

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

English has been playing a crucial role in international communication, especially in this age of globalization, which is in essence the age of information. It is not just an international language in the sense of a medium for international communication. It is actually a universal language: it is the language of the market place, the language of science and technology, the language of research and development.

For Thailand, English has played an important role for a long time in Thai education. This is because English is regarded as the most important foreign language and it is commonly taught in Thai schools. Most Thai students begin studying English at the elementary level of education. It is also required for the university level in many fields of study.

In the field of business English teaching, St John and Johnson (1996: 1-2) remark that Business English has an important role to play in the language teaching world and as such needs to develop and become recognized as a professional field.

At Naresuan University, two courses of English, that is, English for Business (205573) and Conversation and Discussion (205531) are offered in the M.B.A. program. Students are required to take these two courses for foundation and non-credit course work in the first and second semester (Humanities and Social Sciences, Naresuan University n.d.: 13).

Like many other graduate students, M.B.A. students at Naresuan University have to use English for their studies, for example, in order to read English texts, academic journals/ research and write thesis abstracts. So, the English language is essential for students at the graduate level since most resources and information at this level are available in English such as textbooks and academic sources on the Internet.

In designing a successful course, Prat (1978 cited in Pierson and Friederichs 1981: 30) indicates that it must be systematically organized and implemented with the

guidance of rational principles. Pierson and Friederichs (1981: 30) further recommend that the program should contain clear instructional objectives generated from data that identifies the societal and individual needs of the students. As Wilkins (1976: 51) points out, in order to construct any language syllabus, the step that should be taken first is to define objectives based on an analysis of the learners' needs which reflect what the learner will need to do in the particular type of communication.

Mackay and Mountford (1978: 21) remarks that it is the language teachers' duties to plan and produce effective courses for learners to meet their specific purposes. These teachers should also translate the needs of learners into linguistic and pedagogic terms.

In a teaching and learning process, the identification of needs is crucial for making decisions. Richterich (1983: 2-3) points out that every learner should be able to learn what is essential for him or what he wants to learn. The effective and attractive teaching should be more closely related to individuals so that it makes them feel involved.

If no systematic survey of needs is done before the course design, the teacher of the course may have to use personal judgement in deciding what to teach and how to teach it. As a result this may lead to learning failures, that is, students may have low motivation to learn because they see very little application of what is offered by the teacher.

English for Business (205573) offered in the M.B.A program could be considered as ESP. St John and Johnson (1996: 1-2) state that Business English is the fastest growing area of English for Specific Purposes because of the increasing demand for Business English courses, teachers and materials. They further claim that the Business English Teaching taught around the world needs to be more strongly supported by research so that teachers and trainers can be clear what they are doing and why.

With regard to English for Business in the M.B.A. program at Naresuan University, although it has been taught for five years, there has been very little work done on the systematic survey of M.B.A students' and the English language needs for their academic purposes. Therefore, it is difficult to find out whether the course serves the learners' purposes or not. Because the syllabus is drawn up by the teacher

it may not serve their needs. Without the information about students' needs, it seems impossible to know to what extent the English course is useful for students and there would be no criteria for evaluating the degree to which the English course responds to students' real purposes.

For this reason, it seems necessary to identify students academic English language needs, problems and wants in the English course. The findings from this study can be of assistance in the administration and evaluation of the English courses for M.B.A. students and involved planners so that the English courses at Naresuan University will serve the academic needs of M.B.A. students as well.

Statement of the Problem

English for Business (205573) Conversation and Discussion (205531) are offered in the M.B.A. program at Naresuan University. The former is aimed to assist students to practice comprehensive reading from several sources, for example, English textbooks, articles, papers, etc., to practice writing research reports and to provide a study of vocabularies and expressions used in business sector. Whereas the latter is aimed for students to practice speaking and improve their proficiency in many situations and activities in daily life.

Despite the purposes of these English courses identified, there was growing concern among many students in the M.B.A. program that they were linguistically unable to cope with their studies and academic work in English satisfactorily. In the researcher's interviews with eleven Naresuan University M.B.A. students who took these English courses, they complained that they had little opportunity to practice their English language skills in both courses. They admitted that after finishing these English courses they continued to have language difficulties in their studies and they also reported that their English language skills were not adequate for their academic needs. They indicated that they encountered difficulties in reading textbooks because there were a lot of technical terms that they did not know. Some remarked that they needed more English courses provided by M.B.A. course planners involved.

As mentioned above, it seems that students needed to use English in their studies in the M.B.A. program. They need to know how to apply English in the

learning. With the limitation of the current syllabus, students may lack adequate background of English skills. Therefore, it probably causes learning difficulties in the program.

In addition, M.B.A. students are not required to pass any English proficiency test before attending this program. As a result, their English background might be inadequate for M.B.A. course work which employ English textbooks as course materials.

Thus, this study was conducted to investigate Naresuan University M.B.A students' needs for academic English, their language problems and wants for English courses. Some changes based on the result of this study could be implemented where possible to the existing course or for a new course. This could lead to an improvement in the program's overall operation and effectiveness with reference to the needs of students, and could also serve as a starting point for better communication among students, lecturers and course planners involved.

Title: A survey of academic English language needs in relation to problems and wants of Naresuan University M.B.A. students.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to identify the nature of Naresuan University M.B.A students' academic language needs. Furthermore, this study was intended to identify their various language problems in the four skills and a variety of activities, And, then find out what these students' wants of the courses of English to be like.

This study then endeavored to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students need English for academic purposes?
2. To what extent do students have academic English problems?
3. What types of English courses do students want?

Tools: Questionnaire

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to identify Naresuan University M.B.A. students' needs of English for academic purposes, problems and wants in the English courses. The findings obtained can be used as guidelines for planners involved and subject-specific lecturers for the evaluating and planning of English courses at the Faculty of

Humanities and Social Sciences, Naresuan University. So, the planners may gain a better understanding of the importance of English for academic purposes in order to improve and develop the existing English program or a new course for students more effectively in the future.

Limitation of the Study

1. Naresuan University first year Business Administration graduate students were not included in this study because they may have not studied enough to get sense of all their academic needs in the whole curriculum as a result, they may give inaccurate information or speculative opinions about their needs.
2. Guest lecturers from other institutes who taught M.B.A. students were included in this study.

Basic Assumption

It is assumed that all M.B.A. students and lecturers in this study answered all items of the questionnaires in this study honestly.

Definition of Terms

Needs: Needs of the English language which is the requirements of what M.B.A. students should possess in order to function in the academic studies effectively.

Problems: English Language difficulties that students in this study have been facing during their studies.

Students: Second-year graduate students majoring in Business Administration in the special program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Naresuan University in the academic year 1998.

Wants: English language courses that were desired by M.B.A. students.