CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the discussion of the main findings, implications of the study and recommendations for further studies. These are shown in the following sections.

5.1 Discussion of the main findings

    5.1.1 The degree of support for the curriculum statements

    5.1.2 The extent of the perceived implementation of the curriculum

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    5.1.4 The problems obstructing the success of curriculum implementation

5.2 Implications of the study

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5.1 Discussion of the Main Findings

5.1.1 The Degree of Support for the Curriculum Statements

In this study, English teachers in three educational regions strongly support the 7 curriculum statements (See Table 4.1, p. 31). Results from the survey show that all the curriculum statements were supported at a level ranging between "agree" and "strongly agree". Furthermore, teachers in the three educational regions profess their support in the same order of importance (See Table 4.2, p. 33). The teachers' agreement and their strong support suggest that curriculum statements reflect the needs of their students. In other words, teachers view that the current English curriculum attempts to prepare students for the fast changing world in the globalization era.

One reason why the teachers strongly support the curriculum statements might be because of the spread of English worldwide. English language is widely used both

in ESL countries and EFL countries (Crystal, 1997; cited in Graddol, 1997). It has important roles in many fields such as communication, transportation, business, international trade, interaction via the Internet, education, science and technology, broadcasting and entertainment (Crystal, 2001; Brecht and Walton, 1995; cited in Charumanee, 2002). In addition, Crystal (1997) mentions that English will also remain the world's language for international communication for the next twenty-five years.

In Thailand, English is also seen as an important language in many aspects such as technology, the use of the Internet, business and education. Access to these areas requires high proficiency in English (Wiriyachitra, 2002; Smith, 1987). That is why Thai students need to be highly proficient in English. All these reasons explain why English teachers in Songkhla are strongly in favor of the curriculum statements.

According to the ranking, teachers agree that it is most important for students to use English as a tool for seeking knowledge for other subjects from a variety of sources. This might be because the teachers realize that students can use English to expand their subject matter knowledge from various learning sources such as English textbooks, English websites and other English media. As English is the main language used in the Internet and the use of Internet is spreading (Hasman, 2002), this might be a reason why teachers perceive this curriculum statement at the highest degree of importance.

Although the teachers in three educational regions support all curriculum statements at the high level, 2 out of 7 statements are found less important than the others. These statements are using English as a tool for communication, and for cooperation in school, community and society. One possible reason might be that teachers do not see any chances for students to use English in real life both within schools and outside schools because the environment in schools and around the community does not encourage students to realize the need to use English for communication.

According to the survey, encouraging students to use English for seeking knowledge for other subjects is supported at the highest degree by the English teachers. With respect to the result from observation, however, this statement does not

reflect in class. One possible reason might be that the teachers do not integrate the English subject with other subjects and they do not provide assignment which requires students to seek knowledge for other subjects so this curriculum statement is not yet reflected in class. Another reason may be that students use English as a tool for seeking knowledge for other subjects outside class time.

In summary, it is obvious that the teachers in the three educational regions strongly support the 7 curriculum statements. They view that Thai students need to study English because English is essential for communication, for learning the language and culture of the English native speakers, for seeking new knowledge from a variety of learning sources, and for communication and cooperation in community. The main reason of strong support might be because of the important roles of English in many aspects such as international language for communication, the main language on the Internet, a tool for seeking new knowledge from various sources, a bridge to higher study. It can be said that English language is a necessary language for survival in the globalization age.

5.1.2 The Extent of the Perceived Implementation of the Curriculum

Results from the broad perspective investigation suggest that English teachers in three educational regions highly perceive the implementation of the curriculum. (See Table 4.3, p. 34). In addition, the results from the further detail investigation (methods of teaching, classroom activities) show that the curriculum statements were moderately reflected in class (See Table 4.5, pp. 37-38). It is also found that the teachers in Songkhla perceive the curriculum implementation not only at the same degree but also in the same rank orders (See Table 4.4, p. 36). Consequently, it can be concluded that the curriculum is implemented at a fairly satisfactory level. The reasons for this may be as follows.

It is very likely that the quality assurance system plays an important role. At present, the English language proficiency of Thai students as well as the teachers' teaching quality need to be evaluated by inside and outside assessors. Moreover, students who are in Prathomsuksa 3, Prathomsuksa 6, Matthayomsuksa 3 and

Matthayomsuksa 6 are required to take National Standardized Tests to assure the quality of English language teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2001). It might be said that this kind of assessment may make teachers more aware of the importance of turning policy into practice so that the outcome of their teaching can be impressed. In practice, then, this factor might lead teachers to design their courses in accordance with the curriculum statements so that they can meet the expected outcomes.

According to the survey results, all the curriculum statements are implemented from moderate to high levels. However, findings from the observations show that some curriculum statements were not reflected in class. Those statements are related to using English as a tool for seeking knowledge for other subjects; for career development; and for cooperation and harmony in school, community and society. Possible reasons for this happening may be as follows.

According to the current curriculum, the teachers can design the courses themselves and they are free to sequence the objectives and content within the 3 years of upper secondary level (Matthayomsuksa 4 – Matthayomsuksa 6) as far as the courses are still based on the standards and benchmarks specified in the curriculum. In this study, the investigator observed only 3 classes in Matthayomsuksa 4 and Matthayomsuksa 5 within 12 periods. Due to this limited engagement, it is possible that the missed out statements might be implemented at some other times.

Also it is possible that the curriculum statements which are not reflected in classes might be those which teachers do not understand and cannot follow. As mentioned by Wiriyachitra (2002), the teachers might choose to teach only the statements that they feel comfortable with.

So far it can be seen that there are strong support for the policy statements and the implementation is found at a satisfactory level. However, when the degree of support for policy statements and the extent of the perceived implementation are compared, it is found that there are significant differences. The differences are discussed in the following section.

5.1.3 The Relationship between the Degree of Support for the Curriculum Statements and the Extent of the Perceived Implementation

Based on the results of the study, it is obvious that English teachers in three educational regions strongly support the curriculum statements and perceive the implementation at a positive degree. However, the extent of the implementation was reported at the much significantly lower level compared with the degree of support (See Table 4.7, p. 44).   Thus, it suggests that there is the significant gap between policy and practice. And once the gap exists, it cannot be implied that the implementation becomes a success. Wongsothorn (2001), Wiriyachitra (2002) and Charumanee (2002) assert that the gap between policy and practice is one of the problems in English language teaching. As stated in previous studies, the curriculum itself can be considered a factor causing the gap between policy and practice. As reported by Chum-upakarn (1985), teachers cannot interpret objectives in the curriculum and they think that the curriculum is too difficult to follow. The study of Musigrungsi (2002) also shows that the curriculum is not appropriate for some local schools.

Other possible reasons that cause the gap between policy and practice might be various problems in language teaching. Many researchers mention about English language teaching problems. Unpikul (1981), Chum-upakarn (1985), Richard (1985), Biyaem (1997) and Musingrungsi (2002) state that student-related problems are the most serious problem. Those problems are related to low English competence, insufficient English language skills, being passive learners, being too shy to speak out in English and being afraid of making mistakes. In addition, Richard (1985), Chumupakarn (1985) and Biyaem (1997) mention the problems caused by teachers themselves. Those are related to insufficient English language skills, not having cross-cultural knowledge and lack of knowledge about teaching methodology. The third concerns inadequate learning resources such as language laboratory and audio visual aids' being out of date. Large class size is one of the most serious problems in language teaching (Unpikul (1981) and Wongsothorn (cited in Wiriyachitra, 2002). This problem is similar to Hayes' finding (1997). He mentions that large class leads to

five serious problems; 1) unable to promote students interaction; 2) unable to control students when they do activities; 3) unable to cope with the needs of individuals; 4) unable to check all students' work; and 5) unable to check students' understanding in class. Another aspect is related to the wash-back effect that leads to the demand for tutoring and for the purpose of taking the university entrance examination (Biyaem, 1997; Musigrungsi, 2002). Musigrungsi (2002: 130) states that

> English teachers emphasize the grammar teaching instead of communicative language because of the influence of the university entrance examination. The emphasis on grammar teaching in the classroom was influenced by the teachers' views on the students' aim of attending the university entrance examination. To their understanding, the university entrance examination focuses on grammatical knowledge.

In addition, Teo et. al. (2003) mentions that extra work, inadequate English teachers, and limited time in language teaching are also problems that obstruct English language teaching. All these problems may have caused the large gap between policy and practice in the current curriculum.

In brief, the relationship between the degree of support for the curriculum statements and the extent of the implementation is still unsatisfactory. A significant gap exists between policy and practice. It is evident to specify that many problems such as the curriculum itself, students, teachers, large classes, and the influence of the university entrance examination widen the gap between policy and practice. The next section illustrates more problems hindering the success of curriculum implementation based on the results of this study.

5.1.4 The Problems Obstructing the Success of Curriculum Implementation

With respect to the questionnaire responses presented in Table 4.8 (pp. 45-47), a variety of problems occurred in English language teaching in the current teaching situation. The problems are related to the curriculum, teachers' knowledge of communicative approach and cross-cultural knowledge, students' proficiency and

attitude, school support, environment of community, extra work, overclass size, teaching aids and learning resources, and the influence of the university entrance examination. These problems are indicated as very serious problem, fairly serious problem, and slightly serious problem. Each problem will now be discussed.

5.1.4.1 Very serious problems

Five areas of problems are indicated by the teachers at very serious level.

The first serious problem is related to the influence of the university entrance examination. The findings show that it is the most serious of all. To achieve their goal in passing the university entrance examination, students seem to be taught grammar through the traditional way of teaching. According to Musigrungsi (2001), the teachers will emphasize English grammar structure that they think is emphasized in English entrance examination.

The second problem which is indicated as very serious problem is that the community around school is not supportive of students to use English in real life. As mentioned by Seliger (1983, p. 250), "the social environment in which language is used as a tool for communication and the need to use the language as a tool for communication with other people are the two most important factors to the success or failure of language acquisition". It can be implied that students would see the need to use English if the environment of their school, community or society encouraged them to use English as a tool for communication. Without the need to use the language in community, it is hard for students to achieve the goal in using the language for communication. Therefore, in this situation, it may be said that the environment of the students' community might cause the failure of English language teaching that the students do not have the need to use English in their daily life.

The third very serious problem is related to students. Results from the survey show that students do not see the value of learning English. The results are similar to the findings identified by Unpikul (1981) and Musigrunsi (2002). One possible reason why students do not see the merits of learning English might be that they do not have opportunity to use it in their real life especially in their community. Another problem obstructing the curriculum implementation is that students have low proficiency in English. This obstructs the communicative language teaching required by the

curriculum. Insufficient English knowledge of students might be caused by being shy to speak out in English, being afraid of making mistakes, having negative attitude toward English, being passive students and lacking of responsibility for their own learning. Biyaem (1997, cited in Wiriyachitra, 2002) confirms that those negative characteristics of students lead to low proficiency in English.

The fourth problem which is indicated as very serious problem concerns the benchmarks provided in the curriculum. The teachers point out that there are too many benchmarks and some are difficult to implement. Chum-upakarn (1985) found similar problems in the study of problems of English teaching at the upper secondary level in Southern Thailand. It is mentioned that the teachers might not be prepared to cope with the new curriculum. This might be because the teachers did not have enough chances to attend seminars on the new curriculum. Insufficient attendance of the seminar can lead to misunderstanding and not being able to interpret the benchmarks in the curriculum.

The last very serious problem concerns large class size. Some possible reasons for the class having too many students might be due to school policy or some limitations of the school such as insufficient classrooms or insufficient English teachers. It can be observed that problem concerning large class usually occurs in popular government schools where parents believe that their children can succeed at learning if they can get into such schools. This leads to classes getting larger. According to the classroom observation of this study, there are 30 to 40 students in classes. The results are similar to the findings identified by Unpikul (1981). In her study, English teachers in Roi Et province indicate that large class is the most serious problem in their teaching. Hinkel (1999, p. 168) also mentions that "large class is a disadvantage for EFL setting. Although there is considerable variation in class size, it is certainly not uncommon to have at least thirty students in language class and, in some cases, as many as a hundred or more". Duppenthaler (2000) states that in class the teachers should be able to easily identify the students. They need to have a way to monitor individual students' progress. They must be able to have easy access to data about the students' language strength and weaknesses. They should be able to respond to the students as individuals.

5.1.4.2 Fairly serious problems

The teachers indicated five fairly serious problems in English language teaching under the current curriculum.

The first fairly serious problem is that some benchmarks are quite difficult to interpret. One possible reason might be that the benchmark statements contain some ambiguities. This can lead to misunderstanding and different interpretations. Another reason may be because of not having adequate attendance of the seminar on the current curriculum. The findings of this study confirm this reason. The teachers state that they do not have sufficient attendance on the seminar of the new curriculum.

The second fairly serious problem is related to extra work. The results are similar to the findings identified by Chum-upakarn (1985) that it causes ineffective English language teaching. This might be because there are not enough teachers in schools; thus, English teachers must assume other responsibilities such as being in charge of work at self-access center, the school library or being a counsellor. The teachers observed mentioned that they do not have enough time to prepare the lessons according to the curriculum statements because that would be too time consuming.

The third problem which is indicated as fairly serious concerns school or community support. According to this study, teachers mention that they lack of budget for activity organization both in class and outside class (such as celebrating foreign holidays, interacting with foreigners in formal and informal settings, and displays of other cultures). In the current curriculum, teachers are encouraged to design English courses concerning the community setting, to reflect local and community problems, and local wisdom (Ministry of Education, 2001). It seems that the curriculum also aims to include the community as a part of language teaching and learning. Lacking of support or budget from a school can make it difficult for English teaching and learning to achieve the goals stated in the curriculum. In fact, the school itself may tend to provide the support but it may not be allotted sufficient budget from the government.

The fourth fairly serious problem is related to insufficient teaching aids and learning resources. It can be said that the government secondary schools in three educational regions in Songkhla still lack teaching aids such as tape recorders or

audio-visual aids, and learning resources such as language laboratory or library. The results are similar to the findings identified by Chum-upakarn (1985). Both teaching aids and learning resources are essential factors in communicative language teaching. This insufficiency might be because those schools especially medium-sized and small-sized may not have an adequate budget to supply those facilities, especially a language laboratory which is very expensive.

The last fairly serious problem concerns the communicative approach which is emphasized under this new curriculum. To make the matter worse, the teachers think that student-centered activities are a waste of time. One possible reason might be because of large class size which takes a lot of time to organize the student-centered activities. Another reason might be that students do not have enough knowledge in English to practice the student-centered activities such as group discussion, interview, cooperative learning, and role-playing. Doing these activities, students require high proficiency in English.

5.1.4.3 Slightly serious problems

According to this study, four problems related to teachers are indicated at slightly serious level. The teachers are quite confident about their own knowledge in English especially grammatical knowledge and language skills. They do not think that their language ability obstructs the implementation of the current curriculum. This might be that the teachers are well-trained in these areas of knowledge. This can be confirmed by the study of Musigrungsi (2002) that teachers had often learned grammar explicitly through pattern presentation of grammatical structures and detailed explanation of grammatical rules. Furthermore, the teachers might have opportunities to attend workshops which aim to develop their English proficiency. However, there are other two areas which seem to be more problematic. These concern insufficient knowledge about the communicative approach and the lack of cross-cultural knowledge. Based on the 2001 English curriculum, the communicative approach is emphasized. And the results of this study show that the teachers have problems concerning this approach. This might be because the teachers have not had adequate training in theory and practice regarding this theory. Another problem is that the teachers lack cross-cultural knowledge. It is obvious that the curriculum

emphasizes both the language teaching and the knowledge of the culture of the native speakers. Matikainen and Duffy (2000) state that learning about cultural diversity provides students with knowledge and skills for more effective communication in intercultural situations. However, it is not easy to understand other cultures. It can be assumed that the teachers might not understand some particular aspects of the native speakers' culture because they may not have been exposed to the real English speaking environment. Moreover, the learning resources where teachers can find out the information concerning the culture of native speakers may be minimum. It can also be assumed that it is unlikely to have native English teachers in schools who can help clarify some cultural issues that Thai teachers do not understand.

With respect to the data in Table 4.9 (p. 50), it is obvious that the mean scores of the rating scale concerning some teaching problems in educational region 3 seem to be at more serious level than in educational regions 1 and 2, especially problems related to the curriculum, teachers' cultural knowledge, students' proficiency and environment of community. The problems related to the curriculum and teachers' cultural knowledge may be caused by the fact that schools in educational region 3 are in rural areas and categorized as small-sized schools in which there are only 2 or 3 English teachers. Thus, the budget they receive from the government is proportionately small so it is very likely that the schools are not able to provide teaching aids or learning resources with which students can develop their proficiency in English. In addition, the location of the schools in this educational region can cause some inconveniences to the teachers such as in travelling to attend seminars or teacher-training programs which are usually organized in the city so they have fewer opportunities to develop their knowledge and eventually have difficulties in implementing the curriculum. These may have an effect on students' English proficiency. Students in this educational region have very low proficiency in English which may be due to the lack of opportunities and other supports in learning. The environment of the community rarely provides opportunities for students to use English in real life since it is in a remote area. English is not used for communication in their everyday life with all these factors, it can be seen why these problems are more acute in educational region 3 than others.

The findings from this study may provide some insights for English teachers, school heads, curriculum developers and other researchers to pursue their work or research in the area of educational policy. Implications of the study are suggested in the next section.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study may be helpful for a number of educational professionals such as English teachers, school administrators and curriculum developers. The implications are presented as follows:

5.2.1 This current study has demonstrated the English teachers' strong support for the 2001 English curriculum which are likely to prepare students for the globalization age in terms of educational and social development. This study confirms that the English teachers realize the significant status of English as a global language in the domains of communication, intercultural knowledge, new knowledge development, higher education, career growth, and cooperation in society. Therefore, the next step is to make the policy more effective in practice. This needs involvement from different bodies: the government, the Ministry of Education, the curriculum developers, the school administrators, the English language experts, and the English language teachers. Support, insights and cooperation are needed from these agents. It is the time to invest more in ELT and to make the action plan possible.

5.2.2 It has been indicated that even though the curriculum statements are implemented at a satisfactory level, there is a significant gap between policy and practice in all three educational regions in Songkhla. These findings imply the need for further work to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Thus, the curriculum developers should consider the problems derived from the ambiguities of the benchmarks in the curriculum. Since teachers have difficulties in interpreting and practicing, they should be supervised in order for them to clearly understand the benchmarks and make effective use of them. Thus, seminars or training programs are needed and the school administrators should realize this need and support their teachers in attending seminars and/or training programs. Moreover, curriculum

developers should specify more practical statements. For example, behavioral objectives should be specified so that English teachers can implement them easily.

5.2.3 The findings of the study also indicate the problems that obstruct the curriculum implementation. Three areas of the problems are mentioned at very serious level. They are related to the influence of the university entrance examination, students' attitude and their language proficiency, and large class. These problems need effective solutions. This suggests that both teachers themselves and the school administrators should take immediate action to relieve the problems. The following are some suggestions.

5.2.3.1 To avoid the over-emphasis on grammar for university entrance examination, the lesson plans based on communicative language use should be prepared before the semester starts. Teachers can work on this as a team and the plans may be checked by the Head of the English unit before the practice. Peer observations may also be helpful to see if a teacher follows the curriculum.

5.2.3.2 Teachers can make students develop positive attitude toward English by providing interesting and fun activities. Some famous speakers or successful ex-students may be invited to give a talk on the importance of learning English. This will help students see the merit of learning English and they will pay more attention in their learning.

5.2.3.3 Teachers can develop low proficiency students by organizing a special class after school or on weekends. Teachers should also encourage students to study in self-access center or in the school library to develop independent study.

5.2.3.4 School administrators should realize the problem concerning large class size. If the reason is related to inadequate classroom, sufficient budget should be requested from the government. But if the problem is caused by the school policy which requires lots of students in each class, it should be changed.

5.2.4 The English teachers in three educational regions in Songkhla also mentioned that the environment of community around school is not supportive for students to use English in real life. This makes it difficult for teachers to encourage students to communicate in English. This suggests that teachers should design activities that require students to use English starting from inside school. For example,

English camp can be organized on semester basis. English debate between classes may be arranged. Different schools should co-operate in organizing English activities and have students participate. Students should be encouraged to participate in English activities outside school. For example, singing contests, crossword competition, asking and answering questions in English, playing games and speech contests may be arranged for students from different schools. Doing all these means teachers create the environment which demands the use of English among students from the same and different schools.

5.2.5 According to this study, it is obvious that English teachers in educational region 3 face problems concerning the curriculum, teachers' cross-cultural knowledge, students' insufficient English knowledge, and environment of community much more serious than the teachers in educational regions 1 and 2. This suggests that the Head of the Educational Region 3 should take the problems into consideration and try to ease them. Training should be made accessible to them and on a regular basis. In addition, the school administrators should make an effective plan in developing teachers and students' knowledge and ask for the budget from the government or local organization.

5.2.6 Under the 2001 English curriculum, the communicative language teaching is emphasized and to run the communicative activities requires various teaching aids. Thus, schools should provide teaching aids such as tape recorders or audio-visual aids, and learning resources such as language laboratory or library so these will help teachers to create authentic communicative situations. However, the results of this study show that the schools still lack of these facilities. This suggests that school administrators should ask for the budget from the government or the agencies in the community such as the community committee and school committee by making an effective project with a clear purpose, a justification and a process. Support from government or community will be provided if the school project has high potential.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Studies

According to this study, some issues have not been examined because of some limitations. In order to confirm the findings and to find out points that have not been covered in the current study, some areas are recommended for further study.

5.3.1This study intended to investigate only teachers' views on the curriculum. It is recommended that further study should include students' views to see whether the curriculum statements meet their needs for learning English.

5.3.2 This study indicates that there is the gap between the educational policy and practice in three educational regions in Songkhla. To confirm the findings of this study, further research on curriculum implementation in other educational regions around the country should be conducted.

5.3.3 This study focused only on the Expanded Level, thus, it would be interesting to investigate the implementation of the curriculum in other levels such as Preparatory Level (Prathomsuksa 1-3), Beginner Level (Prathomsuksa 4-6) and Development Level (Matthayomsuksa 1-3), in order to see teachers' views on the curriculum, the degree of implementation and problems in language teaching.

5.3.4 The findings in this study indicate that teaching problems exist in the current situations. It would be interesting to design an in-depth study to probe causes of the problems such as a case study, teachers' interview or classroom observation for a semester so a more thorough picture may be revealed. Knowing the causes of problems can help teachers and school administrators find the more proper solution to the problems. The result can lead to the improvement of English teaching in the Thai context.

5.3.5 This study intended to examine only teachers' perception on policy implementation, but it did not include achievement of the students which will indicate the effectiveness of the implementation. It is recommended that students' proficiency in English should be assessed in a further study in order to see the correlation between perception and achievement. As a consequence, the level of success of the curriculum implementation can be further identified.