

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At present, we are able to contact people from other countries easily because of advanced information technology and the influence of English. The English language is important as an international language because it functions as a medium between people who speak different languages. Kachru and Nelson (1996, p.96) state that “English has become – or at least is perceived as – indispensable in many areas of international business and for such special purposes”.

In Thailand, English is a compulsory foreign language identified in the Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544 (A.D. 2001), and it is required for all grade levels. Furthermore, foreign language learning aims at students’ competencies in using language for communication, seeking knowledge from various resources, possessing skills for encountering different situations, and using language and culture appropriately in various contexts (Ministry of Education, 2002). Thus, it can be seen that in learning English, learners do not learn only the target language, but also the target culture.

Culture should be included in language learning because language is the reflection of culture and they cannot be separated from each other, so learning language is associated with learning culture (Kitao & Kitao, 1995; Baker, 2003). Moreover, cultural perspectives are important in training students to behave properly and meaningfully in a second culture (Tang, 2006). Also, “learners will need a grasp of the relationship between language and the values and meaning it embodies...to adapt effectively to new situations and use their cognitive powers to develop

appropriate behaviors, both linguistic and non-verbal” (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991, p.7).

Additionally, Hinkel (2001) points out that ESL learners need to attain second language (L2) sociocultural competence in order to become proficient and effective communicators because attaining linguistic proficiency alone is not sufficient. Furthermore, Richards and Schmidt (2002, p.136) say “there are often more problems in cross-cultural communication than in communication between people of the same cultural background.” Therefore, if students do not know the target culture, it can cause problems in communication because they will transfer their cultural norms, which shape their thoughts and understanding, to the target culture when cultures of two languages are different (Knox, 1999; Cedar, 2005).

From these reasons, teachers should recognize the importance of culture teaching as an essential aspect in language classrooms. In the learning situation, they need to explain and clarify both language and culture in order to help learners communicate and enhance their understanding of others as well as their own culture (Brooks, 1964; Lado, 1988; Tseng, 2002).

However, culture teaching/learning in most language curriculums, especially in EFL and ESL is quite limited and often neglected. To illustrate, culture is taught in a few language courses, and mentioned as an additional part of language teaching. Also, teachers introduce only cultural parts that included in the textbook. Teachers may not teach their students target culture due to many reasons, such as teachers’ limited knowledge of the target culture, lack of time, lack of method and materials (Stern, 1992; Tseng, 2002; Tsou, 2005).

Also, in the Thai context, though there are problems in culture teaching, teachers should realize the importance of culture for communication, and they should

integrate culture teaching as a part of ordinary English lessons. Also, teachers should know both Thai and English cultures as well as be able to take cross-cultural views (Baker, 2003).

In addition, teachers' practices in the language classroom are based on "conscious or subconscious choices...many of these choices are – or should be – the result of a careful consideration" (Brown, 2001, p.3). There are various factors affecting teachers' practices which can be divided into three main components depending on sources of factors: teacher factors, learner factors, and teaching context factors. Obviously, we can see that teacher factors are the most important factor impacting language teaching because teachers are the ones who ultimately determine the successful program by making up for deficiencies (Richards, 2003).

Since culture should be taught in teachers' practices, and teacher factors have an influence on teachers' practices, it is important to see culture teaching practices of teachers as well as to investigate the teacher factors in order to facilitate, and improve teachers' culture teaching practices in Thai context. This leads to the research questions as follows:

1. How do teachers teach culture in an English language classroom?
2. What are the factors affecting teachers' culture teaching practices?

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate teachers' culture teaching practices in an English language classroom.
2. To examine the factors affecting teachers' culture teaching practices.

Scope of the Study

1. This case study was based on English teachers in one public secondary school in Bangkok.
2. The researcher observed three teachers over the course of one semester.
3. In the study, the researcher focused on examining teacher factors only.
4. The variables in this study are as follows:
 - Culture teaching practices
 - Factors affecting culture teaching practices

Definition of Terms

Culture teaching practices refer to teachers' instructions of culture belonging to English speaking social groups which are carried out in the classroom which consist of five components: culture content, teachers' roles in culture teaching, techniques in culture teaching, materials in culture teaching, and methods to assess students' culture learning.

Factors affecting culture teaching practices refer to teacher factors influencing culture teaching practices. In this study, eight teacher factors are the focus of the analysis: teachers' learning experience, teachers' cultural knowledge, teachers' teaching experience, teachers' teaching skills, teachers' beliefs, teachers' personal preferences, teachers' roles, and teachers' preparation time.

Culture content refers to subject matter dealing with culture belonging to English speaking social groups which teachers use in class.

Teachers' roles in culture teaching refer to the roles teachers take in culture teaching practices

Techniques in culture teaching refer to the means teachers use in teaching culture content in class.

Materials in culture teaching refer to instructional media teachers use in teaching culture content in class.

Methods to assess students' culture learning refer to the procedures teachers use to assess students' knowledge of culture content.

Teachers' learning experience refers to teachers' experience in learning the English language and culture belonging to English speaking social groups.

Teachers' cultural knowledge refers to teachers' knowledge of culture content, specifically in the aspect of social interaction.

Teachers' teaching experience refers to the length of time teachers have been teaching English.

Teachers' teaching skills refer to the competency of teachers in culture teaching.

Teachers' beliefs refer to beliefs of teachers about teaching an English language and culture belonging to English speaking social groups.

Teachers' personal preferences refer to teachers' personal interests in general, such as types of activities, and materials.

Teachers' preparation time refers to the length of time teachers use to prepare their lessons.

Teachers refer to Thai teachers who teach English in one public secondary school in Bangkok, Thailand.

Organization of Chapters

There are five chapters in the study. The first chapter consists of background and statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, scopes, and definitions of the research.

In the second chapter, review of the literature is presented. It deals with two concepts of the study: culture teaching practices, and factors affecting language teaching. Also, the theoretical framework is finally shown in this chapter.

The third chapter is associated with the research methodology. It provides population and sample, research instruments, the data collection process, and data analysis.

In the fourth chapter, the findings of the study are described. It includes general background of the participants, culture teaching practices, and factors affecting culture teaching practices.

The final chapter is concerned with the summary of the study, discussions, pedagogical implication, and recommendations for further research.