

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

"Regardless of cultural background, listening is one of the most effective therapeutic techniques. The need to communicate respect for the client is a nursing concept that crosses all cultural boundaries."

Giger & Davidhizar (2008).

In a nursing career, nurses provide education that helps clients change lifelong habits. Nurses communicate with people under stress: clients, family and colleagues. Nurses deal with anger and depression, with dementia and psychosis, with joy and despair. Nurses return to school to specialize, write grants for research proposals, and become entrepreneurs. Nurses become administrators, leaders, case managers, infection control specialists, quality experts, and educators. Nurses cross international boundaries to share knowledge needed to promote worldwide health. Nurses must be assertive to ask the right questions and make their voices heard.

Regardless of the multiple demands on nurses' time, the intimate moments of connection can make all the difference in the quality of care and meaning for the client and the nurse. As nurses refine their communication skills and build their confidence in English they can provide quality of care in the same way as they provide it using their first language. Living in a country where one's language is not primarily spoken can be a great experience, but there are moments when one wishes to be in one's own country, especially when needing health care assistance. However, Thailand has a considerable number of expatriates living in it, and the number of

tourists is growing, comprising people from a variety of cultural groups. Nurses are confronted with the challenge of providing health care to these clients. Many of the nurses in Thailand speak English with a relatively low level of proficiency (Cameron, 1998). In clinical settings, the consequences of such low proficiency may affect not only the learners' professional future but also the well-being of patients, their families and friends, and the reputation of the clinic (ibid).

Difficulty with English is often cited as a factor that leads to Thai nurses' lack of confidence. Communication with patients from different cultures is often complicated by language differences. Language barriers can create numerous frustrating problems; it can make it difficult or impossible to obtain a patient's history and assess the patient's symptoms; it can interfere with explaining hospital policies and medical procedures; it can impede the vital process of teaching and counseling the patient and family and create misunderstandings and resentments between nurses and patients (Munoz and Luckmann, 2005).

In an interview with an American patient who had been in Thailand for a few months, the patient mentioned that she got sick and went to a hospital and stayed there for a few days. She said that due to the nurses' poor communicative ability, they could not even have a short conversation with her. The nurses mechanically performed their duties, such as applying the medication and checking her vital signs, but were not able to answer her questions or explain the procedures. She felt alone throughout this time, since they only responded to her in their first language.

In Thailand's case, the numbers of medical tourists are increasing. Thailand welcomes over a million foreign patients visiting for a range of services each year, and English is needed; nurses are expected to be able to communicate with the patient

(customer) in English (TIR, 2012). In order to do this, nurses must have the ability to communicate effectively with them and to deal with different situations that might arise..

In recent years numbers of tourists who visit Thailand are increasing substantially. In the first six months of 2010, the number of foreign tourists stood at 7,487,880 people (Thai visa, 2010). Chiang Mai has expatriates residing there who come from all corners of the globe. According to the estimates based on visa application at the Immigration Department, there are about 20,000 official foreign expats in Chiang Mai, and this number is expected to increase every year (One Stop Chiang Mai, 2010). In the beginning of July 2010, Chiang Mai was set to become a health center; there are plans to promote Chiang Mai as a health and beauty destination. The Governor Amornphan said that Chiang Mai has a high potential because of the strength and quality of its medical services (Chiang Mai Mail, 2010). Recently a project was confirmed between U.S. Hollywood film productions to start the construction of the Chiang Mai Movie Town Project, which will bring even more foreigners to Chiang Mai (*Expat Newsletter*, 2010). Finally, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will be the goal of regional economic integration by 2015. Thailand is getting ready to become united as a single community for the time being, which will transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital. These situations have brought the influx of foreign work force into Chiang Mai. Consequently, the demand of medical care will increase significantly; health care staffs with English ability are highly needed.

Realizing the urgent needs of a potential health care staff, an ESP curriculum was designed and developed for a group of nurses that are working in a hospital in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The role of an ESP curriculum is to bring to the learners what they desperately need in real-life. Curriculum planning can be seen as a systematic attempt by educationalists and teachers which includes a focus on what educational purposes should be attained. The design of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses can prepare learners for professional communication. Richards (2001) says that the ESP approach to language teaching is a response to a number of practical concerns: for instance, the need to prepare materials to teach learners who have already mastered general English but now need English for use in employment (in this situation, non-English background nurses). The nurses studied English in order to carry out a particular role and to communicate effectively with foreign patients.

The process that comprises an ESP program according to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) is needs analysis, course design, materials selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation. Needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP and leads to a focused course. In the specific field where this research took place, the needs analysis included the aspects of the target situation analysis; learners' previous learning experiences; expectations for attending the course; present situation analysis which allowed the course designer to assess what the learners lack; what is wanted from the course and the information about the environment. The aim was to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners (ibid).

Curriculum design still brings up important issues to many teachers as course developers. Different kinds of English courses have been developed. Despite numerous books outlining curriculum design strategies and processes to follow, many

of the English courses do not address the specific needs. Seeking and interpreting information about one's learners' needs are the most important skills that a course developer must develop. Many problems in L2 classes are a result of teachers not paying attention to learners' interests and ignoring learners as a source of essential information. Giving considerable attention to making a particular course serve a particular group's interests will bring up many advantages such as learners who are actively involved in learning the language.

Developing new courses is an obstacle for many teachers; it requires efforts like making important decisions about the outcomes of the program. Richards (2001: 2) writes "curriculum development focuses on determining what knowledge, skills and values students learn in schools, what experiences should provide to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools or educational systems can be planned, measured, and evaluated." Moreover, curriculum development addresses issues of applied linguistics and describes a set of processes that focuses on "designing, revising, implementing, and evaluating language programs" (2001: 2).

A curriculum designed for nurses and their special needs will help to build their confidence in talking with foreign clients. Adding cultural factors into the course will be useful to the nurses when starting a conversation with patients, such as asking questions and talking to them about their background. In conclusion, the Thai health care system needs nurses with the language ability and the cultural knowledge to meet the health care needs of foreign patients. Nurses need to be able to use English competently. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research aiming at designing and developing an ESP curriculum to improve Thai nurses communicative skills.

In situations such as the one described above, a learner-centered approach can help the learners to improve their communicative skills. This approach together with communicative language teaching is concerned with the situation itself, the topic of conversation, the conversational purpose, and, probably the most important of all, the relationship between the interlocutors in an interaction. All of this interacts in complex ways in communicative language teaching. In order for learning to take place, emphasis must be put on the importance of communication, such as activities that involve real communication. Activities in which language is used to carry out meaningful tasks support the learning process, and language that is meaningful and authentic to the learner boosts learning. This curriculum focused on activities which required learners to do in class what they would do outside of class, enabling them to improve their communicative skills.

After attending this course, the staff is expected to be able to communicate more effectively to the foreign patients who will be attending the hospitals and the general health care provider. A more qualified service can now be offered to the customers.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:

The study aimed to address two main objectives:

- 1) To design and develop a learner-centered specialized English curriculum to improve the Thai nurses' communicative skills.
- 2) To compare learners' English communicative skills before and after the implementation of a learner-centered specialized English curriculum.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Clearly this research would benefit firstly the Thai nurses who will be more qualified to serve a foreign patient and deal with different situations that might arise. Secondly, it would assist foreign patients who might expect that most of the nurses have an ability to communicate in English. Third, the hospitals might expect the nurses to be able to communicate more effectively in English. Hospitals will have opportunities to offer more qualified health care service by having nurses who are able to communicate and increase the number of foreign patients seeking care. The research has also the potential to benefit the general health care staff since nurses are required to engage in interactions with them. Fourth, this curriculum can benefit the medical tourism business since the nurses will be able to communicate more effectively. Finally, since the study successfully improved the Thai Nurses' communicative skills, the nursing departments will benefit from having a curriculum and nursing students might have better opportunities for a career abroad.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The focus of this study was to design and develop a learner-centered specialized English curriculum to improve the Thai nurses' communicative skills, focusing on listening, speaking and vocabulary. The participants were selected by the head nurse; for that reason, the course was mostly administered to nurses from the Outpatient Department (OPD), two from the Emergency Department and one from Inpatient Department (IPD) (Hemodialysis). The researcher only addressed the following topics which seemed most immediately pressing based on the needs and situational analysis: patient registration, signs and symptoms, pain assessment, greeting the patient,

directions around the hospital and medical imaging, general communication: present simple and past tense, administering medication, appointments, telephone skills and health education – diabetes. Because the course was only thirty hours, there was not enough time to cover all the useful topics.

1.5 Definitions of Terms

ESP curriculum development: this refers to the development of a specialized program designed to address the specific learners' needs. This study is mostly based on Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) model which focuses on needs analysis, course design, materials selection, teaching and learning and evaluation.

Learner-centered specialized English curriculum: this refers to a curriculum based on a learner-centered approach, considering the interactivity of the course.

Thai nurses: a group of eight nurses from three different departments (OPD, Emergency and IPD) who work in a large hospital in Chiang Mai and were selected by the Head Nurse to participate on this study.

Communicative skills: this refers to the English skills: listening and speaking, used in specific hospital situations.

Needs analysis: this refers to the process of getting information about the learners' job requirements, that is, what they have to be able to do at the end of their language course. It also takes into consideration what the institution regards as necessary to be learned and what the learners themselves would like to gain from the language course (Robinson, 1991).

Situational analysis: this refers to the process of collecting information by conducting observations, focusing on three sources: the learners themselves (nurses), the user (foreign patient) and place of work (hospital).

Task-based Teaching: this refers to the teaching strategy, focusing on the learners to participate in communicative tasks in English. These tasks were activities in which learners practiced fundamental topics which required them to comprehend and interact with the language learned.

1.6 Researcher's Background

The researcher's experience as a nurse has helped her carry out the research and is an important factor because she was able to input unique insights into the research process. As an ESL learner, this has given the researcher the experience to understand some of the issues that arise when learning a second language. And having experienced the role of a patient living abroad, the fears of being misunderstood by a nurse and a doctor, the researcher could better understand the learners and the patients.