



## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

#### 1.1 Background

English is a required subject for nursing students in Thailand. Six credits are allotted to Foundation English Program which provides first-year students with skills in English for communicative purposes. The major emphasis, however, is given to reading and writing, which are integrated with listening and speaking<sup>(1)</sup>. Different universities have different approaches to the teaching of English and have different emphasis also. Some universities emphasize reading and writing skills which most Thai schools do and little emphasis is given to listening and speaking skills. Course design may be somewhat similar but course objectives, content, learning experiences and teaching methodology may vary from institution to institution.

The conventional way of teaching English still prevails in most Thai schools in Thailand, that is, teachers do all the teaching and talking while students listen. This is supported by Wanida Chokasutta's study, in which she finds out that in teaching and learning process of the Bachelor's Degree English program in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Thai Chambers of Commerce, instructors speak more and students listen<sup>(2)</sup>. Hardly are students given a chance to

actively participate in class. Teaching methods do not vary and learning tasks are often not suitable to the objectives of the course because often times many educational programs do not have clearly defined purposes, so if we are to study an educational program systematically and intelligently, we must first be sure as to the educational objectives aimed at<sup>(3)</sup>.

In some cases one may ask a teacher of English what objectives are being aimed at and get no satisfactory reply. Just as students fail exams because they do not answer the questions precisely, teachers in English fail when they do not know why they are teaching something<sup>(4)</sup>.

Teaching specific topics or skills without making clear their content in the broader fundamental structure of a field of knowledge is uneconomical in several deep senses. Such teaching makes it exceedingly difficult for the student to generalize from what he has learned to what he will encounter later<sup>(5)</sup>. This is supported by Kanchana Sindhavanonda et al<sup>(6)</sup> when she says that curriculum structure should be well planned in advance for the purpose of controlling the teaching process and of achieving the objectives of the curriculum. According to Hilda Taba<sup>(7)</sup> it is impossible to make good decisions about the methods of learning and teaching apart from the concepts

regarding the nature of the learners and the principles of learning. A design of curriculum according to her, needs to make explicit its relationship to the factors in school organization and the instructional resources which are necessary to implement it.

In a study conducted by Sornpet Chaisongkram<sup>(8)</sup>, he says that the school management system in Thailand lacks enough educational supervision, coordination, follow-up and assessment which are important issues to be considered in the implementation of school curriculum.

Another factor that affects the teaching of English in Thailand is that Thai teachers mostly use Thai to teach English. According to a study conducted by Khanitha Kreemaha, second year engineering students at Chulalongkorn University prefer Thai teachers to native speakers because they say Thai teachers understand their problems in English and can explain difficult concepts in Thai. Most students say they cannot study English in English<sup>(9)</sup>.

From most nursing students' point of view, although English is compulsory, it is an unimportant subject. This is because it does not receive many academic credits and nursing students have to study English in the first year only. The

content is very general and not related to nursing. Grammar points are learned without practical applications and a few short passages are given and explained in Thai<sup>(10)</sup>. Nursing students have little opportunity to use the sound lab because most nursing colleges do not have their own language lab. Therefore, speaking and listening skills are hardly practiced. Nursing subjects are much more interesting. From the nursing students' point of view, as practicing nurses, they do not need to use English that much because they will cater to Thai patients in general<sup>(10)</sup>.

Most nursing students or most Thai students are not aware of the importance of English. They do not see the need of studying English because English is not used as the official language in Thailand. Besides students are not properly motivated to learn English because they do not see the importance of learning it. For most Thai students learning English is not fun. English is a boring subject. This is supported by a study conducted by Khanitha Kreemaha<sup>(9)</sup> among engineering students. She says that most engineering students at Chulalongkorn University misunderstand the objectives of the English course they are taking. Students say they need not study English because this subject is not meant for them. They add that it is best only for Arts students. The same finding

is reported by Siripol Kantatip<sup>(11)</sup> when she says that the majority of students in technical colleges do not also see the importance of learning technical English. One question that can be asked is what can be done to make the English courses taught at schools and universities interesting and enjoyable.

Therefore, objectives modifying attitude and perceptions of students to the learning of English should be included in the English curriculum that will be designed for nursing students.

## 1.2 Rationale

Undoubtedly, English is important not only in the business field but also in the field of science and medicine especially to those who are engaged in the health care professions. English is essential for technology transfer, which is necessary for the transmission of ideas. Communication is very important in the field of medicine and this can only be done if there is a common language that can link health care professionals in the world. And that common language is English. Medical news and breakthroughs in medicine are mostly in English. Most international journals and textbooks are in English<sup>(12)</sup>. Swales estimates that more than half of the research papers produced in the world are published in

English<sup>(13)</sup>. Baldauf and Jermudd have found that in chemistry, biology, physics, medicine and mathematics more than 65% of all international journals are in English<sup>(14)</sup>. Most importantly, health care professionals work with human life. Proper patient treatment and proper use of medical terminology is critical. Good understanding of English is crucial in order to practice their professions effectively<sup>(10)</sup>.

According to Songsri Soranastaporn<sup>(10)</sup>, English is very important to nursing career. She says English is used in day-to-day routine work, for instance, reading textbooks, journals, patient's reports and laboratory reports. Secondly, it is a means of communicating with foreign patients, technicians and experts. Thirdly, it is needed for further nursing studies both in Thailand and abroad. Finally, it is necessary to those who would like to work in other countries, especially English-speaking countries.

The nurses' English proficiency should therefore be improved by one means or another in the future. And one of these means is to provide nursing students with an English course that is not only useful in their future work but also in carrying out their various societal activities. But setting up an English course for nursing students is not easy because

the English used in the nursing field is one of the languages for specific purposes<sup>(15)</sup>. Therefore, a survey of the English language needs of nurses practicing their profession is necessary to serve as bases for designing an English course that is appropriate for nursing students in Thailand. This is called needs analysis which, according to Richterich<sup>(16)</sup> will lead to a definition of aims which, operationally speaking, must be translated into language acts and learning acts. In other words, a method for defining the content of the learning units and their pedagogic strategies.

To set up an English course, the characteristics of the course can be obtained from the details of the main components of the process of teaching and learning which are the objectives, the content, the method of learning and the evaluation.

This study investigates the current English needs of nurses practicing their profession in government and private hospitals in Bangkok and the nurses' preferred English course for nursing students that will form bases in designing an appropriate English Course for Nursing Students.