Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the study

In the last few decades, English has emerged as a superior language for international communication. It is spoken by more people around the world than any other languages although Chinese is the most used within one location; English is regularly described as a truly 'global' language. It is the official language of the European Union, the United Nations, many Commonwealth countries and ASEAN as well as various other world organisations, making it a global lingua franca. Across every continent English is spoken and is the chosen language of international air travel. It is used in business, science, nautical fields, and medical circles, as well as information technology to name a few (Foley, 2005; Manivannan, 2006). In fact, 75% of the world use English in mail, fax and email, and 80% of the information stored on computers worldwide is in the English language. The vast majority of the Internet is also in the English language that is accessed by the millions throughout the day. Recentfigures indicate over 940 million people use the internet in English according to figures published in June, 2016 from the Internet World Stats.

As the modern world progresses and develops, the demand for communication amongst countries by using English is fundamental, Thailand being no exception. According to ASEAN Association Project, English is the important language to communicate amongst ASEAN countries and is the official language of ASEAN. In November 2010, the former Thai Education Minister, Mr. Chinnaworn Boonyakiat, delivered a lecture to members of the Thai senate in relation to "Thailand's Educational Preparation for ASEAN Community in 2015," where he stated the importance of the English language for ASEAN and added it is a 'World' language which isused across the globe for nearly all international dialogue and trade as reported by several sources such as Ajarn.com in December, 2010.English became an official language of the ASEAN countries in 2015 (Muttaqin, 2015). Therefore teaching and learning English in Thai society has become a very important project for the present Thai government.

There is a general concern from the government about people's English ability in Thailand and more awareness of English proficiency has been brought to light

since the target date of 2015 for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). A recent study by Anake Permvongsenee, the Secretary of the Thai Education Council, found that Thailand ranked fifth out of ten other ASEAN countries and ranked below Vietnam regarding student's English skills. Anake Permvongsenee additionally stated that the government policy of using the English language within Thailand still doesn't have a clear and defined objective according to anarticle in the Pattaya Daily News, (Thai students ranked, 2012). According to the British Council, indicators are that Thailand's English-language teaching and learning were subsiding below other ASEAN countries (Israngkura, 2013).

Many theories amongst native English teachers are discussed on teaching forums as to why Thailand is generally considered poor in the English language. An abundance of people believe that these theories start from the very top with the education system needing a major overhaul regarding learning a foreign language. For example, Mr. Anake Permvongsenee, the Secretary of Education Council,claimed that there were internal and external problems according to articles in the Pattaya Daily News and Chiang Rai Times in 2012. The 'Manual For The Internal Quality Assurance For Higher Education Institutions' elaborates further by claiming Thai education is directionless, overlapping, deficient in quality and inefficient (2014).Cultural differences and the respectfulness towards teachers were also stated. Thai students are usually passive learners and are spoon fed the information by taking notes distributed by their teachers. Thailand is a collectivist society and independence is not encouraged (Swatevacharkul, 2014).

Another factor for poor learning was down to the quality of teachers. Foreign and Thai nationals fall short of a desirable level in the English language (Dhanasobhon, 2006).It is common knowledge that a considerable number of foreign teachers that come to Thailand seldom have qualifications in English language, and for Thai teachers the problem is even greater with many teachers falling way short of an acceptable level of English. This is supported by a survey in 2006 in conjunction with Cambridge University that tested the levels of 400 Thai teachers of English, and it revealed that over 60% of the teachers had insufficient knowledge of English and teaching methodology. Out of the 40% that passed the knowledge and teaching skills, only 3% had a reasonable fluency in English (Kaewmala, 2012).Old teaching methodologies were still being used within classrooms despite government's initiatives to apply a more

student centred approach (Thongthew, 2008; Zeichner, 2013). Further implications from educators stipulated that many Thai teachers of English were unaware of various teaching methodologies, and teachers focus on rote memorisation and comprehension tests.The strong role of rote memory in the Thai classroom was echoed by Thamraksa along with the negativity it generates for learners (Thamraksa, 2004). Khanarat and Nomura further add that this approach to teaching stifles debate and critical thinking from the students(Khanarat, 2008; Nomura, 2008).Some teaching methods can not be implemented in Thailand due to the extremely low levels of English proficiency amongst Thai teachers of English. It is common knowledge that many teachers resort to using mainly Thai language in the classroom and minimise the target language (Jongusa, 1987; Ratanapreedakul, 1981; Reves& Medgyes, 1994; Sukchun, 1979) as highlighted in a study by Vacharaskunee (Vacharaskunee, 2000).This opposes Willis's theory that teaching English requires teachers to speak and use English as frequently as possible (Willis,1983).

Students from Thailand are not motivated by English as a rule. This can be seen across Thailand in any high school if a question was posed such as 'Do you like the English language?' the answer would be predominately negative. Students learn passively soaking up grammatical rules fed by their teachers whilst their motivation takes a downward spiral (Dueraman, 2012). Self motivation can be a problem for Thai learners but many researchers have been able to signify aspects of a teaching situation that enhance motivation in students (Lowman, 1984; Lucas, 1990; Weinert and Kluwe, 1987; Bligh, 1971). Listening and speaking however still remain the big problems for students in Thailand as these two skills are not components of government tests and less attention is put towards them in the classroom, English therefore is often perceived for utilitarian purposes and not communicative reasons. Overcrowded classrooms may also restrict communicative lessons and reduce student talk time in Thailand.

Numerous theories could be argued as to the causes of problems for students in EFL and ESL classroom settings but often the resulting factor is a lack of communicative competence. A person's communicative competence can be described as the tacit knowledge they possess and the ability they have to use it effectively. Students whilst engaged in the English language, frequently have breakdowns in speech acts, endure anxiety issues and find difficulties in conveying both verbal and non verbal strategies. Scholars have cited that communicative strategy training in

classrooms could directly help students to communicate more effectively, raise students' awareness of communicative strategies, and enhance students' confidence in speaking English (Dornyei, 1995; Kongsom, 2009).

Diverse teaching methods are in practice all over the world to help students improve their learning of a language, with scholars and researchers constantly seeking new theories as to maximise a learner's acquisition and ability. Certain teaching methodologies that are student-centred which could improve English skills for Thai students are plentiful. Students are often stimulated by doing activities in the classroom as opposed to being passive learners. There are many factors that may stimulate and help students to learn (Bligh, 1971; Sass, 1989). Task-based learning is a method to achieve good development and is student-centred that many scholars have reported. Harmer (2001) stated 'task-based learning (TBL) was popularised by Prabhu while working in Bangalore, India.Prabhu noticedthat his students could learn language just as easily with non-linguistic problems as when they were concentrating on linguistic questions' (Justo, 2015). The task-based learning method is used by teachers throughout the world in order to develop students' abilities whilst offering a various approach to traditional 'present, practise and produce' techniques that are frequently used within the Thai classroom. The method allows students to work in groups during the 6 step task cycle. Furthermore, the grouping allows students to communicate with each other for task completion to take place. The communication process is not bound by sole use of the target language, thus reducing immediate anxieties. However, there will be a language shift to the target language before the task is completed. According to David Kolb, learners move from what they already know and can do to the implementation of new knowledge and skills, so task-based learning allows students to reflect and transform their immediate experiences (Kolb, 1984). The researcher selected this teaching methodology to investigate if it provided more opportunities for the students to create and produce the target language. Moreover, a combination of a student centred approach and a subject such as drama, which may also allow certain freedom in language terms were reasons for the selection.

Drama is a controversial subject in the viewpoint for many teachers in English as a foreign language as they fail to see its significance within the classroom for some reasons. For example, it may appear uncontrolled or disorganised from a passing observer (Royka, 2002). However, the subject is held in high esteem in various

countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom with them recognising its pedagogy by installing it on their national curriculum. There have been a sufficient number of studies that reported beneficial effects of using drama for language learning (Fuentes, 2010; Zyoud, 2012). Despite its importance in numerous countries around the world, drama has failed to make it into the Thai national curriculum although some colleges and universities offer this subject to students. Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University in Phitsanulok is one such educational institution that runs a compulsory course for its English major students in the Faculty of Education. The teaching of language by using drama has such potential because it may create real life contexts for listening and purposeful language production, in which learners have to use their language resources (Chauhan, 2004).

There are over 40 Rajabhat Universities across Thailand with many offering courses in bachelor degrees and others running doctoral courses. The Rajabhat Institutes were originally designed as teacher colleges but were elevated to become universities in 2004 by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Rajabhat Universities are ISO certified; government sponsored learning institutes that are open to all Thai nationals. The rankings of the Rajabhat Universities vary between provinces whilst some rank outside the top 100 universities in Thailand; others make it into the top 40 universities according tothe 2013Webometrics Rankings. Pibulsongkram Rajabaht currently ranks at 48 in the universities in Thailand according to the 2016 figures released by the Webometrics Rankings of World Universities. The researcher encountered communicative problems with students using the English language at the university for over 8 years. Failures to convey messages, breakdowns in utterances and language avoidance had been witnessed.

Therefore, to summarise, the researcher selected students majoring in English within the Faculty of Education at Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University in Phitsanulok to use in conjunction with task-based learning and drama in order to determine if communicative competence could be increased. The participants and the location of study were chosen by purpose for the investigation. The subject of drama was selected as the researcher believed that it allowed freedom of the target language to be used in group working. Task-based learning was selected due to it being a student centred methodology and it promotes collaborative working.

Objectives of the research

    1. To investigate the effect ofusing task-based learning and drama for students' communicative competence.

    2. To investigate students' perceptions towards learning English by using the task-based learning method and drama.

Hypotheses

    1. Student's communicative competence will be significantly higher in their post-test score than their pre-test score.

    2. Students will increase their perceptions at a high level after learning task-based learning and drama.

Significance of the study

      This study shows if Pibulsongkram Rajabhat English major students can improve their communicative competence by using task-based learning in drama classes. Additionally it indicates student's satisfaction towards learning English whilst undergoing lesson plans for English through drama classes under a task-based learning method. Researchers and English foreign language teachers may apply the findings of this study for their teaching and for further research.

Scope of the study

        Participants

      The participants of the study were English major students from Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University. The participants were 34 English major students who were studying in the third year from the Faculty of Education, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, selected by the purposive sampling method. 8 English classes (200 minutes per class) were organised for the research with a total of over26 hours for the entirety of the study.
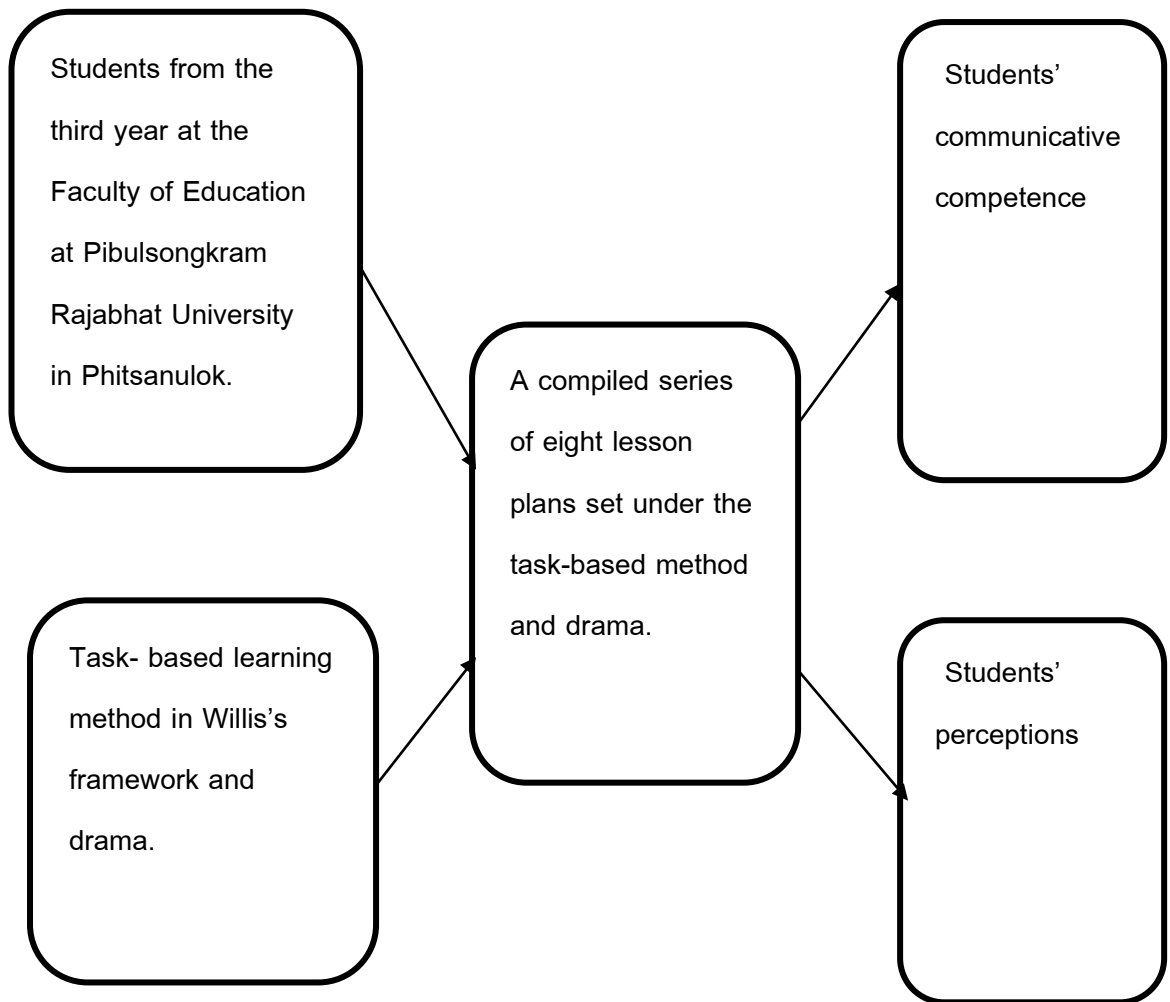
        Variables

      The variables of this study included lesson plans for drama under the task-based learning method as the independent variable and student's communicative competence and students' perceptions as the dependent variables.

Definitions of words

1. **Task-based learning –** A teaching method that focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. In this study the 6 steps of Willis's framework are used. The six steps used for the research 1) – Pre task 2) - Task 3) – Planning 4) – Report 5) – Analysis 6) – Practise. These six steps are used throughout each of the eight lessons.

2. **Drama –** Plays as a genre or a style of literature or the activity of acting. The drama or role-plays for this research were constructed in accordance to the course description stipulated by Pibulsongkram Rajabaht University for the English through drama course. The drama and role-plays consist of verbal and non verbal communication in order for students to display levels of communicative competence.

3. **Communicative competence -** A term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and so forth, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. It is understood thatthere are four components of communicative competence, grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Firstly, grammatical competence can be determined by the recognition and production of distinctive grammatical structures of a language and to use them effectively in communication. Secondly, discourse competence can be measured by the linking of words used to create flowing sentences. Thirdly, sociolinguistic competence may be adjudicated by the polite forms, manner and behaviour expressed in the language that is performed. Finally, strategic competence may be measured by how students execute their actions in both verbal and non verbal forms in order to conduct language or expression.Verbal can be described as using sounds, words and speaking whereas non verbal may include gestures, facial expressions or body movement. In this research, the emphasis and assessment was on students' strategic competence.

Students from the
third year at the
Faculty of Education
at Pibulsongkram
Rajabhat University
in Phitsanulok.

Task- based learning
method in Willis's
framework and
drama.

A compiled series
of eight lesson
plans set under the
task-based method
and drama.

Students'
communicative
competence

Students'
perceptions

Picture 1 Conceptual framework of research