

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SUPPLY OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN THE FORMAL EDUCATION SECTOR 1960-2000

#### 3.1 The Purpose and Scope of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the "supply" of English teaching offered by the formal educational sector. The formal educational sector encompasses a vast range of learning institutions, within which our focus will be on primary and secondary schools. The reason for focusing on these is that our interest lies in identifying broad trends. The primary and secondary school systems are the least specialized among the schools in the formal educational system and their target is the vast majority of the population. The period under study is 1960 to 2000. The selection of the time span is meant to broadly parallel our examination of English teaching in the private sector, but the selection of the year 1960 itself reflects the fact that a major revision of the curriculum took place in that year.

One disclaimer has to be made right at the start: There is little direct quantitative information on what the formal educational sector have actually delivered and accomplished in terms of English knowledge among the Thai population at large. We are facing here the perennial problem of the difficulty in appraising the output and performance of services and particularly public or semi-public services. In order to get an idea, we will be looking at indirect ways of obtaining such information, with the focus being on examining the evolvement of educational policies and their expression through the curriculums. The information that would be obtained will be the intentions of the policy drafters and some feedback commentary on the success of the implementation of previous policies. Compared to a private sector business environment, what we will do

here is to study a company's performance by looking at a series of successive business plans, without having objective quantitative measures of actual success or failure.

Obviously, the picture thus provided is only partial, but it can at least inform us of broad trends and of cardinal problems faced by the English educational system.

The focus of this chapter will therefore be the developments of the English teaching curriculums of primary and secondary Thai schools from the 1960s to the present and their implementation. The discussion will be separated into historical periods based on major changes in the curriculum. Changes in policies offer both a judgment on the performance of the educational system in the past and a prediction of what it is intended to do in the future. The analysis pertaining to each major curriculum change will look at policies and then comment about their implementation. While doing this, one should emphasize again that there is a gap between the extent of information which is available about policy formation and that which is available about their implementation. The policy formation process itself is extensively documented with elaborate details as to the reasons and the debates behind the changes in policy, the policies themselves and suggested ways of applying these policies. Records concerning the actual application of policies are, as mentioned above, sketchy at best. We will rely here on feedback information offered by the newly revised curriculums themselves, some research papers, anecdotal evidence and interviews conducted with people in the Instruction and Curriculum Development Department, Ministry of Education. After the survey of the main historical revisions in the English curriculum we will offer an overview of the common traits and common problems which are shared by all four policy revisions. As we will see, there is a shared pedagogical philosophy behind all these different revisions. At the same time, they all face the same set of problems again and again. These problems are mostly related to implementation.



While the evolution of policies will be fully covered in the first section of this chapter, one of the main issues effecting implementation, that of the shortage, quantitative and qualitative, of teachers, will be dealt with in a separate section of this chapter. The reason for separating this issue is because it is so central for English teaching as compared to the teaching of other subjects, and because it is symbiotically linked to the growth of private sector English teaching. The treatment of the subject of teachers will consist primarily of literature review that will encompass a wide range of research papers and surveys which were conducted about this important subject.

One should also note that the discussion of educational policies is of great interest as these are often closely linked to the development of demand for English proficiency. "Demand" for English proficiency is conceived here as a market force, but it often runs parallel to what policy makers identify as the required set of English skills which the curriculum should develop and promote. In that sense, policy makers try to anticipate future demand and provide the relevant educational content. Nevertheless, the market driven demand and the aims of policy makers are related but not necessarily identical. Policy makers might focus on skills that are not yet in "demand" in the market economy, or already less in demand. In that sense the policy making process might be out of sync with the market reality. Moreover, policy makers might also have goals that are not at all determined by a market economy, such as, for example, the development of broad-minded adults with extensive liberal education and knowledge of their society. Such goals will be related to a social rather than economic agenda.

The period that we shall look at is marked by four major revisions of the English teaching curriculum, namely, the revision of 1960, the revision of 1977/81, the revision of 1990 and the revision of 1996. The mere fact of the increasing frequency of change reflects the escalation in the magnitude of the challenges, which the drafters of the curriculums are facing. The curriculum drafters freely acknowledge this fact. In general, I found the

reasons offered by the curriculum drafters for making the revisions as based on a very realistic view of the challenges of the modern world, the phenomenon of globalization and the growth in the international economy. We can find, for instance, the 1996 Curriculum, declaring that the growth in the information technology has taken Thailand into a new era, the era of globalization. For Thais to be able to communicate with people in this global society both in economic and social context, English comes to play a more pivotal role. (Ministry of Education, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Development, 1996: 1).

## 3.2 The Curriculum Revision of the 1960

### 3.2.1 New Educational Approach in the 1960 Curriculum

The year 1960 marks a major change in the policies regarding the teaching of English in Thailand. The change is in both the content and form of English teaching.

In terms of the form of teaching, the change was from English as an elective course to be a required course for all students starting from high primary school (prathom grade five and six): "In the year 1960 the new educational policy was announced with a curriculum which corresponds to this new policy. English has become a regular required subject which each student had to study in high primary school" (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 98).

The important change in the content or orientation of the curriculum is from an emphasis on the teaching method of grammar and translation to an emphasis on communication skills and from a focus on written language to a focus on spoken language. The underlying assumption of this new approach is that language is a living and evolving

entity, which cannot be described and mastered by formal rules of grammar. It was realized more and more that mere learning of grammatical rules led to the creation of sentences which are not used in the spoken language and which are not relevant to daily life. According to this approach, the "real" language is the spoken language, with grammatical rules being created post-factum to describe this living and fast changing linguistic reality, but never really catching up with it. One should start with the spoken language and then describe its rules rather than starting with rules first. The new approach therefore emphasizes intensive practice of the spoken language instead of the rote memorization of grammatical rules.

The shift in emphasis that was declared in the 1960s curriculum has set the tone for all revisions that took place later. The new tone is a combination of two approaches: that of the "communicative approach" and that of the "learner-centered approach", both of which are take-offs from traditional teaching methods. The two approaches, though separate in principle, do share some common characteristics. Teaching language as a tool for communication means that students have to be engaged in a variety of communicative activities. The emphasis on such activities implies the application of a "student-centered" approach. From the 1960 Curriculum revision and onwards, these two approaches were strengthened, given additional interpretations and additional tools, sometimes corrected, but never reversed. In that sense, the 1960 change in English curriculum is a major crossroads that overshadows successive revisions.

The policy as stated in the 1960 revision requires that all four English skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing should be given equal emphasis, instead of the emphasis being on grammar, reading and translation, as before. Moreover, the four skills have to be taught together instead of breaking up the learning process into different segments focusing on each skill separately. The pedagogical approach adopted by the Ministry of Education was the "aural-oral approach" according to which

students should be encouraged to listen and repeat sentences spoken by their teachers as a way to communicate in English. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 31).

The main principles of this approach are: 1) New vocabulary and sentence structures should be taught by using listening, speaking, reading and writing, in that order. 2) Emphasis should be laid on teaching vocabulary and pronunciation, always bearing in mind that these are different between Thai and English. 3) Use of Thai in teaching is not forbidden, but should be limited to explanations of grammar, new vocabulary and complex structures, where the point cannot be made by acting out or other teaching aids. After the explanation in Thai, emphasis should be laid on heavy practice in English. 4) The emphasis is on very intensive practice in all four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. 5) Practice of listening and speaking will support the reading and writing skills and should therefore be given the priority. (Areerat Nampetch, 1987:122)

### 3.2.2 The Goals of the 1960 Curriculum

The goals of the 1960 English curricula, according to Durr (1971:163), were:

1. "To make pupils see the necessity of studying English as a medium of international communication, as a key to a treasured house of knowledge and information; and as a mean to learn about the world at large.
2. To enable pupils to use English for communication, and to develop skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in accordance with their levels of education and the age ability of the pupils.
3. To make pupils realize the importance of English in their daily lives and the frequent opportunities for the use of the language.
4. To develop an interest and a spirit of inquiry so that pupils keep increasing their knowledge of English.

5. To enable pupils to continue their study of English in the higher level of education."

It would be worthwhile here to refer back to the two major reasons for promoting the study of English mentioned in reference to the reign of King Rama the 4th, which were the following: 1) The need to "transfer the western world's body of knowledge into Thai" would correspond to the translation skills, or written language skills. 2) The need "to converse with foreign emissaries directly" corresponds to communication, or spoken language skills. These two basic "mission statements" for English teaching have not changed, but their relative importance did, particularly so in the 1960 curriculum revision.

The major change, as can be seen in Durr's goals 2 and 3, is therefore that the ability to fluently communicate with foreigners in English has turned from a specialized skill, needed by a small group of people, to a skill deemed as important for the majority of the population. Such a shift in emphasis has to correspond to a new perspective on the type and scale of interaction between Thais and foreigners. Instead of relating to just a small specialist group, the ability to communicate in English is now seen as important for Thais in almost every profession and coming from all walks of life.

While both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> goals emphasize the importance of English as an instrument of communications, the first, third and fourth goals emphasize the need to develop an awareness of the importance of English in today's world. The emphasis on such awareness is critical in a world where policy makers have a clearer vision of the importance of English than the subjects of their policies. Over the years, this awareness will spread through the population reaching a point where the study of English will be something demanded by parents rather than something forced on them. Awareness is also an important base for "student-centered" pedagogy, which will gain ascendancy in the following Curriculum revisions. Such pedagogy will be useless with active

participation of students and such participation cannot take place without awareness of the importance of the subject. In that sense, the emphasis on awareness creates the basis for future curriculum amendments.

The shift in policy as reflected in the 1960s curriculum was very forward looking as it pre-dates the transition to an export intensive economy in Thailand, as well as the general rapid growth in international trade, communications and transportation, which occurred in the mid 1980s. The need for extensive English communication skills, which seems so obvious, now was not yet so evident at that period.

### 3.2.3 Foreign Involvement in the Creation of the 1960 Curriculum

The process of policy making behind the 1960s curriculum is related to the efforts by various U.S led aid organizations to support Thailand in its development process. The effort was applied to numerous areas of infrastructure development such as roads, communications, economic management and also education, and was a part of the general cold-war policy aimed at speeding up the development of USA allies. As Pasuk notes: "As the US developed its cold war strategy between 1947 and 1950, Thailand came to play a part. By 1950, the US was deeply involved in the opposition to communism in Indo-China. Thailand became important in US policy making, first as a 'domino' that needed to be held upright, and later as a strategic base for US military operations in Indo-China. To achieve these policy aims, the US took an interest in the internal affairs of Thailand. The US policy makers believed that the best recipe for resistance to communism was strong government and economic growth based on private capital....to achieve the second aim, the US pressed the Thai military leaders to embark on programs of economic development based on support for private capitalism" (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 1997: 125-26).



The initiative behind the change in the curriculum is therefore not the result of pure domestic initiative, and in general the agenda of development was, in fact, subordinated to "bigger" strategic considerations. In that sense, we can compare "development" in that period to King Chulalongkorn's reforms, which were also development for the sake of strategic considerations. Similarly to that earlier period, development was seen as an instrument aimed at fortifying the Kingdom against foreign dangers. Similarly, education, including the need to acquire English literacy, were seen as part of this development process. Interestingly, the two efforts, though over 60 years apart, complemented each other: "During the late 1960s the national network of primary schools and village administration first proposed during the 1890s was finally completed" (Dixon, 1999: 84)

Foreign aid during the period of the 1960s came in numerous forms, such as financial aid, military aid, the support of experts in different areas and in some instances even the participation of foreign personnel at grassroots level.

An area of educational development in which there was a heavy involvement of foreign experts was the curriculum planning and drafting process. The 1960 curriculum itself was a joint creation of the Ministry of Education and the USA sponsored South East Asian English Regional Project, or SEAREP. SEAREP was headquartered at the College of Education, Prasanmitr and their staffs were from the University of Michigan. The main activity was teacher training, focusing on training in the aural-oral approach. SEAREP offered classes both in Bangkok and in the country-side, as short term courses but also as regular university courses, and it closely collaborated with the Department of Teacher Training in Chulalongkorn University as well as with a number of departments in the Ministry of Education. The project lasted from 1958 to 1964. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 46).

The heavy involvement of foreigners in the policy-making process meant that the perspectives and goals that were incorporated in the curriculum were often those of outsiders looking in. They reflected the views of these experts on the future needs of the Kingdom rather than the realization of local public servants, not to mention to population at large. The call for better awareness of the importance of English, stated in the Curriculum's goals, was in fact directed not only towards students but also towards the local educational establishment. These views were also very often based on generalizations rather than deep acquaintance with the local reality.

As a reflection of the above, much of the later criticism of the goals of the 1960 curriculum as being over-ambitious could be related to the fact that it was drafted with heavy involvement of foreigners. These experts inserted their own ambitious goals into a situation that was not yet ready for their pursuance both in terms of the public's recognition of the needs as well as in terms of the physical infrastructure to implement the program.

An additional difficulty was a result of the fact that text-books were designed by foreigners who were not well acquainted with local traditions and way of life. As Areerat Nampetch notes: "the curriculum was written by foreign academics (English experts). Text books materials were standardized for students across the nation, no different between students in Bangkok and provinces." (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 152-153). " In a sense, because the creation of teaching materials was dominated by foreign experts who were not sensitive to local culture and way of life, the implementation of the curriculum lofty goals was doomed. How could students "realize the importance of English in their daily lives" or have "frequent opportunities for the use of the language", as the policy's third goal declares, or "to develop an interest and a spirit of inquiry" as the fourth goal declares, if the program's basic materials did not relate to student's actual daily lives.

### 3.3 The Curriculum Revision in 1977 and the Controversy Regarding the Place of English Teaching in Thai Primary Education

#### 3.3.1 The Main factors Behind the Change

A major revision of the 1960 curriculum took place in 1977. The revision has become the underlying notion of the 1977 National Scheme of Education. The following year, 1978 (2521 B.E.) the new curricula of all subjects for both elementary and junior secondary levels were implemented. And since the structure of the school levels was changed from a 4-3-3-2 system to a 6-3-3 system, it was not until the academic year 1981 (2524 B.E.) that the upper secondary curricula were implemented. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 35-40).

The main forces behind the change were the following: 1) Acknowledgement of failure in implementing the 1960 policy, particularly as regards the introduction of English as a required subject for all students. 2) A radical change in the orientation of educational philosophy to a more practical, life-long experience and learner-centered type of education. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 41). 3) A third background factor that impacted policy makers in Thailand was the discussion of a possible reorientation of the economy towards exports. During that period 'the growth of the urban economy slowed under the impact of the weakening of agricultural growth, the withdrawal of US patronage, and the inherent limitations of the import substitution strategy. The transition to export orientation was advocated by technocrats, bankers, potential exporters, and foreign creditors, but blocked by vested interests in both business and bureaucracy" (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, 1997: 169). A future reorientation towards exports meant a much higher requirement for English literacy among large segments of the population. This called for a re-examination of the existing curriculum with a view of implementing improvements. Nevertheless, the fact that the transition to an export economy did not actually occur yet,

led to a sense that things should not be rushed out, and that quality rather than speed is the key characteristic required. Eventually, as the economy was aggressively reoriented towards exports from 1983/4, two successive revisions of the curriculum were implemented, the first in 1990 and the second in 1996. The fact that two closely times revisions were made during the period of a fast export led growth demonstrates how closely linked are educational policies, particularly as regards the teaching of English, and the orientation of the economy.

As mentioned above, in the new curriculum English was not any more a required subject, and, in fact, in the first version of the curriculum it was also prohibited for teaching in primary schools. It was later re-introduced in the final version of the 1978/81 (B.E. 2521/24). English curricula as one elective within the foreign language group of elective courses for students of only lower and upper school levels. This re-introduction came in response to a major backlash among parents who viewed the prohibition of teaching English as a downgrade of the primary educational system. As a result of this mounting public pressure, English was reinstated, but as an elective subject in primary schools which had the means and manpower to teach it properly. The "elective" status of English relates to two different spheres of choice. In the first, the students can choose English as one subject belonging to the optional group of subjects titled 'life experience courses'. In the second sphere, the schools themselves have the choice whether or not to offer English to their students based on their available manpower and equipment resources. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 44). The reinstatements of English, though as a "double elective" was enough to satisfy the angry parents. In practice, most schools felt that they have no choice but to offer English to their students, and the "elective" status of the subject had very little weight. (Prasop Chaiyarat, interview, June 1, 2000).

### 3.3.2 The Goals of the 1978/81 Curriculum

Even though the 1978/81 curriculum was drafted as a correction to the 1960 curriculum, in terms of educational orientation it continues on the same path that this earlier curriculum has embarked on. The emphasis is still on oral communication skills, namely, listening and speaking, and the place of reading and writing skills, as well as the study of grammar, is even further reduced. The shift towards "learner based" at the expense of "teacher based" pedagogical philosophy, corresponds well with the shift towards teaching focused on communication skills. The kind of activities which "learner based" teaching promotes usually involve open oral communications between members of the class, whereas "teacher based" teaching tends to involve more emphasis on written practice.

### 3.3.3 Weaknesses of the 1960 Curriculum and the Need for Revision

English teaching in Thailand evolved from a subject being taught by native English speakers to a small group of elite students into a subject being taught by Thai teachers to the majority of the population. The 1960 curriculum, by making Thai a required subject, made it obligatory for every Thai pupil, starting from higher elementary school, to learn English. By simple enforcement, without provision of adequate tools, the new policy was doomed before it even started. Not enough was done in regards to the number of teachers, the qualification of the teachers and teaching aids such as books, tape-recorders etc. Over and beyond the lack of adequate resources, there stands the problem of a lack of positive attitude of the students towards the learning of English. This point is particularly acute in the countryside where the opportunities students have to speak English are few (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 144) and where the knowledge of English is not relevant to daily life. These students are not able to understand the broad visions for the country which are embedded in the educational policy of the country.

Their lack of motivation is only compounded by over crowded classes that leave no room for personal attention and teaching materials which refer to a world with which they are not familiar at all. The foreign background of the teaching materials is the result of the heavy involvement of foreign experts in designing the curriculum, which I discussed at length in section 3.2.3. The other points refer simply to the physical capacity of the school system. The main weakness of the 1960 curriculum is therefore that it was simply overambitious.

### 3.3.4 The Public Controversy Regarding the 1978/81 Curriculum

The proposal for the new curriculum, first disclosed to the public in 1977, created an uproar. Objections were raised that the new curriculum is socially unjust and will increase the social and economic gap between the poor and the rich, because poorer students, who complete only the elementary (prathom) education will have no chance to acquire some base of knowledge in English. But perhaps the main reason for the objection to the new curriculum was that parents wanted their children to start learning English from as early as possible, while the ban on elementary school English teaching pushed the start of English teaching to high school level. The objection to the new curriculum demonstrates that the awareness of the importance of English, one of the main goals of the 1960s Curriculum, was now very high among the population. Parents insisted on the right of their children to receive English teaching from as early as possible as a key for their future. (Prasop Chaiyarat, interview, June 1, 2000).

Other objections were based on research that shows that at an early age, the brain is more open to absorb a new language. Therefore, the earlier a person starts to learn a second language in school, the more chance he has of mastering it. Starting at an older age guarantees a superficial degree of receptiveness. This point stands in contrast to

the claim that one has to fully master his own mother's tongue before embarking on the study of a foreign language. (Pornchulee Achawaamrung, 1999: 84).

This contradictory argument was one of the main points raised by supporters of the new bills. They also point out that the lack of human resources in the primary educational system led to a situation where teaching English was forced. What transpired is that teachers who themselves did not speak English correctly duplicated their own version of broken English among students, who thus started off learning incorrect English. The inadequacy of the teachers also contributed to create a negative attitude towards learning the language. What was taught in class was different than what was encountered in real life situations, making the study look irrelevant and useless. The fact that the study was forced simply made the situation even worse.

The events related to the change of curriculum in 1978/81 are of interest because they offer a rare glimpse of the general public's attitudes towards the teaching of English. It demonstrates beyond any doubt that there is enormous interest, by the general public, in having their children acquire a mastery of English. Not accepting the judgment of the educational establishment of its own deficiencies in delivering proper English teaching to the general public, the demand was that the goal is not abandoned. The main objection was to the ban on teaching English in primary education. This went beyond the cancellation of the 1960s curriculum's designation of English as a required subject. Parents could live with English as an elective subject, judging correctly that schools, particularly in metropolitan areas, will have to offer it in order to attract students. The complete ban was, however, strongly opposed, and consequently rescinded.

As mentioned, the rationale behind the original decision of 1977 was the lack of qualified English teachers in the majority of primary schools. Added to it was the proposition that second language learning should be introduced only after students have mastered their

mother tongue, if one wants good result in language teaching. (Thailand TESOL, 1983: 40-42). As we have seen in chapter 2, the debate about the degree of mastery of Thai required before one commences the study of English is as old as the first proper English teaching schools in Thailand. The argument that a high level of Thai proficiency, including grammar and literature, are required before one can have sufficient tools to properly study a new language has always been the reason given for introducing the study of English at a relatively later stage of one's education. The argument is related more to nationalistic considerations than to real pedagogy. In our case, this reason seems also to be aimed at giving the new policy a base of justification, which is beyond the simple acknowledgement of the failure of the system and its lack of adequate human and other resources.

### 3.4 The Curriculum Revision of 1990 and the "Learner-Centered" Approach

#### 3.4.1 The Main factors Behind the Change

The English curricula of 1978/81 was continued to be used until 1990. In an effort to enhance curriculum development, several agencies were monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the curricula of 1978/81. The goals of the new curriculum are identical to those of its predecessors. According to the findings, the curricula were still not responsive to the rapid changes in socio-economic conditions and the scientific and technological progress. It did not adequately enhance people's knowledge, morality, and ability to become self-reliant in keeping with those changes and to apply appropriate technology in improving their life. In light of these findings, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development (DCID) had therefore revised the school curricula and stressed the importance of learning process over content. The 1990 (B.E. 2533) curricula structure aimed at developing knowledge, ability, attitude and managerial skill to enable learners to acquire analytical and problem-solving skill, to



appreciate learning and to apply knowledge for everyday life. (Ministry of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, 1990: 3-5). The direction of the change taken by the 1990 Curriculum revision is therefore the same as taken by previous revisions, towards which it stands primarily as reinforcement. The "Guidelines for Implementation" of the Curriculum therefore include general instructions such as "Organizing teaching-learning activities using learners as central; making the activities relevant to learners' need and living conditions; and providing equal opportunities for them to develop according to their abilities.....Organizing teaching learning activities to promote learning by doing and emphasize development of concepts in all areas of experiences"(Ministry of Education, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Development, 1990: 3-5). All the above constitutes an expansion of the learner's centered approach to a degree that goes well beyond the first steps taken in that direction by the 1978/81 Curriculum.

Looking at the bigger picture, one should bear in mind that this revision took place in the midst of a rapid process of export led economic growth. The needs for English communications were much greater than before and were growing by the day and the development of English skills among the broader population required close scrutiny. The acceleration of needs rather than actual feedback on the previous curriculums is what created the tendency to reexamine the curriculums at an accelerated pace compared to the past. The country was also in an advantageous economic situation and could afford to invest in technological equipment for education. In hindsight, it is regrettable that the resources that went into a plethora of gadgets were not directed towards the development of human resources, an area that has been, and remains, the weakest part in the effort to enhance the quality of English teaching in Thailand.

#### 3.4.2 Weaknesses of the 1978/81 Curriculum and the Need for a Revision

The main point of criticism often raised about the 1978/81 curriculum is that it was over ambitious. This criticism applied as regards to both the sheer amount of content that the curriculum prescribed for each course as well as the strong emphasis on the communicative and student-centered approach for which an adequate infrastructure did not exist. The sheer amount of data to be taught was not in proportion to the limited time allotted to English studies. This created a situation where things had to be rushed through classes in order to keep up with the pace. Instead of having sufficient time to develop class activities that will make the new vocabulary and sentence forms more memorable, these activities were performed in great haste, effectively making them useless. Furthermore, an over-emphasis on speaking and listening created an imbalance. Students were not able to write grammatically correct sentences and did not understand the grammatical principles underlying sentences which they practiced (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 207). The teachers themselves were poorly prepared to this new approach, particularly to the emphasis on student centered activities. One has to remember that the teachers are not native speakers and their own English education was centered on translation and grammar. The Ministry of Education prepared only two instructors per province to guide teachers in how to apply the new approach, and yet schools often sent unqualified teachers to receive orientation (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 219).

### **3.5 The Curriculum Revision of 1996**

#### **3.5.1 The Main Factors Behind the Change**

In 1996 came about the latest English curricula policy. Unlike the former curriculum revisions, this one was not made as a correction to the shortcomings of its predecessor or as a change of pedagogical direction. The time span between the revision of 1990

and 1996 is too short to have provided sufficient feedback information. The revision is the result of the recognition of the fast pace of change in the world, especially in the areas of globalization and information technology, and therefore the need to try to constantly adjust the curriculum to the changing circumstances. Because of the increased realization of the importance of English in the globalized economic environment and the new information era, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development in the Ministry of Education allowed English for the first time to be taught as an elective starting from grade one. Like before, all schools are free to make their own choice whether they are capable of teaching English language, and therefore whether they can start teaching English from grade one or not. But those that do implement English teaching at an early stage are required to transmit to their students that learning the language requires going beyond the mere acquisition of words and grammar into the ability to use the language appropriately and correctly in different socio-cultural settings or in the international environment. (Ministry of Education, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Development, 1996: 8-15). The Ministry stated its rationale for the revision as followed:

### **3.6 Common Characteristics of the Four Curriculum Revisions**

As one can see, that in the last forty years the English curricula policy has increasingly developed in the direction of preparing students for international communication rather than having students learn for the sake of pure knowledge. The emphasis of the policy in teaching and learning shifted from teacher centered to more and more student centered. As we just saw, in some curriculums, it is the communicative approach that takes the central role, while in others, it is the learner-centered approach which takes the central role. In any case, all the four curriculums incorporate ideas from both these approaches. In my opinion, the development of the English curricula policy in terms of

teaching and learning philosophy in this period has progressed in the right direction, and followed the path of the country's development toward a more open economy.

The new philosophy of communicative approach of teaching English that started in the 1960 curricula was first manifested through the aural-oral method. Even though this is not the best method to teach students to communicate well, it is a good start for a country that, to a large extent, lacked people with English language capability. The aural-oral method allowed the Thai English teachers to practice uttering important sentences before they had a chance to transfer these experiences to their students. The 1990 curricula which stressed learning process over content for student's future application of their knowledge was another step away from Thai's teaching and learning tradition which had been very book-based and rote memorization. In 1996 when the Ministry of Education provided a new term for teachers in this new English curricula policy, that is teachers are "facilitators" of their students, the lesson plan guidelines for teachers have become more focused on students' group or individualized learning. (Ministry of Education, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Development, 199: 8-15).

### 3.7 The Problem of Teachers

An analysis of the development of both the public and private or formal and informal sectors of English teaching will not be complete without devoting serious attention to the issue of the manpower of this industry or the problem of teachers. In that respect, the teaching of English is distinct from the teaching of any other academic subject. Unlike any other academic subject, the identity of the teacher, in terms of nationality or in terms of his or hers mother tongue, plays a significant role in determining the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Native speakers have here a unique advantage in being able to offer the "real thing". Thai teachers, in the majority of cases, suffer from the

disadvantage of not having had enough exposure to the language in real life situations. Most of them are, in fact, products of the very same educational system in which they later come to play the roles of teachers. The deficiencies of this system in terms of its ability to deliver adequate English teaching are reflected in them, creating, as it is, a self-perpetuating vicious cycle. As long as the objectives of learning are focused on reading, writing and grammar skills, this is not a major difficulty. When the focus shifts to oral communications skills, as it did in the 1960s curriculum, the weaknesses of the manpower deployed in the formal sector become more pronounced and more visible. The reasons for this are two: 1) Because teachers were mostly brought up on the grammar-translation method, they find it difficult to instruct in the communicative approach, which lays the emphasis on a different set of skills. This reason is mostly an issue of "generational change" between two pedagogical orientations. 2) The communicative approach requires, in order to be effective, that the teacher is either a native speaker or has been immersed in an English speaking environment. Most Thai teachers did not have the opportunity to be immersed in an English speaking environment and are therefore ill equipped to instruct in this method. This problem is more basic than the issue of "generational change" in pedagogical methodology. Solving it can be done only by a massive and long-term teacher training which creates an English speaking environment for them to be immersed in for a certain period of time.

Set against the background of a vast formal educational system, the existence of a private sector is justified not only in terms of its ability to offer more flexibility, smaller classes and better individual adaptation to each student's abilities, but also its freedom to recruit teachers who are native speakers. The ability, or rather freedom, to tap this important human resource, unconstrained by bureaucratic manpower procedures or budget considerations, is one of the main advantages in terms of appeal to students as well as one of the distinguishing marks of private English centers. There is in fact no similar phenomenon in other academic subjects and its existence in the field of English is a

reflection of the meeting of the demand for better English instruction with the supply of native and semi-native teachers of English.

### 3.7.1 Historical Notes on Teachers of English in Thailand

In our brief historical survey we saw that English teaching in Thailand started off with foreign native speakers who were invited to the Kingdom. Starting from the 1860s and reaching the 1930 and the change in regime, the teaching of English remained a relatively elitist occupation whose main clients were the upper classes. At this early stage, one of the main complaints about teachers of English was that very often they did not speak Thai (Areerat Nampetch; 1987: 73). Needless to say that the expenses associated with the hiring of foreign teachers, even English speaking Asians, were beyond the means of the majority of the population. Wyatt gives the following interesting figures on comparative tuition costs at those times: "The Royal children, whose English education was in the hands of two Englishman in 1892, commanded an annual educational expenditure of Baht 13,440 on salaries alone, giving them by far the best instruction at the greatest cost. Next came the sons of the Thai nobility, who were taught in the English division of Suankulap School at an annual cost of Baht 416 per student. Far below them came the lower ranked middle class Thai and Chinese who attended Sunanthalai, where they were taught by American teachers at an annual cost of 1 Baht 90 per pupil, and the New School, where they were taught by English-speaking Asians at an annual cost of only Baht 21.5 per pupil (Wyatt; 1969: 167). At this early stage, Thais that received English instruction held too high positions to become teachers. At the same time, the clientele of English instruction was small and wealthy enough that foreign native teachers could satisfy the demand.

In addition, the principle followed by King Chulalongkorn, namely that satisfactory knowledge of Thai was required in order to enroll into English courses, ensured a high

selectivity as regards those that were entitled to study English. King Chulalongkorn's reforms were the first step towards creating a homogenous nation state out of what was previously a loose system of tributaries. The newly established national education system, like roads, rail-links and communications were only at the start of a process of penetrating the vast Thai countryside and they were developed in a gradual manner. As far as the educational system is concerned, the majority of schools that were established were in Bangkok with some additional ones being opened in the central plains. Because the system was allowed to develop gradually, the problem of an over-ambitious agenda tripping over a because of lack of resources did not occur. In other words, English teachers were during most of this period European native speakers or Asians with very high exposure to English, and they were hired as per the needs of newly opened schools. No literature describes the emergence of the first Thai English teachers in terms when exactly did they start to operate, and how quickly did their deployment spread. What is certain, however, that the rapid expansion in their deployment is related to the change of regime of 1932.

The change of regime of 1932 brought to the power, for the first time in Thai history, a group of commoners whose main common denominator was resentment of the privileges of the Royal and Noble class. Offering adequate education to the majority of Thais was an important part of their agenda, and they pushed towards a faster rate of expansion of the educational system in the country side. This expansionist drive came, however with a fervent nationalist orientation and a general world situation in which international trade and investment were on the decline following the financial crisis of 1929 and the start of international hostilities fostered by the threats of Nazi Germany and Imperialist Japan. With this international atmosphere, the study of English lost some of the urgency which it had acquired during the fourth, the fifth and the sixth reign. Nevertheless, it is starting from this period and the push to expand the educational system to service the masses, that we first encounter the problems of finding suitable

man-power to deliver English instruction to the broad masses. It is in this period that the role of Thai teachers gains ascendance as the major instrument to deliver English instruction, instead of the previous reliance on foreign teachers. As Areerat Nampetch notes: "(the problems) started to appear between the first and second world war, because the number of schools climbed sharply, both in the center and in the periphery. The different schools could not find native English speaking teachers or Thai teacher with fluent English, as could be done in the past. The scope of English teaching was therefore limited to reading and comprehension, with more emphasis on comprehension than active usage" (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 115). The point made here by Areerat Nampetch is significant as it describes what happened when foreign teachers could not be deployed to accommodate the fast expanding educational system. As more and more Thai teachers with only limited level of fluency were hired, so did the method and nature of teaching English change. The shift was away from oral communications to reading and writing skills. This was due to Thai teachers perennial problem of wrong pronunciation and lack of conversational experience. A shift therefore occurred in the way English was taught due not to a conscious policy decision but to the capabilities of available teachers.

### 3.7.2 The Shortage of Specialized English Teachers

One of the main weaknesses of the man-power situation of English teachers in Thailand is the lack of teachers whose specialty is English teaching. Particularly in the primary education, English teachers are almost never specialists. This problem is further compounded by a low level of teacher certification even for general teachers. According to a study by the University of Pittsburgh (1971: 10-15), in 1961, out of the 85,339 teachers in the government elementary schools all over Thailand (a number which constituted the majority of elementary schools in Thailand), only 50,051 teachers (58.6%) had teaching certification. This low level of certification did not stop these



teachers from being assigned multiple subjects. In 1985, according to Areerat Nampetch's thesis (1987: 230), there were not enough teachers in government elementary schools to handle each subject matter separately. Many teachers had to teach many subjects at the same time. This phenomenon still continues until today as evidenced in a research paper of Chulalongkorn University, on "The Intention to Develop Learning and Teaching English of English Teachers in Thailand"(1998: 1-20). Most teachers who have been assigned to teach English still did not possess English major or minor degree. Moreover, Sixty five percent of this sample group does not even have an English certificate. Also, Sixty percent of the teachers with a bachelor's degree (the degree which, at present, most of school teachers have) do not have their major or minor in English. Apart from teaching English, many of them teach mathematics, Thai language, music, ethics and morality, or other subjects belonging to the special experience group. And as a result, they have been overloaded with work, and do not have enough time to prepare their lessons plan effectively. This problem coupled with their little knowledge about English language and about English language teaching methodology, made English teaching unproductive both for them and their students, as many were not motivated to teach and learn.

These figures are of great interest as they point clearly that the natural disadvantage of non-native speakers in teaching a language not their own is compounded by lack of specialized training in this language as well as by lack of specialization in teaching this language exclusively as their only teaching subject, thus not having the opportunity to accumulate experience in the way of learning by doing.

### **3.7.3 Lack of Sufficient Teacher Training**

An additional point to that of lack of specialization is insufficient training. The two points are related but not identical. The first looks at whether teachers that teach English have

the opportunity to focus on this subject as their area of specialization. The second points looks at all teachers of English, both the specialized and unspecialized ones and sees whether they receive sufficient training in this field. We already saw that a very low percentage of English teachers have an academic degree or even a certificate. Now let us look more closely at training offered by the Ministry of Education to its teachers.

The Curriculum and Instruction Development Department in the Ministry of Education usually sets up a 2-5 day training course for key members of supervisory units and key English teachers from various areas of the country every time there is a change in English curricula. The supervisory unit members whose function is to coordinate between teachers and administrators or officers of the Curriculum and Instruction Development Department are, then, responsible to transfer and teach the new information concerning changes in English curricula to teachers in different local areas by setting up training for English teachers. According to Areerat Nampetch, (1987: 236) this top-down process has not worked very effectively because there is not enough feedback coming from teachers to administrators on how the training should be conducted as to better serve the need of teachers. Furthermore, there is not enough feedback going up to these policy makers on problems faced by teachers' implementation of each of the English curriculum being released by the Ministry. The Office of Rajapat Institute Council, under the Ministry of Education also holds 1-3 month various training sessions for English teachers and for those who are not English teachers but want to teach English. One problem that occurs is that many teachers cannot attend these training sessions because they are held during school year. If they would like to attend, they would have to get a semester leave permission which some of them find it hard to do due to heavy loads of work. (Chantana Pornaudomsuk, personal communication, December 1, 2000).

Both the training organized by the Curriculum and Instruction Development Department and The Office of Rajapat Institute Council lack effective elements of quality control. The trainings do not have stringent requirements on who must attend these trainings; there is no participation control. The trainees come to be trained, but there is no measurement as to what and how much these trainees should achieve from these trainings. (Chantana Pornaudomsuk, personal communication, December 1, 2000).

#### 3.7.4 Teacher Qualifications and the Communicative Approach

Much has been written about the attempts to apply communicative approach teaching methods in Thailand, starting from the curriculum revision of 1960. However, the teaching abilities and habits of Thai teachers are not suitable for the communicative approach set by the Ministry of Education. The grammar and translation method, which has been used even before the 1960 curricula, is still the method most natural for Thai teachers to use. In a Chulalongkorn University research study (1981:160), the qualifications of teachers who can teach the communicative approach are shown, in order of importance, as below:

1. Having solid and in-depth understand of content and grammatical structure.
2. Having complete fluency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with the emphasis being on the speaking skill.
3. Having studied, understood, and followed the goals and objectives being set by the Ministry's detailed curriculum.
4. Having the ability to transfer knowledge using various teaching techniques to motivate students.
5. Having positive attitude toward teaching English and possessing solid foundations in the psychology of teaching.
6. Having ability to measure and evaluate results, and progress for students.

Many of our English teachers, both in elementary and secondary levels do not have these capabilities, particularly in listening and speaking skills, but also in the ability to evaluate and give feedback to students. According to a research paper of Chulalongkorn University on "The Intention to Develop Learning and Teaching English of English Teachers in Thailand" (1998: 4-7), sixty eight percent of English teachers in this survey scored below fifty percent on the AUA Listening Test, twenty eight percent scored below fifty percent on the Reading Test, thirty seven percent scored below fifty percent on the Language in Use Test. and forty six percent scored below fifty percent on the test on the three parts combined.

Because of these weaknesses, Thai teachers are not equipped for teaching English for practical or communicative purposes. Thai English teachers have consistently resorted to the easy way out, that is: the method in which grammar, translation of reading passages and memorization of vocabulary are overemphasized, which is also the way in which many of them have acquired their own English skills. This focus on the grammar and translation method of teaching English is a way to teach "information about a language" but not a language itself. In other words, it is a teaching approach suitable for linguistic studies and not for practical purposes. According to Areerat Nampetch's thesis (1987; 181) the grammar and translation method also has the following characteristics:

1. Focus on learning grammatical rules and exceptions.
2. Focus on learning vocabulary in isolation of its context. Since a vocabulary may have different meanings depending on different contextual use, students might not be able to understand vocabulary items when used in various contexts.
3. Focus on learning to use dictionary to look up the meaning of words.
4. Learners have the tendency to attach to the habit of having to understand every word in the passage when in fact the ability to learn by guessing the meaning of words in their context should also be practiced.

5. Learners could not fully understand the reading passage because word for word translation is not principally accepted as the best way to teach a language.
6. Learners do not have enough opportunities to practice listening and speaking skills, and therefore, cannot not use English fluently.

This teaching method, which is not appropriate to the communicative approach of learning English, is not limited only to students in primary and secondary school levels, but also carries forward into the university level.

According to a research paper led by Sukamolsan (1987: 5-7) on "the Evaluation of Foundation English Curriculum of the Language Institute, Chulalongkorn University," there are reasons why professors were not inclined to teaching the communicative approach. First of all, the communicative approach is a relatively new way of teaching English for many professors who are used to teaching in the structural format; the format which stresses on teaching language usage i.e. grammar rather than language use. Second, many professors are not familiar with the way in which communicative teaching should be carried out such as having students doing pair work or group work. So they may resort to their conventional way of teaching i.e. giving lecture, a format that corresponds well to the relatively large number of students in their classrooms. Third, some professors may have problems using fluent English; therefore, creating teaching obstacles for them.

### **3.7.5 Problems with the Management of Educational Institutions**

Closely related to the problem of teachers' inadequacy is the attitude and competence of the managers and principals of educational institutions. One recurrent problem is the low understanding of the purpose of English curricula of school principals or educational institute management. The management of a school, for example, may have very little

knowledge about English, and therefore, cannot assist English teachers with effective English teaching methodology. For example, they may not put emphasis on the English subject and allocate financial budget for study materials to other subjects. (Areerat Nampetch, 1987: 182).

The support and understanding of the school's management directly effects the level of commitment and motivation of teachers of English. It cannot progress as long as it is seen as an "easy" subject, which any general teacher can somehow manage to teach, instead of being seen as an immensely challenging academic subject. The teaching of subject which is very difficult from the start because students do not have much opportunities to practice it outside their classroom. As we have seen, schools' managements have mostly responded favorably to parents' pressure to include English in their elective curriculums. The mere inclusion of English is, however, different from allocating adequate resources for teacher training and teaching aids which can make the teaching of English more effective.

### **3.8 Summary and Conclusions**

The evaluation of the supply of English teaching in the formal educational system from the period starting in the 1960 to the present, showed a big gap between the Ministry of Education's broad policy and its implementation. While the development of the policy has advanced through time with the socio-economic changes of the country, the implementation has not advanced with it. This is evidenced by the results as evidenced by the inability of most Thai students to communicate in English. The gap between the implementation and the policy occurs both in regards to quality and quantity. First, there has been a lack of English teachers since the beginning of this period to the present. For instance, many teachers in primary school level have teaching responsibilities that cover many subjects at the same time. Moreover, most of these teachers do not possess

a university degree with English as their major and minor. Second, there has been a shortage of teaching and learning and learning aids that would guide and assist teachers to their effective lessons planning. Such materials include teachers' handbooks, audio and visual tools: vocabulary cards, picture cards or posters, tape cassettes, V.D.O. tapes, or computerized multi-media. Furthermore, most textbooks, which are widely available in the market for schools to choose from, do not take the comprehensive view of the English curricula policy and guidelines into account in their design and therefore do not serve teachers and learners with the Ministry of Education's vision. Third, there has been lack of adequate and continuous training for teachers most of whom are in desperate need for training. There are also other factors such as those stemming from the students themselves, the management of schools, the number of hours in English study, etc. that affect the effectiveness of English learning. The effect of this deeply rooted problem of that failure to teach English to Thai students in the primary and secondary school level results also in problems with English proficiency at higher education such as that of the university level.

In this chapter we saw that the problem of teachers is one of the main factors which contributes to the development of the private-sector English teaching. The problem of teachers can be summed up by the fact that teaching English requires a different set of skills than the teaching of most other academic subjects. Non-native speakers have an inherent deficiency, especially in oral skills, while native or semi-native speakers are scarce and expensive. As long as teaching English is restricted to elitist groups, the supply and demand for native speaking teachers can be balanced. However, when the government forces an agenda that includes expansion of English teaching to the vast masses of the population, the result is an unavoidable need to deploy non-native speakers. The wider the span of English teaching forced by the government, the lower the level of qualifications of Thai English teachers. Moreover, if the desire to expand the base of English teaching comes hand in hand with a policy of promoting the use of the

“communicative approach”, the result is a wide gap between what the educational system attempts to achieve and what it can actually accomplish.

This gap between what the educational system attempts to achieve and its capacity to deliver is the opportunity for the private sector to get in. The main advantage that the private sector entertains is the flexibility in accessing the most important human resource, that is native speaking English teachers. The higher the expectations of the educational establishment as regards the implementation of the “communications approach”, the bigger will be the gap between expectations and capacity and therefore the bigger the window of opportunity for the private sector.