



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background of the study how Thai students face difficulty in using English for communication especially in writing and explains why the researcher was interested in implementing collocation vocabulary instruction and students' writing ability.

Background of the Study

English is an important language in the world. It is an international language used for communication among people from different nations and cultures. It is also an important tool used to access information. People can access useful information and use English as a tool to acquire knowledge and catch up with this information world. As English is a very important tool for people nowadays, the ability to use English become increasingly important for Thai people and is required for all students in the basic education level, i.e. grades 1 to 12.

In learning English, learners do not only have to know the language, but also have to be able to use it as a tool for expressing ideas and opinions and for sharing information. To enhance students' ability to use English for communication, the current national curriculum, Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544 (A.D. 2001), states that English instruction shall promote students' competence in using English for communication. According to the curriculum, teachers in Thailand are required to provide opportunities for students to use language to communicate (Ministry of Education, 2001). Therefore, students are expected to use English as a tool to

communicate for various purposes, for example, to work, to earn living, and to higher study.

Even though English for communication is promoted in foreign language instruction in Thailand, Thai students are still facing difficulty in using English for communication especially in writing ability. Thirty years ago, several studies have shown that Thai students did not perform well in writing. Palmer (1980) found that Thai students could write meaningful sentences correctly, but they could not convey their meaning in paragraphs. Mongkolsirikiat (1986) found that Thai students did not performed well in grammar structure, conventions, and vocabulary. Furthermore, Nakasawat (1998) found that Thai students had the problem in writing complex sentences most and the students could not write the thoughts or ideas that they wanted to present or communicate. Besides, Chinnawongs (2001) have shown that Thai students still have difficulty in language production because students do not have adequate knowledge of vocabulary to use to convey their meaning accurately. After using the curriculum for 4 years, Rojanasai (2005) also found that most Thai students had low writing ability although they studied English for communication. Therefore, the improvement of Thai students' writing ability is necessary for learning English for communication.

Writing ability is the ability to produce and arrange sentences coherently and grammatically according to the purposes in writing and suitably for the readers (White, 1980; Widdowson, 1978; Zamel, 1987; Bryne, 1988). Many researchers have agreed that writing ability consists of two components (Lado, 1964; Olivia, 1969; Rivers, 1968; Harris, 1974; Heaton, 1975; White, 1980). The first component is the knowledge of content and grammar, which includes grammar structure, vocabulary, spelling, signs, and

markers. The second component is the knowledge and ability in language use, which enables the writer to communicate and express the thought accurately and suitably. Students who always have problem in their knowledge of content and grammar have difficulty in writing. Bell and Burraby (1984, p.17) have found that foreign language learners may not succeed in English writing because they lack the ability to use appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and the ability to present ideas by using clear and accurate language. Ringbom (1987, pp.71-78) also agreed with this assumption. He has explained that learners' writing tasks may not have good quality or cannot convey their meaning correctly if the learners do not know vocabulary well enough to produce the tasks, and their knowledge of English grammar and English patterns is not adequate. According to these researchers, vocabulary and grammar are the major factors that affect students' writing ability. Therefore, teachers should try to enhance students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar when they teach writing.

To enhance students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge, Lewis (1997) has suggested that teaching words in collocations is effective for productive vocabulary. The students would get a chance to study vocabulary explicitly. When studying collocation vocabulary, the students do not only study how the words can be co-occur, but they also study the grammatical structure from those collocations. Kozłowski and Seymour (2003) showed that collocation can help improve students' writing ability. Students can express their ideas clearly and accurately by studying collocation. In collocation vocabulary instruction, students will have a chance consistently look for, and record, language patterns in context to increase their chances of acquiring meaningful language. Moreover, students need to be taught to identify useful collocates in reading and listening

and record the language in context in collocation notebooks, or by creating vocabulary charts. These activities will dramatically improve the quality of their written language.

Therefore, collocation may be a new and interesting perspective on vocabulary teaching to students that it may lead students to improve the productive skill such as writing. Moreover, there has been no research about teaching vocabulary through collocation in Thailand before. The researcher, thus, wants to study the effects of use collocation vocabulary instruction on writing ability of the lower secondary school students that was the suitable age to prepare them the good English fundamental.

Research Question

Considering the importance of the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in writing, this study aimed to develop students' writing ability by using collocation vocabulary instruction. The researcher thus attempts to find answer to the following question:

1. Are there any differences in the writing ability of lower secondary school students before and after receiving collocation vocabulary?

Researcher Objectives

1. To examine the writing ability of lower secondary school students before and after receiving collocation vocabulary instruction.
2. To compare the writing ability of lower secondary school students before and after receiving collocation vocabulary instruction.

Research Hypothesis

Previous studies about collocation instruction (Wei, 1999; Kozlowski and Seymour, 2003) all support the idea that vocabulary collocation instruction can enhance students' writing ability. Therefore in this study, the hypothesis was set as follows:

1. Lower secondary school students who received a collocation vocabulary instruction will obtain higher scores in the posttest than the pretest at the significant level of 0.05.

Scope of the Study

1. The population of this study was lower secondary school students in public schools in Thailand.

2. The variables in this study were as follows:

2.1 Independent variables: collocation vocabulary instruction

2.2 Dependent variables: writing ability

Definition of Terms

1. Collocation

Collocation refers to the words that generally co-occur in natural texts. In this present study, the collocations that were taught in the collocation vocabulary instruction were medium collocations, which were selected from the materials in English fundamental course. Medium collocations used in this present study were chosen by the words that students may not be aware that these words can be combined with certain words to produce phrases that they cannot translate into their own languages.

2. Collocation vocabulary instruction

Collocation vocabulary instruction is the instruction that aims to raise students' awareness of collocations and to enhance students' ability to use vocabulary productively. In this study, the researcher designed the collocation vocabulary instruction based on Hill (2001) and Wei (1999). The instruction focuses on teaching medium collocations.

3. Writing ability

Writing ability refers to the ability to write English sentences and short paragraphs accurately and appropriately. The students' writing ability was assessed using the writing tests developed by the researcher. The test were graded using BWC (NWREL), which examined seven aspects of writing ability including ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation.

4. Lower secondary school students

Lower secondary school students refer to students in Grade 7 to 9 in public schools in Thailand.

Organization of the chapters

This thesis report consists of five chapters. This first chapter describes the background of the study including the rationale why the researcher was interested in designing collocation vocabulary instruction to enhance students' writing ability, the objectives of the study, and the operational definitions of the key terms used in this study. The next chapter, chapter II, the researcher presents the review of the literature and relevant studies to help the reader understand key ideas used to design this study. In

chapter III, the researcher presents the methodology of this study including the selection of the participants, the development of the research instruments, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis about the effects of the collocation vocabulary instruction on writing ability. The findings are presented and interpreted in the following chapter, chapter IV. The last chapter, chapter V, the researcher discusses the findings in relation to previous studies and propose suggestions for English writing teachers and researchers.