CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study aims to implement strategies-based English language syllabus to improve students' learning outcomes according to the Thailand Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The chapter includes information about the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, delimitation of the study and definitions of significant terms.

1.1 Rationale and Statement of problem

ASEAN or Association of Southeast Asian Nations was founded in 1967 and currently consists of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Now, they are progressing to an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) created under the name Asian Economic Community or AEC by 2015. ASEAN countries have realized that future growth depends on economic incorporation in order to strengthen and centralize the region as a free trade area. With the impact of the AEC, Thai economic activities and foreign investment will increase and Thailand will develop as a production base for the Southeast Asian market. This growth will provide more job opportunities for skilled-workers in the AEC labor market and allow free movement of labor among member countries, increasing employment opportunities. This could be a competitive challenge for Thai workers.

To survive high competition among themselves and with other ASEAN workers, Thai skilled workers are required to improve their necessary working skills, for example, English language, computer usage, and so on (Saraithong and Chancharoenchai, 2012). Among those necessary working skills, English language is one of the most important skills, as language is a fundamental part of workers' human capital (Rooth and Saarela, 2007). The English language has been selected as the means of communication among ASEAN countries. ASEAN professional and skilled workers will participate in cross – border trade area investment so it is necessary for them to be able to communicate effectively with clients, investors and people from other ASEAN countries.

Kapur and Chakraporty (2008) also found that English is increasingly valued in the labor market in this era of globalization. They estimated the returns of advanced English skills in Indian workers and found that individuals who had more English training earn significantly higher salaries, even if they have the same level of overall education.

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Significantly, English skills among Thai workers are basically lower than all other ASEAN countries. English language has always been one of the weakest features of Thai skilled labor and it can be a decisive factor in employment opportunities of workers. Although Thai people do not want to work in other ASEAN countries, people from neighboring countries will come to work in Thailand and grasp opportunities previously available for Thai workers (Saraithong and Chancharoenchai, 2012). This weakness creates a critical need for Thailand to improve the English Language proficiency of its citizens in order to increase their competitiveness and productivity.

As education is an important tool in preparing and developing all citizens, the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) has been designated to initiate policies, development plans, and improved educational standards for higher educational institutes in terms of learning, teaching, research, academic services, cultural conservation, and management (National Education Act, B.E 2542). Thus, the Higher Education Commission committee has appointed a course-plotting group to draft the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF) in order to agree on the expectations for graduates, in terms of knowledge, basic skills, and characteristics which will facilitate useful and happy social coexistence.

In addition, the TQF is a measure to evaluate the quality of programs available at different universities by using indicators with common international standards. Consequently, Thai Higher Education will be widely recognized in international academic and professional communities. Besides, the TQF will ensure that Thai universities offer quality higher educational services which can be compared to educational institutions elsewhere. The TQF can also be used as an educational standard template and directly affect graduates' work performance, employer satisfaction, improvement of Thai competitiveness in national development, and agreement with national education standards. In order to assure educational quality, the Commission on Higher Education has set out standard criteria for each level of higher education.

The TQF is compulsory, it was established as a policy leading tool of the National Education Act B.E. 2543 (2000), The Amendment Second National Education Act B.E. 2545 (2002). The TQF came into force in 2009 in the form of a notification from the Ministry of Education to all higher education institutions in Thailand (http://g8bejournal.au.edu/Journals/Dec 2011.Pornchai.pdf. Kaewnate, 2011). Thus, Rajamanagala University of Technology Lanna, one of the government universities in the northern region of Thailand, needs to improve all of its programs in order to comply with the TQF.

From the educational institution point of view, the mission of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna is to develop and produce skillful students to serve employer's needs in specific areas such as Engineering, Business Administration, and Fine Arts. To reach the TQF standard criteria and to develop English skills, the General English curriculum committees has revised and improved the curriculum

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according to the Thailand Qualifications Framework and has agreed on the expectations or learning domains as follows:

1. Ethical and moral development
   - Public recognition and realization of the value of ethical and moral development
   - Morality in academics and vocations
   - Discipline, diligence, patience and responsibility to society and the environment
   - Respect for human rights and honor

2. Knowledge
   - Knowledge and understanding of theory
   - Be able to follow relevant academic progress and technology
   - Integrate knowledge to other fields

3. Cognitive skills
   - Skills from the integration of knowledge in academics and vocations
   - Skills in applying knowledge and being well-organized

4. Inter-personal and responsibility skills
   - Good relationships
   - Leadership and fellowship
   - Team work and problem solving
   - Apply knowledge to help society

5. Analytical and communication skills
   - Choose appropriate communication instruments
   - Searching, analyzing and applying appropriate technology to solve problems
   - Efficient and appropriate use of Thai and foreign languages

In this research, the researcher focuses on the English through Media and Technology course which all first year students must enroll in. This course is a general education course. Accordingly, it is recognized that students enter university with different knowledge, backgrounds, learning achievements and behaviors. According to Jesdapornpun (2001), 18 technical staff at Samart Comtech had problems in reading English texts because of their limited background knowledge. It is also a fact that learners are somehow not able to perform the learning process if they lack the knowledge of how to achieve by themselves, which requires some guidance and assistance.

Hence, to solve the problems mentioned above, teachers should emphasize more teaching training of their students to use learning strategies while learning English in order to achieve the learning outcomes of the TQF by developing strategies-based instruction. Oxford (1990, p.8) stated that learning is "specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-

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directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations. Cohen (1995) defined 'strategies-based instruction' as explicit classroom instruction directly focused on learners and being concerned about learners' language learning and strategies. Moreover, Chamot et.al (1999) also claimed that strategies-based instruction assists students to become better language learners as they are able to develop and manage responsibilities for their own learning. Strategies are particularly important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence (Oxford, 1990).

Because learning strategies have an important role in facilitating students to learn languages effectively, it will be easier for students who are strategic learners to become a successful language learner as opposed to those who do not have any experience of learning in a strategy training classroom. This is because strategies-based instruction helps students to become successful language learners, so students not only know how to learn, but can manage their own learning as well. The research of Nantachaipant claims that students' oral presentations improved after they have been trained in strategies. As well, Ross and Rost (1991), Kaplan-Dology (1998), Kohler (2002), and Carrier (2003) also stated that students who have been trained in strategies have better listening abilities than students who have not been trained.

Language strategies can be significantly beneficial in helping students to know how to learn effectively, and gives them a chance to use various learning strategies to achieve learning outcomes. Moreover, it is expected that learning strategies would help students develop the characteristics required by the TQF. Learning strategies, namely; cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies, are three main strategies which are able to enhance learning outcomes of TQF. 'Cognitive strategies are able to enhance knowledge domain (TQF), cognitive skills domain (TQF), and numerical analysis, communication and information technology domain (TQF). 'Metacognitive strategies' are able to enhance ethical and moral development domain (TQF), knowledge domain (TQF), cognitive skills domain (TQF), and numerical analysis, communication and information technology domain (TQF). 'Social strategies' are able to enhance interpersonal skills and responsibilities domain (TQF). Therefore, in order to train students to become successful language learners according to the TQF, teachers should develop and apply strategies-based syllabus in the classroom.

For this reason, the researcher is interested in developing syllabus based on learning strategies in order to help students achieve learning outcomes according to the five domains of learning in the TQF.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Does strategies-based English language syllabus improve students' learning outcomes according to the five domains of the TQF?
2. What are the learning strategies that students use?

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1.3 Objectives of the study

This study aims to achieve three objectives which are:

1. To construct and develop strategies-based English language syllabus to improve students' learning outcomes according to the five domains of the TQF

2. To investigate students' learning outcomes according to the five domains of the TQF after the implementation of strategies-based English language syllabus

3. To explore the language learning strategies used by students before and after the implementation of strategies-based English language syllabus

1.4 Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to construct and develop strategies-based English language syllabus to improve students' learning outcomes according to the five domains of the TQF. Most importantly, the findings of this research respond to the national education policy (2009) of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) which stated that Thai institutions must administer curriculum based on the five domains of learning stated in the TQF to assure educational quality.

Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna consists of 6 campuses; Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Nan, Prae, and Pitsanuloke. All six campuses apply the same general education curriculum. Consequently, the results of this study ultimately bring about the same curriculum standards and undergraduate qualifications required by the framework.

The findings of the study may provide information of how language learning strategies improve students' learning outcomes according to the five domains of the TQF, and which strategies come across as supportive or not in developing students' learning outcomes. Additionally, the findings are helpful for English instructors from the six campuses of RMUTL because they are used as a teaching guideline to develop and improve students' English skills necessary for cross-border interactions. Besides, the findings may be useful to ensure educational quality, which can guarantee the educational standards of the institution. Regarding lifelong learning, the results also respond to the National Education Act which emphasizes the promotion of Thai students to be lifelong learners.

Significantly, the results of the study may also have an effect on the institutions promoting of instructors to develop teaching methods, teaching materials, and curriculum responding to the framework.

1.5 Scope of the study

The study is research and development comprising both qualitative and quantitative investigations.

The study took place during the second semester of the 2012 academic year. The subject is a section of students who enroll in the English through Media and

Technology (13-031-017) course. The instruction occurred 1.5 hours a day, two days a week. This study is narrowed into the following:

1.5.1 Sample

The sample group is confined specifically to students who took the English through Media and Technology (13-031-017) course during the second semester of the 2012 academic year at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Chiangmai. The subjects were randomly selected and there were 29 students.

1.5.2 Lesson content

The lessons of this study are based on the English through Media and Technology (13-031-017) course outline and cover three units as follow:
- Unit 1: English through broadcast media (Television)
- Unit 2: English though broadcast media (Radio)
- Unit 3: English though print media (Movies)

Each unit covers all four skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking.

1.5.3 English skills/ abilities

The language subskills are focused on:

(1) Reading
The reading subskills that are focused on are:
- Getting facts
- Getting main ideas and important details
- Making inferences

(2) Writing
The writing subskills that are focused on are:
- Procedural and descriptive paragraph writing

(3) Listening
The listening subskills that are focused on are:
- Comprehending facts
- Listening for gist
- Listening for important information

(4) Speaking
The speaking subskills that are focused on are:
- Oral presentations
- Reading aloud
- Pronunciation

1.5.4 Strategies-based instruction

This research is focused on language learning strategies based on Oxford (1990) the strategies are:

(1) Cognitive strategies
The substrategies that are applied in this study are:
- Practicing which includes *(1) repeating (2) recognizing and using formulas and patterns (3) recombining (4) practicing naturalistically*
- Receiving and sending messages which includes *(1) getting the idea quickly (2) using resources for receiving and sending messages*
- Analyzing and reasoning which includes *(1) analyzing expressions*
- Creating structure for input and output which includes *(1) taking notes (2) summarizing (3) highlighting*

(2) Metacognitive strategies
The substrategies that are applied in this study are:
- Centering your learning which includes *(1) over viewing and linking with already known material (2) paying attention*
- Arranging and planning your learning which includes *(1) organizing (2) planning for a language task*
- Evaluating your learning which includes *(1) self-monitoring (2) self-evaluating*

(3) Social strategies
The substrategies that are applied in this study are:
- Cooperating with others which includes *(1) cooperating with peers*

1.5.5 The Five Domains of Learning According to the TQF (Allen, 2006)

The framework categorized the types of learning expectations of students into five domains namely, (1) Ethical and moral development, (2) Knowledge, (3) Cognitive skills, (4) Inter-personal skills and responsibilities and (5) Analytical and communication skills. The general education representatives from the six campuses of RMUTL considered the details under the five domains and agreed to focus on the following sub topics:

(1) Ethical and moral development
Development of Public recognition and value realization of ethical and moral development

(2) Knowledge
Knowledge and the understanding of theory

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(3) Cognitive skills
The ability to integrate knowledge in academics and vocations

(4) Inter-personal skills and responsibilities
Good relationships and social manners

(5) Numerical analysis, Communication and IT
The ability to use appropriate Thai and foreign languages effectively

1.6 Definition of terms

Strategies-Based English Language Syllabus	refers to a practical and methodical training which was constructed based on language learning strategies by Oxford (1990) to improve students' learning outcomes according to the five domains the TQF.
Language Learning Strategies	refers to specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their English skills based on the five domains of learning according to the TQF.
Cognitive strategies	refers to the strategies that enable students to comprehend a new language by practicing, receiving and sending messages, and analyzing and forming messages in a new language. (Oxford, 1990)
Metacognitive strategies	refers to the ability and knowledge of knowing how to learn and use a language. These strategies provide the students with a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process by using functions such as centering, planning, and evaluating. (Oxford, 1990)
Social strategies	refers to the strategies that help students learn by interacting with other people. (Oxford, 1990)

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Learning outcomes according to TQF	refers to the outcomes of the five domains of TQF, namely, (1) Ethical and moral development (2) Knowledge (3) Cognitive skills (4) Inter-personal skills and responsibilities (5) Analytical and communication skills
TQF	refers to the Thailand Qualifications Framework which is a framework to guide teachers to teach students in the five domains of learning, namely, (1) Ethical and moral development (2) Knowledge (3) Cognitive skills (4) Inter-personal skills and responsibilities (5) Analytical and communication skills
Ethical and moral development	refers to the development of students' discipline, diligence, and responsibilities to society and the environment.
Knowledge	refers to knowledge and the understanding of theory which covers two skills of English; Listening and Reading
Cognitive skills	refers to the ability to integrate academic and vocational knowledge which covers four skills of English: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing
Inter-personal skills and responsibilities	refers to the ability to have good relationships and social manners
Numerical analysis, Communication and IT	refers to the ability to use appropriate Thai and foreign languages efficiently

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Learners/Students refers to non-English major learners who took the English through Media and Technology (13-031-017) course during the second semester of the 2012 academic year in RMUTL