say and understand the assignment but when it comes to verbal communication in classroom, they have difficulties expressing ideas they would like to share in English. This inability can result from their anxiety. For example, a word used in an informal situation was used in a writing



which required formality. As far as reading is concerned, they are able to read and write. But their writing is below the advanced level. Even when they know the format, they simply cannot write because they have no adequate vocabulary. For example, when assigned to write an academic abstract, they cannot do it despite the fact that an example is provided.”

From the quote above, one can readily see that the teachers are well aware of the problems. They also know the causes (whether they are the real causes or not). What is important is whether the situation is rectified. Knowing (guessing) the causes is no use if the teachers do not try to fix them. It should be interesting to see if the teacher attempts to do something to lessen the level of anxiety which they believe to be the root of all the problems identified.

As the results, in order to solve the problems, some teachers (N=3) employ classroom activities, such as role-plays and presentations, to improve the proficiency score of their students, to reduce the anxiety of the students in class, and to expand the vocabulary. Teacher E stated that “The students were assigned to make presentations in front of the class. I found that they were more active and enjoyed the class activity more than the actual lecture from the teacher. Activities such as this force them to speak English; whether they spoke correctly in terms of grammar or not, they performed the activity without any kind of evaluation or correction from the teacher.” Some teachers (N=3) solve the problem by reviewing the basic grammar of which they feel their students lack the knowledge. For example, Teacher B said “...sometimes it’s very difficult to teach them the new lesson because they cannot recall the basic grammar rules to facilitate the given chapter. What I can do is just stop following the syllabus and review it all over again”

There are instances of some informants having different problems. Teacher D for instance, asserted that the main problems he often found were the low motivation and the inappropriate course syllabus. This informant recalled that

“I found that the students with low motivation majoring in English did not take the entrance examination. They were not tested on their English proficiency when applying to the university. Later on, they found that majoring in English was not their preference. On the other hand, some students have high motivation but they still have low proficiency scores. Another problem is the inappropriate course syllabus. The basic courses are not offered at the beginning of the semester. For example, instead of teaching phonetics in the first semester, the phonetics course appears later in the undergraduate program.”

In this study *motivation* is defined as “the effort learners put into learning an L2 as a result of their desire or need to learn it.” As for the general assumption of the relationship between motivation and L2 learning, it is widely believed that a highly motivated learner learns faster and is more successful. According to Teacher D, the problem he found can be the evident showing that lowly motivated students stop developing their L2 learning. In contrast, most students who have high motivation, with low English proficiency scores, facilitate learning activities in L2 classroom. The teacher solves the problems by using sarcastic remarks to motivate his students. He said “I am not a good motivation booster but I often use sarcastic remarks to heighten their motivation. I emphasize their weaknesses and tell them that they have to develop their English proficiency which is lower than the desired standard of undergrad students”.

Such a problem may result from the entrance policy of the university. There is no testing process in order to recruit the candidate who wants to be the English major student. To him, he feels uncomfortable teaching the inappropriate syllabus designed by the faculty. He believes that the basic linguistics courses, such as phonetics, should be taught to students at the beginning of the study program. These might be the factors that we should take into consideration when it comes to the success and failure in L2 acquisition.

As far as the preferences of the informants are concerned, they were asked to choose, if they could, between teaching the high and the low English proficiency students (Question 3). According to the data, five informants (N=5) expressed interests in teaching the high proficiency students and only one informant (N=1) chose the low proficiency learners. All informants who would like to teach high proficiency students argued that teaching clever students facilitated their self-learning process when preparing the lessons for their students. They have



to be well prepared when they have to teach such the students. Some informants felt that they enjoyed teaching the communicative classes when the communication flowed between both parties (teacher and learners). Teacher A said "If I could choose, I'd like to teach the high proficiency students because we can make it two-way communication and they respond to every questions I ask. It contributes a good environment in the language classroom."

As for Teacher B, however, she prefers teaching low proficiency students. She stated that she would consider herself successful if her students showed signs of development.

Questions 4 – 7 were designed to elicit the answers regarding the teaching methods and approaches the informants use in their classes. That is, do you emphasize grammar teaching? If so, how do you teach grammar? If not, why? (question 4). Question 5 was "Do you teach the pronunciation?" Question 6 aimed at asking whether or not they used the integrated approach. And question 7 was "Which language has been used in teaching English?"

According to the data, all informants (N=6) shared the same perception that grammar should be taught. Two, however, stated that grammar should be taught only when teaching writing (Teachers E and F). These two therefore teach grammar only in their composition classes. In classes of which the objective is communication, these two teachers agreed that grammar was not necessary. Students' expected performance is their ability to use English communicatively. Though the output contains grammatical errors, it is acceptable as long as communication flows. Slightly different in terms of viewing grammar teaching, Teachers A and B used the learner-centered method. They provided their students with a number of examples and demanded that the students induce the grammatical rules from the sentences given. This, in a sense, means that students discover grammar rules while working through exercises. Teacher B reiterated, "grammar needs to be taught to the students but I will teach them implicitly by providing examples and let them analyze the examples and arrive at their own rules". Teachers C and D, on the other hand, taught grammar explicitly to their students. The students were asked to recognize grammatical rules and then they were assigned to work on their own with teacher's assistance during the learning process.

As for Question 5, the informants were asked whether they emphasized pronunciation. All informants (N=6) confirmed that they put emphasis on pronunciation when teaching. Teachers E and F explicitly told their students how sounds were produced, while Teachers A and C asked their students to imitate pronunciation from the audio recordings and movies played to the classes. Corrective feedbacks were given for pronunciation in Teachers A and D classes. Teacher A recalled that "the students practiced their pronunciation from sound-track movies and audio recordings. They received corrective feedback when they mispronounced words" This is to say, when students' outputs were incorrect, all the participants provided correction directly to the learners.

Question 6 asked whether teachers used integrative teaching. Not stating what they meant by "integrative", all said "yes" to the question. When asked to clarify the terms, they stated that it meant all skills were taught simultaneously. That is, while communication is the focus, grammar was implicitly taught and pronunciation was emphasized. Even in a speaking class, students must listen, speak, read and write. With there was a demand for the teachers to allow all for skills to be heightened, they inevitably have to be able to teach all four skills.

Regarding the medium of instruction (Question 7), all stated that they basically used the target language. Teacher F, however, admitted that he used Thai more often than English. The other participants stated that they mostly used English. No one specifically stated that when and why Thai was used. The teachers who used English more often reasoned that if they spoke English, their students would have an opportunity to improve their listening skill. However, additional to teachers' utterances, authentic materials such as movies were employed to allow students to be exposed to real life English. The section below deals with questions regarding teaching materials.



Teaching Materials

Questions 8-11 were included in this section: 8) whether the text assigned was a self-compiled or commercial text, 9) whether all the contents in the text were covered, 10) whether additional materials were used, and 11) whether the teachers assigned outside readings. Moreover, as far as the operationalized definitions are concerned, for the purpose of this section, *authentic materials* refer to language materials that are originally intended for native speakers, not L2 learners and *modified materials* are those taken from non-language learning sources and modified for language learning purposes.

The data shows that all informants stated that they used a self-compiled text and most of their materials were authentic materials. They reported having compiled many authentic materials because the authentic materials seemed to be interesting to the students. The typical text usually consisted of more pictures and graphic information compared to the text provided from the university. Teachers A and B, for example, stated that they selected the chapters from different authentic texts because unlike the texts provided from the faculty, the texts consisted of pictures and graphic information which seemed interesting to the students. As for technical terms used in authentic materials, Teacher C admitted that using many different texts will facilitate the students in allowing them to recognize different terms of the same word.

It was found that no teachers interviewed used commercial texts. The texts used were self-compiled. Bits and pieces were excerpted from here and there. While one stated that there was not enough time to cover all the materials prepared, some said that they completed what they had set out to do. One who said that he completed the whole text stated that he only covered the main points without going into the details (Teacher F). This means that students are left to pick up the details on their own.

Regarding additional supplements, the element of which was asked in Question 10, all informants (N=6) indicated that they often came up with additional materials in their teaching. In such cases, then the materials were authentic. Some used online journals, extra clips from English language newspapers, articles from non-academic magazines, etc. Teacher D who preferred using online journals mentioned that such journals were beneficial because online articles were up-to-date and students could learn from various forms and styles of academic writing

In question 11, the informants were asked whether they assigned outside readings to their students. Four teachers stated that additional readings were requirements in their classes. Two only recommended that students do additional readings without assigning any particular text and asked that students look for reading material on their own (Teachers A and C). Teacher F bluntly stated that if the additional readings were not viewed as the class requirements, none of the students would read them on their own. As such, students were forced to read at least one assigned reading.

With the data discussed so far, one point is obvious. That is, there are different styles of teaching which are employed for teaching different skills of English. Materials used vary from teachers to teachers. Nevertheless, whatever the method used, there seems to be no guarantee that the objectives set will be reached. To know whether the time and energy invested yield expected result or not, some type of evaluation must be made to ensure that students' performances are up to the standard. This, in a way, will allow teachers to re-evaluate their teaching styles and make any necessary adjustments. The next section concentrates on evaluation.

Evaluation

In this section, three questions were asked: 12) whether or not the participants themselves wrote the exam questions, 13) what the format of their exams looked like, and 14) whether or not the questions in the exams emphasized any particular skills.

According to the data, in answering Question 12, all informants (N=6) wrote the exam questions themselves. Teacher A adapted the exam questions from CU-TEP test (Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency). He believed that the test was standardized and using it was much more convenient than writing a new test (of which the validity would have to be ascertained). Teachers D, E, and F, however, see the benefit of writing



their own exams. They stated that their own questions met their objectives since they could base the questions on what had been taught.

As for the format of their exam questions, all informants used more essay questions and fill-in-blanks questions than the multiple choices and true/false questions. They found that using the essay format in their exams could, somehow, improve the writing skills of their students. One participant (Teacher F) mentioned the advantage of essay exams, stating "...essay exams are a useful tool for finding out if my students can sort through a large body of information, figure out what is important, and explain why it is important". In the same vein, Teacher B argued that using essay exams could force the students to come up with the key ideas pursued in the class on their own and put them in their own words or to use interpretive or analytical skills practiced in the class. However, according to Teacher A, unseen questions were used when he wrote the exam questions, no matter how the word "unseen" is defined. Another participant (Teacher C) often wrote exams by using the essay format and fill-in-blanks. She also employed pre/post- tests in order to mature the student's development. Allowing students to use a dictionary in the examination is the style Teacher D used. He thought that using a dictionary when doing a test might help his students express their ideas clearly. Unlike the other participants, Teacher E did not focus on grammar when marking essay questions. What she expected was the content the students expressed especially when the objective of the course was fluent communication.

Question 14 was designed to elicit the answers from the informants concerning the objective of evaluation in specific skills. Three teachers (Teachers A, B, and D) evaluated the students' skills depending on the course objectives. For example, Teacher D said, "I didn't evaluate my students in all four skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) in one particular course. It depends on what the course description requires." The rest of them (N=3) evaluated their students by emphasizing on all four skills. They argued that emphasizing all skills in the evaluation could be the beneficial method to improve the students' proficiency. Moreover, Teacher E mentioned that she emphasized four skills when she evaluated her students and this would help the students to communicate effectively.

As far as the evaluation is concerned, it concerns the measuring of students' achievement on the outcomes. However, as facilitators, teachers should take full responsibility to also closely monitor and possibly measure the development of the learners. As of now, no agreements have been reached on what the most effective tool may be when measuring the students' development. Should students be tested by the evaluation designed specifically for a particular course or by the evaluation has been designed to test the general skills of English? In fact, it is and has always been the teacher's decision on the format and the timing of evaluation. This is to say, one of the important factors that we should take into consideration when it comes to success in language teaching is teacher's belief. The next section then shifts the focus the participants' points of view toward EFL teaching in Thailand.

The points of views toward EFL teaching in Thailand

In this section, the informants were asked four questions concerning their beliefs toward EFL teaching in the Thai context. Question 15 was used to elicit the informants' beliefs about the low English proficiency scores of Thai English learners. Two salient themes emerged from the interview data: 1) external factors of the learners such as the lack of natural environment in which English is used, insufficient input, and ineffective teaching styles; and 2) an internal factor, namely motivation. I begin with the external factors.

Four informants (Teachers A, B, D, and F) shared the same idea that their students could not achieve high proficiency scores because they lacked the opportunity to use English to communicate as their speech community-Thailand- does not require the use of English in everyday life. Teacher B, for example, mentioned that "In my opinion, Thai children are not in the environment that allows them to speak English and they don't have the opportunity to use English to communicate with others..." Another external factor mentioned by the participants was the ineffective teaching style of English teachers in Thailand. Teacher C viewed that students should be taught by native-speaking teachers rather than by Thai teachers. To him, the beneficial aspects of learning English with native-speaking teachers are pronunciation, the native-like accent, and the listening skill. Teacher F supported that the English proficiency of students reflected the ineffective teaching styles, stating that using a communicative approach in a language classroom was one of the effective styles he used but was



not very popular among most Thai teachers of English. He also argued that lacking sufficient input was the major problem he found with students with low English proficiency, no matter how “sufficient input” was defined.

As for the internal factor, motivation seems to be the key. Teacher C found that highly motivated students performed better than lowly motivated students. She accepted that motivation was the basic factor which facilitated the learning process and led to successful language learning.

As far as the age of second language learners are concerned, the informants were asked, “In your opinion, what is the most appropriate age for a child to acquire an additional language?” All (N=6) agreed that second language should be taught to L2 learners when they were children. Most of them stated that English should be taught at the age of 4 or 5. Teachers B, C, and D believed that L2 should be taught after a child knew the basic structure of L1. Teacher B, for instance, stated, “the appropriate period is when s/he has a certain degree of L1 knowledge and then let her/him learn a new language. I think it should be learnt at grade 4. S/he can compare the similarities and the differences between two languages and understand how they work.” The other participants (Teachers A, E, and F) stated that L2 should be taught to a child at the time when they were acquiring L1. They believed that, in terms of language acquisition, children could easily pick up any language since language was unconsciously learnt.

Another important point related to English language instruction which all informants were asked was whether English language should be effectively taught by Thai teachers or native speaking teachers. Three teachers (Teachers A, B, and F) believed that English should be taught to Thai students by both Thai and native speaking teachers. They asserted that writing and reading classes should be taught by Thai teachers since the lessons were complicated to students with low proficiency. However, speaking and listening skills should be trained by native speaking teachers. Teacher B stated, “Writing is no one’s first language. I think writing English should be taught by Thai teachers so that the students can get over the difficulties when communicating with teachers.” Teacher A supported that “...students should basically learn the language with Thai teachers but let the native speaking teachers play an important role when it comes to practicing the speaking and listening skills.”

Teacher C, on the other hand, viewed that the most effective method when it comes to acquiring a second language was learning it with a native speaking instructor. Unlike Teacher C, Teacher D argued that Thai students should learn English with Thai teachers. He reasoned that “students should learn English with an efficient Thai teacher because a Thai teacher has the basic knowledge about the learners’ background and a Thai teacher can use Thai to explain complicated lessons” Only Teacher E believed that instructors were not an important factor successful second language acquisition. She stated that students, themselves, played the most important role when acquiring a second language. Teachers, be they Thai or native speakers of English, could not help them to if the students themselves were not highly motivated.

The last question, Question 18, asked whether English should be mandatory for Thai students. All informants (N=6) agreed and shared the same idea. Teacher A stated, “English should be mandatory for Thai students with no doubt, of course. English plays a crucial role in everyday life. In all fields, technology, education, and commercial, one cannot live without using English. The communicative English users can easily have access to all sources such as the Internet, text books, and any academic information.”

Teacher D brought up an interesting idea about English as a basic skill for Thai students, stating that “I think English should be included in any course syllabus for any field of studies. In the next ten years, in Thailand, English will no longer be defined as a special skill but the basic skill which is considered the standard to all careers.”

As shown in the data described above, it can be readily seen that different teachers have experienced different challenges. Though they share ideas in certain aspects of teaching, there remain differences in their views. As this study is descriptive in nature, it does not aim at prescribing remedies for the challenges encountered. The remedies, as the researcher believes, is context- (if not individually) specific. The challenges the informants



feel they are facing in this study, when asking the students who are on the other side of teaching, might not be problematic to them at all. As such, this study does not attempt to make a statement such as “if problem A occurs, use method B to solve it.” As we all know too well, human beings as teachers and learners are not machines. Both are sensitive to physical, social, and cultural contexts of teaching and learning. The next chapter provides the conclusion to the study.

CONCLUSION

Insofar as the challenges the teachers have in teaching English, this study describes the challenges the teachers of English as a foreign language come across when they teach. As the study was designed to explore how local Thai EFL teachers dealt with their teaching situations, the questions asked in this research not only focus on the challenges participants actually face in the EFL classrooms, but also how they deal with such challenges.

Teaching and learning any foreign language demands efforts from both the teachers and the learners. Since classroom atmosphere is never exactly the same as the natural setting, simulations are often created. As such, input is artificially created by the teachers with hope that learners can acquire the language taught naturally. Teachers then take on the role of input providers, mistake correctors, and coaches at the same time. The results from the semi-structured interviews, as discussed in Chapter 4, indicated that the challenges range from students having low proficiency all the way to the university’s policy on admission. As a result, there are students of many levels in one class. This creates even more difficulties to the teachers since they have to cater to students of all levels of competence.

Dealing with their challenges, each teacher employs individualized techniques. According to the data, the informants deal with the challenges using his/her knowledge, instinct, and experiences. When dealing with students of many levels in one class, one informant, for instance, fixed the problem at its cause. She contended that rudimentary grammar needed to be explained before she could move on to teaching other things. Time, as a result, was slotted for grammar teaching to assure that all students have somewhat the same knowledge. Students who know these rudimentary rules can think of this lesson as a review while those who lack knowledge are provided with the information essential for further input. Another minor challenge the teachers are faced with, for instance, is students having narrow vocabulary. Oftentimes, students are not able to translate the words asked. This stops them from advancing to higher levels. According to one informant, misspelling is the most obvious indicator of not having adequate vocabulary. Attempting to rectify their problems, some students use inappropriate words. For example, a word usually used in an informal situation is used in a piece of writing which requires formality. This creates the domino effect since the use of inappropriate vocabulary leads to the problem of foreign language pragmatics.

For positive results, teachers must be aware of not only their actions in class but also their roles at any particular time. Lessons need to be prepared in advance. They must be aimed at creating input, correcting mistakes, and the like. Inevitably, they must be able to identify phenomena that occur in classrooms. For example, they are expected to be able to distinguish mistakes and errors, give positive feedback, and, most of all, enhance the students’ performances. Moreover, mistakes are to be labeled, and knowing the causes of which can guide teachers to find the most appropriate remedy.

While this study does not attempt to make any generalization, it aims only to reflect teachers’ views which might be useful for those who would like to become foreign language teachers. They can, for instance, get an idea as to how challenges are met. The study does not provide any fixed solutions to each challenge since it is the researcher’s belief that different challenges have their own merit and that teaching and learning are a joint effort of both the teacher and the learner. Both parties therefore have to reconcile their differences and make necessary adjustments as they see fit. As the data is solely from the teachers, this study is far from giving a complete picture. More needs to be done to obtain data on students’ views.



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