

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is a survey of the implementation of the 2001 English language curriculum and problems concerning its implementation in government secondary schools in Songkhla with emphasis on Expanded Level. A questionnaire was used to obtain the data about English teachers' views on the curriculum, the perceived degree of the implementation in classes and problems obstructing the success of the implementation. In addition, classroom observation field-notes were also used to further investigate the curriculum in practice.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the rationale for the study, statement of purpose, research questions, scope and limitations of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter two reviews related research and literature. Chapter three explains the research methodology and the analysis of data. Chapter four presents findings of the study. And chapter five contains discussion of the main findings, implications and recommendations for further study.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

In Thailand, English is required at all levels of study in primary, secondary and tertiary education. During the last decade, English language teaching was performed according to the 1978 Basic Curriculum (revised in 1990). However, the monitoring, assessment and research conducted by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development indicated that there were some limitations and weaknesses in this curriculum. In the case of foreign language teaching, especially the English language, learners still fail to use language for communication. Neither are they sufficiently capable of seeking new important knowledge required in the Information Age (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Because of the weaknesses and the limitations of the revised 1978 curriculum, the National Educational Curriculum, which was a fundamental mechanism for the

development of national education quality was reformed in 1999. The Basic Education Curriculum 2001 was endorsed as a result, and has been implemented to develop students' knowledge and ability to suit the fast changing world. The 2001 curriculum which is the current curriculum for primary and secondary education is based on "unity in policy and diversity in practice" principle (Ministry of Education, 2001). The curriculum aims to develop Thai students in all aspects: morality, intellect, happiness, Thai-ness, potential in furthering education and securing careers (Ministry of Education, 2001).

In foreign language learning, English subjects are placed as a core subject, which is required for all levels, aiming to enhance students' interest in language learning. Students are expected to gain positive attitude toward English and be able to communicate in English more fluently. This is useful for their further education as well as for their careers. They are also expected to understand more about other cultures. According to this curriculum, the substances, standards and benchmarks are provided for English teachers as guidelines for designing courses. The four substances which act as the main goals to be covered in the foreign language curriculum are 1) language for communication 2) language and culture 3) language and other subjects 4) language and its relationships with communities and the world. Standards serve as the objectives or the aims of each substance. There are eight standards in foreign language curriculum. Furthermore, there are twenty-eight benchmarks that act as the descriptors in each standard. Both standards and benchmarks are guidelines for course designing and criteria for assessing quality or achievement of learners.

The current curriculum was first implemented in the academic year 2003 for primary education (Prathomsuksa 1 and 4), and secondary education (Matthayomsuksa 1 and 4) while students in other grades still studied under the revised 1978 curriculum until they finished the last grade of each level. In the academic year 2004, the implementation of the curriculum covered Prathomsuksa 1, 2, 4 and 5 and Matthayomsuksa 1,2,4 and 5. The basic curriculum 2001 covered all grades (Prathomsuksa 1-6) and (Matthayomsuksa 1-6) in the academic year 2005.

In the past, when there was an educational reform or a curriculum change, problems concerning its implementation usually occurred as a result. For example, upper secondary English teachers in government secondary schools in southern

Thailand had problems implementing the 1981 English curriculum in their teaching. The problems concerned students, teaching aids and also the curriculum itself (Chum-upakarn, 1985). In addition, Musigrungsi (2002) reported that English teachers in Region 2 (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun Provinces) had problems in teaching grammar via the communicative language teaching approach required by the curriculum. Other problems are related to students, curriculum, teaching techniques, teaching aids, school policy and evaluation system.

The 2001 curriculum has just been implemented for a few years. As with the implementation of other new curricula, it is subject to questions it brings to the English teaching and learning situation. At present, it is not clear if English teachers agree with the new English language teaching curriculum, if they are sufficiently prepared to handle the new curriculum, if they have any problems or if there are limitations in their teaching under the new curriculum. All these need investigation. Therefore it is worth studying English teachers' view on the policy and how the policy is reflected in practice. This research, thus, took the English teaching in Mattayomsuksa 4 and Mattayomsuksa 5 in Songkhla as the context of the study to find out the relationship between policy and practice and eventually find out the factors hindering the success of the curriculum.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

According to the 2001 English curriculum, it is not clear to what extent the English teachers support the new curriculum and to what degree the curriculum has been reflected in practice. It is also worth studying if the curriculum brings some problems in teaching. This study, thus, attempts to do the followings:

1. to survey the views of English language teachers regarding the 2001 English curriculum in government secondary schools in Songkhla,
2. to investigate the degree to which the curriculum has been reflected in classes, and
3. to find out problems and limitations in language teaching based on the new curriculum

1.3 Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do English language teachers support the 2001 English curriculum statements?
2. What is the extent of implementation of the 2001 English curriculum in Matthayomsuksa 4 and Matthayomsuksa 5 as perceived by English teachers?
3. What is the relationship between the extent of support for the curriculum and the degree of its perceived implementation?
4. What are the problems obstructing the implementation of the curriculum?

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1. This study specifically covers government secondary schools and the subjects of the study are only English teachers in M.4 and M.5.
2. The study is limited to Songkhla Province; hence, the problems and teaching situation may differ from those in other areas.
3. The implementation of the curriculum does not cover all the Expanded Level (Matthayomsuksa 4-Matthayomsuksa 6) so it may not cover all substances, standards and benchmarks stated in the curriculum.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to investigate among English teachers the degree of support for the 2001 English curriculum and the perceived implementation of the curriculum. The relationship between the degree of support and the degree of implementation was also investigated to see whether there was a gap or mismatch between them. Hence, the study will reflect the current English language teaching situations and problems in teaching according to the new curriculum in Songkhla Province, as well as indicating the level of support for the curriculum and its implementation in this area. The results will be helpful to school administrators to

improve teaching situations and to solve the problems which obstruct the success of the implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the results may be helpful for policy makers as the basis for further policy making to bridge the gap between the policy and its implementation.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

1. **Substances** act as the main goals of the 2001 curriculum. According to This curriculum, there are four substances: 1) language for communication 2) language and culture 3) language and other subjects 4) language and its relationships with community and the world.

2. **Standards** act as the objectives or the aims of the 2001 curriculum. They Are interpreted from the substances. Standards are as the means to reach each particular goal. For example, “Language for communication” includes three standards: understanding listening and reading processes, possessing skills for language communication and understanding speaking and writing processes. Altogether, there are 8 standards.

3. **Benchmarks** act as the descriptors of each standard according to the 2001 curriculum. They act as the guidelines for teachers to prepare contents or activities to serve each standard. For example, in the first standard of the first substance that emphasize understanding listening and reading processes, the benchmark includes understanding the tone and the feelings of speakers, reading aloud correctly based on principles of pronunciation, giving opinion on a reading text or news.

4. **Expanded Level** refers to the Mattayomsuksa 4, 5 and 6 in government secondary schools.

5. **English teachers** are teachers of English in Mattayomsuksa 4 and 5 currently teaching in government secondary schools in Songkhla in the academic year 2004.

6. **Seven curriculum statements** are derived from the eight standards stated in the 2001 curriculum. The eight standards were simplified so that they are easy for the respondents when responding to the curriculum statements.