

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As the government of Myanmar has changed from “military government” to “presidential government,” the demand for English language ability has also been inevitably increasing in the fields of education, economics and politics in Myanmar. English language has been taught as one of the subjects in every Myanmar governmental school, from primary school to university, using a passive teaching style, formal or conscious language teaching style, since 1982. In other words, every person who receives education from the governmental school in Myanmar knows English but is not able to speak or use English language in real-life situation. As Brown and Hanlon (1970) point out, error correction and explicit teaching are not relevant to language acquisition for it requires meaningful interaction and natural communication in target language in acquiring the language. Again, Krashen (1981) stated the language performers’ or learners’ fluency in production is based on what they have picked up through active communication since utterance initiated by acquisition system in general. It is therefore very difficult to apply conscious learning to perform or use the language successfully.

Furthermore, as the Myanmar presidential government is changing their policy from closed-door policy to open-door policy, new connections with nations all over the world are playing a crucial role in Myanmar. Likewise, as the open-door policy embraces foreign investment in both business and education, the new generation in Myanmar is seeing a considerable number of opportunities to study and work in international companies and universities both in their own country and foreign countries. Thus, the demand for English language ability plays a vitality important role and has become a current issue in Myanmar as English is a lingua-franca which is globally accepted language. For these reasons, the demand on private English language schools which are led by local Non-Government organizations (NGO) or International Non-Government organizations (INGO) have been inestimably increasing year by year. These English language schools emphasize Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006) which involves many different teaching methods such as active teaching, learner centered teaching, corporative teaching-learning, and group or pair works with authentic and meaningful interactions that provide the language learners opportunities to use the English language in real life. As the English language schools are playing an important role, it is necessary to evaluate the curriculums and courses of the language schools to measure the communicative effectiveness of them.

Thus, undoubtedly curriculum, course or program evaluation that is being used in these language schools is very critical for the future educational, economics and political success of Myanmar. The target school, CEPC (Cetana English Proficiency Center) is one of the non-profit and non-government language schools, on which my research will be conducted; mostly use CLT (communicative language teaching) through integrating the four English language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

1.2.1 Background history of Cetana English Proficiency Center (CEPC)

Cetana English Proficiency Center (CEPC), which situated in Yangon, Myanmar, has been operating as an English language school under the umbrella of Cetana Educational Foundation (CEF) since 1999. The mother organization CEF was founded in 1993 to provide support to enable students to pursue university study at universities abroad and then return to Myanmar, to serve its people. CEF is unique in its nature and able to work both inside and outside the country. The whole organization has got different functions. As the board of director of Cetana is from U.S.A, works to build partnership with universities abroad and to obtain funding. On the other hand, the Cetana Myanmar advisory board manages CEF – Myanmar operates within the national border of Myanmar. CEF is a secular organization and it is not involved nether directly or indirectly with any religious organization in whatsoever ways. The only purpose of CEPC is to provide English language instruction for its students to elevate their language skills (www.cetana.org).

CEPC offers four levels of classes for its students. In order to qualify for CEPC students must fulfill some requirements. Firstly, every student must have high school graduate degree or a university graduate from any reputed university of Myanmar. Secondly, every student has to sit for a placement test in order to prove their proficiency level. In addition to that this placement test also use to determine each student's level of English and which class he/she would join.

The target school, CEPC, had been running without any particular syllabus for about 13 years (1999-2012) but in the middle of 2012, CEPC started using a language curriculum.

The focus of the objectives of CEPC is on the development of learners' English language skills so as to provide them with better opportunity for academic and career advancement. Tanner & Tanner's (1975) suggested in their idea of curriculum, the purpose is for the learners' continuous and wilful growth in academic personal and social competence.

The lack of English language communication skills in the learners' real-life situation can give negative effects on the development of Myanmar in both economics and educational fields as the communication skills in English are prerequisite for success and advancement in various fields of employments and education in Myanmar. It is, therefore, important to have communicative English language teaching (CLT) approach at the language schools in the current situation of Myanmar. Thus, the CLT,

communicative language teaching, approach is crucial in any language curriculum as it relatively place great influence on providing learners to be able to use the target language in various contexts and learning language functions. In this situation, it is necessary to evaluate the communicative effectiveness of curriculum at the language schools in Myanmar. Curriculum evaluation is fundamentally concerned with deciding on the value of worth and wholeness of a learning process as well as the effectiveness with which it is being carried out. The investigation should identify the curriculums' strengths and weaknesses, and as a result can be accepted, modified or eliminated (Gay, 1985).

Since the demand for English language schools has been increasing in Myanmar, the number of English language schools has also been increasing in the former capital city of Myanmar, Yangon. It is, therefore, worthwhile to consider Lynch's (1996) idea of program evaluation which said 'enabling a program to assess its quality against that of comparable programs or schools'.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

Questions

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum of CEPC?
2. How effective has the current curriculum been in enhancing the students' communicative language skills?
3. What are the opinions of the students toward the curriculum?

Objectives

- To evaluate the curriculum of CEPC
- To investigate the communicative effectiveness of the course in enhancing students' communicative language skills
- To identify the students' opinions toward the course

1.4 Scope of the study

The scope of the study focuses on the following:

- The students of the level-1 and level-4 class who enrolled in CEPC from the middle of August to the end of October in 2013.
- The whole of curriculum evaluation process will be done by using the model based on the evaluation model ideas of Brown (1995), Bradley, (1985), Nunan (1991), Richard (2006), Stakes (1972), Stufflebeam (1971), Tyler (1950).
- English proficiency refers to the ability of the students based on the ability of level-4 and the bands that have been set by the school, CEPC.
- Content of the curriculum is based on the themes from the main listening and speaking course books, *Let's Talk* – I for level-1 & level- 2 and *Let's Talk* - II for Level- 3.

Geographically the entire study focuses on the Yangon (the former capital city of Myanmar) branch of Cetana English Proficiency Center (CEPC).

1.5 Definition of Terms

CEPC (Cetana English Proficiency Center): CEPC is a non-profit English language school which is controlled by an INGO (International Non-government Organization) named Cetana Educational Foundation.

Communicative Effectiveness of the Curriculum: The term 'communicative effectiveness of the curriculum' in this study refers to the effectiveness of the program in terms of its communicative competence. The communicative competence refers to being able use the four language skills, speaking, writing, reading, and listening in the authentic context through the teaching-learning that focuses on the real-life situation with enjoyable activities that interest them.

English Curriculum: English Curriculum in this research study refers to a language teaching learning plan that include the four course outlines and their respective syllabi one for each of the four levels of classes in the target school (CEPC). These respective syllabi are composed of goals and objectives, teaching materials, resources, teaching methods and evaluation and assessment process that attain the course goals and objectives.

Curriculum Evaluation: It is rendering value judgment to a set of experiences selected for educational purposes such as to investigate its communicative effectiveness, to find out its strengths and weaknesses in order to implement modifications for a better curriculum in the future. Plus, curriculum evaluation in this study focus on the curriculum activities: objectives, contents, materials, teaching, and assessment process of the syllabi.

English Communicative Skills: The term 'English communicative skills' can be defined as the communicative skill or expertise in the four English language skills, set by the target school (CEPC) that engages by speaking, reading, writing and listening, which includes both accuracy and fluency of the language . It can also be called 'language communicative competence'.

Language School: In this study, language school refers to Cetana English Proficiency Center (CEPC) which is school for the teaching of second language or English language in Myanmar.

Opinion: Opinion in this study refers to a person's negative or positive perspective, understanding, particular feelings, desires and beliefs about a certain program (CEPC) or course that focus on its contents, materials, teaching and assessment process.

1.6 Contribution of the study

Evaluating a language curriculum or a course benefits learners, teachers, and institutions for it usually attempts to enhance the learners' second language acquisition, teachers' professional development and the attainment of institution success. For the success and development of second / foreign language learning and teaching, curriculum evaluation is the primary issue. In the school targeted for this study, the intended outcome from each question would meet the aim of the study and benefit the target group: learners, teachers, and the institution. It is also useful for other language schools in Myanmar.

The outcome of question (1), "What are the strengths and weaknesses of the course or curriculum?" is going to point out the strong points of the course that provide the learners effective methods for language learning. Discovering the weaknesses can lead to omissions, edits and modifications in the future curriculum to attain a better course. The outcome of question (2), "How effective has the current curriculum been enhancing the students' communicative language skills?" will be to clearly reveal the individual student's communicative language skills or language achievement through their use of the current curriculum, thus showing the extent of the curriculum impact on the students' communicative language achievement. Finally, the intended outcome of question (3), "What are the opinions of the students toward the course or curriculum?" is going to identify the learners' opinions toward the curriculum which will also reveal whether it meets the needs and expectations of the learners. The findings of this research study will help to improve English language policy of the language schools in Myanmar since the demand for communicative language skills in economics, education and politics takes important role in current Myanmar situation.