

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

At the present time, English is known as a lingua franca which is the common language used by people of different language backgrounds to communicate with each other. Moreover, it is used in global communication, international business, sciences and technology, social and cultural affairs. Owing to the vast extent of English use on global scale of roughly two billion users, it is necessary to learn English to respond several requirements (Crystal. 2003). Therefore, we cannot deny the importance and benefit of English as a crucial language widely used.

Among four language skills, writing is an important skill apart from the others: listening, speaking, and reading. It is one of essential skills for communication as described in the standards of foreign language teaching in the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008). Moreover, writing continues to be one of the most difficult areas for the teachers and learners of English to tackle (Holmes. 2006). In Thailand, English writing has been considered troublesome to students; writing skill is the most difficult English language problem that Thai students encounter (Pawapatcharandom. 2007). Furthermore, Widdowson (1981) states that most of students do not know how to write. They cannot clearly express their points to readers and their sentences are ungrammatical. Effectively writing is a skill that can be trained. Therefore, teacher has to design activities that motivate

writing skill of students. Moreover, students need to know the English grammar well because it will help students increase their writing ability effectively.

The situation of English in Thailand, learners study English as a foreign language. Effective writing depends on many significant factors. One of the essential factors of learning English skills is grammar which is included in all levels of English education. Grammar is partly the study of what forms or structures are possible in a language (Harmer. 1999). Zhenhui (1999) states that grammar is a skill that can be best used and learned by creating and engaging in real-life situations. Furthermore, grammar is central to the teaching and learning of language. It is also one of the difficult aspects of language to be taught well. Grammar is about forms and one way to teach forms is to give students rules; however, grammar is much more than forms and its teaching is ill served if students are simply given rules (Freeman. 2000). Students often fail with language using due to a lack of comprehending about grammar. As a result, grammar is an important basic structure for learning English of students in all levels.

In English grammar, tense is one of the confusing problems for Thai students because tense refers any of the forms of a verb that may be used to show the time of the action or state expressed by the verb (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. 2014). Moreover, when study English grammar, tense plays the most crucial part and it is one of the difficult parts in English language which non-native learners have to spend much time to understand and use it correctly and properly. Similarly, Swan and Smith (2004) note that the grammatical structure of Thai is very different from English particularly in terms of "tense". Thai verbs have no inflected forms like English ones: an English single verb (= *go*) covers not simply *go* and also *goes*, but

*went, was going, has gone, is going, will go, would go* and so on. The problem is that students get confused when they meet many kinds of verb forms and they associate them with time. They have the idea that verb tenses are always associated with particular times. Many forms of verb tense are sometimes not related to the time as the learners understand (Frederickson. 1997).

For five-year English teaching experience, the researcher has found similar problems as mentioned above. At Phnomrung School where the researcher has worked, the common mistakes in secondary school students' writing is tense usage especially present simple tense and present continuous tense. The researcher has found that the causes of these mistakes are misunderstanding the functions of tenses. They are often confused about verb forms of each tense as well. Due to the fact that there are no tenses in Thai language system, it is also very hard for Thai students to realize the structure of different parts of tenses. A common mistake is the misuse of verb tense. The students write "*I study now.*" instead of "*I'm studying now.*" or "*Where you go?*" instead of "*Where are you going?*" or "*She get up late every day.*" instead of "*She gets up late every day*". These are some examples of misunderstanding of using tenses of Grade 9 students at Phnomrung School. As Swan and Smith (2004) reveal that verb inflections and complex verb phrases present a formidable obstacle to Thai learners, and many prefer to use the unmarked base form of the English verb rather than attempt more difficult forms. Moreover, students have negative attitude in learning tenses since they encounter with difficult and puzzled rules while learning. Therefore, the researcher will manipulate these problems to enhance English tenses and students' satisfaction.

In the past, learning and teaching grammar were taught through language books and teachers. At present, there are many aids available these days such as audio, visual and audio-visual aids which have very much importance in teaching. The process of teaching and learning depends upon the different types of equipment available in the classroom. As we know, there are many materials in teaching English but there has been no conclusion which teaching model is the most effective. Chanthiam (2009) states that there are some advantages and disadvantages in each teaching approach that has been widely used. Teachers must learn and be aware of those teaching theories and teaching approaches in order to make a decision to enable them to apply all approaches in classroom activities suitable for students.

Task-based Learning (TBL), a part of Communicative Language Teaching has been accepted as an alternative approach to aid the English teaching. Muller (2006) notes that using task-based learning, teachers can be confident that they are meeting institutional requirements and facilitating the development of genuine communication skills among learners. Moreover, task-based learning provides many advantages in teaching English as a foreign language because it offers language experience in the classroom. Task-based learning focuses on learners using language naturally in pairs or group work, allowing them to share ideas (Nunan, 2004). In addition, Willis (1996) proposes that the task based learning framework, combined with tasks and texts, provides learners with rich exposure to language plus opportunities to use it themselves. Throughout the task cycle, emphasis is on learners' understanding and expressing meaning to complete tasks. Therefore, task-based learning is one of the approaches which can be used to develop writing skill of students. Moreover, students have to work in pairs or small groups toward TBL, so it makes them to brainstorm

and discuss to find the best answers. In consideration of the problems of grade 9 students' writings and the importance of using tenses in their works correctly, the researcher is interested in implementing task-based learning which consists of three phrases of teaching process, namely, pre-task, task cycle, and language focus (Willis.1996:38) into correcting writing mistakes.

Accordingly, the results of this study will be useful to solve the problems of English writing on tenses, develop learners' English writing proficiency, and improve learning process in English class. Additionally, it will enhance learners' satisfactions with learning English tenses through task-based learning, and will provide significant information to develop the learning management in the future.

## **1.2 Purposes of the Study**

1.2.1 To determine the efficiency of task-based learning in English tenses on writing skill of grade 9 students based on the standard criterion set at 75/75.

1.2.2 To compare students' writing skill before and after learning through task-based learning.

1.2.3 To investigate grade 9 students' satisfaction toward learning English tenses through task-based learning.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1.3.1 What is the efficiency of task-based learning in English tenses?

1.3.2 Will grade 9 students who learn English tenses through task-based learning have higher writing skill?

1.3.3 How are the students' satisfactions in learning English tenses through task-based learning?

## **1.4 Research Hypothesis**

1.4.1 The efficiency of task-based learning in English will be at high level and meet the criterion set at 75/75 with statistically significant difference at .01 level.

1.4.2 Students who learn English tenses through task-based learning will have higher writing skill at the .01 level of statistical significance.

1.4.3 Students are satisfied with learning English tenses through task-based learning.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The present study is worth conducting on several counts:

1.5.1 The tasks developed for this study can be used as guidelines for EFL teachers to plan their lessons.

1.5.2 The results of this study can be used to improve writing processes in English classroom.

1.5.3 It can motivate learners in learning English tenses through task-based method. The results of this study might be the guidelines for English teachers to adopt the TBL principles and procedures in teaching English tenses for enhancing students' writing skill.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Some scopes of the research are listed below. Inferences and conclusions from this study must take these scopes into account:

### **1.6.1 Population and Samples**

**1.6.1.1 The populations** of this study were 85 grade 9 students from the 3 classes who studied Additional English Course (EN23201) in the first semester of academic year 2015 at Phnomrung School in Chaloeprakiat District, Buriram Province under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 32.

**1.6.1.2 The sample group** in this study was a class of 30 students who took Additional English Course (EN23201) in the first semester of academic year 2015 at Phnomrung School in Chaloeprakiat District, Buriram Province. One class from three classes was selected by cluster random sampling.

### **1.6.2 Variables**

**1.6.2.1** The independent variable of this study was task-based learning in English tenses.

**1.6.2.2** The dependent variables were learners' achievement and learners' satisfaction toward task-based learning in English tenses.

### **1.6.3 Contents of the Study**

The lesson topics were English tenses on writing skill which they were the essential skill for grade 9 students is based on the 2008 National Fundamental Curriculum, Foreign Language Subject Area, Ministry of Education. (A.D. 2008). The lesson plans were designed from Willis's (1996) task-based learning framework consist of three phrases; 1) pre-task, 2) task cycle consisting of task, planning and report, 3) language focus including analysis and practice. The tasks were designed

from Willis's (1996) six types of task by selecting 4 types of tasks: 1) ordering and sorting; 2) comparing; 3) problem solving; and 4) sharing personal experiences. Two tense forms were selected for the present study: 1) present simple tense entitled "What time do you get up?", and 2) present continuous tense entitled "What are they doing?" based on the 2008 National Fundamental Curriculum, Foreign Language Subject Area, Ministry of Education. (A.D. 2008).

#### **1.6.4 Duration of this Study**

This study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2015 for 15 periods: 6 periods for learning present simple tense through 4 tasks, 6 periods for learning present continuous tense through 3 tasks, 1 period for reviewing through 1 task, 2 periods for doing achievement pre and post test and the satisfaction questionnaire. Each period took 50 minutes.

### **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms are defined within the context of this study:

**1.7.1 Task-based Learning (TBL)** refers to learning processes which students are required to perform the pieces of worksheets or activities together in order to achieve an outcome. The tasks were designed based on the task-based learning framework of Willis (1996) consisting three phrases: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus.

**1.7.2 Task** refers to the pieces of worksheets or activities which students are required to do together either in pairs or groups or both in order to achieve an outcome. In this study, they included four types of task-based learning activities:



ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, and sharing personal experiences based on Willis' tasks (1996).

**1.7.3 Writing skill** is learners' scores from achievement test both pre-test and post-test toward two tenses: present simple tense and present continuous tense.

**1.7.3.1 Pre-test** is a multiple choice test that students do before studying the lessons via task-based learning in English tenses on writing. It contains 40 items.

**1.7.3.2 Post-test** is the multiple choice test which contains the same contents as pre-test. The students do the test after studying the lessons via task-based learning in English tenses on writing. It includes 40 items.

**1.7.4 Tense** is a grammatical form taken by a verb to show the times and aspects of an action. In this study, there are two kinds of tenses:

**1.7.4.1 Present simple tense** refers to an action that is regular, true or normal that happens in present time.

**1.7.4.2 Present continuous tense** refers to an activity which is happening now, or in the near future, especially for planned future events.

**1.7.5 Standard criterion 75/75:** the score used to find out the efficiency of learning English tenses on writing through task-based learning. (Promwong.1982)

**1.7. 5.1 First standard criterion 75** (efficiency of the process) is the percentage of learners' total mean scores from the exercises scores of learning through task-based learning.

**1.7. 5.2 Second standard criterion 75** (efficiency of the outcomes) is the percentage of learners' total mean scores from the achievement test (post-test).

**1.7.6 Satisfaction** refers to the feeling or attitude of 30 Grade 9 students that indicates favorableness, pleasure, and gladness towards learning English tenses through task-based learning activities.

**1.7.7 Students** refer to grade 9 students who took Additional English Course (EN23201) in the first semester of academic year 2015 at Phnomrung School in Chaloemphrakiat District, Buriram Province.

## **1.8 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter mainly presents the background of the study, purposes and research questions. The present study also provides the hypotheses, significance of the study, and scope of the study. The last outlined is about definition of terms. The next chapter, Chapter Two, will focus on the review of the related literature.