



CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH CONVERSATION SCHOOL INDUSTRY IN THAILAND FROM 1960-2000

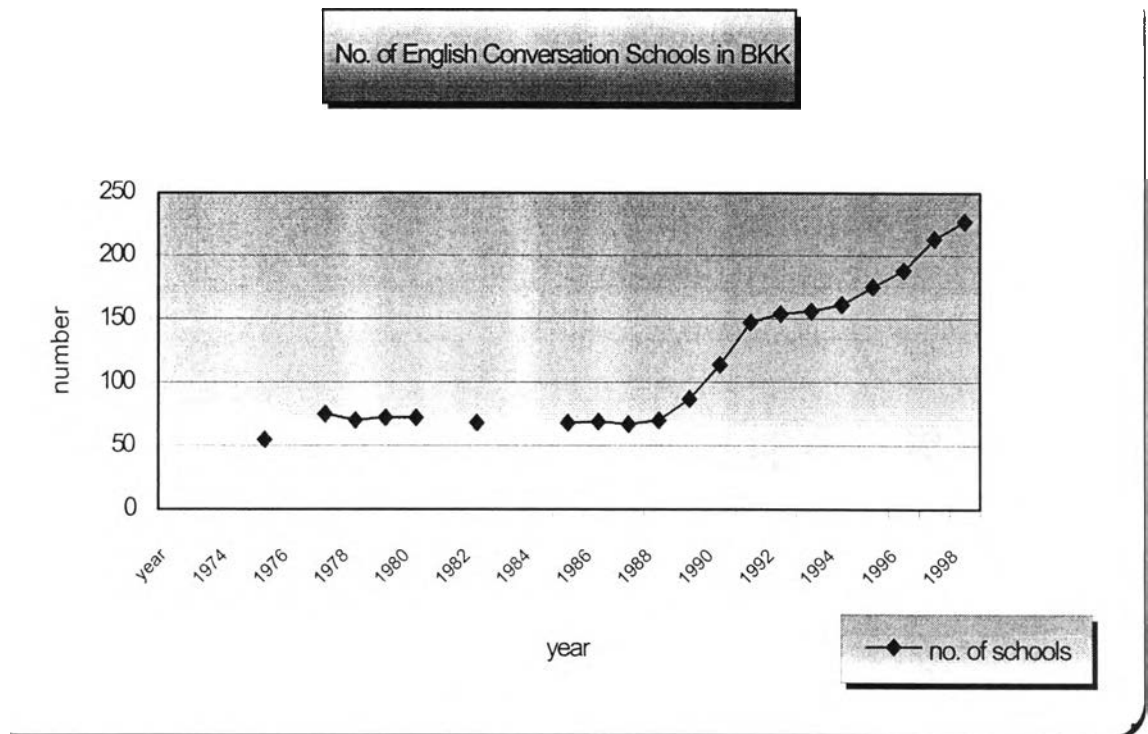
4.1 The General Trend in the Number of English Conversation Schools

The data obtained from the Ministry of Education (Statistics of Private Education, Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education) as regards the number of English language conversation schools that I could gather starts from the year 1976 up until the year 2000. The data for some years is missing but there is enough information available to be able to see the general trend. The missing years are 1977, 1982, 1984 and 1985. The data shows a significant rise in the number of schools. As can be seen in table 1, the number rises from 50+ schools in the 1970/1980s up to over 200 schools in the 2000. While there is very little change during the 1976-1990 period, the 1990s are marked by a continuous rise. Almost the entire increase occurs in the 1990s. (Statistics of Private Education, Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education).

For the sake of clarification two remarks are important to make:

- 1) The number of schools includes branches of existing schools. The increase is therefore both in number of schools and the number of branches of existing schools.
- 2) The numbers might be slightly overstated because the Ministry of Education is very slow in deleting the names of schools that were closed down. In my interview with the Ministry's official, Ms. Phagawan Jeamchaisri of the Office of the Private Education Commission (interview, October 8, 2001) I was told that they are in the process of revising this number to be more updated, and that they will go and check who closed down and take them off the list. The official said that a rough estimate or unofficial

number would be that 20% of the names in the list has been closed already. But even after adjusting to this number, the rise is still very significant.



In any case, the trend is quite clear, namely, a significant rise throughout the 1990. In an interview Ms. Phagawan Jeamchaisri, an old time official of the Private Education Commission (interview, October 8, 2001) in the Ministry of Education, I was told that in the 1960s there were a very small number of English schools, probably not more than 20 schools. The official named the schools as AUA, the British Council, Wannavichit Pasa Lae Thurakit, Phranakorn Pasa Thangprathaet, Rongrean Sonpasa Thangprathaet Krirk and a few smaller schools in Yaowaraj road and Charoenkrung road that she could not remember the names. Even though these schools existed before she joined the ministry, she knew that these schools were there from the 1960's because she had to contact them personally.

According to this official, in the 1970's there were many more schools being registered, a sharp rise from the total of about 20 schools in the 1960's going up to about 50 schools in 1970-1979. She said that most schools in the first twenty years of this period were established because the owner was a teacher who wanted to open the school to teach on his own and may have hired other teachers to help as the need arose. The characteristics of such owners were that many were educated in America or England and had good command of spoken English. Many were also university professors (may not be in the field of teaching English) who run such schools as a sideline.

4.2 Registration Requirements of the Ministry of Education

In order to better understand the figures given here and the relations between the schools and the Ministry of Education it is worthwhile to dedicate a few lines to the process of registering a school in the Ministry of Education.

The registration guidelines of the Ministry of Education during the period of the 1960s were not very strict, especially since in this period the ministry promoted this kind of schools to open. (Saowanee Saereewattanawong, personal communication, October 5, 2001) Today the guidelines are a bit stricter, especially as regards the qualifications of the principal teacher. In order to apply you need to register the owner, the manager and the principle teacher (all can be one person). The qualifications of the head teacher is that they have to have at least bachelor degree in education or in language teaching, or art degree major in English or languages. There is no need for other teachers to register in the beginning, but as the operation starts to roll and the number of students increases, then additional teachers can be registered. In practice, most schools would register only the head teacher and perhaps 2-3 teachers that are hired relatively frequently. In addition, a school has to submit the proposed curriculum in detail and show the Ministry's officials that the school has at least one classroom size 4*5 square

meters for each language taught. That is all. (Regulations in setting up private schools, Office of Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education)

The result of these relatively relaxed regulations is that many schools open on evenings and/or weekends only, so there is no one in the school to ask inquiries during the day. The Ministry had no strict regulation such as would force operators to be open throughout the day and maintain a certain size of administrative staff. Such regulation would have severely impeded the development of the industry. One can say that the existing regulations allowed the industry to be relatively flexible in its response to market trends.

4.3 The Two Major Periods in the Development of the Industry

Based on the figures presented in the graphs of this chapter, the data obtained about various aspects of the development of English conversation schools and the interviews conducted in the Ministry of Education, we can separate the development of the English conversation schools in Thailand into two periods, first twenty years 1960s and 1970s and the second period from 1980-2000 (figures are available until 2000).

The first period is a period of slower growth as measured in terms both of number of schools and other development that I will categorize below. It is true that we see during the early part of this period a growth from about 20 to over 50 schools, as reported in the interview conducted in the Ministry of Education. Qualitatively, however, the new schools were mostly small schools operated by an individual owner/teacher. This quantitative growth was therefore not accompanied by any qualitative difference in the nature of the industry.

The period of the 1980s and 1990s is characterized not only by a steep growth which is evident in the 1990s, but also by the changing face of the industry from one dominated by small operators (plus a few long standing non profit institutions) to one dominated by professional corporations and sophisticated international operators. The 1980s themselves are not characterized by a rapid expansion in the number of schools but the establishment of many of these professional corporate entities. This period of setting up a base by these companies is followed by the rapid expansion in numbers in the 1990s. This expansion is reflected in our figures that include branches of existing schools. This period therefore sees a sharp quantitative growth accompanied by a qualitative change in the nature of the industry.

In light of the above, it should be pointed out that our division of the periods does not follow the mere number of schools. If we did that, we would look at the 1970s and 1990s as period of relative fast growth and at the 1960s and 1980s as periods of stagnation. However, I believe that qualitative changes play as important a role as quantitative changes, and I therefore suggested a breakdown into two periods which is based primarily on such changes.

We will now look at the development that took place between these two periods by examining important aspects of the schools. The categories used will be the same as those used in the previous chapter which discussed the structure of the industry. These categories are: 1) Establishment. 2) Location. 3) Facilities. 4) Courses. 5) Peripheral courses. 6) Materials. 7) Students. 8) Teachers. 9) Management and Operations.

4.4 Establishment of Schools

As noted above, in the 1960's there were not many English conversation schools at all, probably not more than 20 schools. Among these were AUA, the British Council,

Wannavichit Pasa lae Thurakit, Phranakorn Pasa Thangprathaet, Rongrean Sonpasa Thangprathaet Krirk, and a few other smaller schools in Yaowaraj, and Charoenkrung.

In the 1970's there were many more schools being registered, a sharp rise from the previous estimated number of about 20 schools in the 1960's to about 50 schools in 1970. From 1970-1980, the development in the number of schools can be seen from the data, growing from 55 schools in 1976 to 72 schools in 1980). According to the above mentioned official in the Ministry of Education who I interviewed (interview, October 8, 2001), most schools in the first twenty years were established because the owner was a teacher who wanted to open the school to teach on his own, only occasionally hiring other teachers to help. The characteristics of the owner are that they were often educated in the USA or Britain and had good command of spoken English. Many were university professors, or worked in embassy (such as USA, Britain, Australia; people who use English intensively in their work). They may not be in the field of teaching English directly but do this as sideline.

These schools gain their popularity through the owner who is the main teacher of the schools, so people associate the school with name of the owner or of the teacher. The schools in that time used Thai name except two school which are AUA and the British Council which are nonprofit organizations which at that time were run or headed by people sent from the USA or Britain.

It is hard to find information about the schools in this period because they all have closed down already. The closing down is usually associated with the death of the owner / teacher and no one in their families could carry on the school. In this period we can give example of the prominent one such as Wannavichit Pasa lae Thurakit, or Phranakorn Pasa Thangprathaet, Rongrean Sonpasa Thangprathet Krirk (at present Krirk college exists and is run by the daughter of the original owner, but the language

school closed down a long time ago following his death). All these schools became well known because of the owner 's ability as a teacher of English.

Wannavichit's Ajarn Karess, a Sikh Indian, was famous for his presentation or public speaking skills in English. He taught at ACC and was the president of the toastmaster club in Bangkok (international club established for people who are interested to improve their English in public speaking). He wrote the book "Let's talk English". Dr. Puang Boonuapas was an expert in many languages including English and French and was a professor at Chulalongkorn University before starting his own language school: Phranakorn Pasa Thangprathaet . Ajarn Krirk of Rongrean Sonpasa Thangprathet Krirk was very famous at his time and in fact, his is remembered even today. (Dr. Weerapong Boonyopas, interview, January 19, 2001; Wanna Chotikapanich, interview, January 25, 2001).

These three schools were prominent during the first period because they were relatively big schools run by experts whose teaching skills were their major selling points. They were different than other small schools because they operated full time and not only part time (like other schools where the owner operated only on evenings or weekends).

These three school close down because the owner's death.

In the second period of the 1980s and 1990s there are many more schools, both local names and international. The local names are not always associated with the owner as teachers anymore. These schools are owned by people rely on their access to teachers rather than their own teaching skills. Even in the cases that the owner is a teacher, his skills are now used to organize and manage the school rather than teaching himself. In the 1980's we still see that the names of these schools are mostly in Thai, but in the 1990s the fashion of using English names begins. At the same time there are local people who have capital and are capable of setting up an organization bigger than a

simple one-branch school. British American, ECC, Siam Computer, BCC, started operating schools in a more business oriented way. The owners of these schools are also teachers of some kind, in the case of British American, the owner is an English teacher of Indian nationality (and a nephew of the deceased owner of Wannavichit Pasalai Thurakit), the owners of Siam computer and BCC are experts in computers and considered as “ajarn” in their own right. The owner ECC is not a teacher in his own right, but is a business entrepreneur.

4.5 The Location of Schools

Schools in the first period were all located either in rented shop houses, private houses or the residential shop houses of the owners. The big school's location were prime market areas such as Pakklong Talad , Yaowarat, Charoenkrung and Siam Square were there was a lot of traffic. Smaller schools also located in busy market areas, very often in the vicinity of the bigger schools.

In the second period one sees a gradual into department stores, malls and, in some cases, into office buildings. The international names such as Berlitz, Inlingua, but also local chains such British-American, locate themselves almost exclusively in such spots.

This change in venue does not represent any fundamental change in the way these schools operate, but rather shows their adjustment to the changing urban landscape. As the old market commercial centers, where stores and commercial establishments are concentrated, give place to shopping malls and department stores on the one side and office buildings on the other side so do the schools relocate themselves to better cater to their clientele. But whereas in the past the commercial centers were both a shopping area and an office area at the same time, today the locations are split into office buildings and malls. Schools that locate themselves in office building tend to be focused

more on the corporate sector, while those located in malls are focused on the general population, including high school and university students.

In fact, it is these two important market segments: working people and students, which determine the space selection of English schools to a very large extent. Schools that are not located in malls and office buildings often set shop in the vicinity of large high schools or universities. Such schools will often incorporate a number of tutorial courses in their curriculums. Schools that locate in office buildings will, on the other hand, tend to incorporate business English courses in their curriculum. Schools that locate in busy malls will often appeal to the third important market segment, that of young kids. These schools will often incorporate kids English courses aimed at parents that wish to leave their child in the school while going shopping.

A new phenomenon related to the locating of schools in malls is the allocation of a special floor in many malls for educational institutions. These can include English and other language schools, music and dance schools, sports schools, computer schools, etc. Because such general educational areas are mainly aimed at younger kids, the English schools that locate in such malls tend more and more to focus on the younger population. This is a change from the earlier pattern where locating in malls aimed at "mimicking" the old busy market street locations.

4.6 School's Facilities

One can generally say that there has been very little change in the facilities which English conversation schools offer their students. The main facility, besides a class room and a white board, is the access to teachers, mainly foreign teachers. What did change is the appearance of the schools, a change that is in part connected to their changed locations but is even more connected to the greater need to project image.

This is related to the fact that the appeal of the schools does not lie any more with a charismatic teacher. The teachers are mostly foreign, are not well known, change often and are sometimes not even qualified to teach English. The way to impress students is through well-organized reception areas, well-designed classrooms and professional looking facilities.

The only visible changes in the learning facilities themselves are the change from green to white boards in all schools and the change from desk-chairs to round "discussion" tables in high-end schools. Besides these minor changes, one also starts to see, in some schools, first attempts to incorporate technology. Interestingly, these seem to be most obvious in the nonprofit schools AUA and the British Council, who have a big sound lab audio and libraries full of books. AUA also has a large cafeteria, teacher rooms and additional facilities. Some schools do have videos and tape players, but hardly use them, and in any case these are technologies that have been around for a long time.

The truly advanced multi-media facilities may require substantial investments (in computers, educational software) which is beyond the means of many schools. However, with the new corporate chains of schools and the international affiliated schools, the finance and the expertise should be available to apply a major revamp of teaching facilities. The technology of computerized learning with extensive multi-media products that incorporate sophisticated voice-recognition systems definitely exists today and is applied by some international English conversation school chains, such as Spain based "Wall Street". In Thailand today, only Direct English of the Nation Group possesses extensive multi-media labs.

This lack of progress and slowness in applying advanced technology reflects, I believe, one of the main characters of the English conversation school industry in Thailand. It is

the role of the industry as a mediator between teachers, mostly foreign, and students. School function as a place where these two populations meet. They do not function as curriculum innovators that offer novel methods of language teaching. Also they do not function as technology pioneers that offer students the latest technology. In many countries, language schools play such roles, but in Thailand the main role is as a forum of exchange between foreign teachers and Thai students.

4.7 Courses and Curriculum

The idea of using placement tests to see each student's ability before placing him into the right class has started in the beginning period with AUA and British Council. Other schools, especially the bigger ones such Phranakorn Pasa Thangprathaet, implemented simplified placement tests. One of the reasons that AUA and British Council did was because they were professional in teaching English and were run by experts from abroad, so they could design their test to be accurate. In addition they were a big schools with many students so they could were able to separate them into numerous different levels and still be able to open a class for everyone whereas other small schools had to group students of different skill levels together.

However, students in that period often had to start from the beginning level anyway. Today, however, the children of some of high and middle income family start learning English in private language schools much earlier than the old generation and they have many other choices, such as studying abroad in summer, exchange programs and other options. The result is a much bigger variability in skill levels between different students with different backgrounds, and it is therefore much harder to group students together.

Compared to the big schools such as AUA and the British Council, smaller schools used informal ways of testing student's abilities. These included talking to each student and

asking them some questions or have them look at the materials of different level and ask them to say things or answer some questions. Each test was in fact individual to each student and there was no standard format.

But in the second period, many more schools started to use the idea of standardized level tests, both small schools and large chains. The main reason for adopting such standardized placements tests is first as a marketing tool, as it looks much more professional in student's eyes, and second is that standardized tests are now available off the shelf whereas in the past they had to be developed by each school. In fact, many of the textbook series such as Interchange Series or American streamline of Oxford University Press have their own corresponding level placement tests. The standardized tests generally test some grammar, vocabulary and reading skills. Recently, starting in the late 1990s, there has been an invention of a new type of test, namely, a computerized placement test which could test your listening skill as well, but only a few schools use this now.

The basic structure of a typical English conversation course did not change over the years. Each course still consists of around 30-40 hours or about two and a half to three month long. This length of course has nothing to do with any Ministry of Educations regulation. The Ministry does not rule how long should a course be. What did change is the length of sessions, namely in the first period, sessions take place mostly thrice weekly, such as Monday, Wednesday and Friday or Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. In the second period there is a tendency to hold sessions of two hours twice a week, one weekly session in the weekend. The reason for this change is mainly the bad traffic situation. By lengthening the sessions, traffic time is reduced. Also, schools have more students and by lengthening sessions they can rotate the classes more often. Many teachers who I interviewed claimed the sessions are too long today for conversation

classes and students are not capable of absorbing the new information properly. According to these teachers the maximum length of a session should be two hours.

In terms of the length of the whole program (including all levels), one can say that it is about the same for both periods, and that the situation is still that the big schools (corporation type or non profit organization) have got more level than the small school or in other words, got more hours in total for students to study. The schools in the corporation type (local or international or non profit organization) usually have 8-15 levels. The first three level would be grouped as basic levels, the next three as lower intermediate levels, then intermediate levels, upper intermediate levels, and advanced. This could be done because big schools could run longer programs than a small school due to higher rates of renewals. (Students continue to go up level by level). The design has to do with commercial and academic reasons: It is good for the school's income and it is more effective when students engage in a longer program (because they get to practice more). Psychologically too, students who want to achieve a good level of English feel that they have to complete the whole program and as a result they end up studying many more hours than they originally thought and their level of English can improve significantly.

In the first period, Small schools (family run local name) offered about three levels, basic, intermediate and advance, but in the second period these schools usually offer about four or five levels, beginner or basic, lower intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced.

In the first period, general conversation courses were the main course or the main focus of the conversation schools, and are still today the main attraction for the majority of the students who attend these schools. However, one type of courses that gains more and more interest are business English and business writing courses. This demand became

noticeable in the last ten years and became even stronger after the 1996 crisis. During the interviews with the managements of different language schools, I was told that business English became more popular because of increased exposure to international contacts and the fact that many foreign companies have come to be established in Thailand and employ Thai people. The 1996 crisis made a large number of people redundant and people became much more aware of the need to improve their English skills in order to maintain their jobs. The crisis also hit hard the booming domestic market, making exports and the contact with foreign buyers once again the engine of the economy.

According to the brochures gathered, every school offer general conversation classes and also some courses relating to business communication. A new type of school that came into being caters only to the corporate training market. Examples are Vektor and Text and Talk.

Another development that occurred in the content of the conversation courses is that the content being taught to students has become more and more difficult. In the first period only listening and speaking skills were emphasized. The main form of practice has been repetition of sentences. In the past ten years, the communicative approach that emphasizes the simultaneous practice of all four skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening has become more and more prominent. Simple repetition has lost favor as a practice technique. The emphasis is also on enabling students to confront more complex real-life situations, whereas in the past situations were abstracted to very simple events. The result is a much more complex content and a richer vocabulary being taught under the same title of levels.

For business English, courses have gotten more specialized or more tailored to students needs. In the first period, the idea of sending teachers to companies to teach English

did not exist and only a small portion of students learning English studied business English. As a result, very few schools offered business English, which at that time was called business correspondence. Also, at that time, there were not many people who had the expertise to teach the subject either. In the late 1980's the demand for business communication has widen to the extent that many schools in the early 1990's started to make it convenient for their clients by sending teachers to companies rather than having them study at the center. Due to this change, the nature of the business English courses began to change. Instead of providing what is offered at their center as standard business English and charge them at a standard center price, these schools started to offer more specific courses tailor made to the corporate customers needs. Courses include business presentation, business negotiation, or specialized English courses for Hotel or Hospitality business, or banking, etc.

Another new developments is that the demand for children courses have risen in the last ten years and the momentum has speeded up after the crisis. This is a new phenomenon because in the first period, programs particularly designed for children (age 4-14, children and teens) learning English did not exist in Thailand. More recently, people realized that if don't train their children in English early on, they might lag later on and might not be able to keep with the requirements of the market. People applied to their children the lessons they learnt themselves, particularly in relation to the increased competitiveness in the job market. So, in the last decade, many schools, both corporate and family run, started to devote efforts to building up a foothold in the children market. This move has helped them to achieve a high rate of growth in the past ten years. Also, some new schools started in this period, which specialize exclusively in the children market, such as NAVA (local corporation), and Fun language school (international franchising corporation).

In the first period, if any children were studying English in a private language school, the lessons would be teaching them how to read ABC and teaching them simple words and how to spell these words, like C.. A.. T.. cat. Also taught was the reciting of simple sentences like "I am a boy." This approach was not different from the approach used in the formal educational system and the teachers were often Thai. In the second period, particularly in the last ten years, private language schools have adopted a natural approach in teaching English to children, generally aged below 15. Using native speakers is the key to this approach, because there would be no Thai spoken. Students learn to listen and speak before they learn to spell words. They would pick up new vocabulary and the correct pronunciation through activity based learning. This sharply differentiates these schools from the formal educational sector and the emphasis is now on native English speakers as teachers.

4.8 Peripheral Courses

Other languages such as Thai, Japanese, Chinese, German, French, or Spanish were and still are taught in many English Conversation schools as supplementary courses. Usually these classes are conducted on the private level (mostly one to one lessons), however, there has been a shift in demand from European languages to a higher demand for Asian languages, particularly in the last ten to fifteen years. Also evident is the establishment of separate schools for only Japanese, Chinese or Thai. This happens more often in the past decade and the popularity of these schools is on the increase.

In general however, as the market for English conversation itself is getting more fragmented and complex, including, besides normal conversation also business English, young children English, specialized professional English, tutorial English and so forth, so the tendency for English schools to offer supplementary subjects is going down. The field of English itself is becoming wider and requires larger resources to

cover its different branches. These scarce resources are therefore being diverted from a plurality of subjects into the offering of a comprehensive package in the field of English itself.

4.9 Materials

In general, books were and still are the most important tool in teaching and learning English. Usually when students register for a course, the materials that accompany their course is a book. This has not changed over the periods. What also did not change was the fact that the private English teaching industry in Thailand contributed very little to the creation of new textbooks, textbooks that are specifically tailored to the needs of Thai students. Very little textbook creation took place in the past and very little takes place in the present.

Besides books, there are other learning tools such as tapes and videos or multimedia cds but only a few schools started to give this to students as materials of their registered course. The exception is Direct English, of the Nation Group. Usually tapes or videos or multimedia cds are sold in bookstores, and are not provided in language schools. Certain schools like Berlitz or Lessons for Life have these learning tools (they developed them), but they also sell them separately from the courses themselves as extra learning for home.

Mainly, the typical class would consist of talking to teachers and students-teachers interaction. There is no time to listen to other media. In fact, professional books like Oxford and Cambridge University Press or other publications, have tapes and listening parts in their books. And teachers could use it in the beginning of their class, to be followed by a group discussion. But many teachers I interviewed do not use this tool on

a regular basis. They said they rather do something more relevant to student's lives than have them considered less related to their lives.

In the first period, the only other tool available at all was tape cassettes, which were available as classroom supplemental activity. But as mentioned earlier, they have never gained popularity among most of the teachers. However, this technology stays until today and is still used in some occasions. In more recent times we have multi media packages designed specifically for English teaching. These are very sophisticated programs that involve reading, writing, speaking and listening, in fact a full class environment tailor made to the personal pace of each person. The schools that use it in one way or another are AUA (audio and computer lab), IDP (computer lab), EF (Computer lab) and Direct English (Computer Lab). In all these schools the lab is supplementary to classes and functions as a place where students can practice their frontal lessons.

In reality, however, the multi media labs can function as a full substitute to frontal classes. This approach is used in some foreign language institutes such as Spain based Wall Street. Such a radical approach is not taken by any institute in Thailand.

Needless to say that books are the most important tools for learning. However, many teachers I interviewed mentioned that if you follow a book strictly, whether it is a good or bad book, you couldn't keep the interest of the students. They are bored. Books are used as guidelines, but extension exercises are critical. The individual abilities of the teacher therefore play a role not only in the presentation of the book materials but also in creating new materials of his own.

About every four to five years every publisher is coming out with new editions of the old books. So schools change books every four to five years to be up to date with the new

materials. However, in the past forty years books have gone a long way in their development due to the shift in different approach in teaching English to foreigners. In the first period, the situational based approach or the audio-or lingua approach or also called behaviorist approach was the popular approach in teaching English to non-native speakers. (Paul Humphries, interview, March 26, 2001). Books in this period comprised of lists of vocabulary for pronunciation practice, lists of sentences similar in structure for students to practice or repeat after their teachers. For example, the sentences could be " I went to a movie last night," " I went to a restaurant last night, " " I went to a shopping mall last night." Then there were simple dialogues between two to three people in different situations such as in a train station or restaurant or in department stores. There was not usually reading or writing exercises in these texts. (Wanna Chotikapanich, interview, March 14, 2002).

In the second period of this study, this way of teaching English was still prominent until in the late 1980's when communicative approach of teaching English became popularly accepted in Thailand. During this period (late 1980's to 2000), there was a slow broadening of different skills built into the communicative textbooks. The books during this time has progressively got more integration of the skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar points. Whereas before no grammar points were incorporated in reading passages or writing exercises, now they always are. There are also comprehension exercises using all these four different skills.

4.10 Students of English Conversation Schools

In the first period, those who studied English in these English conversation schools were almost exclusively adults of an age starting from early twenties or following graduation from schools or university. Students came from relatively similar income and education background.

In the second period, one sees a broadening of these various groups since more and more people are interested in studying English. Also, particularly in the last ten years, children have joined in as students of English conversation schools.

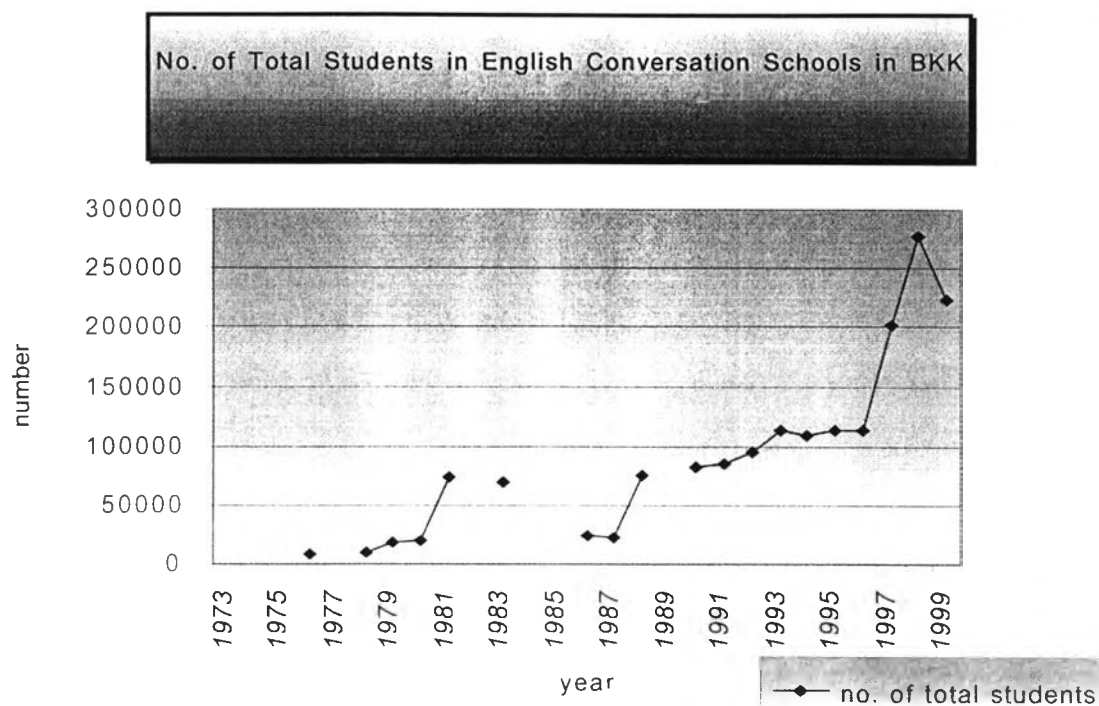
However, the students' intention to study is different in different periods. In the first, many students study English because they want to increase their general knowledge of English. The need is not felt as a critical obligation towards the advancement of their careers. Not many of them actually used English in their work or further studies. Their level of English was low, they could hardly understand simple everyday sentences such as "How do you do?," "What are you doing?" "You are welcome". Almost all of these students could be ranked as beginners.

In the second period, more and more people need to learn English conversation for more specific purposes such as for their study (abroad and local) or work. As a result, students' seriousness in studying English has greatly increased. In the last ten years, due to more exposure of international media such as movies, concerts, music, books, and due to the fact that many more English language schools were available for them, many students were able to acquire a level of English higher than the beginning level. There are quite a lot of these students who can be considered at the level of intermediate. As a result, there is much larger variability in the skills of students that apply to study in English conversation schools.

Also, the 1996 crisis influenced people to study English more seriously and for specific purposes. They expect to learn more in class because they now realize how important it is to obtain English skills for their future career. And after the crisis, more students are interested in learning how to write (general, academic, and business writing) rather only to listen and to speak. (John Tylor, interview, March 8, 2001).

In general, students have become much more selective in more recent years. There are many reasons why students have become more selective. First they have had better communicative English training in their formal school or university. In the last ten years, many private schools both primary and secondary have started to hire non-Thai English teachers (native speakers, and/or Filipino, Burmese) to teach part of the English classes (the Thai teachers would teach grammar classes, and the non-Thai would teach English conversation classes). Moreover, many universities also have higher ratio of native teachers. Second, many of them have begun to study English outside their formal education institutes many years before they graduate. Third, there are many private English schools with variety of quality for them to choose from. The result is that various factors such class size, teachers qualifications, look of the school, etc, has become some of the issues critical to some of the students enrolling decisions. (John Tylor, interview, March 8, 2001).

Looking at the graph, though we do not have much data available in the first period, we can still see high growth. In 1976 the number of students was 8,572 and at the end of this period (in 1980) the number went up to 19,218 students, or 124% growth within four years. In the second period, in the 1981 number of students was 74,049, a big jump from the end of the first period. In other words, within one year the number of students rose 285%. The number of students continued to rise strongly in this period despite the



fact that we are missing some data in the beginning of this period. 1997 the number rose strongly from 113,815 in 1996 to 201,598 in 1997 or 77% growth, proving that people are more alert of the need for English proficiency and want to improve it even more during the economic crisis. In 1999 the number drop slightly but then rebound and continued to be on a rising trend in 2000 with 245,200 students. (Statistics of Private Education, Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education).

4.11 Teachers in English Conversation Schools

Teachers are the main resource used by English language conversation schools. As such, developments in that area are of great significance. The recent introductions of multi-media interactive teaching programs have not changed the prominence of teachers as the main instrument of delivering English teaching.

In the first period, teachers in private language schools were mostly Thai. The exception has been the large non-profit schools such as AUA and British Council. The majority of schools were purely local entities. As mentioned in the "establishment" section earlier, many schools in this period were run on part time basis, on evening and/or weekends to accommodate the owner or the runner's convenient hours, since the owners usually managed the school and acted as the main teacher. The characteristic of the owner was that many were educated in the USA or England and had good command of spoken English. Many were also university professors, or worked in embassies of English speaking countries. During this period, because the nature of the school was such that it depended mostly on one teacher, teaching qualification were usually critical to the existence and success of the schools. People or students would associate the quality of the schools with the particular teacher. And this was also the mechanism of marketing the school by words of mouth, a mechanism which usually determined the reputation of each school in this period. Even the more professionally run of the local schools of that time depended on the owners reputation as a teacher for their success.

As mentioned already, the exception to the general view of local schools at that time were AUA and the British Council. AUA and the British Council are the two strongest schools in this period because of the strong support in both finance and human resources that they received from abroad. In terms of human resources, they brought in a team of native speakers to run the academic management of the schools. This included an academic director and head teachers. However, apart from these few posts, their teachers were all locally recruited native speakers. Teachers in AUA during this period were mostly wives of people working in the American embassy or other American non-profit organization like USIS, USOM. They were not coming from a teaching background but were viewed by AUA as semi qualified because they were native English speaker. Being a native speaker was viewed as an important factor to

become a teacher of English conversation course at AUA since it was thought that they could be trained to be teachers relatively easily.

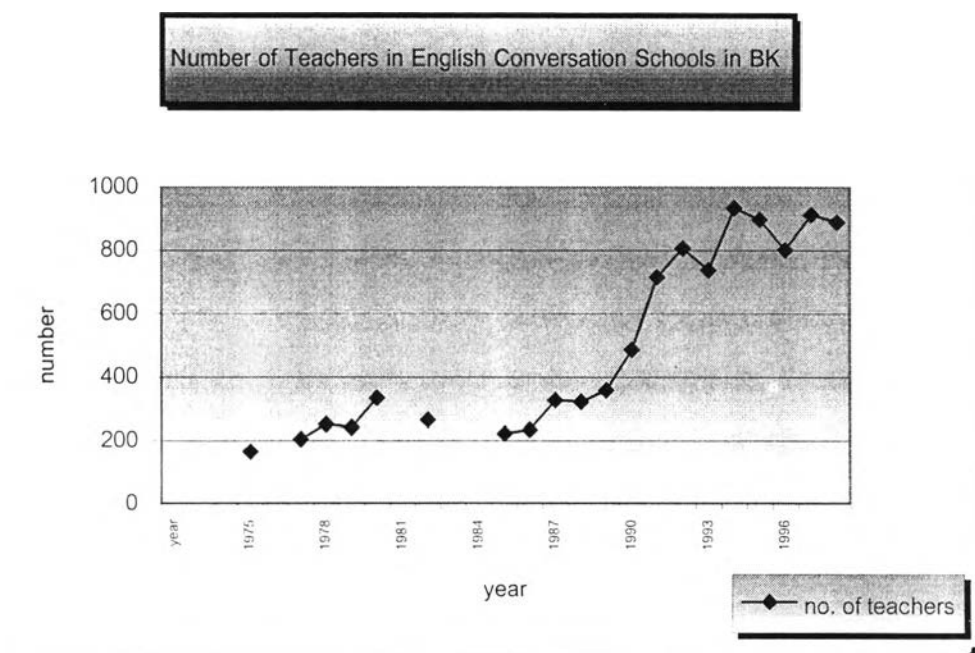
Another interesting case is Wannavichit Pasa Lae Thurakit where the owner also gained good reputation as a teacher. In this case the owner was not Thai but of Indian descent who was fluent in English because of his education in India and the USA. In his school he hired Thais and foreigners both native and non native (such as Indian and European) whose first language is not English. The source from Wannavichit told that in the 1970's native teacher were not widely accessible like today. During this period, Wannavichit recruited teachers of different nationalities such as German, French Indian, Burmese, who could speak English fairly well. Students did not mind since their level of English was that of beginners and they could not tell the difference between native speakers English and the English of other European nations. (Wanna Chotikapanich, interview, January 4, 2002).

In the first ten years of the second period, hiring European who were not the real native speakers of English to teach English in Bangkok was still practiced but the supply of this type of teachers started to fade off by itself and was being replaced by Asians who came to Thailand to find work. These English speaking Asian included Filipinos, Burmese, Malaysians and Indians. European traveling into the kingdom were mostly young backpackers who were more interested in exploring the country than in working. (Wanna Chotikapanich, interview, January 4, 2002).

In this period the native English-speaking teachers become more widely accessible, but it was not until around 1990 that supply reached a significant size. Today the population of English teachers residing in Thailand can be measured in many hundreds, if not thousands. It is a population that develops a culture and a community life of its own as it exists at the fringes of Thai society. Some members of this society revive the tradition of

small teacher-centered schools by establishing their own, mostly unregistered schools, while the majority is circulating between different schools.

At the same time, the Asian English speaker came to constitute a sizable number as well, and many schools use these teachers mixed with native speakers. They are looked at as second-class teachers and are cheaper to hire because they are not native. It is impossible to tell what percentage Thai teachers, Asian teachers, or native teachers represent because the record of this type has not been kept by the Ministry of Education or any other organization. However, we can see from the running 57 schools as of the year 2000 that 26 schools or 46% use both native and non native and 24 schools or 42% use only native or 6 schools or 12% use only non native. The chart below also gives a good overall indication that the number of teachers is rising steadily. However, these numbers are not accurate and are most probably too low. The reason for that is that many schools do not register all of their teachers with the Ministry of Education.



Recently, the qualifications of native English speakers have become an important issue. Unlike in the past, being a native speaker is not considered as an automatically sufficient qualification any more. Native speakers include American, British, Australian, New Zealanders and Canadian. There are three types of native speakers:

- 1) The first type of teachers is a qualified teacher of English to non-native speakers. These teachers come to Thailand with teaching intention because of their teaching degree and experience. They constitute only a very small fraction of all teachers in Thailand. These teachers when coming to teach at private conversation schools are eventually assigned (after gaining experience in Thailand for sometime and if they decide to stay in Thailand for longer time) management position such as head of the academic department, or head teacher. There are some who come to Thailand to teach English in universities and seek part time teaching position at private conversation schools. People in this group usually stay for at least two to three years.
- 2) The second group are those who did not have a degree in teaching English or experience in teaching English as a second language before coming to Thailand, but would like to live and earn a living in Thailand and have found that English teaching is an option to pursue. These people may stay in Thailand at least a couple of years or more. Their interest really lies in staying in the Kingdom and the professional consideration is a means towards that goal.
- 3) Third are those who come to Thailand for a short period of time to travel and explore life or living in a foreign country and want to make some income in order to stay or extend their stay. Some of these end up staying longer than they planned and become one of those in the second group.

The first group of native teachers has always constituted only a small percentage of the total number of English teachers in Thailand.

As for the second and third group, it is hard to differentiate between these two in the beginning of this period because the purpose of coming to Thailand is the same, namely, they come to explore life in a different culture. However, the second group found Thailand a good place to live and decided to stay on. From talking to many teachers who are in this group, we seem to get the idea that this group started to come in the late 1980's or early 1990's. This group has become a larger and larger part of the total as more and more people came, liked life in Thailand, and decided to stay on. Many of them are not so young (in their thirties), they have work experience in their country (usually not teaching English as a second language) and many had come here before on vacation and liked it here and want to establish a life here. Many in this group settle down and marry Thai people.

The third group constitutes the largest part, which I estimate at over 60% of the total. People in this group are mostly young people aged in their twenties who want to explore life abroad. Usually they stay for a year or few years and move on to explore other countries or go home. They come and end up in part time teaching jobs earning money to survive or extend their stay. This phenomenon is the same in other Asian countries like Japan, Taiwan and China. Such people cannot find a full time job because they don't want to commit themselves and they are probably not qualified to do much else. Besides, there are not much of other jobs for them. Also the nature of language schools is that they do not need to hire people full time. In all three groups, most teachers are men, and probably less than 10% are women.

In terms of their qualification, ten years ago students were excited just to be able to speak to native English speakers. So their qualification was only their being native speakers. There was not much in terms of class preparation either. But recently things have changed especially as the nature of students has changed (as mentioned in the student section). (John Tylor, Interview, March 8, 2001). This has triggered a rise in the

expectations from teachers. Also there is a lot more competition amongst many more language schools and the quality of teachers can determine the reputation of schools. Big schools such as AUA or Inlingua adopted some measures of quality control. They now have training for new teachers and a lot more strict guidelines of what teachers are supposed to be doing in class. So you can actually differentiate good and bad teachers more clearly.

In the last ten years many more teachers have bachelor's degree, while before there were many teachers with only high school education or diplomas. Particularly after the crisis schools seem to demand a bachelor's degree from new teachers. Just recently, a couple of years only, bachelor degrees seem to be the minimal requirement for ideal teacher that schools are looking for.

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) certificate is a new phenomenon. The certificate is issued to prospective teachers who complete a course that usually takes a few months. Now many teachers have upgraded themselves and are taking courses to attain this certificate. Even teachers in the third category take these courses. It went so far that some of them attain the certificate before coming to explore life in Thailand. As they realize that they might seek occupation in Thailand they prepare themselves first. Many also come to take these courses in Thailand.

In the first ten years of this period almost all teachers have tourist visas, not until about 1990 that some big schools such as British American, Inlingua, AUA, ECC, the British Council began to arrange work permits for some of their teachers with a one-year visa. Teachers without work permit have to leave the country every two or three months (depending on the type of visa they have). Having teaching experience or teaching certificate however does not guarantee a working visa because many schools don't offer them to these teachers due to the nature of the work being part time. Schools are not

obligated to give work permit and it involves some legal expenses. It is usually only the bigger schools that arrange it for their more permanent teachers.

While some teachers in big schools can have enough work in their respective schools, the majority of teachers still run around from one school to the other, trying to fill in a working day. The majority just get by, save very little, and generally live in the margins of society. Very few manage to establish themselves properly, and these are mostly the senior teachers in the bigger and international schools.

4.12 The Management of English Conversation Schools

In the first period, there were not many schools, and they were either family business or non-profit organization (AUA and the British council). There was not much competition but there was not that much demand either. The local family run schools in this period was usually run by the owners/teachers. The operation was simple: hire a few staff and teachers are all on part time. Marketing was by words of mouth. The schools in this period said they sometimes put advertisement on newspapers (the big school like AUA, British Council, Wannavichit, and Pranakorn Pasa Tangprathaet). They passed out fliers, but mostly relied on word of mouth.

In the second period, we start to see schools as business corporations, so management becomes much more professional. We begin to see the owners hire professional to run the schools. International brand names have people with teaching expertise to be a head teacher and the art of managing other teachers became the important issue because one gets so many kinds of teachers. Training becomes important: Head teachers train teachers, coordinate teaching schedules, and they have to provide teaching guidelines, choose materials like which book to use for the schools, and other materials. They also conduct teachers meeting, and training.

In the second period one sees administrative complexity in the management of the schools: different sections are forming in big schools such as finance and accounting, marketing and public relations, academic, maintenance, legal and others. Marketing by passing out fliers and newspaper advertisements are still common but in this period there are other magazines like student weekly, and nation junior or education of Wattachak and the fashion magazines. So the choice of advertising strategy becomes more complex and requires specialized skills.

In general, the change in management style is one of the main factors that distinguish the first and second period. The move from family owner-teacher operations to complex organization is the main difference between the 1960s-1970s and the 1980s-1990s. The "professionalization" of the teachers is related to this trend. This change in management style also embodies the change in the scale of the industry. Bigger scale requires a different level of management approach. In that sense, the fact that this change started in the 1980s has been a precursor of the dramatic increase in the size of the industry, as measured by number of schools, which took place in the 1990s.

4.13 Summary

As we have seen in this chapter, we can look at two main periods in the development of the industry of English conversation schools, namely, the 1960s and 1970s with some growth but very little changes in the way the industry operates, and the 1980s and 1990s, when not only rapid growth in the size of the industry occurs but also far reaching changes in the way it operates take place.

The changes that take place is a move from small schools operated by owners-teachers who are Thai (with the exception of two non profit organizations AUA and British Council), to large chains of schools operated as business organizations and operated

as such, some with various affiliations to international school networks, some domestic, all relying primarily on foreign teachers who are native speakers. Thai teachers, who previously were the backbone of the industry, have now been completely marginalized.

The industry at the end of the 1990s is, when comparing to the past: 1) More business-like. 2) More internationally affiliated. 3) More reliant on foreign teachers. Interestingly, there are no major developments in the curriculum or in the instruments used to deliver the content. We found that the curriculum plays a minor role and is usually borrowed from widely available textbooks. There is no effort by the industry to localize content or to create content which is unique to the Thai environment. Also, with all the technological advances of the past two decades, it is still books which are the main instrument used by teachers. Tape recorders, videos, and, the latest innovation, interactive, voice-recognizing multi-media software are not widely used at all. The biggest change is from a green board to a white board, hardly a technological leap of faith.

Looking at the industry from the widest angle possible, one can say that it has become, in some sense, a business-minded middle-man between foreign teachers who are native-speakers and Thai people who are eager to learn directly from the source. The development of these foreign teachers from the early housewives of diplomats stationed in Bangkok and backpackers to the later certified teachers who often have regional teaching experience only underlies the above statement. The industry is geared towards improving the skills of its teachers rather than the quality of its curriculum or the technological advancement of its instruments. It competes on having the best teachers and delivering them to the students. It is, in fact, an economic delivery mechanism of foreign teachers to Thai students.