CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Statement of the Problem

Although most students in Thailand have had years of learning

English as a foreign language, the vast majority of them still cannot

communicate in English effectively (*National Education Act of*

B.E.2542, 1999). As of now, foreign language instruction in Thailand

remains ineffective due to two major causes.

The first cause is the teacher-centered education philosophy that

dominates the country's public and private education sector. In a

teacher-centered classroom, the teacher lectures and asks questions.

The students must listen to the teacher, write everything down, answer

questions, and do written homework. There is no teamwork.

Individual work is limited to answering the teacher's questions.

The teacher does most of the speaking in the classroom. Students can

usually practice by answering questions or reading what they have

written down during the lecture.

Additionally, there is typically no student self-assessment. Instead, the teacher usually controls the entire class and each student individually, providing immediate correction at all times. Peer editing and peer correction are uncommon. There are group activities occasionally but they appear not to be stimulating.

Furthermore, the students are not really interacting. They are expected to stay quiet and focus on the teachers, not their peers (Kagan, 2000). No talking is allowed in class except when answering a teacher's question or following the teacher's order.

Overall, there is very little or no interaction in English between students at all. As a result, most students fail to learn how to communicate in English.

The second cause is the lack of opportunities to apply knowledge of English in real life. There is no stimulating environment. There are no academic tasks to solve in English. Since the students can use Thai to get information from their teachers, they do not need to perfect their English.

One way to improve the situation might be to establish English immersion programs, supported with cooperative learning strategies. Such a program could provide the opportunities in using English. It is the objective of this research to investigate whether this would indeed be the solution.

Aim of the Research

The aim of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of using cooperative learning in English language learning immersion programs in Thailand.

Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of using cooperative learning strategies in an immersion program with Thai high school students who are non-native speakers of English.

Statement of Hypothesis

Since the teacher-centered instruction and lack of opportunities to use English in real-life situations dominate education on all levels of education in Thailand, students who have had years of formal instruction still cannot communicate in English. However, cooperative

learning strategies and immersion programs are known to improve the

situation in schools around the world (Jacobs, Lee, and Ball, 1995;

Christison, 1990; Kagan, 2000; Slavin, 1983; Met, 1993; Soifer, 2000;

Gumz, 2000). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that students in an

English immersion program where cooperative learning is used will

demonstrate particularly better proficiency in English than students

taught using the traditional teacher-centered approach.

Scope of the Study

The research was carried out with two groups of Thai high school

students who were between fifteen and seventeen years old and

enrolled in the intensive English summer program at the Asian

University of Science and Technology in Pattaya, Chon Buri, Thailand

in March-May of the year 2001 lasting sixty hours of EFL instruction.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted on subjects who are Thais. Although they

signed a contract with the Asian University of Science and

Technology saying they would speak only English throughout the

duration of the summer program (see Appendix A), it was

theoretically possible for them to communicate in Thai outside of class

sometimes as strict control was not always possible. As a result, the effect of English immersion may be diminished for this or that particular subject (participant), should that subject (participant) sometimes have chosen to speak Thai in their free time (e.g., when talking to his/her parents on the phone). Thus it was an undesired intervening variable. Use of pairwork with the control group was also occasionally possible during conversation practice.

As most of the students participating in this study come from relatively equal upper-middle class families and ethnic background, socio-economic class should intervene in the role assignment for cooperative learning. However, it should be noted that the teamwork in a heterogeneous team consisting of representatives of various socio-economic classes might be different. Therefore, it is important to understand that this study deals primarily with a homogeneous class of subjects. However, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using cooperative learning in English immersion programs in Thailand in general terms using participants in the summer intensive program at the AsianUST as a population for this particular research.

Definition of Terms

1. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a teaching approach where lessons are developed so that students of different linguistic and educational backgrounds and different skill levels can communicate and work together on a common task for a common goal in the classroom. Cooperative learning encourages students to learn by communicating and sharing their ideas. Cooperative teams (sometimes still called cooperative learning groups) allow students to communicate, to share insights, test ideas, and jointly learn (Jacobs, Lee, and Ball, 1995).

Robert Slavin (1990, p. 3) defines cooperative learning as learning methods that share the idea that "students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own". He emphasizes the use of team success and focus on team goals. Slavin (1990, p. 3) also says that team success can only be achieved if all members of the team learn the objectives being taught. "Tasks are not to do something as a team, but to learn something as a team" (Jacobs, Lee, and Ball, 1995, p. 26). To show that learning through

involvement in cooperative learning activities is effective, Christison

(1990) uses a Chinese proverb:

> Tell me, and I'll forget.
> Show me, and I'll remember.
> Involve me, and I'll learn. (p. 6).

Johnson and Johnson (1987, p. 6) note that it is cooperative learning

when "students work together to accomplish shared goals." They

further note that in cooperative learning "students are assigned to

small groups and instructed to learn the assigned material and to make

sure that the other members of the group learn the assigned material"

(Johnson and Johnson, 1987, p. 6).

Johnson and Johnson (1987, p. 6) also indicate that in cooperative

learning "students perceive that they can only reach their learning

goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach

their goals." Furthermore, cooperative learning "exists when students'

goal attainments are positively correlated"(Johnson and Johnson,

1987, p. 44), i.e., students achieve the goal with participation of fellow

team members.

"In practical terms, collaborative learning entails students working

together to achieve a common learning goals" (Nunan, 1993, p. 3).

Nunan (1993) indicates the following in regard to the definition of

cooperative learning:

> It stands in contrast with competitive learning. (Although, of course, collaboration and competition can coexist in the same classroom; for example, when learners work collaboratively with some other learners in a small group, but competitively against other learners in other groups.) (p. 3).

H. Douglas Brown (2001) provides the following definition of

cooperative learning:

> A curriculum or classroom that is cooperative — and therefore not competitive — usually involves learner-centered characteristics. As students work together in pairs and groups, they share information and come to each other's aid. They are a "team" whose players must work together in order to achieve goals successfully. (p. 47).

Neil Davidson (1990, p. 9) adds that cooperative learning is in fact the

atmosphere of mutual helpfulness that should exist in every group.

Face-to-face interaction in small groups is essential for cooperative

learning because the students "need to be talking together in order to

learn from one another" (Jacobs, Lee, and Ball, 1995, p. 27), which is important in a language class.

Spencer Kagan (1999) adds that it is real cooperative learning when students actually "have the opportunity to interact with their classmates in a positive way" (p. 1).

"Students discuss the material with each other" (Johnson and Johnson, 1987, p. 6). This includes "prolonged and intense interaction among students, helping and sharing" (Johnson and Johnson, 1987, p. 44). Mary Ann Christison (1990, p. 9) adds, "Through cooperative learning techniques, students can become real partners in the learning enterprise."

Robert Slavin (1983) notes in regard to cooperative learning as a structured learner-centered vehicle of learning collaboration:

> The research done up to the present has shown enough positive
> effects of cooperative learning, on a variety of outcomes, to
> force us to re-examine traditional instructional practices. We
> can no longer ignore the potential power of the peer group,
> perhaps the one remaining free resource for improving schools.
> We can no longer see a class as 30 or more individuals whose
> only instructionally useful interactions are with the teacher,

where peer interactions are unstructured or off-task. On the other hand, at least for achievement, we know that simply allowing students to work together is unlikely to capture the power of the peer group to motivate students to perform. (p. 128).

Finally, Christison (1990, p. 6) summarizes the definitions of cooperative learning by indicating that it can be defined as a system of strategies that are used to "help the students develop the positive image of self and others, to provide a vehicle for critical thinking and problem solving, and to encourage collaborative skills."

2. Foreign Language Immersion

Immersion is a method of foreign language instruction in which the regular school curriculum is taught through the medium of the foreign or second language (Met, 1993). According to Met (1993), the foreign language is the vehicle for instruction. No Thai is allowed, and only English is used for all purposes.

Although when immersion programs were first established in Canada in the early 1960s, they were mainly serving learners of French as a second (not foreign) language, their popularity eventually resulted into establishment of French as a foreign language immersion programs.

Then followed other foreign language immersion programs all over

the world (including Thailand), with English language immersion

programs becoming more and more popular.

The underlying assumption was initially that the use of English for

instruction increases the students' skills in the English, i.e., the

assumptions are similar to those defining such relatively recent TEFL

methods as Suggestopedia and Direct Method, as well as

Communicative Language Teaching. The main goal is achieving

proficiency in English.

Met (1993) states that:

> The long-range goals of an immersion program include: (1)
> developing a high level of proficiency in the foreign language;
> (2) developing positive attitudes toward those who speak the
> foreign language and toward their culture(s); (3) developing
> English language skills commensurate with expectations for
> student's age and abilities; (4) gaining skills and knowledge in
> the content areas of the curriculum in keeping with stated
> objectives in these areas.

Furthermore, Met (1993) adds:

> Successful immersion programs are characterized by: (1)
> administrative support; (2) community and parental support; (3)
> qualified teachers; (4) appropriate materials in the foreign
> language; (5) time for teachers to prepare instructional materials
> in the language; and (6) ongoing staff development.

3. Regular Thai Environment

In the regular Thai environment, students are not immersed in English.

Instead, all instruction is conducted in Thai, so Thai environment is

not stimulating in terms of second language acquisition. As a result,

English is only learned (not acquired) through formal instruction in a

foreign language class, often through instruction using the students'

native language. Consequently, there may be little or no opportunities

to practice English in real-life situations (e.g. to solve academic tasks

in various subjects using only English), which may result in a poorer

mastery of English as compared to that of students immersed in

English (Met, 1993).

4. English Immersion Environment

In an English immersion environment, students are totally (in total

immersion programs) or partially (in partial immersion programs)

immersed into English. This means that the environment is stimulating in terms of second language acquisition. All communication is in English. A foreign language is acquired, not learned. According to Met (1993), students who study in an English immersion environment acquire English faster than students in regular Thai environment (see above). Met (1993) calls immersion "the most effective way of developing foreign language proficiency", and English environment is a key element in an immersion program.

Significance of the Study

Since Thailand aims to be a part of the global community, the knowledge of English, particularly proficiency in it, becomes increasingly important. Nonetheless, the EFL instruction in private and especially public schools remains the same and teacher-centered foreign language instruction is used even though learner-centered curriculum has been advocated in Thailand's *National Education Act of B.E.2542* (1999).

Despite the fact that parents urge their children to study English, hire expensive private tutors for their children, and pay for years of

instruction in private schools, the majority of students' English in terms of communicative competence remains low.

As a result, even after years of formal instruction most of the students cannot communicate (speak, write, listen, and read) effectively in English. Given that the role of English in international communication is important, not knowing English on a nationwide scale is a regrettable situation and a cause for concern to the nation (*National Education Act of B.E.2542*, 1999). This means that there is an urgent need for finding new ways of teaching EFL in Thailand.