

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study set out to discover what influences the motivatedness of Shan students learning English at a migrant learning center in Chiang Mai. The behaviors of motivated and demotivated students were looked at as well as how various aspects of a course affect students' motivation. The data was collected from three sources: the teachers, the students and my own observations. It was hoped that by triangulating the data, more substantial results would be obtained. Through interviews, a motivation survey and observation, several answers have surfaced.

First, the behaviors of a motivated Shan student as listed by the teachers include obvious ones such as smiling, making eye contact with the teacher, participating enthusiastically in activities and asking questions. In addition, less obvious behaviors include sharing feelings with the teacher as well as sharing personal struggles and problems. Arriving late to class, missing classes and not completing homework are actually not behaviors showing a lack of motivation. Rather, due to the extenuating circumstances surrounding a Shan person's life in Chiang Mai (including work situations or family problems), these behaviors result from the many struggles Shan people face when they relocate in Thailand.

Second, throughout a term, many factors influence a Shan student's motivatedness. The most important factors discovered include the following:

Shan students are more motivated by conversation practice; that is, speaking and listening opportunities. Many of them are not interested in reading or writing since they have no immediate need for those skills. They are also motivated through the group activities and the encouragement of their classmates.

Third, consistency in teachers and materials influences the students' motivatedness as well. Volunteer teachers constantly coming and going actually cause students to feel demotivated. A constant change in coursebooks and materials confuses the students and slows their progress, causing further demotivation. Many students are motivated through using a coursebook because they can track their progress more easily. However, the topics in many coursebooks are completely irrelevant for Shan students, many of whom have grown up in remote rural agricultural locations. Their progress is slower when learning English through topics for which they have no schemata. Using a coursebook with more appropriate topics is likely to cause students to feel more motivated. Games, songs and other "fun" activities have been observed to produce a great deal of motivated behavior in the Shan students. However, many of them have indicated that they question the usefulness of these so called "fun" activities in the classroom.

Finally, the students' motivatedness increases when they are able to meet and chat with foreigners. Although some of the students use English on the job, many students only speak English during class. Consequently, their contact with English is minimal at best. This explains why the students have asked for more speaking, listening and pronunciation practice during class. Most of them have no immediate use for reading and writing and would prefer not to study these skills much.

Implications for Teaching in Shan Cultural Contexts in Thailand

In sum, teachers who are teaching Shan students in Thailand must be aware of the personal challenges facing many, if not all, Shan people. Teachers must consider the educational backgrounds of their students and realize that many of them may have had limited opportunities to study which could slow down their progress. Ultimately, motivation must be demonstrated by the teacher in order for the students to catch enthusiasm and excitement for learning. Like many researchers have noted (Wlodkowski, 1986; Dörnyei, 2001a), the teacher should model motivation. If a teacher portrays dedication and enthusiasm while teaching, the students are more likely to respond in the same way. Also, since Shan people thrive in community, a positive group atmosphere will go a long way towards boosting Shan students' motivatedness. This confirms previous research (Dörnyei & Murphy, 2003) regarding the importance of group dynamics and creating a cohesive group, where each member of the group is valued and important.

Many of the Shan students, although they enjoyed games, songs and other fun activities, believed that studying English should consist of grammar drills and bookwork. Yet their words contradicted their behavior, as Shan students appeared to be most motivated when participating in these "fun" activities. It would, therefore, be of help for teachers to clearly explain the purpose and importance of each activity in order for the students to gain a sense of its usefulness. Additionally, more speaking and listening activities should be done in class, and teachers would do well to create more opportunities for real practice with foreigners. This should not be difficult in Chiang Mai with its large foreign population.

Teaching learning strategies to Shan students is also vital for teachers. Since many Shan people have had limited educational experiences in the past, they may or may not know how to learn. Shan students should be exposed to various learning strategies and encouraged to choose ones that work best for them. Teachers may also find to make students aware of their preferred learning style as well as their beliefs about language learning. This would be helpful for students and teachers alike.

Teachers of Shan students should not forget the difficult history of people from Shan State. Shan students are in desperate need of quality education. When working with the Shan, volunteers must approach their work with excellence and wholeheartedness, even when not getting paid. Teachers must remember that many Shan students are separated from family and friends, and along with education, they also need friendship.

Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitations in this study include the small number of participants, the length of the study and the quality of data collected during the individual interviews. Even though there are many Shan people living all over Thailand, I focused my study on only one school: the Migrant Learning Center in Chiang Mai. To gain an even broader perspective of what motivates Shan students, a study of Shan schools in other cities in Thailand may prove effective. In addition, I was only able to individually interview three students, as the other two students selected were forced to drop out. Next, although I have been a teacher at MLC for almost one year, my study only lasted the duration of one term (nine weeks). I believe even more fruitful results could be obtained by following several students as they

progress through all four levels of the English program at MLC, perhaps over the course of an entire year.

One difficulty I encountered during the first few weeks of individual interviewing was the lack of honest answers from the participants. I had intended for the interviews to be general and open-ended. However, during the first few weeks I received answers such as *Everything is good, Teacher. I like everything. Nothing is demotivating to me.* I found that I needed to ask very specific questions about each activity or task. Often I had to ask a question two or three times in different ways in order for students to give a straightforward answer. The director told me this behavior was natural. Because Shan students hold all teachers in high esteem, they naturally believe that everything the teacher does is good. The students would never think of contradicting or questioning anything the teacher does. When I realized this, I talked to the participants and reiterated the importance of giving truthful, blunt answers and how the results of this study would help me to become a better teacher. Gradually, the participants opened up and began to provide useful answers.

In addition, the role of participant-observer actually proved to be quite difficult. Since I was teaching and observing at the same time, I was not able to fully observe all of the students and record everything that was happening while I was teaching. My priority had to remain on teaching. For future studies, I would recommend adding a non-participant observer or using a video recording instead.

Hope for the Future

This study has only scratched the surface of motivation as it relates to Shan students living in Thailand. I believe that through more qualitative as well as ethnographic studies, greater insight could be gleaned into what truly motivates and

demotivates Shan learners of English. It is my hope that through this study, other teachers will gain an awareness of the particular struggles Shan students face in Thailand. When I first began to teach at MLC, I thought that the students were very slow learners and quite lazy since many of them were often absent never completed their homework. But as I began to learn of their stories and hardships, I realized that these students were actually quite diligent (working long hours and still making time to study) and intelligent. So I hope that future teachers will not pass off the Shan as lazy or slow learners. I hope they will consider the history of the Shan people and all the events that have transpired causing more and more Shan people to come into Thailand under desperate circumstances. Finally, I hope that Shan people will not give up but will continue their struggle for freedom and for education. The Shan students I have come to know are a proud people, dedicated and hard working, but they are also overlooked and oppressed. Yet they remain hopeful for the future of their people. For the Shan people, there is still light at the end of the tunnel.

“Zaam Yu Lae Kai (Near but Far)”

Sitting in front of school
Selling food from dust to dawn
Oh, poor and underprivileged child,
Other children have opportunities to study.
You have to make a living,
So sad that no one ever knows about your life.
But I will sing about you.
So that people will learn about lives of poor Shan children.
So that one day you are able to obtain schooling.
Don't be sad my child.
There will always be light at the end of the tunnel.
There are people who are willing to help.
Let's go to school and work at the same time.
Don't let down your hope, come study.
There will always be light in the sky.
(Naw, 2009, Track 10)