

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to develop a curriculum for blended professional development or teacher training for English language teachers at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan (RMUTI). This chapter is an introduction to the thesis and provides a background as well as a context for the present study. This section contains the rationale of the study, purposes of the study, research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

Rationale of the Study

The trend of educational reform is based on 3 main principles: 1) life long education for all, 2) participation of all segments of society, and 3) continuous development of knowledge and the learning process (National Education Act, 1999). The first principle refers to the ability of learners to keep studying as much as they want to for the rest of their lives. There is no limitation for anyone to learn. Even if they have finished with the highest level of formal education available, they can further their studies individually. The second principle refers to the participation of all the segments of society. The last principle refers to the learners' attitudes towards self-development. In supporting the learners to reach the aforementioned goals, some educators have recommended teachers to integrate information and communication technology (henceforth ICT) into their teaching (Martin, 2003; Rader, 2003; Dillon, et al., 2003). This requires learners to bring together several learning and communicative skills, and ICT has been recommended as a key to help teachers to enhance their learners' ability to reach all the requirements effectively.

ICT (information and communications technology - or technologies) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated

with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICTs are often spoken of in a particular context, such as ICTs in education, health care, or libraries (TechTarget, 2004). The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) during the past two decades has had many points of contact with education and training. The development of technology is placing new demands on expertise, and it is also leading to the increased use of information technology (IT) in instruction and learning (Sinko, M. and Lehtinen, E., 1999). This in turn has had an impact on educational needs, both in terms of the content and the delivery of educational services, and there has been increasing pressure on decision-makers to acquire new technologies. At the same time, forms of ICT are multiplying with an increasing array of ICT options for decision-makers to choose from when integrating ICT into education (UNESCO., 2008). This proves that some advantages could be made by using ICT for teaching and, as a result, various educational sciences adopted ICT into their pedagogical methods.

Many educators agree that there are some advantages of the integration of ICT into teaching. Burns suggested that having children use some computer programs as tools for learning increased their motivation more than traditional teaching methodology in school. (Burns, 1994). Hubbard reported that multimedia software and web sites developed by educators offered a range of new opportunities for learners to develop listening proficiency in the target language. (Hubbard, 2005). Krischner and Selinger stated that ICT offered an essential potential to satisfy the learning needs of individual students, promoted equality of learning opportunity, offered high-quality learning materials, and increased self efficiency and independence of learning among learners of all ages. According the benefits reported by some educators, some language teachers tried adopting ICT into their language teaching and subsequently reported some positive results. (Krischner and Selinger, 2003).

For language teachers, ICT is advantageous because it provides various tools and teaching styles for language teachers to choose from and to integrate them into their teaching. Krischner and Selinger stated that teachers can make use of ICT as an essential tool in their daily work. It can be used to encourage new ways of working as part of professional learning teams. (Krischner and Selinger, 2003). Cabanatan also stated that there is a clear direction towards using the internet to provide education to

students everywhere. The use of the internet ranges from making course materials available on-line to using the internet as a communication tool for a course. (Cabanatan, 1999). Thus, teachers can use the internet as a powerful teaching material through the use of the educational web sites available on the internet as a part of learners' tasks. In fact, there are many functions available in the internet for language teaching. Both teaching materials and professional development forums for innovation teaching methodology are available on-line. There are several kinds of internet-based activities for ESL/EFL classrooms and some strategies to help ensure that the activities would keep the students' interest (Lee, 2000). In order to be able to use ICT appropriately and effectively, teachers need the vision of the ICT's potential, opportunities to integrate ICT into teaching, training about integrating ICT into teaching, immediate support as required, and time to experiment the integration of ICT into teaching (Malaiwong, 2002; Pongsart, 2005; Kongsanay, et al., 2005).

Since the late 1990s, the Thai government has provided teacher education institutes with special facilities to play a pioneering role in the integration of ICT in education. The governments' policy has focused especially on primary and secondary education institutes because they are responsible for students' necessary basic education. The teachers at these levels must be able to prepare young people for the knowledge society in which the competency to use ICT to acquire and process information is very important (Malaiwong, 2001). Considering the role the teacher education institutes are expected to fulfill, it is important that a teacher educator provide his students with 'good' examples. ICT is not only regarded as a tool, which can be added to or used as a replacement of existing teaching methods, but it is seen as an important instrument to support new ways of teaching and learning. (Voogt, 2005; Voogt and Odenthal, 1997). Teachers must be confident to use ICT to create teaching materials or lessons for their students appropriately (Martin, and Vallance, 2008). Teachers understanding of how ICT is able to contribute to the learning environment often has an important impact upon their actual use of technology in the classroom (Drenoyanni and Selwood, 1998; Higgins and Moseley, 2001; Hokanson and Hooper, 2000; Niederhauser and Stoddart, 2001). Most of the research on the implementation of ICT in schools is focusing on factors that influence the use of ICT in general. Some educators have predicted that the use of ICT will lead to changes in learning

arrangements and teaching methods but factors influencing innovative ICT-use are not explicitly analyzed (Becker, 2000).

To support the use of ICT in school, The Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) (2006) and the Educational Media Centre (EMC) promoted the integration of ICT into teaching in schools and provided various professional developments for teachers to create ICT teaching materials. The curricula were created and developed differently depending on the purposes of each branch in different district. All the professional developments were conducted mainly with an aim to encourage the teachers to be able to use some software to create ICT teaching materials. The teachers who were trained stated that they became more proficient in creating teaching materials. However, a lot of them were still unable to use ICT for their teaching due to several factors, such as teachers' lack of self-confidence and ICT appropriate supports (Mumthaisong, M. 2008). This study aims to investigate language teachers teaching at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan(RMUTI) who needed professional development to be able to appropriately integrate ICT into teaching.

Rajamangala University of Technologies Isan (RMUTI) consists of five campuses located in five provinces in the Northeastern Region-Nakhorn Ratchasima, Khonkean, Surin, Kalasin and Sakonnakhon. With its long history, continuous development and regional reputation, RMUTI has provided opportunities of higher education to students and people in the Northeast and upgraded the standards of vocational education leading to outstanding expertise in practical technology, research, invention and academic service to the society. The university also willingly accepts the participation from the public in terms of administration, management and supports its affairs for highly academic qualities and professional standards to meet manufacturers' needs. Each campus intends to develop manpower qualified in practical science and technology. To support its students to reach the expected qualities and professional standards, RMUTI equips all the campuses with new and high quality technology devices as well as high speed internet to support the teaching and learning process effectively and appropriately. Moreover, RMUTI also provides an LMS (Learning Management System) for teachers to create their online courses. As a result, there were a large number of courses available online for RMUTI students

(RMUTI, 2009). However, according to the 2009 organization annual report, no English Language teacher has no yet created a course for online teaching. The information gathered after a short semi-structured interview conducted during the annual faculty meeting in 2009 to all the English teachers. They emphasized the lack of self-confidence to use ICT for teaching and the lack of ICT competencies to create ICT teaching materials.

Due to the limited numbers of English teachers using LMS for teaching, RMUTI tried providing some professional development for English teachers to be able to use LMS for their teaching. However, the result of the training was completely negative since there was still no English teachers trying to use LMS for their teaching. The preliminary study asking for reasons refusing using LMS after training were 1) there was no help when they tried to use LMS for teaching after training, 2) there was no supports available after training, 3) the training provided just only how to use some tools available in LMS but how to use in English teaching appropriately, and 4) there was no motivating using LMS in teaching. Thus, the present study aims to bridge this gap. The researcher intended to create a curriculum for a blended training for English language teachers to improve their attitude toward the integration of ICT into teaching, improve their knowledge and performance to be able to integrate ICT into teaching appropriately and effectively. This study also evaluated the curriculum by all the teachers and experts. The results obtained were expected to be a source of information for future study and training for teachers in different fields.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were

1. To develop a blended teacher training curriculum for ICT integration in English teaching at Rajamangala University of Technology.
2. To verify the developed curriculum.
3. To implement the developed curriculum

Scope of this study

The present study aimed at developing blended teacher training curriculum for ICT integration in English teaching at Rajamangala University of Technology. The scopes of this study could be described as followed,

Phase 1 Context Analysis

1. The subjects of this study were 30 English language teachers in all 5 campuses of Rajamangala University of Technology Isan. They are Nakhon Ratchasima, Surin, Khon Kaen, Sakon Nakhon, and Kalasin.

2. The instruments used in this phase was a questionnaire asking for teacher's current use of ICT, their needs for professional development.

Phase 2 Curriculum Development

There were two groups of subjects in this phase.

1. The subject of this phase was three experts in curriculum development, ICT for education, and ICT integration in English teaching.

2. The subjects of this phase for the pilot study were 30 English language teachers of Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Chiangmai province.

There were two tools used in this phase according to the subjects.

1. The instrument for three experts was an evaluation form asking for the appropriateness of the developed curriculum.

2. The instrument used in the pilot study was the evaluation form asking for the trainees' opinion about the appropriateness of the curriculum.

Phase 3 Curriculum Implementaion

1. The subjects of this study were 30 English language teachers from all 5 campuses of Rajamangala University of Technology Isan. They are Nakhon Ratchasima, Surin, Khon Kaen, Sakon Nakhon, and Kalasin.

2. The instruments used in this phase were 1) a pre-training questionnaire asking for teacher's current ICT knowledge and skills, 2) a post training questionnaire asking for teacher's ICT knowledge and skills after training as well as their opinions toward the appropriateness of the training components, and 3) the final project evaluation form for teacher to evaluate their own project.

Phase 4 Curriculum revision

1. The subjects of this phase was 9 deans of humanities division of 9 RMUT.

The instrument used in this phase an opened-end question asking for their opinions towards the developed curriculum.

Significance of the Study

The curriculum developed for the study could be used as a model for a blended teacher training curriculum for ICT integration in English teaching at Rajamangala University of Technology with the following purposes; 1) to develop a blended teacher training curriculum for ICT integration in English teaching at Rajamangala University of Technology, 2) to verify the developed curriculum., 3) to implement the developed curriculum.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

1. Blended teacher training curriculum

Blended teacher training curriculum refers to a blending of different learning methods, techniques and resources and applying them in an interactively meaningful learning environment. For this study, the blended teacher training curriculum included two main training theme; 1) online theme, they are online contents, online assignment, online communication for consulting, providing feedback, giving suggestions and serving supports, and 2) off-line theme, they are face-to-face orientation for preparing the teachers readiness before participating the online activities, on-site supports on schedule and upon request. This off-line theme also include phone supports that are always available along the thirty days training period. This teacher training is also known as hybrid teacher training.

2. Curriculum Development

Curriculum development is the process of designing and preparing all the courses offered in a particular subject according to the problems found after conducting the needs analysis. The objectives, contents, learning activities and evaluation tools are designed for appropriate courses conducting to improve the trainees' abilities due to their problems. The process of curriculum development includes 1) identifying the types of professional development, 2) define the rationale of the curriculum, 3)define training goal and

training objectives, 4) define expected outcome, 5) define the course structure, 6) establish training course description, 7) develop the learning unit, 8) set the plan for learning activities, 9) establish assessment and evaluation method, 10) defining follow-up management

3. English Teachers' Attitude

English Teachers' Attitudes refer to the attitudes of the teachers who participate the training and they provided information reflect their attitude before, during and after the training to the questionnaires used in the training as well as an unstructured interview after the training and during the follow-up stage one month after the training which are all reflections towards the appropriateness of the training contents, training activities, and training team.

4. English Language Teachers

This term refers to 30 Thai teachers of English language courses at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan of all 5 campuses in academic year 2010. These teachers attended the professional development session voluntarily in order to increase their positive attitude toward the integration of ICT into teaching, their knowledge about the ICT integration into teaching and their performance and skills to integrate ICT into teaching with expectation to improve their self-confidence to integrate ICT into their teaching and ability to find ways to solve their problems found in teaching.

5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

This term refers to information and communication technology applications which are web based application, such as LMS (Learning Management System), weblog, webboard or forum, wiki, and interactive online teaching materials. They are also synchronous and asynchronous communication software for communicational purposes.

6. Instructional Design

Instructional Design is the practice of arranging media (communication technology) and content to help learners and teachers transfer knowledge most effectively. The process consists broadly of determining the current state of learner understanding, defining the end goal of instruction, and creating some media-based "intervention" to assist in the transition. Ideally, the process is informed by

pedagogically tested theories of learning and may take place in student-only, teacher-led or community-based settings. The outcome of this instruction may be directly observable and scientifically measured or completely hidden and assumed. Yutdhana's ID Model adapted as one component considering in developing the curriculum in this study.

7. Professional Development or Teacher Training

In order to support teachers to develop themselves, professional development or teacher training is one of the options. Professional development refers to activities to improve knowledge and skills to integrate ICT into teaching, such as, participating studying online lessons, participating the teaching material creation, creating some activities using ICT applications as teaching tools, and developing an online lesson as the final project. The professional development could be also the guides for all the teachers to acquire as ways to integrate ICT into their teaching effectively and appropriately.

8. Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning or PBL, is the use of in-depth and rigorous training projects to facilitate learning and assess trainees'. Trainees use technology and inquiry to respond to a complex issue, problem or challenge. PBL focuses on student-centered inquiry and group learning with the teacher acting as a facilitator.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher described the rationale of the study, the purposes of the study, the scope of the study. This is followed by the significance of the study. Then, operational definitions of key terms were presented.