

Native English Speaking Teachers' Beliefs about Difficulties in Teaching English to Thai Learners

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate native English speaking teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners. The data were collected from 34 native speaker (NS) teachers who are employed by a private language school in Bangkok, Thailand. The instrument used was a questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended questions with rating scales and open-ended questions. The results revealed that the participants believed that teaching English for Thai learners tended to be easy; however, there were some difficulties that the participants encountered, including certain characteristics of Thai learners, the Thai educational system, teaching techniques, classroom management, school management and cultural differences. Additionally, the participants suggested some useful solutions for other NS teachers and they also commented on the Thai educational system.

Introduction

It is undeniable that English is an important means of communication, especially in the era of globalization. Most people around the world use English as an international language. For Thais, competence in English is seen as both a mark of sophistication and a passport to a more prosperous life (Smyth, 2001). Although, in Thailand, English is not usually necessary for people's daily communication, it is an important foreign language that Thai people use for various purposes, such as for studying and for communicating with foreigners. Furthermore, most private companies and even some governmental sectors nowadays require staff who have knowledge of English and are competent in the four language skills. Therefore, the demand for English language teaching in Thailand exceeds the supply of language schools and institutions.

There are many language schools in Bangkok that offer various English courses such as examination preparation, business English, language skills training and English for careers. Most language schools demonstrate their standards and quality by employing NS teachers. Avasadanond (2005) states that Thai students studying English in private language schools in Thailand will, for the most part, expect their teachers to be NSs and *farangs* (foreign Caucasians). There are already a great number of NSs employed currently in Thailand and the demand for them is likely to increase in the future as well.

Since most of them are from foreign cultural backgrounds, they may deal with the task of teaching based on their own cultural experiences and beliefs. These factors may influence teaching and learning English in the classroom as well. Thus, the beliefs of NS teachers should be examined. If we know what NS teachers think about teaching English to Thai learners, we will have a better idea of what they do in the classroom. Richards et al. (2001: 41) state that "the study of teachers' beliefs forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualise their work. In order to understand

how teachers approach their work, it is necessary to understand the beliefs and principles they operate from". Additionally, the study of teachers' beliefs can provide significant insights into many aspects of teaching and learning. Pajares (1992) states that exploring teachers' beliefs is essential to their professional development and improvement of their teaching practices. In view of the fact that the number of NS teachers is increasing in Thailand, their beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners should be examined.

Literature review

This review begins by defining teachers' beliefs, looks at the relationship between these beliefs and teaching, and reviews studies of teachers' beliefs.

Definitions of teachers' beliefs

Cognitive psychologists define 'belief' as one's representation of reality that guides both thought and behavior (Abelson, 1979; Anderson, 1985, cited in Johnson, 1994). Moreover, Rokeach (1968) and Johnson (1994) conclude that beliefs contain cognitive, affective and behavioral components and, therefore, act as influences on what one knows, feels and does. Borg (2001) describes 'belief' as a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others.

Since beliefs play such an important role in real life, they also play an important role in many aspects of teaching. Then, what does the term 'teachers' beliefs' mean? In the past decade, although the concept of teachers' beliefs has featured in educational research papers and has recently come into favor in English Language Teaching (ELT), there is no consensus on its meaning. Calderhead (1996, cited in Borg, 2001) describes teachers' beliefs as a term usually used to refer to teachers' pedagogic beliefs or beliefs of relevance to an individual's teaching. Similarly, Kagan (1992: 2, cited in Farrell, 1999) defines teachers' beliefs as "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught". She also mentions that teachers' beliefs are stable and do not change, maybe because, as mentioned by Hampton (1994, cited in Richards et al., 2001), they are 'personal constructs'. Additionally, Johnson (1999) states that teachers' beliefs could be seen as a belief substructure that interrelates with all other beliefs; they have a filtering effect on everything that teachers think, say and do in classrooms.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching

Teachers' personal views of their roles in the classroom are under the influence of their beliefs. This view is supported by Richards (1994), who states that a primary source for teachers' classroom practices is teachers' belief systems: the information, attitudes, values, theories and assumptions about teaching and learning which teachers accrue over time and bring with them to the classroom. Similarly, Richards & Lockhart (1994) describe what teachers do in the classroom as a reflection of what they know and believe, and that their knowledge and thinking provide the underlying framework or schemata that guide their classroom actions. Pajares (1992, cited in Albion, 1999) also supports a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practices. Furthermore, Richards & Lockhart (1994) divide teachers' beliefs about language teaching into five aspects: beliefs about English, learning, teaching, programs and curricula, and language teaching as a profession.

Studies of teachers' beliefs

There are three studies concerning teachers' beliefs which the researchers used as the main guidelines in conducting this study. The first is a study by Richards et al. (2001). The study explores the beliefs and processes of change reported by 112 English-language teachers from Southeast Asian countries. They were asked to report their most important beliefs about language teaching and learning. Thirteen main categories of beliefs were reported, the four most important of which are as follows. The first one was beliefs about the role of grammar and how much grammar should be taught. The second largest category of beliefs was about learners; the subjects commented that the learners should be independent, self-directed and responsible. The third most common key beliefs were about the importance of the language skills; they mentioned the importance of reading instruction, especially extensive reading. The fourth one was teachers' characteristics; it was their belief that teachers should be respectful and supportive and should act as facilitators, leaders and guides.

The second study was conducted by Karabenick & Noda (2004). Their study is about the professional development implications of teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward English language learners. In one Midwestern suburban district in the United States, 729 language teachers were asked about their beliefs, attitudes, practices and needs related to their learners, who were immigrants and refugees. The study shows interesting results, such as: (1) the teachers held positive attitudes toward having English language learners (ELLs) in their classes; (2) most teachers believed that learning in one's first language (L1) does not interfere with learning in the second language (L2); (3) the majority believed that, if ELLs develop literacy in their L1, it would facilitate the development of reading and writing in English; (4) they believed that assessing abilities and academic performance may be inappropriate for ELLs; however, they were uncertain whether ELLs should be tested in English or their mother tongue; and, (5) they believed that ELLs' parents were not as involved in the schools as were parents of non-ELLs.

In the third study, Chin (2005) investigated NS teachers' beliefs about Korean learners. The data obtained from 18 NS teachers showed four main aspects to the respondents' beliefs about teaching and learning in Korea. The first one was beliefs about language teachers. The respondents believed that a good language teacher was someone who could facilitate students' learning, assess students' levels and adjust accordingly, gain students' interest, entertain students, be creative and interested in teaching, and be open-minded and understanding of the students. The second one was beliefs about Korean EFL learners. They believed that Korean EFL learners had negative and passive attitudes towards learning English. They were weak in spoken English because they lacked confidence. They also reported that Korean EFL learners did not have much exposure to foreigners. The third was beliefs about favorite classroom activities; the respondents mentioned that using group-oriented creative activities was popular among Korean learners. Lastly, for beliefs about teaching strategies, the results revealed that role-play activities could encourage Korean EFL learners to learn effectively; also, the activities given should be various and relevant to learners' interests.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to explore what NS teachers' beliefs are about the difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners touching on these elements: teaching techniques, classroom management, communication, teaching language skills, curriculum, classroom activities, material and assessment. The results will show us

what difficulties the NS teachers encountered and should help us investigate ways to solve the problems. From the results, Thai teachers and educational sectors will also learn and understand NS teachers, which should help us work more co-operatively with them in the future.

Methodology

Subjects

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the data had to be obtained from NS teachers who had pedagogical knowledge and real teaching experience in Thailand; therefore, setting the criteria for selecting subjects was necessary. For this study, the subjects had to have: a Bachelor's degree; at least one year's teaching experience; and an ELT certificate, such as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

The subjects finally selected for this study were 34 NS teachers who were employed by a private language school in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants were aged 25-61 and consisted of 33 males and 1 female. There were 12 Britons, 10 Americans, 5 Australians, 3 Canadians, 2 New Zealanders and 2 South Africans. Their average English teaching experience in Thailand was four years; 27 participants held a Bachelor's degree, 6 participants held a Master's degree and 1 had a Doctorate. All participants also held certificates in English language teaching: 19 participants held a TEFL certificate, 10 participants held a CELTA and 5 participants held a TESOL certificate.

Instrument

A questionnaire consisting of three parts was used as the research instrument. The first part is about personal information, including name, age, gender, nationality, what level of students the subject is teaching and how long the subject has taught in Thailand. The second part contains both the rating scale and open-ended questions that concern the subjects' perceptions on teaching difficulties they are encountering in Thai classrooms; the rating scale addressed beliefs related to eight teaching areas: communication, assessment, materials, classroom management, teaching techniques, curriculum, language skills and classroom activities. The last part contained an open-ended question asking for suggestions or information that the subjects would like to provide for other NS teachers teaching in Thailand.

Procedures

Pilot study

A trial was first done to see if the questionnaire was comprehensible. Two NS teachers who are employed by *EF English First Language School* (a privately run school) participated as the pilot subjects.

Questionnaire adjustment

There were two beneficial suggestions from the pilot subjects to adjust the questionnaire to be more comprehensible for the real subjects: providing descriptions for some technical words (i.e. 'norm-referenced' and 'criterion-referenced'); and, in Item 14 of Part II, class size should be specified as the number of students in English language classes in Thailand varies according to each school's policy.

Data collection

Copies of the revised questionnaires were distributed to 45 NS teachers employed by *EF English First Language School*; 34 completed questionnaires were returned.

Data analysis

The results from the closed-ended questions (i.e. the data from the rating statements in the questionnaire) were analyzed quantitatively by using arithmetic means (\bar{X}) and were interpreted by using the following criteria: 5.00-4.21 = very difficult; 4.20-3.41 = difficult; 3.40-2.61 = not too difficult; 2.60-1.81 = easy; and 1.80-1.00 = very easy. The qualitative part (i.e. the data from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire) was analyzed by grouping under the same themes.

Data presentation

The results will be presented under four headings: NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with various teaching areas; their beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with their personal perceptions; suggestions for NS teachers; and suggestions concerning the Thai educational system.

- **NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with various teaching areas**

This section reports the data from the rating scale addressing beliefs in eight teaching areas.

According to Table 1 (below), generally, the subjects rated their difficulty in teaching English to Thai learners as 'not too difficult' (2.65). It was found that none of the teaching areas was in the 'very difficult' or the 'very easy' categories. Furthermore, we might say that the NS teachers believed that teaching English to Thai learners tended to be easy; as we can see, half of the teaching areas were categorized into the easy level (22 items from 43 items).

The most difficult areas were: to encourage learners to use English outside the classroom (3.81); teaching in classes with more than 35 students (3.43); and encouraging Thai learners to learn independently (3.41) Three more aspects tended to be difficult as the mean scores were more than 3: to help Thai learners think critically (3.39), teaching classes with mixed levels of proficiency (3.36) and communicating with the learners' parents (3.00). On the other hand, establishing a positive relationship with Thai students and providing supplementary materials were the easiest (2.09).

Table 1: NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties teaching English to Thai learners

Rating scales	Teaching areas	Means
<i>Difficult</i>	Teaching techniques	
	Encouraging students to use English outside the classroom	3.81
	Promoting learning independence	3.41
	Classroom management	
	Teaching large classes (more than 35 students)	3.43
<i>Not too difficult</i>	Teaching techniques	
	Helping students think critically	3.39
	Encouraging students to use English in the classroom	2.68
	Motivating students to learn	2.64
	Classroom management	
	Teaching students who have different levels of proficiency	3.36
	Teaching discipline (e.g. be punctual, be honest)	2.91
	Communication	
	Communicating with parents	3.00
	Communicating with English language department officers	2.65
	Teaching language skills	
	Teaching grammar	2.97
	Teaching writing	2.88
	Teaching reading	2.71
	Curriculum	
	Teaching without a curriculum	2.97
	Teaching students to achieve school's curriculum	2.75
	Classroom activities	
	Teaching by using discussion	2.71
	Using whole-class work	2.61
	Teaching by using role play	2.61
	Assessment	
	Designing testing	2.73
Using a variety of assessment	2.62	
Material		
Teaching with materials given by school	2.70	
<i>Easy</i>	Classroom activities	
	Using group work	2.36
	Teaching by using various activities	2.32
	Using individual work	2.29
	Using pair work	2.24
	Teaching by using games	2.23
	Teaching techniques	
	Building good attitude towards English	2.59
	Increasing students' self confidence	2.58
	Making students involved in learning activities	2.53
	Assessment	
	Testing by using norm references	2.54
	Grading / Marking students' assignments	2.53
	Testing by using criterion references	2.48
	Using tests provided by school	2.39
	Teaching language skills	
	Teaching listening	2.53
	Teaching speaking	2.41
	Teaching pronunciation	2.36
	Teaching vocabulary	2.18
	Materials	
	Choosing materials suitable to students' level of proficiency	2.45
	Using authentic materials	2.21
	Providing supplementary materials	2.09
	Curriculum	
	Teaching by following school's curriculum	2.56
	Communication	
Communicating with students	2.44	
Classroom management		
Establishing a positive relationship with students	2.09	
Average		2.65

- **NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with their personal perceptions**

This section reports the data obtained from the four open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The data were obtained by counting the numbers of responses rather the number of the subjects because one subject could mention or report more than one difficulty.

Table 2 shows that 33 responses could be categorized into seven aspects: some Thai learners' characteristics, teaching techniques, Thai learners' backgrounds, materials and facilities, Thai teachers, classroom management and others.

Table 2: Additional teaching difficulties

Additional difficulties	Number of responses
Thai learners' characteristics	9
Teaching techniques	9
Thai learners' backgrounds	4
Materials and facilities	4
Thai teachers	2
Classroom management	1
Others	4
Total responses	33

* Number of subjects is 24.

According to Table 3, we can see that the subjects had different points of view in the difficulties that they encountered. The largest number of NS teachers thought that Thai learners represented the most difficult aspect while fewer saw teaching techniques and classroom management as the most difficult areas.

Table 3: Most difficult aspects of teaching

Most difficult aspects of teaching	Number of responses
Thai learners	10
Teaching techniques	4
Classroom management	4
School management	2
Immigration and visa rules	2
Culture differences	2
Thai teachers	2
Assessment	1
Total responses	27

* Number of subjects is 27.

Details of each of these eight difficult areas are now provided.

Thai learners

Ten responses show that some characteristics and learning styles of Thai learners were seen as the areas of greatest teaching difficulty. Four responses indicate that Thai learners were not interested in learning, had no sense of responsibility, did not respond to the NS teachers and did not participate in classroom activities. The subjects believed that these Thai learners' characteristics interfered with English language learning, as the examples cited below show.

“Most students are simply not interested in anything outside of shopping, food, movies, sleeping and fun.” (Subject 5)

Some subjects, furthermore, believed that Thais were passive learners, used only a translation approach or paid attention only to grammar and vocabulary and did not desire to practice using English inside or outside the classroom.

“As stated, students tend to be passive. They do little to no work outside the classroom. They don’t strive to improve their grammar or study vocabulary, nor do they desire to practice. An example is a conversation class, where all teachers have had the same problems of Thai students staring blankly and not wanting to say anything because they’re afraid or incapable of trying.” (Subject 24)

Teaching techniques

The second most difficult aspect was teaching techniques, which was obtained from four responses. The subjects believed that the most difficult aspect was giving instructions in order to enhance students’ understanding. In addition, some subjects stated that it was very difficult when teaching low-proficiency students and where there were no teaching assistants.

“The biggest difficulty is breaking the language barrier with students who have a very low comprehension level, which is made harder when you don’t have a teaching assistant.” (Subject 13)

Classroom management

Four responses indicated that the most difficult teaching area concerns classroom management, especially in teaching large classes of beginners, as shown below.

“Most difficult – large groups of total beginners.” (Subject 9)

Furthermore, it was found that teaching different levels of proficiency in the same class is difficult.

“Students being placed in classes that are obviously not assessed correctly during their interviews, i.e. teaching students at different levels.” (Subject 20)

School management

Two subjects replied that their most difficult teaching aspect involved school management. One of these stated that he/she had to teach too many hours per day; the other stated that the school did not follow the new policy required by the Ministry of Education, as shown in this data extract:

“The biggest difficulty has been the unwillingness of some school administrations to change and adapt themselves to the new educational guidelines required by the Ministry of Education.” (Subject 27)

Immigration and visas

Another most difficult area related to immigration and visa systems. Two subjects reported that Thai immigration and visa regulations were very strict. They believed that this difficulty discouraged NS teachers from living in Thailand.

“The biggest difficulty is actually two problems. Firstly, the immigration and visa rules and regulation relating to living in Thailand appear to be getting stricter and unworkable. It becomes more and more problematic

every month. The regulations do not encourage a foreigner to want to fight to stay in Thailand and come to be a teacher.” (Subject 10)

Cultural differences

Two responses showed that cultural misunderstandings were another most difficult aspect such as they did not know what topics were acceptable to talk about in Thai classrooms.

“Cultural misunderstandings: knowing what topics are acceptable and unacceptable to talk about in class.” (Subject 18)

Thai teachers

To communicate with Thai teachers who generally could not speak fluent English was the most difficult aspect raised by two subjects. Moreover, one of the subjects implied that some Thai teachers had bad attitudes towards foreign teachers.

“Thai teachers’ attitude – most are excellent towards foreign teachers. Some, however, like to complain about nothing.” (Subject 6)

Assessment

One subject said that the NS teachers had difficulties about assessment as their school’s policy did not allow them to fail any students, even if their students had in fact failed.

“Not being able to be truthful about students because of the ‘face’ issue. They are not allowed to ‘fail’. (most difficult)” (Subject 16)

Table 4 shows the three aspects of teaching that the NS teachers considered were least difficult: Thai learners, classroom management and availability of work. These are now explained in more detail.

Table 4: Least difficult aspects of teaching

Least difficult aspects of teaching	Number of responses
Thai learners	3
Classroom management	1
Availability of work	1
Total responses	5

* Number of subjects is 5.

Thai learners

Even though in the previous section ‘Thai learners’ were counted as the most difficult area that NS teachers had to deal with, there were two subjects who believed that, overall, Thai students were keen, eager and willing to learn.

“The least difficulty encountered in teaching in Thailand are the students and the parents themselves. Overall, the students are keen and eager to learn and demonstrate a very good attitude to making improvements in using the language.” (Subject 10)

Another subject believed that Thai learners were friendly and had positive attitudes, which made it very easy to establish good relationships if the teacher paid attention to their culture.

Classroom management

A subject revealed that the least difficult aspect was teaching small groups of adults who were at an intermediate level of proficiency and willing to talk.

“Easiest is smaller groups of intermediate adults and students who like to talk.” (Subject 9)

Availability of work

A subject reported that there were many teaching positions which required NS teachers, so it was easy to find a job in Thailand.

“Least difficulty is availability of work.” (Subject 5)

• Suggestions and comments provided for NS teachers

There were thirty-four responses showing suggestions/comments provided for other NS teachers. The following are the details of each aspect reported.

NS teachers’ qualifications

Twenty of the responses were about NS teachers’ qualifications. Six subjects suggested that NS teachers should be patient, especially in encouraging Thai learners to speak. They pointed out that Thai learners were very shy and it took a long time to get over their shyness. Therefore, NS teachers had to be patient and try to find ways to help them. Nine subjects suggested that NS teachers should have a sense of humor, friendliness, empathy and attentiveness to Thai learners, as Thai learners react positively to humor. Moreover, five subjects suggested that NS teachers should take Thai culture and lifestyle into consideration.

Appropriate teaching techniques for Thai learners

Since nine NS teachers in this study believed that some characteristics of Thai learners interfered with learning English, choosing teaching techniques should depend on students’ characteristics. NS teachers should convince shy students to learn from their own mistakes in order to get over their shyness. It was also found that using role-play or drama activities and having small group tasks could increase speaking English among Thai learners who lacked productive skills. Moreover, it was suggested that NS teachers should provide learning in a relaxing environment and lead Thai learners to realize the importance of English for their future careers in order to motivate them to learn. It was reported that Thai learners could not produce individual work as they lacked critical thinking skills. NS teachers, therefore, should provide the skills and push them to do their own work and avoid plagiarizing from each other.

Understanding Thai pronunciation

One subject mentioned that NS teachers should try to understand those aspects of Thai pronunciation that differ from English. In doing this, NS teachers would understand more when Thai learners pronounce some words incorrectly, especially the sounds with which they tend to have problems: /s/, /z/, /r/, /l/ and /v/.

Salary/Payment

Five of the subjects mentioned the low rate of payment for foreign teachers. Foreigners should come to Thailand to explore its great culture more than to earn money.

• Suggestions and comments concerning the Thai educational system

The subjects suggested that the system should continue to emphasize, but better enforce, a communicative approach and student-centred learning in order to promote English language learning among Thais. Moreover, phonetic teaching should be taught at the beginning in order to enhance listening and speaking skills. The subjects also commented that assessment in the Thai educational system was inappropriate. Students

automatically had a pass mark because teachers did not allow any students to fail, even if, in reality, they had failed.

To conclude this section, while, on the rating scale, the NS teachers in this study rated their overall difficulty in teaching English to Thai learners as ‘not too difficult’, it was found that there were difficulties in a few particular teaching aspects.

Discussion and conclusion

This section presents a discussion and conclusions of the findings concerning the roots of teaching difficulties and solutions.

• Roots of teaching difficulties

In Thailand, English has been used as a foreign language for communication with foreigners. Similar to other countries, Thailand has responded positively to the need to promote English as the language for international communication (Tripasai, 2004). However, Thais’ level of English proficiency is low in comparison with other countries in Asia, e.g. Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore (Wiriyachitra, 2002). What are the causes of low levels of English language proficiency among Thai learners?

From the findings, the NS teachers believed that the most difficult aspect in English teaching in Thailand is some Thai learners’ characteristics. They pointed out that Thai learners have some characteristics that interfere with teaching and learning English language. Why do Thai learners have these characteristics that obstruct their learning? Actually, these characteristics are not necessarily innate but might be influenced by external factors such as the educational system, culture and their families.

According to Kaewdang (1999), the Thai educational system has long emphasized ‘chalk and talk’ pedagogy, rote learning, and placed an importance on school education with teachers as the centre of teaching-learning activities. These traditional teaching approaches directly influence the learning styles of Thai learners. While English language teaching and learning in Thailand have been dominated by a teacher-centred approach, Thai learners view knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher. They place their trust and their future almost entirely into the hands of their teacher. Most Thai learners do not discover knowledge as they are always ‘spoon fed’ by their teachers. As a result, Thai learners get used to being passive learners who desire to be receivers rather than willing to be knowledge discoverers. This causes a lack of responsibility among Thai learners as well.

Since the Thai educational system has emphasized the translation approach or paid attention only to grammar and vocabulary, the Thai learning style is based on rote memorization. This causes Thai students to have less critical thinking and fewer problem-solving skills. Similarly, Buripakdi & Mahakhan (1980, cited in Adamson, 2005) state that a lack of ‘critical questioning’ in the Thai educational system prevents Thai students from being able to think critically; they can only be ‘reproductive’. Individual thought and a questioning mind are not encouraged even through to the tertiary level, by which time, most Thai learners, according to Kirtikara (1996), are brain-dead or their brain neurons have atrophied.

Thai culture is another factor that influences the characteristics of Thai learners. This view is supported by Mackenzie (2002), who states that Thai learners are repeatedly

characterized as lacking willingness to speak due to a culturally-based seniority system. Thais are taught from childhood to follow the advice of their elders. They do not talk back or show contrasting views. As a result, Thais are reluctant to express direct feedback to their seniors, unwilling to ask questions directly to their teachers and often show their respect by keeping quiet in the classroom.

With the importance of the English language, most Thai parents attempt to increase their children's English proficiency. Most Thai learners are forced to learn English; as a result, their motivation is extrinsic. They view English as a compulsory subject and they realize that they have to pass their English courses in order to graduate. Extrinsic motivation exists when the only reason for performing an act is to gain something outside the activity itself, such as passing an exam or obtaining financial rewards (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989, cited in Williams & Burden, 1997). As many Thai learners do not learn English in order to fulfill individual needs, they are unmotivated. Therefore, it can be concluded that family pressure may be a cause of lack of intrinsic motivation among Thai learners.

- **Solutions to teaching difficulties**

To solve their difficulties, NS teachers have to work hard for long periods of time. In the primary stage of solving problems, the difficulties might decrease if NS English language teachers take the following into consideration.

Teaching approaches

There have been several attempts to reform English language educational policy in Thai educational institutions. At the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, these institutions have been criticized by both Western and local educationalists for taking a traditional and conservative approach to EFL teaching (Brown, 2004). For English language teachers, therefore, it is time to reform teaching approaches. The teaching approaches should be beneficial both in terms of promoting learning and changing the characteristics mentioned earlier. What teaching approaches should be used?

Recently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and learner-centred approaches have become the two most accepted tenets for English language teaching in Thailand (Watson Todd, 2005). CLT starts with a theory of language as communication and its goal is to develop the learner's communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, cited in Rao, 2002). There are a variety of communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, simulations and problem-solving tasks) which give students an opportunity to practice communicating meaningfully in different contexts and in different roles (Rao, 2002). As CLT provides students with opportunities to learn in various enjoyable ways, it is suitable for Thai learners who prefer to learn through the concept of 'learning with playing'. Thai learners are likely to be motivated if their teacher provides a relaxing environment for learning. Moreover, practicing communication skills in CLT could be used to encourage those Thai learners who pay attention only to grammar and vocabulary to speak English as well.

A learner-centred approach groups together educational philosophies that stress the individual needs of learners, the role of individual experience and the need to develop awareness, self-reflection, critical thinking, learner strategies and other qualities and skills that are believed to be important for learners to develop (Richards, 2003). Moreover, the learner-centred approach is aimed at replacing the conventional style of teaching (which sees teachers dictate to students) with carefully designed techniques

that can meet students' demands and encourage free thinking so as to enable them to have more creative minds. Such an approach is enshrined in the Thai National Educational Act 1999 / B.E. 2542, its Amendments and the Second National Education Act 2002 / B.E. 2545 (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). The role of teachers in this approach is to be facilitators who give students chances to learn what they prefer and enable them to discover knowledge by themselves. The learners have opportunities to learn from their own mistakes, opportunities that also enable Thai learners to be more active.

For these reasons, NS teachers should implement both CLT and learner-centred or child-centred approaches to enhance English language proficiency among Thai learners. It is also necessary to prepare Thais to learn through the new approaches. NS teachers should build positive attitudes towards English language learning among Thais. Furthermore, NS teachers should provide activities that meet learners' demands and encourage them to think critically. The purposes of the activities should cover the principles of a child-centred approach, such as promoting responsibility among students to find learning resources and to solve problems by themselves.

Cultural awareness

Any NS teacher who wants to teach in Thailand should learn to be aware of cultural differences so that they are able to take cross-cultural perspectives. They should learn the differences in order to adapt their own teaching. For example, in a Thai context, work and other tasks are made easier by the cultural concept of *sanuk*; that is, there must be an element of fun attached to everything (Kirtikara, 1996). Because having fun is an important part of the Thai lifestyle, activities that allow Thai students to learn while having fun can be very effective. Therefore, it is an advantage to use a variety of communicative activities such as games, role plays and simulations.

Thai learners are taught from childhood to show respect to their elders by following their advice and not talking back or showing contrasting views. Consequently, Thai learners often act towards their teachers in the same way as to their elders by keeping quiet in the classroom. Therefore, in order to lead Thai learners to feel free to express their feelings and ideas, NS teachers should be more of a friend than a 'teacher', showing fun and empathy as well as being attentive to them. It tends to be easy to build a good rapport with Thai learners as they tend to react positively to foreigners. Moreover, NS teachers should show patience, especially in encouraging Thai learners to speak, as most of them are very shy and it takes a long time to get over their shyness.

NS teacher training

Since NS teachers are from foreign cultural backgrounds and might deal with the task of teaching based on their own cultural experiences, they need to be trained in how to teach effectively in Thailand. What should be included in their training?

First, they should be trained about Thai culture and lifestyle. Due to a culturally-based seniority system, Thai learners might keep quiet in the classroom; so, NS teachers should not be frustrated that Thai learners are unwilling to participate in discussions or challenge their ideas. NS teachers should accept it, be patient and friendly, and encourage them to speak. They also need to know what topics are appropriate in the classroom; for example, to criticize the king and his family might be acceptable in Western countries, but it is prohibited in Thailand.

Second, NS teachers need to be trained about appropriate teaching techniques and classroom activities for Thai learners. They also need to know Thais' learning styles in order to take them into account in their teaching; for example, Thai learners are usually quite shy and afraid to lose face to their classmates by making mistakes in front of their teachers. Therefore, at the beginning, rather than individual activities or whole-class activities in which the teacher nominates individual students, there should be pair work, group work or whole-class choral work. Competitive games, especially those which require competing in groups, seem to be favored among Thai learners.

Finally, NS teachers should be trained about materials. They need to know how to utilize materials as well as to choose and adapt materials to suit to their learners.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the NS teachers in this study generally believe that teaching English to Thai learners tends to be easy; however, as mentioned earlier in this article, they reported encountering several difficulties. The researchers hope that this study will shed some light on the belief systems of NS teachers in Thailand. In addition, the data obtained may be beneficial to the Ministry of Education and to Thai schools.

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