

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

With the great development of the global economy and technology, English is the world's most prominent language in business, education, world news, and communication. Today, English enjoys international recognition and vitality. On this account, Crystal (1997: 139) observes that "there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. In Thailand, English has been complemented as an integral part of higher education; however, Thai students' proficiency in English is still lagging behind their peers in neighboring countries according to regional surveys of standard tests reported in The Nation newspaper dated 10 August 2005.

Currently, due to growth in international trade, tourism promotion, higher potential for better career prospect and individual development, a good command of English is becoming more and more critical. As a result, there are a number of outstanding tools that have allowed more people to learn English than ever, one of which is using English as medium of instruction in education. In all English courses, English is required to be used as the medium for instruction as much as possible. Hence, most students at Thai universities have had the opportunity of learning English from both NEST and NNEST. In second language education, teachers come from a myriad of backgrounds. Native English speaking teachers (NEST) and non native English speaking teachers (NNEST)" are one of the efficient ways to categorize them. These types of instructors surely obtain different advantages in teaching English as a second language. Obviously, students are able to get benefits from learning with both types of English teachers.

As Medgyes (1992), along with many others, believes the native speaker is error-free and since s/he learns the language from infancy, s/he has an unquestionable proficiency and efficiency in it. This is a common (perhaps erroneous) notion of a native speaker. NEST can teach not only their authentic native tongue but also their cultures, values, and histories related to the target language. There are also a number of merits of studying English in NNEST classes. Because of having experienced all

the hardship in learning a new language, NNEST can understand their students' difficulties, goals, purposes, and feelings.

In summary, the NESTs have their strengths in English proficiency; while the NNESTs have their strengths in teaching techniques, and the understanding of learners as well as cultural background.

The Language Institute of Thammasat University, one of the best universities in Thailand, plays an important role in English education. It provides various English programs and courses taught by both native English speaking teachers and Thai teachers to meet the individual expectations of people who want to enhance their English knowledge and ability. Investigating the characteristics of preferred English teachers perceived by students is beneficial to teachers and students as well as researchers. On the part of teachers, they can check the appropriateness of their beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning based on students' opinions. In addition, teachers can understand what their students expect from them, and develop their professional skills and pedagogical techniques through reflection on teaching, which will in turn enhance the complex process of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, the attitude of students who are taking English courses of graduate programs towards learning English with NESTs and NNESTs would be quite helpful in exploring the effectiveness and benefits of learning English with them, and it can be used as a guideline for students to meet their specific needs of the individualized English learning.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to analyze the students' opinions and preferences towards learning English with native speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native speaking teachers (NNEST). Specially, the study seeks answers to two questions:

1.2.1 Main Problem

What are the students' opinions towards learning English with native and non-native English speaking teachers?

1.2.2 Sub-Problems

1. What type of teacher will be more effective for learning English with when comparing between NEST and NNEST?

2. What are the features that contribute to the students' preferred English teachers?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research has the following objectives:

1.3.1 Main Objective

To explore the students' opinions towards learning English with native and non-native speaking teachers.

1.3.2 Sub-Objectives

1. To find out whether it is more effective to learn with native or non-native speaking teachers.

2. To investigate the features those contribute to students' preferred English teachers.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The definitions of the terms of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 "Attitude" refers to the way the students think and feel about learning English with native and non-native speaking teachers

1.4.2 "Students" mean graduates who study MA Program of English for Careers and Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Language Institute, Thammasat University.

1.4.3 "Non-native English Speaking teacher" refers to English teachers who have the same first language as their students. In this article, it refers to English teachers of Thai nationality.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted among students who were studying the English for Careers program at Language Institute, Thammasat University. This study did not cover students who were studying the Teaching English as a Foreign Language graduate program.

The study is aimed at investigating the students' perceptions and opinions towards learning English with native and non-native speaking teachers. A structured questionnaire is used to collect data regarding students' viewpoints.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study concerns the attitude of students' who study at Language Institute, Thammasat University in Thailand towards learning English with native and non-native English speaking teachers. The study will lead to an understanding of the needs of students regarding learning English with both native and non-native English speaking teachers. This study is expected to be significant in the following aspects:

1.6.1 The findings of this study will be beneficial as a guideline for any language institute or any organization which plans to develop or provide English courses taught by both native and non-native speaking teachers.

1.6.2 For English teachers, the findings of the study would shed some light on what their students expect from them so that they can enhance their teaching effectiveness.

1.6.3 This study will be useful for English learners to guide them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of the individualized English learning.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of "attitudes towards learning English with native and non-native speaking teachers" is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study which provides background, statement of the problems, objectives of the study, the definitions of terms, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, and the organization of the study. The second chapter is the review of literature and previous relevant research. The third chapter presents the methodology regarding the subjects of the study, materials used in this study for data collection, procedures and data analysis. The results of the study are described in the fourth chapter. The summary of findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations are summarized in the last chapter.