

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and Statement of the problem

Knowing one or more foreign languages is beneficial in today's world because it allows people to communicate on a wider basis. English is widely accepted as a universal language. It is one of the most important foreign languages. It is used for international trade, foreign exchange, information technology and many other worldwide purposes. According to Kitao (1996), English is the language for news and information, business, governmental issues in some countries, diplomacy, maritime communication, international air traffic control and entertainment (music and movies). Moreover, Kitao stated that there are 350,000,000 native English speakers and 400,000,000 speakers of English as a second language. This indicates that English has become the language that is accepted by most people. Hence, it is beneficial for students to be proficient in English so that they can compete for opportunities in the future.

English has been taught for a long time in Thailand, but with no special emphasis. Before 1996, English was taught from grade 5 onwards as an optional subject. Achara, et. al. (1996) mention that the Educational Developmental Plan of 1996-2001 requires that English language be taught from Prathom 1 onwards. This is a good start to solve the problem of English language that Thai students face.

According to Achara, et. al. (1996), Thai students studying at the secondary level and university level have problems with their English language proficiency. They state that the students had most problems with their speaking skill and least amount of problems with their reading skill. Also, Roongthip, et. al. (1996) state that students at secondary schools of Educational region 12 lacked listening and speaking skills. Also, students did not know how to apply their knowledge of English. Thai students have been learning English for many years but are still not able to use English for communication. Krashen and Terell (1995) state that the time of learning a foreign language should be close to the age when children learn their mother tongue. Furthermore, teaching a foreign language to young children is beneficial in various ways. First, young children can easily reproduce sounds and rhythms of the other language, making their pronunciation native or near native. Second, young children

learn things as a whole, not in parts. Therefore, language should be learned as a whole. Third, when young children know that another language can be used to express the same functions as their mother tongue, they use their curiosity to explore that language. (Krashen and Terrell, 1995; Nerbovig and Klausmeier, 1956)

Students should not only know the English language but also should be able to search for information and to choose useful information in today's world. They have to possess problem-solving skills that are a major part of critical thinking skills. Therefore, it is important for the students to practice critical thinking skills. Also, National Education Law (no. 24/2) states that learners should be taught how to think, solve problems, and apply their knowledge in solving problems. The law suggests that the students be changed from passive recipients of information to autonomous learners. Being autonomous means being able to think for themselves. According to Raveewan (1994, p.16), if learners know how to think, they can solve problems and face new situations. Concerning Thailand's education, Alongkorn (2001) states that to become autonomous learners in a democratic society students must think and express opinions. However, this is not the case with Thai people, who were taught through rote learning in the past and are not

used to asking questions in class. Teachers lectured and students completed the exercises. There was no critical thinking involved (Amrung, 2000, p.2). Teachers asked questions that required a single correct answer, requiring no use of higher order thinking skills. Then, when learners faced problems that required higher level thinking, they were not able to solve their problems (Raveewan, 1994, p.16). Soraj (2001) states that today the trend has shifted from mere quantity to both quantity and quality of education. This means that people are given knowledge, are taught how to acquire that knowledge, and are taught how to think on the basis of that knowledge. In the past several decades, the teaching of English began with the grammar-translation method where the students were taught through rote learning. Then, the Audio-lingual method focused on extensive use of drills. Though the trend has shifted to the communicative method Thai students still face problems in speaking.

According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), language learning in childhood is a natural acquisition process. This implies that students acquire language naturally not through rote learning or drills. To be able to speak a foreign language, students should be able to think so that they have something to say. Hence, students should be encouraged to think

more. This does not mean students cannot think anything but that thinking should be systematized, reflective and reasonable. Bunlua (cited in Suraphong, 1997, P.2) states that the thinking that is necessary in everyday life is critical thinking. Critical thinking should be practiced by learners in all subjects through all the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. For young children, use of speaking skill would be the best way to express their thinking, even immediate thoughts, because they are not very proficient in the target language in order to write out their thoughts. Also, the use of listening and reading skill should be encouraged.

From observing many EFL kindergarten classrooms in Chiang Mai, the researcher has found that teachers asked questions that did not require the students to use higher order thinking skills. According to Bloom's taxonomy (1960), this falls in the knowledge level, the lowest level of critical thinking skills. The students follow the teacher and do not think for themselves. According to Morrow and Smith (1990), students should be encouraged to initiate. This is in contrast with the observation above where the students only repeated the teacher's words or actions without expressing their opinions. Furthermore, Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) state that it is often mistakenly believed that young children cannot think.

Bernard (1972) believes that young pupils can discuss behavior, feelings, attitudes, and the effect one has on others. This is underestimated for young children.

This study aims to develop students' English language proficiency skills along with their critical thinking skills. Therefore, the choice of approach directly affects students' success. The approach should match with students' characteristics because young children have different characteristics. This study used the eclectic approach for teaching. It combines many approaches because at this level students have a very short attention span (Nerbovig and Klausmeier, 1956). Students at this level quickly get bored, so various approaches and instructional models were used to get their attention and make them think in English. Most of the approaches used were 'the audiolingual approach', 'the whole language approach', 'the natural approach' and 'the total physical response' or TPR (Brown, 1994). Other approaches were incorporated according to the lesson needs.

The instructional models used were direct instruction model, concept development model, concept attainment model and classroom discussion model (Gunter, et. al., 1995). The combination of the above was used in order to bring out the best in students.

It is clear that if children learn English language at an early age and get to practice their thinking along with it, they would be more proficient in English and able to face new situations. Also, they would use the language genuinely and get more meaning from it. Students should be able to think in a foreign language as well as in their mother tongue. In Thailand, there is a lack of critical thinking syllabuses for all levels. This study is the first study in Thailand that focuses on the development of critical thinking skills of kindergarten students. Since this kind of study needs to be implemented more in Thailand, the syllabus and the results of this study will be beneficial for students and teachers of kindergarten level.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- 1.2.1 to develop an English critical thinking syllabus for the students at the kindergarten level.
- 1.2.2 to compare the critical thinking skills of kindergarten students before and after being taught through the English critical thinking syllabus.

1.3 Hypothesis: After learning through critical thinking syllabus, students critical thinking skills will be higher.

1.4 Scope of the study

1.4.1 Subjects of the study

This study is confined specifically to students in kindergarten three level (K.3) of Baan Dek Kindergarten School. These students were the students who registered in the summer program of the school, during May to June, 2002, for 7 weeks.

1.4.2 Content of the study

There were seven critical thinking skills used with the kindergarten students. Of Bloom taxonomy's (1960) six higher order thinking skills, five were used in this research. These skills have sub-skills that students perform in order to achieve the respective skill. Bloom's five critical thinking skills (sub-skills) used in this study were: comprehension, application (ordering/categorizing), analysis (comparing and contrasting), synthesis (creating) and evaluation. Along with these five critical thinking skills, two skills of Beauchamp's (1956) four higher order mental were used: problem-solving and giving reasons.

1.4.3 Variables

Independent variable: English critical thinking materials
for K.3 level.

Dependent variable: Critical thinking skills of the K.3
students.

1.5 Definitions of Terms

1.5.1 Syllabus development refers to the development of an English critical thinking syllabus for the kindergarten level. The process of development includes conducting a needs survey, constructing the protosyllabus and pedagogic syllabus or a set of connected lesson plans and activities and implementing and evaluating the lesson plans. The evaluation of the syllabus is performed by using the lesson plan evaluation forms and students' performance assessments during lesson plan implementation.

1.5.2 Critical thinking skill refers to the ability to think at a complex level. In this study, critical thinking skills are 'comprehension', 'ordering/categorizing', 'creating', 'comparing and contrast' and 'evaluating' from Bloom's taxonomy; and 'problem solving' and 'giving reasons' from Beauchamp. Critical thinking skills will be

assessed in terms of oral assessment before and after the implementation of the syllabus.

1.6 Expected outcome of the Study

The researcher expects the following benefits from this research. This study would help:

- 1.6.1 to provide an English syllabus for teaching critical thinking in the kindergarten level.
- 1.6.2 to be a guideline for designing an English critical thinking syllabus for the higher levels.