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Editorial

In this volume of *rEFLections*, there are five articles. The first three have the common theme of strategies but with varying breadths of focus, ranging from general language learning strategies to vocabulary learning strategies and reading strategies. The remaining two articles have contrasting themes: one is on teachers' beliefs about difficulties teaching English while the other has a methodological focus, investigating the use of two different instruments in a case study on a learner. The first four articles present research conducted in Thailand whereas the last paper reports on research conducted on a Thai ESL learner in Britain. Two of the articles report on graduate students' research at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT).

The first article, by Richard Watson Todd & Wilaksana Srimavin, utilized a case study approach to investigate context influences on students' reporting of their use of learning strategies. It was found that, rather than eliciting typical strategy use, a well-known questionnaire of strategy use elicited strategies used during recent learning experiences. While the findings are not generalizable, they nonetheless raise serious doubts about the construct validity of strategy questionnaires.

Athorn Muensorn & Saowaluck Tepsuriwong's article looked at the vocabulary learning strategies reported by Thai primary school students and found that they relied heavily on one strategy, rote learning. The authors noted that many of their subjects had negative attitudes towards learning English and spent so little time on vocabulary learning that they would be unlikely to meet the requirements of the Thai Basic Education Curriculum. The authors recommend effective training in vocabulary learning strategies.

Focusing on the effects of reading strategies instruction on graduate students, Pratin Pimsarn's article conducted a pretest-posttest study in which the experimental group received instruction on strategies whereas the control group did not. While the quantitative data showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups, follow-up interviews revealed reports of enhanced self-confidence and self-reliance among the experimental subjects.

Nitaya Weawong & Wareesiri Singhasiri investigated native English speaking teachers' beliefs about some of the difficulties teaching English to Thai learners at a private language school. Using a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions, the study found that the most difficult aspects were encouraging students to use English beyond the classroom, promoting learning independence and managing classes of more than thirty-five students. The study also revealed that these teachers felt that several aspects, including using group work, were not at all difficult.

Singhanat Nomnian's article focuses on the pros and cons of using two different instruments, diaries and interviews, in investigating a Thai ESL learner's perceptions on British culture. He found that the interviews, which included questions based on the subject's diary data, provided more in-depth data than the diaries could do alone. The author's conclusion stresses the benefits of combining the use of the two instruments.

We hope that you enjoy reading the articles in this issue of *rEFLections*, in either the print version (to which you can subscribe, see page 66) or the electronic version (http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/sola/). In addition, we hope you feel inspired to submit your own article for the next issue. We welcome any comments and suggestions you may have.

Jonathan Hull & Wareesiri Singhasiri, Editors

Context Influences on the Reporting of Strategy Use

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Abstract
Learning strategy research has often investigated typical strategy use through large-scale surveys using questionnaires such as the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Despite its extensive use, doubts remain about the validity of the SILL. This paper investigates this issue using a case study of a single learner who completed a reduced version of the SILL after two different reading tasks. By triangulating the learner's reports of strategy use on the SILL with retrospective interviews focusing on the strategies used in the two reading tasks, it was found that the SILL elicited strategies used during recent learning experiences, rather than typical strategy use. The findings, although not generalisable, cast further doubt on the construct validity of strategy questionnaires such as the SILL.

Over the last 30 years, learners' use of strategies has become a major focus of research in language teaching. This research has examined the strategies used on specific tasks, learners' development of strategy use, and large-scale surveys of typical strategy use, the last often conducted to investigate the relationship between strategy use and other variables, such as learning style and language proficiency.

The instruments used in strategy research depend on the purpose. Investigations of specific task strategy use usually involve think-aloud protocols (e.g. Gu et al., 2005; Li & Munby, 1996; Nassaji, 2003; Yang & Shi, 2003), retrospective interviews (e.g. Dhieb-Henia, 2003; Nassaji, 2003; Yang & Shi, 2003) or diaries (e.g. Halbach, 2000; Leki, 1995). Research into strategy development often involves narrative interviews (e.g. Gao, 2006). Surveys of typical strategy use largely rely on questionnaires, either ones specifically designed for a particular research focus (e.g. Liao, 2006; Vandergrift, 2005; Zhang & Goh, 2006) or standard questionnaires into strategy use. By far the most frequently used standard strategy use questionnaire is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (Oxford, 1990). This instrument has been applied both without any changes (e.g. Akbai & Hosseini, 2008; Cohen, 1999; Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Griffiths & Parr, 2001; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Mochizuki, 1999; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Taguchi, 2002; Yang, 1999) or as a tweaked version for a specific purpose (e.g. Petrić & Czárl, 2003; Purdie & Oliver, 1999; Sheorey, 1999). The SILL has clearly been a valuable and productive research instrument, but in this paper we raise questions about its reliability and validity.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
The SILL is "an instrument for assessing the frequency of use of language learning strategies" (Oxford, 1996: 30) which appears in two main versions, one for native English speakers learning a foreign language and one for ESL/EFL learners. In this paper, we will focus on the latter. The ESL/EFL SILL consists of fifty five-point Likert rating scale questions. Each question takes the form of a statement describing a learning strategy (e.g. "I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English") which

respondents rate on a scale from 'never or almost never true of me' to 'always or almost always true of me'.

A questionnaire like the SILL as a research instrument to investigate strategy use allows a wide range of strategies to be measured at one time (Oxford, 1996), is practical and non-threatening (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) and can be used with a large number of subjects to test hypotheses (Cohen, 1998). However, results may reflect students' perceptions more than actual behaviour (Gu et al., 2005), may be based on students' ideas about the 'right answer', may not cover all strategies used (Chamot, 2001), and may not be accurate because of over- or under-estimation by respondents (Cohen, 1998).

Because of such problems, it is important that the validity and reliability of research instruments be investigated and reported. In the case of the SILL, extensive data is available concerning its validity and reliability (see Oxford, 1996, and Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, for summaries).

The data concerning SILL reliability is fairly uncontroversial with high to very high reports of Cronbach alpha scores. For validity, however, the data provided by Oxford is less persuasive. Validity concerns the extent to which an instrument actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Both Oxford (1996) and Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) contain long reports purportedly showing the validity of the SILL. These reports focus largely on criterion-related validity, and claim that high levels of criterion-related validity are shown because of strong relationships between SILL results and language performance. These validity claims are strongly emphasised in the reports; for instance, "this evidence is probably the strongest support possible to the assertion of the validity of the SILL" (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995: 7). However, learning strategies and language performance are very different constructs, and arguing that a relationship between them indicates validity is dubious (even the nature of the relationship is unclear since Hong-Nam & Leavell (2006) found that intermediate students use more strategies than advanced students, and Mullins (1992, cited in Oxford, 1996) found a negative correlation between affective strategies and performance). In several research studies, the SILL has been used to investigate whether there is a relationship between strategy use and performance. Arguing that findings from such studies indicating such a relationship validate the SILL is circular since the SILL was used to produce the findings. Similar arguments are made for the validity of the SILL based on its relationship with learning styles.

Rather than correlating the results of the SILL with completely different constructs, examining the relationship between the SILL and other methods of eliciting learning strategies, in other words triangulating the data, is needed for validation (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2005). In addition, conducting a think-aloud protocol of how respondents answer the SILL (Petrić & Czárl, 2003) and examining the effects of extraneous factors on SILL responses would also provide information relevant to its validity. None of these approaches is included in the lengthy reports claiming to show the validity of the SILL, and thus its validity is still in doubt.

In this paper, we intend to investigate one of these aspects of validity (and reliability) not previously considered, namely, whether extraneous factors have an influence on students' self-reports through SILL. Several studies into specific tasks have shown

that learners' choice of strategies is dependent on the context (e.g. Brown, 2008). Because of this, Cohen (1998) argues that respondents' recent experiences may have an effect on the strategies they report, and goes on to suggest that, because of this, strategy use research should focus on specific experiences rather than typical strategy use. However, research into typical strategy use is potentially valuable. Rather than focusing research exclusively on specific experiences, we would argue that research into typical strategy use is needed, but evidence of the extent to which experiences affect reports of typical strategy use is vital if such research is to be credible. Therefore, it is our purpose in this study to investigate how recent learning experiences influence the self-reports of one student about her typical strategy use.

Research methodology

Overview

To investigate the effects of recent experiences on self-reports of strategy use, we decided to adopt a naturalistic approach following a single learner, rather than requiring a group of learners to engage in experiences that they may not necessarily normally engage in. The subject was a Masters student of engineering at a respected Thai university who regularly read both academic articles in English for her studies and graded readers both for pleasure and to improve her English. She is named Somying for the purposes of this article. As an enthusiastic member of a self-access reading club, we were able to ascertain the English reading materials she expected to read, and identified a period of time where she expected to read an academic article in detail for a few days and then wanted to spend time reading a graded reader. This would allow us to compare the effects of academic reading experiences and reading-for-pleasure experiences on her self-reports of typical reading strategy use.

To elicit self-reports of typical strategy use, an adapted version of the SILL questionnaire was completed by Somying twice, once after her intensive reading of the academic article (Zhang et al., 1998) and once after she had spent a week reading her chosen graded reader (Paretsky, 2000). In addition, we interviewed Somying four times: at the start of the research to elicit her personal background; twice, immediately after each completion of the adapted SILL, to gain more information about her recent reading experiences; and at the end of the research to find out about her responses to the questionnaire.

Subject

Somying comes from a large upcountry town in Thailand and started studying English at primary school. Much of her English study at school involved memorising vocabulary lists, but she started reading short articles in English in her last two years of secondary school. At university, Somying studied four English courses, including one specifically about reading which involved extensive reading of English language newspapers and intensive reading of academic articles, an area also covered in her one course of English in her postgraduate studies. Although a keen reader of novels in Thai, before she started her Masters degree, Somying read English only because the teacher assigned reading and read each text only once. In her postgraduate studies, she reads academic articles for a clear purpose, and so often reads articles several times until she is sure that she understands them.

Questionnaire

To investigate the effects of recent experiences on SILL responses, it is not practical to use the full 50-item SILL. Since Somying's recent language learning experiences concerned reading, a shorter questionnaire focusing on reading was designed, based largely on the SILL. The rubric, rating scale and format were taken directly from the SILL, and 5 SILL items directly related to reading together with a further 3 SILL items indirectly related to reading were included in the questionnaire. A further 4 items directly related to reading but not included on the SILL were constructed following the same style as the SILL. As a control, 5 more items were randomly selected from the remaining SILL items for inclusion on the questionnaire. The questionnaire (see below) therefore consisted of 17 SILL or SILL-like items divided into four groupings: strategies related to approach to reading, strategies for dealing with unknown words while reading, strategies for remembering new words, and general learning strategies.

The questionnaire was presented in English and was completed by the subject at the start of the second and third interviews. No reference was made to Somying's recent reading experiences until she had completed all of the questions. The items were presented in different random sequences on the occasions the questionnaire was used.

Interviews

Four interviews were conducted with the following purposes:
- Interview 1: To elicit personal background and history of English language learning, and to identify potential language learning experiences that could be used in the research.
- Interview 2: To complete questionnaire 1, and to gain details of Somying's recent academic reading experiences.
- Interview 3: To complete questionnaire 2, and to gain details of Somying's recent reading-for-pleasure experiences.
- Interview 4: To clarify responses to the two questionnaires, and to highlight differences in reading approaches between academic reading and reading for pleasure.

The interviews were conducted in Thai with both researchers involved, and each interview lasting around one hour. Key topics to be covered in the interviews were prepared beforehand. The interviews were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed and translated.

Data analysis

Somying's responses to the two questionnaires were compared, both as individual questions and in the clusters of questions given in the description of the questionnaire above. If the questionnaire is reliable and if recent experiences do not affect responses (i.e. the questionnaire is valid), we would expect to see little difference in Somying's responses to the two questionnaires. If the questionnaire is reliable but experiences affect responses (i.e. the questionnaire is not valid), we would expect to see little difference in Somying's responses to questions not concerning reading but differences in her responses to questions concerning reading. If the questionnaire is not reliable, responses to all questions may differ.

The data from the interviews were categorised into the following themes:

- reasons for reading English in general
- reasons for reading academic articles
- strategies used in reading academic articles
- problems in reading academic articles
- reasons for reading graded readers
- strategies used in reading graded readers
- problems in reading graded readers
- comparison of reading academic articles and graded readers

The categorisation into these themes was compared for reliability (with a reliability coefficient of 0.91 suggesting reliable categorisation into themes). The thematically categorised themes were then used to try to explain the findings from the two questionnaires.

Findings
Questionnaire data
The ratings of strategy use from the two questionnaires are shown in Table 1. In comparing the responses from the two questionnaires, no difference or a difference of 1 is taken as showing no real differences in strategy use in the two contexts. Differences of 2 or more suggest that there is a real difference in strategy use. There are four items where a difference in strategy use is manifested:

- If I guess the meaning of a word, later I will check whether my guess is correct by using a dictionary.
- I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.
- I try not to translate word-for-word.
- To understand unfamiliar words, I will try to identify the part of speech of the words.

All four of these items concern reading, and are therefore strategies where the different contexts (after reading an academic article or after reading a graded reader) may have an influence. The lack of any real difference for the other 13 items suggests that the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 1: Ratings for strategy use after the two reading experiences

	After reading an academic article	After reading a graded reader	Difference between ratings
Strategies related to approach to reading			
I try not to translate word-for-word.	4	2	2
I read English without looking up every new word.	4	4	0
I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	5	2	3
I am aware of my purposes in reading.	2	2	0
Strategies for dealing with unknown words while reading			
To reinforce my learning, I will complete any activities included in books concerning unfamiliar words.	2	2	0
To understand unfamiliar words, I will try to identify the part of speech of the words.	2	4	2
If I guess the meaning of a word, later I will check whether my guess is correct by using a dictionary.	5	1	4
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	4	5	1
Strategies for remembering new words			
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	1	2	1
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	2	3	1
I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page.	1	1	0
I look for words in Thai that are similar to new words in English.	3	2	1
General learning strategies (not related to reading)			
I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3	3	0
I practise English with other students.	1	1	0
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	4	5	1
I try to talk like native English speakers.	2	1	1
I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	5	4	1

Note:
1. Never or almost never true of me (very rarely true of me)
2. Usually not true of me (less than half the time)
3. Somewhat true of me (about half the time)
4. Usually true of me (more than half the time)
5. Always or almost always true of me (almost always)

In terms of the groupings of strategies, the average differences in the ratings after reading an academic article and after reading a graded reader are shown in Table 2. Again, there are clear average differences in ratings for those two groupings which most closely concern reading (approach to reading and dealing with unknown words) whereas the average differences in ratings for the two groupings not directly related to reading (remembering new words and general strategies) show high levels of agreement. These findings reinforce the conclusions that different contexts affect reading strategies and that the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2: Average ratings for strategy groups after the two reading experiences

Strategy grouping	Average difference in ratings
Strategies related to approach to reading	1.25
Strategies for dealing with unknown words while reading	1.75
Strategies for remembering new words	0.75
General learning strategies (not related to reading)	0.60

Interview data

To see why Somying reported such clear differences in reading strategy use, we need to examine her detailed reports of her recent reading experiences from the interviews. Firstly, Somying had very different reasons for reading an academic article and a graded reader.

As might be expected, Somying read the academic paper "in order to learn more about what I am studying" (Interview 1), and to achieve this goal, she needed to "read to get details" (Interview 1). She had clear goals concerning the content she wished to learn from the article:

> "I read this paper because I need to understand about how to recycle batteries. I want to know how such recycling is done, so I can use this knowledge in my own research ... I read the experiment because I want to know about the different types of experimental research – how much the research works, what are the advantages and disadvantages of each research study." (Interview 1)

From her reading, she was also able to make judgments about the usefulness of reading the article:

> "My research is to recycle nickel metal hydride batteries as I have mentioned. However, this paper finished at the form of the solution but I will re-form the solution to be a metal. So I will follow this paper for about half of my study and for the other half I will follow another paper which is about reforming nickel below the recycling grade ... From this paper I would like to know about the pH used. What pH is used and for how long? ... At the beginning I didn't know what the solvent exception is, I have to find it, and then I found it." (Interview 2)

In reading academic articles, then, Somying had clear pre-set goals and needed to focus on understanding details in order to achieve these goals.

For the graded reader, in contrast, Somying's goals are far less specific:

> "I read it for pleasure. Actually, I like reading novels, but recently I've changed from reading novels in Thai to reading them in English ... I admit that I just read for fun." (Interview 1)

These different reasons for reading are reflected in how Somying approaches the reading of the two different texts. For academic articles, Somying first skims the article and then reads parts of it several times in depth to make sure that she understands the details:

> "I start by reading the abstract and then decide whether it is relevant to what I want or not. If it is relevant, I read it from the first page to the last one. I read everything in the paper because I need to understand both the methodology and the results ... For the first time, I read in order to know what the paper is about, to get the overall picture. Then, I read the details ... For the second time, I don't read the introduction, but for some parts I read them again in detail." (Interview 2)

For the graded reader, on the other hand, Somying only re-reads individual sentences that she has problems understanding and even then was not concerned with understanding everything:

> "At home, I read from the first page, but I don't look at the preface or other parts ... According to my purposes of reading, I don't feel that I have to know everything ... Sometimes I couldn't get the meaning of the sentences ... I would read two or three times, but if I still couldn't understand I would move on to the next sentence or the next paragraph and continue reading." (Interview 3)

Another key difference in how Somying reads the two texts concerns how she deals with unknown words. For academic articles:

> "When reading academic articles, some words have specific meanings. I have to be careful, so I have to use a dictionary to make sure ... I will show you one example. The word 'stripping' means to remove or take off. But, in the case of this article, it means to take away what we don't want. It doesn't mean to remove or take off. It means to wash away ... Maybe I'll try to guess it the first time, but then I don't feel very sure, so I have to use a dictionary." (Interview 2)

For the graded reader, on the other hand:

> "In the short story, if I don't know some vocabulary, it doesn't affect my understanding of the story much ... When I see some words that I don't know, I'll try to guess the meaning that fits with the sentence." (Interview 1)

> "For any sentences that I thought were important to understand, I would look up the difficult words in a dictionary. But I think I didn't use a dictionary for most of the words, only a few. Sometimes, I was so interested in the content that I didn't want to use a dictionary. I would just underline the words and continue reading." (Interview 3)

One final clear difference in Somying's approach to reading the two texts concerns translating:

> "When I read this academic article, I want to translate it word by word. However, the meanings of some words are not the same as in the dictionary, so I try to read the whole sentence to understand what it's about. For the short story, I really translate word by word like in the case of the word 'grain' that I needed to translate." (Interview 4)

These three differences in how Somying reports that she reads the two texts – overall approach to reading, using a dictionary to deal with unknown words, and translating word by word – match three of the items in the two SILL questionnaires where the differences in reading strategies reported were greatest. This suggests that the differences in Somying's ratings of strategy use on the questionnaires were due to her recent reading experiences.

The interviews also show that Somying used very similar strategies for the two texts for those points where the ratings on the two questionnaires were similar. For instance, for remembering new words, Somying complained that she had problems remembering words from both the academic article ("If I read another paper, sometimes I have to use a dictionary again for the same word" Interview 1) and from the graded reader ("I completely forgot some words. I don't know how to write or pronounce the words and I forgot the meanings" Interview 1). Her preferred strategy for remembering new words ("writing the words on pieces of paper and posting them to the walls of my room" Interview 1) was the same for all words, irrespective of whether she read them in an academic article or a graded reader.

Discussion

Despite claims that learning strategy questionnaires such as the SILL elicit typical strategy use, the findings in this study suggest that questionnaire ratings of strategy use are heavily influenced by recent experiences. Even though the instructions for the questionnaire and the descriptions of the rating scale explicitly asked about typical strategy use and no mention of recent reading experiences was made prior to the questionnaire being completed, Somying's responses on the questionnaire clearly reflect her recent reading experiences more than her typical strategy use. There were clear differences in her ratings for those strategies that she used differently in reading the two texts, while other strategies remained stable. This suggests that, even though the questionnaire is reliable, it is not a valid instrument for measuring typical strategy use.

While it is impossible to generalise from a single case study, the findings still suggest that questionnaire ratings of typical strategy use need to be treated with caution. More research into the validity of strategy elicitation research is needed, since it is unclear whether typical strategy use can be elicited (or, indeed, even exists). Perhaps, questionnaires eliciting strategy use should be restricted to reports of recent experiences (Cohen, 1998) or, if typical strategy use is targetted, an extra section asking respondents to list recent experiences could be included to allow the results to be interpreted more accurately. Whether either of these choices is used or not, the doubts about the construct validity of strategy use questionnaires such as the SILL mean that any researcher using such instruments to investigate typical strategy use should be very cautious about the findings.

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Richard Watson Todd has been working at KMUTT for over fifteen years. His research interests are wide-ranging.

Wilaksana Srimavin has been working at KMUTT for over twenty years. Her research interests are about teaching techniques, self-assessment and task-based learning.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Thai Primary School Students

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Abstract
The study surveyed vocabulary learning strategies of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's (BMA) primary school students and their problems in vocabulary learning. A questionnaire was distributed to 50 Pratom 6 students (aged 11-12) and 10 of them were further selected for a follow-up semi-structured interview. The findings indicated that most students realized the importance of vocabulary learning and they had encountered new words from various sources. However, they did not devote enough time to vocabulary learning and this strongly affected their lexical development. Moreover, many of them relied heavily on rote learning rather than other strategies. Their vocabulary learning problems were also related to their negative attitudes and poor English background as well as lack of support from their teachers, parents and peers. Therefore, teachers and parents need to work cooperatively to support their learning and to deal with negative attitudes. Also, students should be trained with a variety of effective vocabulary learning strategies in order to maximize their potential for language learning.

Background and introduction

'The younger the better' is one influential belief in learning a second or a foreign language. It is argued that younger learners are better at second language acquisition than older learners (Krashen, 1987). English, with its crucial status as the global language and a major foreign language in Thailand, is thus taught at many Thai schools beginning at the lower primary levels.

Like other schools, Watthampirataram School, one of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's (BMA) primary schools, realizes the importance of English and makes it compulsory for Pratom 1-6 students (i.e. primary school students aged 5-12). Students at each level study English for at least one course per term. The school also reinforces the importance of English by supporting many extracurricular English activities, such as English Camp and English Words of the Day. It also provides supporting resources, such as setting up an English Self Access Centre, an English Sound Lab, and hiring English native speakers to teach there.

In this school, students normally study English in classes of 35-40 students. The teachers use a course book provided by the Ministry of Education. They encourage students to learn English both inside and outside class. The teaching emphasizes all language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. As stated in the Basic Education Curriculum (2001 / B.E. 2544), at the level of Pratom 6, students will have had to have studied English for six years and should possess the last level of vocabulary size, between 1,050 and 1,200 words.

From the researchers' experience, however, most Pratom 6 students at this school usually acquire fewer words than the standard number required by the curriculum. Many English teachers at the school also complained that students often forget the words that they had learned easily. Some teachers blamed the teaching techniques as not good enough to enable students to retain vocabulary; others thought that the problems may be rooted in the students' poor background and low motivation to learn English since a BMA school is meant to serve a local community. Most of the students attending the schools come from low-income families and the parents cannot afford to send them to other, more prestigious schools. Many students have no real interest in learning especially English. Some teachers questioned vocabulary learning strategies, suspecting ineffective use or even lack of strategy knowledge as they had introduced many words in class but the students could not remember these words and some students said that they did not know how to remember them well. To address these problems, this study aims to investigate vocabulary learning strategies used by Pratom 6 students and problems that they have in learning vocabulary. It is expected that the investigation will cast light on the problems and provide insights into effective vocabulary teaching for young learners.

Importance of vocabulary
Vocabulary plays a significant role in second or foreign language learning. It seems to be a pre-requisite for communication and is required for both receptive and productive skills. For receptive skills, meanings which are focuses of communication are carried through vocabulary inputs via listing and reading. Learners, therefore, need an adequate number of words to comprehend the input. If learners have limited vocabulary, they probably would have limited comprehension. Nation (2001) suggested that, in order to gain reasonable comprehension of a text and to be able to guess meanings of unknown words from context, learners need to know at least 95% of the running words in the input.

The same is for productive skills, learners use words to convey meanings. Vocabulary is used productively when learners want to express their meaning through speaking and writing; so, if they do not have enough vocabulary, they may fail to convey their messages. Wilkins (1972: 111) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary, stating that "*Without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed*".

Process of learning new vocabulary
In order to learn new words and retain them in memory, Nation (2001) proposes that learners have to go through three important processes: noticing, retrieval and creative or generative use.

At the initial stage, the word has to be noticed. This noticing stage involves seeing and paying attention to the word as an item to be learned. It is an important stage as it affects the extent to which the word is picked up and learned (Laufer, 1997). If words are noticed and processed as learned words, they become part of the learner's lexical knowledge. The more the learner is involved in learning, the deeper the level of processing and the better they can memorize and retain the words since such active involvement as deeper analysis requires high levels of cognitive effort, which leads to a more persistent memory trace (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Noticing may be affected by several factors: how outstanding

the word is in the context, frequency of the occurrence of the word and learners' awareness about the importance of the word (Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

Retrieval is the stage where learners recall the learned words from their memory. Only the words learnt would be retrieved. When learners encounter the word in a different context, they can recall or recognize it as a previously learned word. In this retrieval stage, learners may recognize the forms, meanings, and uses of the words in new contexts.

Creative or generative use seems to be the aim of vocabulary learning. It is the stage where learners have enough vocabulary that they can use for communication as the words learned become active vocabulary or words that they can use effectively and productively in different contexts. To be able to use vocabulary effectively, learners have to know enough about the words. Knowing vocabulary means knowing its meanings, forms and uses. Learners need to know all these aspects of words and need to practice using them actively to enhance both retrieval and creative use. In order to do so, effective vocabulary learning strategies are required to guide learners to process their learning and expand their lexical knowledge.

Vocabulary learning strategies
Vocabulary learning strategies constitute knowledge about what learners do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in long-term memory, recall them when needed in comprehension, and use them in language production (Ruutmets, 2005). Based on this definition vocabulary learning strategies can be used in all the three phases of vocabulary learning process outlined in the previous section. To help learners reach the last stage of generative use, they have to be encouraged to apply two main groups of vocabulary learning strategies: discovery strategies and consolidation strategies.

Discovery strategies are strategies used for gaining initial information about a new word (Schmitt, 2000). They include two main strategy groups: determination strategies and social strategies. Determination strategies are used for discovering new words' meaning by, for instance, guessing from context, using reference materials, analyzing parts of speech, affixes and roots. This group of strategies seems to be self-dependent strategies – learners work out the meaning of the new words by themselves, whereas social strategies are based on interaction with other people. Learners get the word meanings by asking from other people or interacting with others.

Consolidation strategies are used for reinforcing and remembering a word once it has been introduced (Schmitt, 2000). These include four main strategy groups: memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Memory strategies play crucial roles in helping learners remember the words. They are those that '*enable learners to store verbal material and then retrieve it when needed for communication*' (Oxford, 1990: 39). Memory strategies are also known as 'mnemonic' methods. They include memorization techniques such as grouping a word with its association, using key words, semantic mapping, and reviewing in a structured way. Cognitive strategies are similar to memory strategies; however, they are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing. These strategies are less obviously linked to mental operation. They operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that support learning (Oxford,

1990). They can be considered under three broad groups of processes: rehearsal, organization and elaboration. Examples of cognitive strategies are repetition and using mechanical means to study vocabulary, including the keeping of vocabulary notebooks. Metacognitive strategies are used by learners to control and evaluate their own learning. These strategies allow learners to control their own cognition to cooperate in the learning process by using functions such as planning, monitoring and evaluating. Learners can also consolidate the words learnt by studying and practicing in groups, with peers or a teacher, or interacting with native speakers. These social strategies enhance interaction, providing opportunities to use the words in a real communication.

These vocabulary learning strategies are important contributors in learning new words. They equip learners with effective tools to expand lexical knowledge learning new words, storing and turning them to active vocabulary that is ready to be used in communication.

Factors affecting vocabulary learning
Vocabulary learning is affected by many factors (Higa, 1965; Nation, 1990; Laufer, 1997). These factors can be broadly categorized into two groups: words and learners.

Frequency of word occurrence and saliency are important words' characteristics that designated whether the words would be noticed and chosen to be learnt. The words that occur at high frequencies are more easily recognized than words at low frequencies (Ellis, 2002). Therefore, the more often the learner encounters the words, the higher the chance that they will remember and learn the words. Moreover, if the words are perceived as 'salient', they will be easily noticed and picked up by learners. Skehan (1998: 48) says that "*the more a form stands out in the input stream, the more likely it will be noticed*". Word saliency can be promoted. For example, teachers may emphasize the words by writing them on the board, asking questions about the words to direct learners' attention, and using unusual tones of voice to make the words more obvious. However, neither frequency nor saliency can work in isolation; both need to be incorporated with other factors to explain how students learn vocabulary.

Learners seem to be the most influential factors in vocabulary learning. Learner factors include needs, motivation, attitudes, and learning styles and strategies used. Learners learn words more quickly if they have a need for them in some ways. They are likely to remember well vocabulary which is concerned with their needs and relevant to their use in the future as needs, interest, attitudes and motivation are closely related, and these positively contribute to learning. Styles and strategies used are also crucial learner factors that strongly affect success in vocabulary learning. Learners use their preferred strategies as tools to cope with words they have encountered. However, research suggested that some strategies are more effective than others. Therefore, if the learners' preferred strategies are effective strategies, their vocabulary learning is likely to be efficient. Nonetheless, other research does not support concepts of 'good' or 'poor' strategies. Rather they point out that more effective learners use greater variety of strategies and use them in ways that help them complete language tasks successfully, whereas less effective learners have fewer strategy types and frequently use strategies that are inappropriate to the task or that do not lead to successful task completion (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). However, though there is no consensus whether it is better to use more strategies or

which strategies are better, it is agreed that styles and strategies used vary from learner to learner and individual differences play an important role in any kind of learning.

Methodology
Subjects
Fifty Pratom 6 students at Watthampirataram School were the subjects of this study. They were randomly chosen from the three classes in the school.

Instruments and procedures
Two instruments were used, a questionnaire (N=50) and a semi-structured interview (N=10), both of which were in Thai in order to avoid misunderstanding due to language constraints. In the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), the subjects were asked about their background and attitudes towards vocabulary learning, opportunities for encountering new English words, strategies for obtaining and consolidating words' meanings, and problems related to vocabulary learning. They were in the form of a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The subjects were provided with lists of possible sources where they encountered new words and vocabulary strategies, and they were asked to select the point on the scale that fitted their vocabulary learning and strategy use. Open-ended questions were also provided to account for other sources or strategies not included in the list. To obtain additional information and clarification of the questionnaire data, ten of the fifty subjects were randomly selected for a follow-up semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2).

Data analysis
The data obtained from the questionnaire and the interview were grouped into themes of students' background, their views on the importance of vocabulary learning, vocabulary learning opportunities, vocabulary learning strategies and problems related to vocabulary learning. The numbers of subjects supplied each answer discussed were counted into percentages and the total responses to the rating scale items were calculated for mean scores to see how often they used the strategies. The means are interpreted as follows: 4.21-5.00 = always, 3.41-4.20 = often, 2.61-3.40 = sometimes, 1.81-2.60 = hardly ever, and 1.00-1.80 = never.

Results and discussion
This section begins with presentation and discussion of the questionnaire findings on the subjects' views on vocabulary learning and their reports on use of vocabulary learning strategies. Then the interview data on the subjects' problems learning vocabulary are presented and discussed.

Subjects' views and backgrounds on vocabulary learning
The findings from part 4 of the questionnaire revealed that the subjects had different views on, and levels of commitment to, vocabulary learning. As shown in Table 1, most of the subjects (72%) regarded vocabulary learning as 'important' or 'very important'; only 4% did not think that it is important while some subjects (24%), however, could not decide how important vocabulary learning is to them.

Table 1: Subjects' views on importance of vocabulary

Levels of importance	Subjects (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Very important	17	34%
Important	19	38
Undecided	12	24
Less important	0	0
Not important	2	4

Noticeably, though most of the subjects realized the importance of vocabulary learning, they reported learning only a few words a week. Table 2 shows that most of them (70%) reported learning not more than 10 words while only 30% learn more than 10 words per week. This means that, in a twenty-week semester, they would learn only about 200 words and not be able to meet the requirement of the primary schools' curriculum, which stipulates that students at this level should know 1,050-1,200 words (Basic Education Curriculum, 2001 / B.E. 2544).

Table 2: Numbers of words subjects reported learning per week

Words per week	Subjects (N=50)	Percentage (%)
Fewer than 10 words	35	70
More than 10 words	15	30

In addition, the subjects spent only a few days a week on vocabulary learning. More than half of them (58%) spent only 1-2 days a week on vocabulary learning. Only some (30%) spent 3-4 days per week and 12% spent more than 5 days a week on vocabulary learning. It should, therefore, be pointed out that the subjects did not spend enough time on vocabulary learning as they studied only a few words in a few days. Their devotion to vocabulary learning is not enough and this might partly explain their insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Sanaoui, 1995).

Table 3: Time subjects reported **spending on vocabulary learning per week**

Days per week	Subjects (N=50)	Percentage (%)
1-2 days	29	58
3-4 days	15	30
5-6 days	2	4
Every day	4	8

However, in part 1 of the questionnaire, when the subjects were asked about opportunities for encountering new English words**,** they reported opportunities both inside and outside class. The subjects encountered new words from teachers, the course books, graded readers, and other 'daily life' situations, explaining that they meet new English words from television programmes, advertisements, magazines, etc. A few of

them (10%) also added a different source, such as dictionaries. In the interview, the subjects revealed that, in school, they usually read the school magazine, *Thammasamphan*; although it is in Thai, there are some English words in a dedicated English column.

These wide ranges of opportunities should have positively reinforced their vocabulary learning; however, based on the evidence from part 4 of the questionnaire (presented above), the subjects did not seem to learn these words. This might be because their frequency and saliency may not be enough for them to pay attention to and pick up for learning (Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2002). The subjects may see new words from a TV program or a magazine every day, but they did not reinforce or review the words so they easily forget them.

Subjects' vocabulary learning strategies
The subjects' vocabulary learning strategies are classified into groups of discovery strategies and consolidation strategies.

Discovery strategies
Part 2 of the questionnaire asked the subjects about their use of discovery strategies to find the meanings of new words. Table 4 presents the strategies reported as used either 'often' or 'always'.

Table 4: Strategies reported frequently for discovering meanings of new words

Discovery strategies	Reports of using strategies 'often' or 'always' (%)	Mean
Using bilingual dictionary (English-Thai, Thai-English) (DET)	82	4.22
Asking teachers (SOC)	64	3.86
Using monolingual dictionary (English-English) (DET)	62	3.72
Asking friends (SOC)	60	3.68
Guessing meaning from context (DET)	52	3.52

Note: DET = Determination strategies; SOC = Social strategies (Schmitt, 2000)

In Part 2 of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked how often they used five discovery strategies listed based on a five-point rating scale (from 'never' to 'always'). As suggested by the mean scores, which ranged from 3.52-4.22, all of these strategies were reported as being utilized 'often' or 'always'. Using a bilingual dictionary seemed to be the most frequently used strategy (82%), a finding that is consistent with many studies, such as Ahmed's (1989) and Gu & Johnson's (1996). Though a bilingual dictionary seems to lead to problems of word-to-word translation and the use of a monolingual dictionary is usually suggested to promote better learning (Baxter, 1980; Nation 2001), for this level of learners, a bilingual dictionary could be a good start. They then could be trained to use a monolingual dictionary after gaining more confidence.

Guessing meaning from context was the least common determination strategy and it was reported by only half of the subjects (52%). In order to be able to use contextual clues effectively, a reader needs to know about 95% of the running words (Nation, 2001). This seemed to be the reason why the strategy was not common among the subjects who had limited lexical knowledge. Improving vocabulary knowledge and promoting this strategy, therefore, seem to be interrelated.

The subjects also commonly used social strategies in discovering word meanings. These strategies involved students communicating with other people. However, students should be well trained also to check the information obtained and to reflect on when they should ask. These strategies should be used with caution. There should be a balance between depending on others and aspiring towards being autonomous.

Consolidation strategies
In Part 3 of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked to rate how often they used twelve consolidating strategies for vocabulary learning. To facilitate discussion, these strategies were then categorized into two main groups: strategies related to reciting and rote-learning and those requiring deeper levels of cognitive processing**.** The mean scores reported in Table 5 represent the averages of the mean scores of strategies in each group.

Table 5: Strategies reported for consolidating vocabulary learning

Consolidation strategies	Reports of using strategies 'often' or 'always' (%)	Mean
Strategies related to reciting and rote-learning: - Writing words in a notebook for remembering - Repeating the words and their meanings - Sticking words on a wall for remembering	72	3.74
Strategies requiring deeper levels of cognitive processing: - Using semantic mapping - Categorizing words - Making sentences from words - Creating stories from words - Using pictures or flash cards - Relating words with similar sounds - Using synonyms - Using antonyms - Playing vocabulary games	30	3.21

All of the strategies mentioned in Table 5 were used by the subjects to review and recite the words they encountered. It seemed that the subjects used many memory strategies in consolidating their vocabulary learning. However, most of them (72%) relied on strategies that involve reciting (e.g. putting words in a notebook, repeating words until they remembered, seeing the words again and again by sticking them nearby). They

frequently used these strategies as evidenced by the mean score of 3.74; however, these strategies do not seem to be very effective (Chamot, 2005).

Only some subjects (30%) used higher level cognitive strategies or strategies that required deeper levels of cognitive processes, such as, grouping strategies, semantic mapping or forming sentences from words (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Moreover, the reported frequency of these strategies were not high, as suggested by the mean score of 3.21; these strategies were just 'sometimes' used. The use of less effective strategies might be part of the causes of the subjects' vocabulary problems.

Subjects' problems learning vocabulary
Moving to the interview data, these revealed that the subjects' major problem seemed to be not enough devotion. This part of the findings reinforced the data from the questionnaire which indicted that they learnt only a few words per week and spent only a few days on vocabulary learning. Insufficient learning time is often a major factor that deters mastery of language (Lightbown & Spada, 1989). The same to vocabulary learning, learners need to devote sufficient time to learning and be actively involved in the learning process. Most of the interviewed subjects (6 out of 10) rarely practiced or recited words outside class. They explained that they did not have time to do so because of homework from other courses and some family errands. This pointed towards inefficient time management. Students should be taught how to manage time efficiently and how to prioritize their work since they were young as time management and self-disciplines are important learning skills.

The subjects also mentioned problems about their memory. Three of them complained that they often forgot the words even though they had just learned them the day before. Another two subjects stressed that they did not have good techniques for vocabulary learning so they easily forgot the words. The researchers thought that this issue might be related to strategies that they used. After checking with them, it appeared that the main strategies used were reciting or repeating the words, which, incidentally, reflects the questionnaire data (reported above). As discussed earlier, these strategies were not quite effective as they did not require higher levels of cognitive processes (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). If the learners employ more effective vocabulary learning strategies, they should be able to remember the words better and make the words become their active vocabulary.

Two subjects blamed their poor background and level of English. They said that they were not good at English and this demotivated them. Two subjects thought that English was very difficult so they did not like English. They could not read many words so they did not bother paying attention to leaning them. Students' attitudes towards the language and language learning are one influential factor that strongly affects the results of their learning (Nation, 2001). If they are discouraged and feel that they could not learn well, they can never learn well.

Lack of parental and moral support also seemed to be a problem. Two subjects explained that their parents did not know English so, when they had problems, they could not ask their parents for help. They then did not and could not review words at home. Two mentioned that they felt inferior in an English class. They did not like to be laughed at by

friends. Another subject seemed to be discouraged by a teacher after hearing him say "Even I myself don't know English".

Conclusion

The findings indicate that vocabulary learning is influenced by many interrelated factors, including students' attitudes, devotion and vocabulary learning strategies. In fact, most of the subjects recognized the importance of vocabulary; however, they did not devote enough time to vocabulary learning and this may have strongly affected their lexical development. They encountered new words both from resources both in and beyond class but did not pick up the words for further consolidation. Moreover, relying more on rote-learning rather than utilizing strategies that require deeper processing, such as using word associations, seemed to fail to optimize the situation. Many of them forgot the words easily afterward. In addition, some of the subjects had negative attitudes towards English and their own learning, thinking that English was too difficult for them and they were in a hopeless situation. Learners with poor English background and negative attitudes need a lot of support from teachers, parents and their peers.

These factors helped explain causes of the subjects' insufficient vocabulary knowledge. This problem needs to be dealt with carefully and immediately as they are at the age when they can best learn English. An English class can be a good starting point to solve the problem. Positive attitudes and effective vocabulary learning strategies should be introduced and reinforced to equip learners with effective learning tools so that they could make the most out of their opportunities for language learning.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed in order to investigate Pratom 6 students' vocabulary learning strategies. It includes 4 parts. Your answers will not affect your grade for English course. Please feel free to give frankly opinion.

Directions: Please put √ in the column that fits your choice.

When learning vocabulary, I do this
5 = always   4 = often   3 = sometimes   2 = hardly ever   1 = never

Vocabulary Learning Strategies	Your Opinion				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Part 1. Sources that students encounter new words					
1. Course books					
2. Teacher taught in class					
3. Graded readers					
4. Daily life (e.g. newspaper, TV, billboards)					
5. Others (Please specify)…………………………………….					
Part 2. Strategies students use for finding out the meaning of new words					
1. Ask teachers					
2. Ask friends					
3. Use a bilingual dictionary (English-Thai, Thai-English)					
4. Use a monolingual dictionary (English-English)					
5. Guess meanings from contexts					
6. Others (Please specify)…………………………………….					
Part 3. Strategies use to review and recite words encountered					
1. Write words in a notebook for remembering					
2. Write words on paper and stick them up where they can be easily seen (e.g. on the wall, mirrors, beds, doors)					
3. Make sentences from words					
4. Use pictures or flash cards for remembering techniques					
5. Categorize or group words into themes					
6. Play vocabulary games (e.g. crosswords, word puzzles)					
7. Recite words with Thai translation					
8. Relate words with the same or similar sounds (e.g. use rhyme)					
9. Use synonyms (e.g. learn-study, home- house)					
10. Use antonyms (e.g. good-bad)					
11. Create stories from words					
12. Use semantic mapping					
13. Others (Please specify)…………………………………….					

Part 4. Others

1. Beside the strategies mentioned, do you have any other vocabulary strategies?
   ☐ Yes (Please specify)…………………………………………….
   ☐ No
2. How often do you learn vocabulary by yourself?
   ☐ 1-2 days/week   ☐ 3-4 days/week
   ☐ 5-6 days/week   ☐ every day
3. How often do you learn vocabulary by yourself?
   ☐ fewer than 5 words   ☐ 5-10 words   ☐ 10-15 days/week
   ☐ more than 15 words (please specify)…………………. Words
4. In your opinion, how important is vocabulary learning?
   (Put a √ the column that fits your opinions)

1	2	3	4	5
(Not important)	(Less important)	(Undecided)	(Important)	(Very important)

5. Please give information on your vocabulary learning problems or any comments.
   ………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………………………
   Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview questions

1. What do you think about your levels of English and your vocabulary learning? How well is your learning / vocabulary learning?
2. Do you have time / opportunities to learn vocabulary outside class? Where? When?
3. How much time do you spend on vocabulary learning? How many words do you learn per week? Is this enough? Why / Why not?
4. How do you learn vocabulary? Do you have any special techniques in learning vocabulary? Please give some examples what you have done and or some words that you used the techniques with.
5. Do you think your techniques are effective? Why? Why not?
6. Do you have any problems in learning vocabulary? What are they? How did you try to solve the problems? Did your techniques work?
7. What factors influence your vocabulary learning the most?
   - Do your teacher and his / her teaching techniques influence you?
   - Do your parents influence you?

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The Effects of Reading Strategies Instruction on Graduate Students' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the effects of reading strategies instruction on graduate students' reading comprehension whose reading comprehension abilities are moderate. The randomly-selected, pretest-posttest control-group research design was employed with first-year graduate students in the academic year 2005 from various faculties at a public university in Bangkok. After sixteen weeks of instruction, both groups were administered a reading comprehension post-test and ten subjects in the experimental group were randomly selected and interviewed to elicit their attitudes towards using reading strategies. Based on both statistical data and interviews, there was substantial evidence to show that there were positive outcomes even though there were no statistically significant differences among the subjects studied. However, examining the experiment throughout the whole process, the research yields the result that there was something qualitatively different among the two groups, especially the teaching-learning atmosphere and the classroom-interactions, which were overtly observed.

Background of the study

A great deal of time is spent during graduate study on reading materials, from which graduate students must gain the gist and extract relevant information in order to attain deeper levels of understanding. Graduate students devote countless hours of effort browsing assigned texts and related research articles from various professional journals to obtain the information they need. In the process, they employ various techniques which they assume will help them more or less accomplish their goal. Because of the complexity and amount of materials that graduate students must cover in a short period of time each semester, it is vital that their reading be both purposeful and efficient enough to understand the texts adequately.

To ensure this, graduate students must develop the reading strategies that are assumed to be crucial for their reading comprehension. Reading strategies equip the students with the skills of how to handle their reading materials effectively, how to understand textual structures, how to read for different purposes and how to reflect on their reading. Once they have developed and utilized their reading strategies, they will more likely understand the written texts better. Several research studies have shown that reading strategies play a vital role in students' reading comprehension. Among those studies, it is shown that good and poor readers of the English language who are second language learners use different types of reading strategies in their reading performance (Carrell et al., 1988; Salatachi & Akel, 2002; and Wong & Agnes, 2003).

There are more than 4,000 graduate students at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand, who are required, willingly or not, to read English textbooks and articles. Reading skills are the most commonly used language skill at this level of study (Vessakosol & Parisuttimarn, 1985). However, a substantial number of these students

struggle to understand the texts they read. To help them cope with this problem, therefore, they are introduced to reading strategies and are encouraged to apply these strategies as often as possible in order to improve their reading skills and to better understand the texts. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effects of reading strategies on graduate students who are classified as 'moderate' in their reading comprehension ability.

Objectives of the study
This study aims to:
- investigate the effects of reading strategies instruction on graduate reading comprehension;
- find out the effects of reading strategies instruction on reading skills of graduate students' reading comprehension;
- compare students' attitudes *before* and *after* instruction in the use of reading strategies.

Research questions
This study attempts to answer the following questions:
1. Is there any difference in reading achievement between graduate students who have received explicit instruction in the use of reading strategies and those who have not?
2. Are there any differences between male and female graduate students who have received explicit instruction in the use of reading strategies and those who have not?
3. What are graduate students' attitudes towards using reading strategies?

Literature review
Reading comprehension
The ultimate goal of reading is reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is the process through which readers use their own syntactic, semantic, rhetorical and prior knowledge as well as necessary cognitive skills to analyze, interpret and understand the writer's thoughts and ideas conveyed through the printed text (Devine, 1986). Therefore, readers employ different kinds of reading skills in order to understand what they read (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

According to Anderson (1999), there are three models of comprehension process: 'bottom-up', 'top-down' and 'interactive'. According to 'bottom-up' models, readers decode and reconstruct the author's meaning through recognizing the printed letters and words and then build meaning from the smallest textual units at the 'bottom' (letters and words) to larger and longer units (phrases, clauses, intersentential linkages) at the 'top' units (Carrell, 1988). As for the 'top-down' models, readers move through reading texts trying to understand them as a whole without worrying about individual visual components of the language but actively using strategies like hypothesis-testing, making and adjusting predictions, activating or generating prior knowledge as well as interpreting contextual clues (Anderson, 1999; Eskey, 1988). The 'interactive' model is the combination or interaction between the aforementioned models. According to Hedge (2000), the interactive model provides the description of a vital relationship with the text as the readers make a great effort to understand it; it also relates to the interactions among many different kinds of knowledge that the readers use while reading through texts.

Reading strategies

Reading strategies refer to those specific actions which readers employ before, during and after reading in order to understand most efficiently what they read. According to Koda (2005), reading strategies, or *strategic reading*, are believed to influence readers in adjusting their reading behaviors to work on text difficulty, task demands and other contextual variables. There are six characteristics of reading strategies that make them valuable for explicit teacher instruction (Paris et al., 1991, p. 609):

- Strategies allow readers to elaborate, organize and evaluate information derived from the text.
- The acquisition of reading strategies coincides and overlaps with the development of multiple cognitive strategies to enhance attention, memory, communication and learning.
- Strategies are personal cognitive tools that can be used selectively and flexibly.
- Strategic reading reflects metacognition and motivation because readers need to have both knowledge and disposition to use strategies.
- Strategies that foster reading and thinking can be taught directly by teachers.
- Strategic reading can enhance learning throughout the curriculum.

There are four main approaches to grouping reading strategies. First, Paris et al. (1991) classified reading strategies into three categories based on when they are used: *before*, *during* and *after* reading. *Before*, or pre-reading, strategies are believed to activate prior knowledge, or schemata, essential for understanding texts; *during*, or while-reading, strategies help to locate the main idea; *after*, or post-reading, strategies are used to review, detect and cogitate upon the information. Second, Anderson (1991) adjusted Paris et al.'s time-based distinctions into five categories: *supervising, supporting, paraphrasing, establishing text coherence* and *test-taking*. *Supervising* is used to self-monitor progress in comprehension; *supporting* for regulating processing behaviors such as skipping unknown words; *paraphrasing* for aiding information processing; *establishing text coherence* for global text-information processing; and *test-taking* for accomplishing a particular task on a reading test.

Third, Chamot & O'Malley (1994) grouped reading strategies into *cognitive*, *metacognitive*, and *social and affective* strategies. *Cognitive* strategies are used to accomplish a specific cognitive task during reading while *metacognitive* strategies are used to regulate cognitive processing; *social and affective* strategies are used to interact cooperatively with other strategies during reading. Lastly, following the reading models mentioned above, Anderson (1999) divided the reading process, or reading strategies, into three categories: *bottom-up*, *top-down* and *interactive*. The *bottom-up* process emphasizes 'lower-level' reading skills such as word recognition, letter identification and grapheme-phoneme recognition; the *top-down* process, on the other hand, operates mainly at a 'higher level', starting with hypothesizing and predicting, and then trying to confirm from the printed words. The *interactive* process is the interaction between the bottom-up and top-down processes and the interaction between the reader and the text.

Readers may choose a variety of strategies that they find appropriate for their reading proficiency and purposes. Successful readers tend to use many of the following specific actions (strategies) when attempting to comprehend reading materials (Gebhard, 1996, pp. 199-200). Those strategies are:

- Skipping words they do not know
- Predicting meaning
- Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context
- Not consistently translating
- Looking for cognates
- Asking someone what a word means
- Having knowledge about the topic
- Drawing inferences from the title
- Making use of all information in the paragraph to comprehend unfamiliar words
- Trying to figure out the meaning of a word by the syntax of the sentence
- Reading things of interest
- Studying pictures and illustrations
- Purposefully re-reading to check comprehension

Aebersold & Field (1997) further refined the set of reading strategies that can be used to help guide reading teachers to improve students' reading comprehension (see Appendix 1 for a modified version of their strategies that was used for instruction of the experimental group in this study).

Related studies concerning reading strategies
During the past two decades**,** a large body of research on reading strategies has accumulated. To narrow the focus, this paper considers only a representative sample of those studies conducted at the college level abroad and in Thailand. The findings yield remarkable and valuable insights for language teachers, especially reading teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

While university level students are consistently able to identify various kinds of reading strategies and agree that reading strategies may aid in reading comprehension, a surprisingly small percentage of those students actually employ reading strategies in their own reading behavior or use them successfully (Block, 1986; Anderson, 1991; Harnseithanon, 2002). In the Block (1986) study, researchers aimed at identifying the differences between native and non-native English-speaking college students in a remedial reading program. It was found that all participants in the study were able to identify various kinds of reading strategies, but only a few were able to use them successfully. It was concluded that it was implicitly invalid to assume that students would use reading strategies if they only knew about them.

Anderson (1991) studied *self-reported* actions among college learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners at an American university to determine whether strategies used in reading an academic text differed comparatively from those used in a standardized, multiple-choice reading test. It was found that participants who verbalized more during *self-reporting* generally performed better on reading tests; however, even though readers tended to know which strategies to use, they failed to employ the strategies successfully.

Other impediments to effectively using a wide range of reading strategies were borne out in studies of native and non-native speaking students. Upton (1997) investigated the use of reading comprehension strategies by Japanese ESL students enrolled at an American university. Five of them were taking intermediate ESL classes while another six were

taking academic subjects only. It was found that the ESL students tended to switch to their first language (L1) when coming across unknown vocabulary in a second-language (L2) text. The content-based students, however, retained the use of L2 in attempting to figure out the meaning of difficult vocabulary. Furthermore, the ESL students tended to rely more on translation and paraphrasing into L1.

Crabal (2002) surveyed the practice of reading strategies at the college level in universities in Portugal. The data from the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the students tended to use general strategies connected with their specific academic tasks and study habits. They avoided the use of strategies that involved interaction with the teacher and other strategies that would control/determine their academic writing tasks.

There are many research studies conducted with Thai students. Harnseithanon (2002) undertook a survey study of the effectiveness of reading strategies on English reading comprehension of third-year marketing students at a college in Thailand. The findings from the rated questionnaire indicated that the students had positive attitudes towards reading strategies and felt that reading strategies affected their reading comprehension moderately. Supanan (2005) investigated the reading strategies of first-year Business English students at a university in Thailand. The results of the questionnaire-based study showed that the students employed various reading strategies to assist in their comprehension of English material. More than half of the listed reading strategies were used by the students. The most frequent strategy identified was 'looking up the meanings of unknown words and/or usage from an English-Thai dictionary'.

Furthermore, two studies conducted on reading strategy use by Thai students reveal additional insights to how Thai university students employ reading strategies. Saowakhon (2003) studied the reading strategies of first-year engineering students at a university in Thailand. The results indicated that the students employed reading strategies moderately when reading English language materials. The students reported using reading strategies in learning vocabulary, learning difficult sentence patterns, reading passages, storing content in memory, individual reading outside the classroom and in other reading tasks requiring strategies. Meanwhile, Sunate (2004) surveyed the reading strategies used by students of English for Communication and a study-skills course at a Bangkok university. The findings revealed that, overall, the students used reading strategies moderately, but males tended to use reading strategies more frequently than females.

Based on the foregoing research studies, it can be summarized that both native and non-native English-speaking college students are *aware* of reading strategies, with some groups making moderate use of them while others apply them unsuccessfully. However, competency of reading strategies does not necessarily lead to enhanced performance in reading ability. Thus, an essential element in the learning of reading strategies may be the role and guidance of the teacher in actively modeling how to employ the strategies consistently and appropriately across the wide range of available strategic skills.

Methodology
Subjects and subject selection
This study is an applied research study involving an experimental study of the pretest-posttest control-group design, consisting of an experimental group and a control group. Each group consists of 30 first-year graduate students in the academic year 2005 from

various faculties at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. The procedure for selecting the subjects is as follows.

Incoming graduate students are required to take the Thammasat University Graduate Entrance Test (TU-GET) to determine their academic English language proficiency. Based on the score results for the purpose of this study, students were classified as poor, moderate or good readers. The criteria used were the mean ± 1.5 SD on their TU-GET scores: poor readers (17-39), moderate readers (40-54) and good readers (55-98).

Among the 25 classes of the English remedial course, with approximately 35 students in each class, 7 classes are made up of the moderate readers. Only two classes, comprising 70 moderate readers, were randomly used as subjects for this study. However, ten of them, five from each group, did not complete the post-test and were therefore eliminated from the study, making a total of 30 subjects in each group.

The principle rationale for selecting the moderate readers as subjects for this study is that many research studies tend to focus on the 'good' and 'poor' language students to determine the disparities between them. Few studies have focused attention on the 'moderate' group, thus making it hard to draw any generalizations from this group. Secondly, the author believes that the moderate group more or less accurately represents the average population and can lead to valuable generalizations in certain domains of study.

As shown in Table 1, the 30 subjects in the control group consisted of 30 graduate students, 18 of whom were males and 12 females, while the samples in the experimental group consisted of 30 graduate students, 14 of whom were males and 16 females.

Table 1: Background of graduate students

Group	Sex	Number	%
Control	Male	18	60.00
	Female	12	40.00
Experimental	Male	14	47.00
	Female	16	53.00
Total		**60**	**100.00**

Instruments
Two instruments were used in this study, a reading comprehension pretest-posttest and a semi-structured interview. The test was used in order to find out if there were any differences between the control and experimental groups and any differences between male and female students; the interview was used to elicit the subjects' attitudes towards using reading strategies.

Procedures
Both the experimental and control groups were administered the pre-test. Both groups were taught by the researcher and they received an equal amount of instruction in reading comprehension over sixteen weeks. The control group was taught using a conventional teaching approach to reading comprehension skills while the experimental group received extensive instruction in applying reading strategies.

The reading strategies explicitly taught to the experimental group follow the researcher's adaptation of Aebersold & Field's (1997) set of reading strategies (see Appendix 1). The subjects in this group were introduced to the reading strategies in the first period of teaching, followed by reading practice of short passages closely related to students' schemata. As the course progressed, the teacher provided longer reading passages for the students to read, consistently and explicitly highlighting the use of appropriate reading strategies to assist in their comprehension.

After the sixteen weeks of instruction, both groups were administered the post-test, which was identical to the pre-test. The pretest-posttest was designed and administered by the Language Institute of Thammasat University. At the end of instruction, ten subjects in the experimental group were randomly selected and interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix 2 for core questions), conducted in Thai, recorded, translated and transcribed. The researcher sought to elicit the subjects' attitudes towards using reading strategies and how they used the reading strategies.

Data analysis
For the pretest-posttest, using SPSS, the arithmetic means (X) and standard deviations (SD) of the two groups were computed using the t-test to determine the differences between the two groups; the significance level was set at the $p = <.05$. The data from the interviews were analyzed descriptively.

Results
There are three parts to this section: results from the tests, results from the interviews and the researcher's informal observations of classroom interactions.

Results from the tests
As shown in Table 2, the average pre-test score of the control group was 455.33 with a SD of 68.27 while the average post-test score was 474.33 with a SD of 56.06. The result of the t-test was significantly different at the level of .05. For the experimental group, the average pre-test score was 442.37 with a SD of 65.79 while the average post-test score was 493.60 with a SD of 56.66. The result of the t-test was highly significantly different at the level of .05.

Table 2: Comparison of pre-test/post-test scores across groups

Group	Test	Number	Mean	SD	t-test	Significance
Control	Pre-test	30	455.33	68.27	-2.16	0.04
	Post-test	30	474.33	56.06		
Experimental	Pre-test	30	442.37	65.79	-7.41	0.00
	Post-test	30	493.60	56.66		

Note: The full score is 1,000.

Table 3 shows that the average pre-test and post-test scores for male students in the control group were 457.78 and 480.00 while the average pre-test and post-test scores of the female students were 451.67 and 465.83. However, the t-test was not highly significantly different at the level of .05. The average pre-test and post-test score of female students in the experimental group was lower than the male students', but the average post-test score of female students was higher than the male students'. However, the result of the t-test was not significantly different.

Table 3: Comparison of pre-test/post-test scores within groups by gender

Group	Test	Male		Female		t-test	Significance
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Control	Pre-test	457.78	67.87	451.67	71.71	0.24	0.81
	Post-test	480.00	56.67	465.83	56.48	0.67	0.51
Experimental	Pre-test	452.93	60.29	433.13	70.87	0.82	0.42
	Post-test	490.57	59.16	496.25	56.08	-0.27	0.79

Table 4 shows that the average pre-test scores of male students in the control group and the experimental group were almost the same, 457.78 and 452.93, respectively. However, the average post-test score of the experimental group was substantially higher than the control group's, 490.57 to 480.00, respectively. The result of the t-test was not significantly different. The average pre-test scores of female students in the control group was higher than those of the experimental group, 451.67 and 433.13 while the average post-test score of the experimental group was higher than the control group's, 496.25 to 465.83, respectively. The result of the t-test between these two groups was not significantly different at the level of .05.

Table 4: Comparison of pre-test/post-test scores across groups by gender

Group	Test	Control		Experimental		t-test	Significance
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Male	Pre-test	457.78	67.87	452.93	60.29	0.21	0.83
	Post-test	480.00	56.67	490.57	59.16	-0.51	0.61
Female	Pre-test	451.67	71.71	433.13	70.87	0.68	0.50
	Post-test	465.83	56.48	496.25	56.08	-1.42	0.17

Table 5 shows that the average pre-test and post-test scores of the control group were 455.33 and 474.33 while the average scores of the experimental group were 442.37 and 493.60, respectively. The result of the t-test was not significantly different at the level of .05.

Table 5: Comparison of average pre-test/post-test scores of the groups

Group	Control		Experimental		t-test	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Pre-test	455.33	68.27	442.37	65.79	0.75	0.46
Post-test	474.33	56.06	493.60	56.60	-1.32	0.19

Summary of results from the pretest-posttest data
The effects of reading strategies instruction on graduate students' reading comprehension reveal the following results, comparing the control group and the experimental group. There was no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the following:
- the students in the control group;
- the students in the experimental group;
- the male and female students in the control group;
- the male and female students in the experimental group;

- the male students in both the control and the experimental groups, even though the experimental group's post-test score was substantially higher than the control group's;
- the female students in both the control and the experimental groups, even though the experimental group's post-test score was substantially higher than the control group's; and
- the control and the experimental groups.

Results from the interviews

Most of the ten subjects interviewed from the experimental group stated that using reading strategies boosted their confidence and made them more at ease when reading by themselves. Some of them reported reading the title or the topic of the reading passages first and trying to guess some of the content of the passages from the topic. Some of the interviewees said they skimmed through the passages without paying attention to unknown words and then asked themselves questions about the content of the passages. Next, some of them reported trying to derive the meaning of the unknown words, using word roots and contextual clues. Then they reread the passages, trying to grasp the main idea and major details of what they were reading; word roots and affixes were also examined from time to time and they paid attention to the syntax of the sentences to help them understand the passages better. Rereading was also a must for them to understand thoroughly what they were reading. Some of them also reported consulting friends during class reading tasks. The last step some of them mentioned was summarizing the passage.

Overall, the subjects said that using reading strategies increased their self-reliance and improved their levels of comprehension of the passages they read. Some of them concluded that their reading was not passive but quite active in terms of comprehending the vocabulary and grasping the whole meaning of the passages. Some of them reported guessing and trying to determine the correct meanings of unknown words and then confirming their meanings in order to understand the whole passage. Having had instruction in reading strategies motivated them to read more and to feel more comfortable when interacting with friends in a reading class.

Self-confidence

Some of the interviewees, who were taught reading strategies before they were encouraged to read on their own most of the time during the teaching activities, found that their confidence had increased. They claimed that they felt for the first time that they could rely on themselves when reading. Even though reluctant at first, they eventually felt at ease to move around and consult friends in the class to check their reading comprehension.

Self-reliance

Some of the interviewees claimed they had become more independent in reading all kinds of reading materials. Before instruction, they had not read much without a teacher's help, but now they believed they would be able to apply most of the reading strategies taught, especially skimming through the reading materials to get the general idea, guessing meaning using contextual clues, looking for key words, finding out the writer's intention and predicting.

Informal observations of classroom interactions

From the researcher's informal observation during the experiment, it seemed apparent that those graduate students who enjoyed using reading strategies felt more comfortable in a classroom atmosphere. There were more classroom interactions among classmates and teacher. The students worked at their own pace while the teacher allocated enough time for the students to complete their reading tasks. The most interesting consequence was the perceived increased rapport between the teacher and the students by the end of the course, which was very helpful in ensuring that the students could read accurately and with fuller comprehension.

Discussion and conclusion

This study intended to find out whether there is a relationship between reading strategies instruction and increased reading comprehension ability of moderate readers at a graduate-level English remedial course. This is a required course for all graduate students at Thammasat University, Bangkok, whose English skills did not meet the Graduate School's requirements. Based on both statistical data and interviews, there was substantial evidence to show that there were positive outcomes even though there were no statistically significant differences among the subjects studied. There may be various underlying reasons for this finding, one of which could be due to the sample size and the uneven number of male and female samples. Thus, based on the findings, the research questions can now be answered as follows:

1. There was no statistically significant difference at the level of .05 between the graduate students who were instructed in the use of reading strategies and those who were not.
2. There were no statistically significant differences between male and female graduate students who were instructed in the use of reading strategies for reading comprehension and those who were not.
3. The semi-structured interviews provided evidence that, following instruction, these graduate students had very positive attitudes towards using reading strategies.

Furthermore, from the researcher's informal observation through teaching both groups in the experiment, the research seems to yield the result that there was something qualitatively different between the two groups, especially the teaching-learning atmosphere and the classroom-interactions. Since this research focused mainly on moderate readers, it may be valuable to recommend that students at all levels be taught reading strategies at the very beginning of each semester so that they would have these skills at their disposal throughout their language courses. There should be further studies on reading strategies at all levels using greater sample size to verify the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction.

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Appendix 1: Strategies (adapted from Aebersold & Field, 1997)

This is a list of the strategies used in instruction to the experimental group in this study.

- Reading the title to infer what information might follow
- Paying attention to the general idea of the passage
- Guessing the meanings of unknown words by using the context
- Varying reading rates according to the type of the passage
- Skipping unknown words during the first reading
- Underlining or marking important points of what was read
- Trying to relate prior knowledge and experiences to the passage
- Re-reading texts in order to make sure that important information was not missed
- Reading over each sentence quickly for main ideas; then, going back and reading carefully for details
- Paying attention to key words in sentences
- Trying to understand what has been read by using imagination
- Guessing the meanings of unknown words through word roots and/or affixes (prefix, suffix, infix)
- Using different reading strategies according to the type of passage
- Noticing punctuation and using it as an aid to reading
- Guessing the meaning of unknown words by considering sentence syntax
- Separating important from unimportant information
- Finding out the writer's intention
- Keeping the purpose of reading in mind
- Summing up or noting down the content

Appendix 2: Core questions in the semi-structured interviews

- Do reading strategies help you read better?
- Have you ever been taught these strategies?
- What reading strategies do you use quite often?
- How do you feel when you apply these strategies?
- Do you think you will use them when you have to read any English materials?
- Would you recommend or introduce these strategies to your friends or your younger brothers and sisters to help them read better?
- Are you happy to have been taught these strategies and know how to use them?

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Native English Speaking Teachers' Beliefs
about Difficulties in Teaching English to Thai Learners

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate native English speaking teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners. The data were collected from 34 native speaker (NS) teachers who are employed by a private language school in Bangkok, Thailand. The instrument used was a questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended questions with rating scales and open-ended questions. The results revealed that the participants believed that teaching English for Thai learners tended to be easy; however, there were some difficulties that the participants encountered, including certain characteristics of Thai learners, the Thai educational system, teaching techniques, classroom management, school management and cultural differences. Additionally, the participants suggested some useful solutions for other NS teachers and they also commented on the Thai educational system.

Introduction

It is undeniable that English is an important means of communication, especially in the era of globalization. Most people around the world use English as an international language. For Thais, competence in English is seen as both a mark of sophistication and a passport to a more prosperous life (Smyth, 2001). Although, in Thailand, English is not usually necessary for people's daily communication, it is an important foreign language that Thai people use for various purposes, such as for studying and for communicating with foreigners. Furthermore, most private companies and even some governmental sectors nowadays require staff who have knowledge of English and are competent in the four language skills. Therefore, the demand for English language teaching in Thailand exceeds the supply of language schools and institutions.

There are many language schools in Bangkok that offer various English courses such as examination preparation, business English, language skills training and English for careers. Most language schools demonstrate their standards and quality by employing NS teachers. Avasadanond (2005) states that Thai students studying English in private language schools in Thailand will, for the most part, expect their teachers to be NSs and *farangs* (foreign Caucasians). There are already a great number of NSs employed currently in Thailand and the demand for them is likely to increase in the future as well.

Since most of them are from foreign cultural backgrounds, they may deal with the task of teaching based on their own cultural experiences and beliefs. These factors may influence teaching and learning English in the classroom as well. Thus, the beliefs of NS teachers should be examined. If we know what NS teachers think about teaching English to Thai learners, we will have a better idea of what they do in the classroom. Richards et al. (2001: 41) state that "the study of teachers' beliefs forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualise their work. In order to understand

how teachers approach their work, it is necessary to understand the beliefs and principles they operate from". Additionally, the study of teachers' beliefs can provide significant insights into many aspects of teaching and learning. Pajares (1992) states that exploring teachers' beliefs is essential to their professional development and improvement of their teaching practices. In view of the fact that the number of NS teachers is increasing in Thailand, their beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners should be examined.

Literature review
This review begins by defining teachers' beliefs, looks at the relationship between these beliefs and teaching, and reviews studies of teachers' beliefs.

Definitions of teachers' beliefs
Cognitive psychologists define 'belief' as one's representation of reality that guides both thought and behavior (Abelson, 1979; Anderson, 1985, cited in Johnson, 1994). Moreover, Rokeach (1968) and Johnson (1994) conclude that beliefs contain cognitive, affective and behavioral components and, therefore, act as influences on what one knows, feels and does. Borg (2001) describes 'belief' as a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others.

Since beliefs play such an important role in real life, they also play an important role in many aspects of teaching. Then, what does the term 'teachers' beliefs' mean? In the past decade, although the concept of teachers' beliefs has featured in educational research papers and has recently come into favor in English Language Teaching (ELT), there is no consensus on its meaning. Calderhead (1996, cited in Borg, 2001) describes teachers' beliefs as a term usually used to refer to teachers' pedagogic beliefs or beliefs of relevance to an individual's teaching. Similarly, Kagan (1992: 2, cited in Farrell, 1999) defines teachers' beliefs as "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught". She also mentions that teachers' beliefs are stable and do not change, maybe because, as mentioned by Hampton (1994, cited in Richards et al., 2001), they are 'personal constructs'. Additionally, Johnson (1999) states that teachers' beliefs could be seen as a belief substructure that interrelates with all other beliefs; they have a filtering effect on everything that teachers think, say and do in classrooms.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching
Teachers' personal views of their roles in the classroom are under the influence of their beliefs. This view is supported by Richards (1994), who states that a primary source for teachers' classroom practices is teachers' belief systems: the information, attitudes, values, theories and assumptions about teaching and learning which teachers accrue over time and bring with them to the classroom. Similarly, Richards & Lockhart (1994) describe what teachers do in the classroom as a reflection of what they know and believe, and that their knowledge and thinking provide the underlying framework or schemata that guide their classroom actions. Pajares (1992, cited in Albion, 1999) also supports a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practices. Furthermore, Richards & Lockhart (1994) divide teachers' beliefs about language teaching into five aspects: beliefs about English, learning, teaching, programs and curricula, and language teaching as a profession.

Studies of teachers' beliefs

There are three studies concerning teachers' beliefs which the researchers used as the main guidelines in conducting this study. The first is a study by Richards et al. (2001). The study explores the beliefs and processes of change reported by 112 English-language teachers from Southeast Asian countries. They were asked to report their most important beliefs about language teaching and learning. Thirteen main categories of beliefs were reported, the four most important of which are as follows. The first one was beliefs about the role of grammar and how much grammar should be taught. The second largest category of beliefs was about learners; the subjects commented that the learners should be independent, self-directed and responsible. The third most common key beliefs were about the importance of the language skills; they mentioned the importance of reading instruction, especially extensive reading. The fourth one was teachers' characteristics; it was their belief that teachers should be respectful and supportive and should act as facilitators, leaders and guides.

The second study was conducted by Karabenick & Noda (2004). Their study is about the professional development implications of teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward English language learners. In one Midwestern suburban district in the United States, 729 language teachers were asked about their beliefs, attitudes, practices and needs related to their learners, who were immigrants and refugees. The study shows interesting results, such as: (1) the teachers held positive attitudes toward having English language learners (ELLs) in their classes; (2) most teachers believed that learning in one's first language (L1) does not interfere with learning in the second language (L2); (3) the majority believed that, if ELLs develop literacy in their L1, it would facilitate the development of reading and writing in English; (4) they believed that assessing abilities and academic performance may be inappropriate for ELLs; however, they were uncertain whether ELLs should be tested in English or their mother tongue; and, (5) they believed that ELLs' parents were not as involved in the schools as were parents of non-ELLs.

In the third study, Chin (2005) investigated NS teachers' beliefs about Korean learners. The data obtained from 18 NS teachers showed four main aspects to the respondents' beliefs about teaching and learning in Korea. The first one was beliefs about language teachers. The respondents believed that a good language teacher was someone who could facilitate students' learning, assess students' levels and adjust accordingly, gain students' interest, entertain students, be creative and interested in teaching, and be open-minded and understanding of the students. The second one was beliefs about Korean EFL learners. They believed that Korean EFL learners had negative and passive attitudes towards learning English. They were weak in spoken English because they lacked confidence. They also reported that Korean EFL learners did not have much exposure to foreigners. The third was beliefs about favorite classroom activities; the respondents mentioned that using group-oriented creative activities was popular among Korean learners. Lastly, for beliefs about teaching strategies, the results revealed that role-play activities could encourage Korean EFL learners to learn effectively; also, the activities given should be various and relevant to learners' interests.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to explore what NS teachers' beliefs are about the difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners touching on these elements: teaching techniques, classroom management, communication, teaching language skills, curriculum, classroom activities, material and assessment. The results will show us

what difficulties the NS teachers encountered and should help us investigate ways to solve the problems. From the results, Thai teachers and educational sectors will also learn and understand NS teachers, which should help us work more co-operatively with them in the future.

Methodology
Subjects
In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the data had to be obtained from NS teachers who had pedagogical knowledge and real teaching experience in Thailand; therefore, setting the criteria for selecting subjects was necessary. For this study, the subjects had to have: a Bachelor's degree; at least one year's teaching experience; and an ELT certificate, such as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

The subjects finally selected for this study were 34 NS teachers who were employed by a private language school in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants were aged 25-61 and consisted of 33 males and 1 female. There were 12 Britons, 10 Americans, 5 Australians, 3 Canadians, 2 New Zealanders and 2 South Africans. Their average English teaching experience in Thailand was four years; 27 participants held a Bachelor's degree, 6 participants held a Master's degree and 1 had a Doctorate. All participants also held certificates in English language teaching: 19 participants held a TEFL certificate, 10 participants held a CELTA and 5 participants held a TESOL certificate.

Instrument
A questionnaire consisting of three parts was used as the research instrument. The first part is about personal information, including name, age, gender, nationality, what level of students the subject is teaching and how long the subject has taught in Thailand. The second part contains both the rating scale and open-ended questions that concern the subjects' perceptions on teaching difficulties they are encountering in Thai classrooms; the rating scale addressed beliefs related to eight teaching areas: communication, assessment, materials, classroom management, teaching techniques, curriculum, language skills and classroom activities. The last part contained an open-ended question asking for suggestions or information that the subjects would like to provide for other NS teachers teaching in Thailand.

Procedures
Pilot study
A trial was first done to see if the questionnaire was comprehensible. Two NS teachers who are employed by *EF English First Language School* (a privately run school) participated as the pilot subjects.

Questionnaire adjustment
There were two beneficial suggestions from the pilot subjects to adjust the questionnaire to be more comprehensible for the real subjects: providing descriptions for some technical words (i.e. 'norm-referenced' and 'criterion-referenced'); and, in Item 14 of Part II, class size should be specified as the number of students in English language classes in Thailand varies according to each school's policy.

Data collection
Copies of the revised questionnaires were distributed to 45 NS teachers employed by *EF English First Language School*; 34 completed questionnaires were returned.

Data analysis
The results from the closed-ended questions (i.e. the data from the rating statements in the questionnaire) were analyzed quantitatively by using arithmetic means ($\overline{X}$) and were interpreted by using the following criteria: 5.00-4.21 = very difficult; 4.20-3.41 = difficult; 3.40-2.61 = not too difficult; 2.60-1.81 = easy; and 1.80-1.00 = very easy. The qualitative part (i.e. the data from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire) was analyzed by grouping under the same themes.

Data presentation
The results will be presented under four headings: NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with various teaching areas; their beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with their personal perceptions; suggestions for NS teachers; and suggestions concerning the Thai educational system.

- **NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with various teaching areas**

This section reports the data from the rating scale addressing beliefs in eight teaching areas.

According to Table 1 (below), generally, the subjects rated their difficulty in teaching English to Thai learners as 'not too difficult' (2.65). It was found that none of the teaching areas was in the 'very difficult' or the 'very easy' categories. Furthermore, we might say that the NS teachers believed that teaching English to Thai learners tended to be easy; as we can see, half of the teaching areas were categorized into the easy level (22 items from 43 items).

The most difficult areas were: to encourage learners to use English outside the classroom (3.81); teaching in classes with more than 35 students (3.43); and encouraging Thai learners to learn independently (3.41) Three more aspects tended to be difficult as the mean scores were more than 3: to help Thai learners think critically (3.39), teaching classes with mixed levels of proficiency (3.36) and communicating with the learners' parents (3.00). On the other hand, establishing a positive relationship with Thai students and providing supplementary materials were the easiest (2.09).

Table 1: NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties teaching English to Thai learners

Rating scales	Teaching areas	Means
Difficult	**Teaching techniques**	
	Encouraging students to use English outside the classroom	3.81
	Promoting learning independence	3.41
	Classroom management	
	Teaching large classes (more than 35 students)	3.43
Not too difficult	**Teaching techniques**	
	Helping students think critically	3.39
	Encouraging students to use English in the classroom	2.68
	Motivating students to learn	2.64
	Classroom management	
	Teaching students who have different levels of proficiency	3.36
	Teaching discipline (e.g. be punctual, be honest)	2.91
	Communication	
	Communicating with parents	3.00
	Communicating with English language department officers	2.65
	Teaching language skills	
	Teaching grammar	2.97
	Teaching writing	2.88
	Teaching reading	2.71
	Curriculum	
	Teaching without a curriculum	2.97
	Teaching students to achieve school's curriculum	2.75
	Classroom activities	
	Teaching by using discussion	2.71
	Using whole-class work	2.61
	Teaching by using role play	2.61
	Assessment	
	Designing testing	2.73
	Using a variety of assessment	2.62
	Material	
	Teaching with materials given by school	2.70
Easy	**Classroom activities**	
	Using group work	2.36
	Teaching by using various activities	2.32
	Using individual work	2.29
	Using pair work	2.24
	Teaching by using games	2.23
	Teaching techniques	
	Building good attitude towards English	2.59
	Increasing students' self confidence	2.58
	Making students involved in learning activities	2.53
	Assessment	
	Testing by using norm references	2.54
	Grading / Marking students' assignments	2.53
	Testing by using criterion references	2.48
	Using tests provided by school	2.39
	Teaching language skills	
	Teaching listening	2.53
	Teaching speaking	2.41
	Teaching pronunciation	2.36
	Teaching vocabulary	2.18
	Materials	
	Choosing materials suitable to students' level of proficiency	2.45
	Using authentic materials	2.21
	Providing supplementary materials	2.09
	Curriculum	
	Teaching by following school's curriculum	2.56
	Communication	
	Communicating with students	2.44
	Classroom management	
	Establishing a positive relationship with students	2.09
Average		**2.65**

- **NS teachers' beliefs about difficulties in teaching English to Thai learners along with their personal perceptions**

This section reports the data obtained from the four open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The data were obtained by counting the numbers of responses rather the number of the subjects because one subject could mention or report more than one difficulty.

Table 2 shows that 33 responses could be categorized into seven aspects: some Thai learners' characteristics, teaching techniques, Thai learners' backgrounds, materials and facilities, Thai teachers, classroom management and others.

Table 2: Additional teaching difficulties

Additional difficulties	Number of responses
Thai learners' characteristics	9
Teaching techniques	9
Thai learners' backgrounds	4
Materials and facilities	4
Thai teachers	2
Classroom management	1
Others	4
Total responses	**33**

* Number of subjects is 24.

According to Table 3, we can see that the subjects had different points of view in the difficulties that they encountered. The largest number of NS teachers thought that Thai learners represented the most difficult aspect while fewer saw teaching techniques and classroom management as the most difficult areas.

Table 3: Most difficult aspects of teaching

Most difficult aspects of teaching	Number of responses
Thai learners	10
Teaching techniques	4
Classroom management	4
School management	2
Immigration and visa rules	2
Culture differences	2
Thai teachers	2
Assessment	1
Total responses	**27**

* Number of subjects is 27.

Details of each of these eight difficult areas are now provided.

Thai learners

Ten responses show that some characteristics and learning styles of Thai learners were seen as the areas of greatest teaching difficulty. Four responses indicate that Thai learners were not interested in learning, had no sense of responsibility, did not respond to the NS teachers and did not participate in classroom activities. The subjects believed that these Thai learners' characteristics interfered with English language learning, as the examples cited below show.

"Most students are simply not interested in anything outside of shopping, food, movies, sleeping and fun." (Subject 5)

Some subjects, furthermore, believed that Thais were passive learners, used only a translation approach or paid attention only to grammar and vocabulary and did not desire to practice using English inside or outside the classroom.

"As stated, students tend to be passive. They do little to no work outside the classroom. They don't strive to improve their grammar or study vocabulary, nor do they desire to practice. An example is a conversation class, where all teachers have had the same problems of Thai students staring blankly and not wanting to say anything because they're afraid or incapable of trying." (Subject 24)

Teaching techniques

The second most difficult aspect was teaching techniques, which was obtained from four responses. The subjects believed that the most difficult aspect was giving instructions in order to enhance students' understanding. In addition, some subjects stated that it was very difficult when teaching low-proficiency students and where there were no teaching assistants.

"The biggest difficulty is breaking the language barrier with students who have a very low comprehension level, which is made harder when you don't have a teaching assistant." (Subject 13)

Classroom management

Four responses indicated that the most difficult teaching area concerns classroom management, especially in teaching large classes of beginners, as shown below.

"Most difficult – large groups of total beginners." (Subject 9)

Furthermore, it was found that teaching different levels of proficiency in the same class is difficult.

"Students being placed in classes that are obviously not assessed correctly during their interviews, i.e. teaching students at different levels." (Subject 20)

School management

Two subjects replied that their most difficult teaching aspect involved school management. One of these stated that he/she had to teach too many hours per day; the other stated that the school did not follow the new policy required by the Ministry of Education, as shown in this data extract:

"The biggest difficulty has been the unwillingness of some school administrations to change and adapt themselves to the new educational guidelines required by the Ministry of Education." (Subject 27)

Immigration and visas

Another most difficult area related to immigration and visa systems. Two subjects reported that Thai immigration and visa regulations were very strict. They believed that this difficulty discouraged NS teachers from living in Thailand.

"The biggest difficulty is actually two problems. Firstly, the immigration and visa rules and regulation relating to living in Thailand appear to be getting stricter and unworkable. It becomes more and more problematic

every month. The regulations do not encourage a foreigner to want to fight to stay in Thailand and come to be a teacher." (Subject 10)

Cultural differences
Two responses showed that cultural misunderstandings were another most difficult aspect such as they did not know what topics were acceptable to talk about in Thai classrooms.

> *"Cultural misunderstandings: knowing what topics are acceptable and unacceptable to talk about in class."* (Subject 18)

Thai teachers
To communicate with Thai teachers who generally could not speak fluent English was the most difficult aspect raised by two subjects. Moreover, one of the subjects implied that some Thai teachers had bad attitudes towards foreign teachers.

> *"Thai teachers' attitude – most are excellent towards foreign teachers. Some, however, like to complain about nothing."* (Subject 6)

Assessment
One subject said that the NS teachers had difficulties about assessment as their school's policy did not allow them to fail any students, even if their students had in fact failed.

> *"Not being able to be truthful about students because of the 'face' issue. They are not allowed to 'fail'. (most difficult)"* (Subject 16)

Table 4 shows the three aspects of teaching that the NS teachers considered were least difficult: Thai learners, classroom management and availability of work. These are now explained in more detail.

Table 4: Least difficult aspects of teaching

Least difficult aspects of teaching	Number of responses
Thai learners	3
Classroom management	1
Availability of work	1
Total responses	**5**

* Number of subjects is 5.

Thai learners
Even though in the previous section 'Thai learners' were counted as the most difficult area that NS teachers had to deal with, there were two subjects who believed that, overall, Thai students were keen, eager and willing to learn.

> *"The least difficulty encountered in teaching in Thailand are the students and the parents themselves. Overall, the students are keen and eager to learn and demonstrate a very good attitude to making improvements in using the language."* (Subject 10)

Another subject believed that Thai learners were friendly and had positive attitudes, which made it very easy to establish good relationships if the teacher paid attention to their culture.

Classroom management
A subject revealed that the least difficult aspect was teaching small groups of adults who were at an intermediate level of proficiency and willing to talk.

> *"Easiest is smaller groups of intermediate adults and students who like to talk."* (Subject 9)

Availability of work

A subject reported that there were many teaching positions which required NS teachers, so it was easy to find a job in Thailand.

> *"Least difficulty is availability of work."* (Subject 5)

- **Suggestions and comments provided for NS teachers**

There were thirty-four responses showing suggestions/comments provided for other NS teachers. The following are the details of each aspect reported.

NS teachers' qualifications

Twenty of the responses were about NS teachers' qualifications. Six subjects suggested that NS teachers should be patient, especially in encouraging Thai learners to speak. They pointed out that Thai learners were very shy and it took a long time to get over their shyness. Therefore, NS teachers had to be patient and try to find ways to help them. Nine subjects suggested that NS teachers should have a sense of humor, friendliness, empathy and attentiveness to Thai learners, as Thai learners react positively to humor. Moreover, five subjects suggested that NS teachers should take Thai culture and lifestyle into consideration.

Appropriate teaching techniques for Thai learners

Since nine NS teachers in this study believed that some characteristics of Thai learners interfered with learning English, choosing teaching techniques should depend on students' characteristics. NS teachers should convince shy students to learn from their own mistakes in order to get over their shyness. It was also found that using role-play or drama activities and having small group tasks could increase speaking English among Thai learners who lacked productive skills. Moreover, it was suggested that NS teachers should provide learning in a relaxing environment and lead Thai learners to realize the importance of English for their future careers in order to motivate them to learn. It was reported that Thai learners could not produce individual work as they lacked critical thinking skills. NS teachers, therefore, should provide the skills and push them to do their own work and avoid plagiarizing from each other.

Understanding Thai pronunciation

One subject mentioned that NS teachers should try to understand those aspects of Thai pronunciation that differ from English. In doing this, NS teachers would understand more when Thai learners pronounce some words incorrectly, especially the sounds with which they tend to have problems: /s/, /z/, /r/, /l/ and /v/.

Salary/Payment

Five of the subjects mentioned the low rate of payment for foreign teachers. Foreigners should come to Thailand to explore its great culture more than to earn money.

- **Suggestions and comments concerning the Thai educational system**

The subjects suggested that the system should continue to emphasize, but better enforce, a communicative approach and student-centred learning in order to promote English language learning among Thais. Moreover, phonetic teaching should be taught at the beginning in order to enhance listening and speaking skills. The subjects also commented that assessment in the Thai educational system was inappropriate. Students

automatically had a pass mark because teachers did not allow any students to fail, even if, in reality, they had failed.

To conclude this section, while, on the rating scale, the NS teachers in this study rated their overall difficulty in teaching English to Thai learners as 'not too difficult', it was found that there were difficulties in a few particular teaching aspects.

Discussion and conclusion
This section presents a discussion and conclusions of the findings concerning the roots of teaching difficulties and solutions.

- **Roots of teaching difficulties**
In Thailand, English has been used as a foreign language for communication with foreigners. Similar to other countries, Thailand has responded positively to the need to promote English as the language for international communication (Tripasai, 2004). However, Thais' level of English proficiency is low in comparison with other countries in Asia, e.g. Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore (Wiriyachitra, 2002). What are the causes of low levels of English language proficiency among Thai learners?

From the findings, the NS teachers believed that the most difficult aspect in English teaching in Thailand is some Thai learners' characteristics. They pointed out that Thai learners have some characteristics that interfere with teaching and learning English language. Why do Thai learners have these characteristics that obstruct their learning? Actually, these characteristics are not necessarily innate but might be influenced by external factors such as the educational system, culture and their families.

According to Kaewdang (1999), the Thai educational system has long emphasized 'chalk and talk' pedagogy, rote learning, and placed an importance on school education with teachers as the centre of teaching-learning activities. These traditional teaching approaches directly influence the learning styles of Thai learners. While English language teaching and learning in Thailand have been dominated by a teacher-centred approach, Thai learners view knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher. They place their trust and their future almost entirely into the hands of their teacher. Most Thai learners do not discover knowledge as they are always 'spoon fed' by their teachers. As a result, Thai learners get used to being passive learners who desire to be receivers rather than willing to be knowledge discoverers. This causes a lack of responsibility among Thai learners as well.

Since the Thai educational system has emphasized the translation approach or paid attention only to grammar and vocabulary, the Thai learning style is based on rote memorization. This causes Thai students to have less critical thinking and fewer problem-solving skills. Similarly, Buripakdi & Mahakhan (1980, cited in Adamson, 2005) state that a lack of 'critical questioning' in the Thai educational system prevents Thai students from being able to think critically; they can only be 'reproductive'. Individual thought and a questioning mind are not encouraged even through to the tertiary level, by which time, most Thai learners, according to Kirtikara (1996), are brain-dead or their brain neurons have atrophied.

Thai culture is another factor that influences the characteristics of Thai learners. This view is supported by Mackenzie (2002), who states that Thai learners are repeatedly

characterized as lacking willingness to speak due to a culturally-based seniority system. Thais are taught from childhood to follow the advice of their elders. They do not talk back or show contrasting views. As a result, Thais are reluctant to express direct feedback to their seniors, unwilling to ask questions directly to their teachers and often show their respect by keeping quiet in the classroom.

With the importance of the English language, most Thai parents attempt to increase their children's English proficiency. Most Thai learners are forced to learn English; as a result, their motivation is extrinsic. They view English as a compulsory subject and they realize that they have to pass their English courses in order to graduate. Extrinsic motivation exists when the only reason for performing an act is to gain something outside the activity itself, such as passing an exam or obtaining financial rewards (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989, cited in Williams & Burden, 1997). As many Thai learners do not learn English in order to fulfill individual needs, they are unmotivated. Therefore, it can be concluded that family pressure may be a cause of lack of intrinsic motivation among Thai learners.

- **Solutions to teaching difficulties**
To solve their difficulties, NS teachers have to work hard for long periods of time. In the primary stage of solving problems, the difficulties might decrease if NS English language teachers take the following into consideration.

Teaching approaches
There have been several attempts to reform English language educational policy in Thai educational institutions. At the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, these institutions have been criticized by both Western and local educationalists for taking a traditional and conservative approach to EFL teaching (Brown, 2004). For English language teachers, therefore, it is time to reform teaching approaches. The teaching approaches should be beneficial both in terms of promoting learning and changing the characteristics mentioned earlier. What teaching approaches should be used?

Recently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and learner-centred approaches have become the two most accepted tenets for English language teaching in Thailand (Watson Todd, 2005). CLT starts with a theory of language as communication and its goal is to develop the learner's communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, cited in Rao, 2002). There are a variety of communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, simulations and problem-solving tasks) which give students an opportunity to practice communicating meaningfully in different contexts and in different roles (Rao, 2002). As CLT provides students with opportunities to learn in various enjoyable ways, it is suitable for Thai learners who prefer to learn through the concept of 'learning with playing'. Thai learners are likely to be motivated if their teacher provides a relaxing environment for learning. Moreover, practicing communication skills in CLT could be used to encourage those Thai learners who pay attention only to grammar and vocabulary to speak English as well.

A learner-centred approach groups together educational philosophies that stress the individual needs of learners, the role of individual experience and the need to develop awareness, self-reflection, critical thinking, learner strategies and other qualities and skills that are believed to be important for learners to develop (Richards, 2003). Moreover, the learner-centred approach is aimed at replacing the conventional style of teaching (which sees teachers dictate to students) with carefully designed techniques

that can meet students' demands and encourage free thinking so as to enable them to have more creative minds. Such an approach is enshrined in the Thai National Educational Act 1999 / B.E. 2542, its Amendments and the Second National Education Act 2002 / B.E. 2545 (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). The role of teachers in this approach is to be facilitators who give students chances to learn what they prefer and enable them to discover knowledge by themselves. The learners have opportunities to learn from their own mistakes, opportunities that also enable Thai learners to be more active.

For these reasons, NS teachers should implement both CLT and learner-centred or child-centred approaches to enhance English language proficiency among Thai learners. It is also necessary to prepare Thais to learn through the new approaches. NS teachers should build positive attitudes towards English language learning among Thais. Furthermore, NS teachers should provide activities that meet learners' demands and encourage them to think critically. The purposes of the activities should cover the principles of a child-centred approach, such as promoting responsibility among students to find learning resources and to solve problems by themselves.

Cultural awareness

Any NS teacher who wants to teach in Thailand should learn to be aware of cultural differences so that they are able to take cross-cultural perspectives. They should learn the differences in order to adapt their own teaching. For example, in a Thai context, work and other tasks are made easier by the cultural concept of *sanuk*; that is, there must be an element of fun attached to everything (Kirtikara, 1996). Because having fun is an important part of the Thai lifestyle, activities that allow Thai students to learn while having fun can be very effective. Therefore, it is an advantage to use a variety of communicative activities such as games, role plays and simulations.

Thai learners are taught from childhood to show respect to their elders by following their advice and not talking back or showing contrasting views. Consequently, Thai learners often act towards their teachers in the same way as to their elders by keeping quiet in the classroom. Therefore, in order to lead Thai learners to feel free to express their feelings and ideas, NS teachers should be more of a friend than a 'teacher', showing fun and empathy as well as being attentive to them. It tends to be easy to build a good rapport with Thai learners as they tend to react positively to foreigners. Moreover, NS teachers should show patience, especially in encouraging Thai learners to speak, as most of them are very shy and a take long time to get over their shyness.

NS teacher training

Since NS teachers are from foreign cultural backgrounds and might deal with the task of teaching based on their own cultural experiences, they need to be trained in how to teach effectively in Thailand. What should be included in their training?

First, they should be trained about Thai culture and lifestyle. Due to a culturally-based seniority system, Thai learners might keep quiet in the classroom; so, NS teachers should not be frustrated that Thai learners are unwilling to participate in discussions or challenge their ideas. NS teachers should accept it, be patient and friendly, and encourage them to speak. They also need to know what topics are appropriate in the classroom; for example, to criticize the king and his family might be acceptable in Western countries, but it is prohibited in Thailand.

Second, NS teachers need to be trained about appropriate teaching techniques and classroom activities for Thai learners. They also need to know Thais' learning styles in order to take them into account in their teaching; for example, Thai learners are usually quite shy and afraid to lose face to their classmates by making mistakes in front of their teachers. Therefore, at the beginning, rather than individual activities or whole-class activities in which the teacher nominates individual students, there should be pair work, group work or whole-class choral work. Competitive games, especially those which require competing in groups, seem to be favored among Thai learners.

Finally, NS teachers should be trained about materials. They need to know how to utilize materials as well as to choose and adapt materials to suit to their learners.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the NS teachers in this study generally believe that teaching English to Thai learners tends to be easy; however, as mentioned earlier in this article, they reported encountering several difficulties. The researchers hope that this study will shed some light on the belief systems of NS teachers in Thailand. In addition, the data obtained may be beneficial to the Ministry of Education and to Thai schools.

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Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Diaries and Semi-Structured Interviews in a Case Study Examining a Thai ESL Student's Perceptions on British Culture

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Abstract

The paper addresses some advantages and disadvantages of using a diary and a semi-structured interview in a case study which examined the perceptions of British culture of a Thai ESL learner called 'Shirley'. Shirley's diary entries enabled the researcher to discover her existing cultural perceptions and see gradual changes in her attitudes towards learning about the target language culture over time. The semi-structured interview offered the researcher insights and information on certain issues, which might be far beyond what her diary entries could provide. Some drawbacks to diary data were noted: redundancy, irrelevance and inconsistency in the subject's writing; drawbacks to the interview data were researcher bias, the 'real-time' nature of the interview and the time-consuming nature of processing and analysing the interview data. Nevertheless, the advantages of the research methods employed appear to outweigh their inherent limitations. This paper could potentially benefit researchers in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL who plan to use diary studies and semi-structured interviews as research tools.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to discuss critically some advantages and disadvantages of a diary and a semi-structured interview that were employed as the research tools in Nomnian's (2008) case study. The case study aimed to examine the role of English language teachers on a Thai student's perceptions of the target language culture at a British university. However, in order to illustrate the extent to which methodological triangulation could potentially strengthen both validity and reliability to confirm the emerging findings of the case study, this paper focuses particularly on these two research tools (i.e. diaries and semi-structured interviews).

Methodological triangulation is not just about using as many different methods or sources of data collection as possible. The individual strengths and weaknesses of various methods must, first, be known and, secondly, applied in such a way that they counterbalance each other (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It is, therefore, important to try to blend and integrate the use of a diary and a semi-structured interview by not simply designing a study that comprises distinct, mutually exclusive approaches.

Diaries of research participants are used as a tool to provide researchers with insights into first-person accounts of situations (Burgess, 1984, as reported in Bell et al., 1984). Nunan (1992) notes that they are considered an important introspective tool of first-person observations that are recorded over a period of time. However, Nunan notes that diarists need to make careful records of the situations in which they are involved because these records will be used to explore and explain the social world of schools,

classrooms, teachers and pupils. Cohen (1998) also mentions the term 'dialog journal' by having the reader responding to the learner's writing.

As for interviews, Arksey & Knight (1999) emphasise three major approaches: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A structured interview has a fixed set of questions which could promptly produce simple descriptive data while an unstructured interview encourages interviewees to be open and spontaneous, and to speak about the issue in question using language and ideas of their own rather than having these imposed on them by the researcher.

In the following section, the paper explains the background to this case study with regard to its research setting and participant; it provides a rationale for the research design; and then it details the procedures observed with the two instruments and data collection and analysis. Following these methodological issues, the major part of the paper consists of discussion, with illustrative data extracts, of some of the advantages and disadvantages of using diaries and semi-structured interviews as research tools. The interview-diary as a research method will then be addressed. With reference to the undertaken case study, the paper draws conclusions on the utilisation of a diary together with a semi-structured interview as research tools; there are also suggestions for future research and recommendations.

Background to the case study
Research setting
The study was undertaken at the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) of a British university. The ELTU has offered a wide range of English courses to international students coming to study degree courses since 1995. In this case study, the Thai student, Shirley, was enrolled on course C (upper-intermediate level) from April to June 2004. The course consists of three sub-courses: general language, academic skills and options. General language focuses on the development of the English language for everyday use while academic skills emphasise reading, listening, speaking, writing for academic work and general knowledge about Britain. For the optional course, students can choose to develop areas such as pronunciation, computer literacy, listening to the news and media, extensive listening, reading literature, discussion skills, grammar and computer-aided language learning.

Participant
At the time of data collection, Shirley was twenty-three years old. She had been studying English for thirteen years and had obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication from a Thai university. She had been living in England for more than a year in order to take language courses for her masters. After completing her language courses, she planned to enrol on a Master's degree in Marketing at a British university because she is interested in marketing communication, which could potentially help in her future career in marketing in an international firm in Thailand. She strongly believes that studying at a British university and living in England can improve her English and help her future career in the international business arena.

Rationale for research design
Case study was appropriate for the original study (Nomnian, 2008) because it could allow the researcher to identify complex issues emerging from Shirley regarding her perceptions of British culture. Cohen et al. (2000) view a case study as an observation

of characteristics of an individual unit, which can be a person, a class or a community. Yin (1993) defines case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The researcher could aim at quite detailed understanding of her perceptions in her educational context. The findings of this study did not aim to generalise her perceptions of British culture but rather to explore the concept of ESL learners' cultural perceptions by employing the Thai student as a case for investigation.

Procedures, instruments, data collection and analysis
Prior to the data collection of this study, the researcher initially approached Shirley and asked her if she would be interested in participating in the study since she was the only Thai student studying a language course at this particular British university. She was at first reluctant to agree since she had never participated in any research before and did not know what she would experience. The researcher assured her that her rights and information would be protected throughout the study based on research ethics. Becoming more confident in the researcher, she also realised the importance of the study, which could tentatively contribute to new knowledge regarding cultural perceptions of Thai students who study in educational institutions in Britain. A week later, she agreed to join the project. Shirley was then given an informed consent form. Once informed consent had been granted, the researcher could proceed with data collection and analysis.

Shirley agreed to write a diary after she finished her class every week for two months and send it to the researcher via e-mail. In order to avoid any intervention in Shirley's original thoughts and feelings, the researcher did not make any comments on her diary. The diary was written in Thai because it could convey her thoughts better; it was translated and sent back to the participant for verification.

The aim of the semi-structured interview was to find out how Shirley perceived British culture based on her experience of living and studying in Britain, her teachers, and passages and illustrations selected from two units in Jordan's (1999) textbook, *Academic Writing*: 'The United Kingdom' and 'State Schools in England and Wales'. A pilot interview was undertaken with another Thai student to find out whether the questions were answerable and to ensure they were not ambiguous. Some of the interview questions, however, derived from Shirley's diary; in other words, in the interview, the researcher was able to address issues from the diary that needed further clarification. The diary entries could thus inform the design of the interview schedule and, consequently, the interview could represent the participant's perceptions of particular aspects of British culture in depth.

The interview was conducted in Shirley's room three weeks after her course started, in other words after the third week of her diary writing. This timing was observed so that Shirley could reflect on some cultural issues and the researcher could tentatively understand how Shirley perceived British culture from what she had written in her diary. Immediately before the interview, Shirley was reminded to express herself freely based on her initial thoughts. The interview lasted for one hour, was conducted in Thai, tape-recorded, translated and transcribed and then returned to Shirley for verification. Among the interview questions were: *'How do you define culture?'*, *'What aspects of British culture do you learn from the class?'*, *'What are the similarities and differences between British culture and Thai culture?'* and *'How do you perceive their similarities*

and differences with regard to the Thai context?'. Probing questions, such as *'Can you tell me more about what your teacher mentioned about British culture?'* and *'Why did you say that?'*, were also added to explore her different perspectives in depth during the interview.

Shirley's diary entries and interview transcripts were analysed by examining the emerging and salient issues regarding Shirley's perceptions of British culture.

Before proceeding to the main part of this paper, the following short section provides a summary of the findings of the original study (Nomnian, 2008).

Findings of the original case study
Shirley's diary entries and interview transcripts potentially acknowledge the value of background cultural knowledge for her language course. Here is an example of Shirley's diary entries illustrating her interest in learning about the British education system in her writing class:

Diary entry, 7ᵗʰ June 2004
> *The British education system was the topic of my lesson today. I think it's really good because I have learned the differences between the system here and the one in Thailand.*

From the interview data, she pointed out the importance of learning about cultural differences, which would allow her, to a certain extent, to write more informed contrastive essays:

Interview data
> *Cultural knowledge helps me in my writing class because Thai culture is different from the British culture here so, when I refer to Thai culture, my British teacher could get confused. For example, the teacher would give us an article about the education system and ask for an opinion whether I agree or not. If I know the educational system here and I can compare it with the Thai system, I will choose some interesting points about the education system here to write about or refer to and I can refer to some interesting points about Thai education.*

Shirley became to appreciate the complex relationship between language and culture as her course progressed, which was evidently pointed out in her diary entries and interview data. The following sections consider the advantages and disadvantages for researchers of using, respectively, diaries and semi-structured interviews.

Advantages and disadvantages of diaries
Advantages of diaries
Diaries as a tool of self-reflection
Diary writing may be beneficial to learners themselves because regular writing can help them become more aware of their cultural perceptions. Peck (1996, as reported in Bailey & Nunan, 1996) also uses diaries with adult learners of Spanish to increase students' cultural sensitivity, and students' learning diaries inform teachers about how and the extent to which students are becoming more sensitive to the target culture. Shirley used a diary as an opportunity to reflect upon her learning of the English

language and British culture. Shirley's diary writing could help her to see the importance of learning about cultures in a language class, which could potentially better her understanding in her academic study. As is evident from the following diary entry, Shirley realised that her listening difficulty was not solely because of her listening skills but also due to her lack of British cultural knowledge, which hindered her comprehension for a listening task.

Diary entry, 29th April 2004

> *I learnt about the culture from the cassette tape that was fast and difficult to catch because I do not have knowledge about British culture.*

This example could be applicable to other language tasks where Shirley's cultural knowledge is required.

Since diaries are learner-generated and usually unstructured, the entries may cover a wide range of themes and issues. Shirley's entries, for example, included classroom activities, interactions with teachers and peers, assignments, exam anxiety and encounters with British people. These entries illustrated retrospective self-report or self-observation; for instance, after reading Jordan's (1999) passage 'The United Kingdom' (mentioned above), she began to compare the size of population in Britain and Thailand, as her diary entry revealed:

Diary entry, 27th April 2004

> *By the way, after reading, I have just realised that the UK population is the same as in Thailand.*

Chamot et al. (1999) suggest that students should be encouraged to write their diaries in the target language because of the language practice involved. In this study, however, entries in the native language (Thai) were accepted because Shirley was not confident in writing in the target language (English) and she felt more comfortable about expressing her feelings in Thai. Since the goal of the study was for Shirley to reflect upon her perceptions of British culture learned in class, it was considered appropriate for her to use her mother tongue.

Convenience
Another advantage of the diary is that learners can keep their diaries anywhere they like and have the option of writing for even several months before giving them to a researcher for analysis (Chamot et al., 1999). Shirley agreed to return her diary entries via e-mail every week during the eight-week period of data collection and analysis. This helped the researcher to keep up with her progress consistently and see the tendency of her changes in cultural perceptions.

Nevertheless, tempering this advantage somewhat, Shirley confessed that, during the study, she was sometimes bored from keeping up with writing a diary. The researcher suggested to her that she should reflect only on her cultural perceptions and write on the day that she felt her cultural learning took place. She agreed and felt more comfortable to continue writing. The researcher realises that this potential issue could arise in future studies where diaries are utilized. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to give participants clear instructions on what they should record in their diaries and allow them a reasonable period of time of diary writing that would not discourage them to

keep up with their diary; otherwise, participants will be bored and may not keep up with their writing, which could affect the results of the study.

Disadvantages of diaries
Redundancy and irrelevance of data
Shirley's diary covered various topics. Some of the entries were redundant and contained irrelevant information. Shirley's first diary entry, for instance, did not mention much about her cultural perceptions but had more about her interest in academic writing:

Diary entry, 23rd April 2004
> *Today, we had a writing and seminar class that are important for this course. I do not think the seminar will be interesting for me but it is still important for masters. I am quite interested in writing and I will have a tutorial with my tutor. I think I will improve my writing skills. I hope to get the best mark I can.*

Cohen (1998) suggests that researchers could, in response to the entries, ask diarists to provide more detail retrospectively. The researcher immediately informed Shirley after reading the first entry that she should focus more on her perceptions of British culture. Once this objective had been clarified, Shirley narrowed her report to focus on more specific cultural issues in her later entries:

Diary entry, 28th April 2004
> *My classmates and I talked about our country's history. After that, we learned about British history and listened to the tape. It was difficult because I do not have knowledge about it and the speed was fast.*

It should, however, be noted that, though there were redundant and irrelevant issues, such as Shirley's writing course and homework in the first few entries mentioned above, these issues perhaps suggested that Shirley's main focus was accomplishing her academic writing course with little attention to cultural issues since she did not initially perceive the importance of learning culture in a language class. Shirley's later entries illustrated that she began to realise the significance of learning about British culture for her listening task.

Inconsistency of diary writing
The researcher found that, during the first week of diary keeping, Shirley's diary entries showed her perceptions of cultural learning and classroom participation. The entries, however, gradually declined over the following weeks. This may be because Shirley became less conscientious than when she first started the diary. Corti (1993) suggests that the period over which a diary is to be kept needs to be long enough to capture the behaviour or events of interest without interfering with successful completion. The researcher, therefore, consistently encouraged Shirley to keep writing the diary but had to accept the fact that, for some periods, she had to prepare for her mid-term and final examinations, which prevented her from writing her diary. During those periods, the researcher had an informal conversation with her and she agreed to continue writing after her examination was over.

This paper now turns to the second instrument under investigation, semi-structured interviews.

Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews
Advantages of semi-structured interviews
Depth of information
A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a specific agenda to follow and select relevant topics and themes to pursue in advance. Since semi-structured interviews are relatively unstructured, they allow the researcher and the Thai ESL learner to pursue topics of interest which may not have been foreseen when the questions were originally drawn up (Cohen, 1998); furthermore, these topics may be treated in relative depth. The example below illustrates how the researcher was able to use follow-up questions to explore meanings and more specifically address Shirley's perceptions regarding British culture and people:

Interview data
Interviewer: *When talking about British culture, what do you think of?*
Shirley: *I would think of foods in different occasions and their eating manners.*

Interview data (follow-up question to initial response on a more specific topic)
Interviewer: *How about British people?*
Shirley: *I think British people are so gentle and concerned about eating manner that I'm afraid of doing something wrong unintentionally or improperly. Also, the cultures of greeting, people here easily greet each other. But in my case, I wouldn't be so easy to greet the strangers. Sometimes, when I was waiting at the shop, some people came and talked to me in a friendly manner. They would also begin by asking about the weather though I never knew them.*

The researcher, however, was also aware of Shirley's reluctance towards expressing her feelings, which may be related to her cultural background. Holmes & Tangtongtavy (1995, as reported in Adamson, 2002), for example, refer to *krengjai*; that is, in order to show their politeness, Thais are reluctant to express direct feedback to their seniors. The researcher, therefore, had to remind Shirley that she should not feel hesitant to say what she wanted to say as her openness could contribute to the findings of the study; Shirley agreed and freely responded to the interview questions.

Flexibility
Drever (1995) suggests that the semi-structured interview allows researchers to adapt the main questions to suit interviewees' complementary roles in order to explore their different perspectives in depth. Keats (2000) points out that additional information can be obtained by probing the initial responses, which gives richness to the data by revealing interviewees' opinions and reasoning. For example, based on the aforementioned reading passage, 'The United Kingdom' (Jordan, 1999), the probing questions could potentially yield more information about her classroom instruction. As illustrated below, the researcher was able to improvise follow-up questions and to explore meanings and areas of interest that emerged.

Interview data

Interviewer: *After reading the passage, what do you think?*

Shirley: *I learn about its neighbouring countries, the continent it's situated on, the size of the population, the distance from here to France and other countries, the capital of the UK, and among its neighbouring countries,* [London] *is the biggest one!*

Interview data *(follow-up from the initial response)*

Interviewer: *Since you have been here, have you noticed any differences about the UK from what you previously believed?*

Shirley: *In Thailand, the books I have read talk only about famous cities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester. My teacher told me that there are other big cities in England that are different from what I have studied.*

Interview data *(follow-up from the previous response to gain further information)*

Interviewer: *What else did your teacher mention about the UK?*

Shirley: *My teacher suggested that we visit Derby because it's close to Leicester. Like this spring season, she suggested that we visit the Lake District, which is very beautiful. She also drew a map indicating where Leicester and the Lake District are. She also mentioned visiting the seaside, which is full of stone, instead of sand. She also told us about festivals, like Bonfire Night, that we should go and visit.*

Shirley could answer the questions in terms of what she perceives as important. There was also scope for her to choose what to say about Britain's geography based on Shirley's previous knowledge and the probing questions could elicit more detailed responses from Shirley concerning the role of her teacher as a cultural informant.

Specificity

The researcher could address specific points or issues such as Shirley's perceptions of the particular textbook illustrations. The researcher expected that a semi-structured interview could specify and reveal her perceptions of illustrations better than her diary entries as she might not know what to write about. The interview data potentially revealed her thoughts on British culture and Britain's educational system to certain extent. For instance, based on the three photographs which are used to illustrate the text *'State Schools in England and Wales'*, she could compare between the classroom in the picture and ones in Thailand:

Interview data

Interviewer: *Let's take a look at the first picture[1], what do you think? Does it accurately represent an actual class?*

Shirley: *I think the picture and the reality are not different. I think when the teacher asks students to sit in groups on the floor in order to allow them to participate and teach them how to socialise.*

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[1] The picture illustrates a class in a primary school catering for children aged 5-6. While the teacher is teaching, students pay attention and some students raise their hands to ask questions.

Interview data (follow-up question to the initial question)

Interviewer: *What are the differences between the classroom in the picture and the one in Thailand?*

Shirley: *In Thailand, students are asked to sit at the table and it is very boring. The atmosphere in class is very stressful and students do not want to participate. I think sitting on the floor encourages students to participate with the teacher.*

A semi-structured interview could potentially supplement a diary by providing an additional source of information in order to address the specific objective of the study. This example illustrates that the semi-structured interview could help the researcher specify certain points that Shirley might not have thought about before. It is interesting for the researcher to understand what Shirley thought about the British educational system as she was studying in a UK institution, which she was likely to find different from the ones in Thailand.

Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews
Researcher bias

Keats (2000) mentions that interviewees' responses may be based on the emotional impact or the perceived purpose of interviewers. Interviewers' values can enter the interview and interviewers might not realise the extent to which they are dominating or controlling their interviewees' responses. Interviewees can thus either tell interviewers what they think their interviewers want to know or they may consider issues in terms of what they truly think (Walker, 1989, as reported in Hammersley, 1989). Likewise, the current researcher as an interviewer might have imposed opinions in his questions that could have affected the interviewee's responses, as illustrated below.

Interview data

Interviewer: *It sounds like your teacher helps you learn more about British culture besides learning from the text, right?*

Shirley: *Yes, I would think so. She gives more details besides what it says in the book.*

This example could potentially illustrate that the researcher's opinion entered in this closed question posed to the interviewee in order to gain an expected response, which could assure the researcher's previous knowledge regarding the role of teacher as a cultural informant. The researcher, therefore, needs to be more aware of avoiding the imposition of this type of question when conducting future interviews. The researcher could instead ask probing questions like *'Can you tell me more about what your teacher mentioned about British culture?'*, which could allow the interviewee to give more additional information.

'Real-time' nature of the interview

Being a novice, this researcher experienced pressures from a semi-structured interview as he had to 'think on his feet' since the nature of the interview was conducted in real time, which the researcher found quite difficult. The researcher as an interviewer had to make decisions quickly whether probing questions should be asked because responses from the interviewee at that time of interview seemed so sound that the researcher did not realise that more probing questions should have been asked during an interview. For example, the researcher should have probed and elicited 'richer' data such as the

issue of the complex relationship between language and culture, which the interviewee did not clearly point out.

The researcher felt that relevant follow-up questions were relatively organised to some extent as they were tested and modified through a pilot study; however, more probing questions should have been added in order to gain in-depth information, which could potentially contribute to better findings of the study. Due to the time constraint of the study and the busy schedule of the participant, the researcher could conduct only one interview. In a future study, the researcher could seek to overcome this issue by having a series of interviews and return to an interviewee to ask more relevant questions that the researcher may have failed to investigate during the initial interview.

Time consumption
Interviewing allows people to express their views on a wide range of issues, and to wait for such information to be generated in naturally occurring situations would be very time-consuming (Walford, 2001). Interviewing in this study took a considerable amount of time and energy, not only the duration of the interview itself but also piloting the interview schedule, travelling to the interviewee's place, transcribing, translating, validating, typing, and analysing data, the latter of which took the researcher over seven hours for the hour-long interview. It should be noted that the researcher and the participant share the same native language, Thai, which was used in the interview in this study because the participant felt more comfortable about expressing her opinions in Thai. Keats (2000) suggests that the research interview should be conducted in the respondent's preferred language. The interview data were transcribed and translated verbatim from Thai to English for data analysis. The transcript, however, could enhance and demonstrate the soundness of the study because the transcript could be repeatedly checked during the analysis.

Juxtaposing diary and interview data
In this section, the diary-interview research method will be critically addressed as the combination of these two research tools potentially allowed the researcher to gain results relevant to the study. Corti (1993) claims that, for events which are difficult to recall accurately or are easily forgotten, diaries can be a more reliable research tool than interviews and that they can help to overcome potential problems with sensitive information being collected by personal interview. Diaries can also be used to supplement interview data to provide a rich source of information on respondents' behaviour and daily experiences. The semi-structured interview in this study helped the researcher check on the completeness of Shirley's recorded entries. For example, when she mentioned the topic of 'atheism' in her diary, the researcher was able to ask Shirley for more information during the interview regarding the topic, as follows:

Diary entry, 28th April 2004
> *Today my topic was whether atheism should be taught in British schools. I have not got any ideas about it.*

Interview data (for clarification from the diary entry)
Interviewer: *Before your teacher began the topic about atheism, what did he do?*
Shirley: *He introduced it to us by asking whether our school taught religion, how many religions there are in the world, and how*

> *often British people went to church. Then he gave us a definition*
> *of atheism. After that, he asked our opinions on whether it's good*
> *or bad to teach religion in school, and, supposing that we were*
> *parents, asked us what we think about it. So I think it's good that*
> *the teacher gave us some background about a cultural topic that*
> *we didn't have knowledge about before.*

The diary, in this instance, was used as a data resource which the researcher could exploit to raise a series of questions that potentially provided further data to be elaborated upon, discussed, illustrated, and explored in the semi-structured interview. Also, once Shirley elaborated upon this topic, the more detailed data elicited was useful and relevant to the focus of the research.

Keats (2000) claims that the experience of an interaction in an interview can be sufficient enough to change a respondent's views and subsequent behaviours because it can reveal aspects of topics which the respondent has not previously considered. Some of Shirley's perceptions on learning about the target culture did not appear to be fully developed in the diary entries but were actually thought out during the interview, and this potentially helped to encourage the formulation of 'new' perceptions in the interview setting itself, as illustrated below:

Interview data
Interviewer: *What are your reasons for studying in England?*
Shirley: *The reason I chose to study in England is because England is the*
native country of the English language. I realise that studying in
England also gives me a chance to be exposed to other cultures,
which I think is very valuable for me because I would like to be
friends with people from other countries so that I can understand
them better. Also, if I want to work in international business, I
have to communicate with other businesspersons from different
nationalities.

Employing a semi-structured interview after the diary entries had been collected and analysed was certainly worthwhile. The results provided the researcher with valuable information and insights. The semi-structured interview was most suitable because it yielded the researcher with an opportunity to explore in-depth, and with a degree of detail, aspects such as the motivation governing the behaviours of the interviewee that may be beyond the scope of the diary entries.

Discussion and conclusion
This paper aimed to discuss some advantages and disadvantages of utilising a diary and a semi-structured interview with reference to a case study on a Thai student's perspectives on British culture. The combination of a diary and a semi-structured interview was employed in order to yield more valid and reliable results of the undertaken case study. The advantages of using both a diary and a semi-structured interview could potentially overcome their inherent drawbacks due to ways these two research tools can add validity to each other.

The diary, on the one hand, gave information on a Thai ESL learner's perceptions of British culture. Having the participant, Shirley, report on her cultural perceptions

through diary entries enabled the researcher to discover her existing cultural perspectives and see her changing attitudes. Shirley was encouraged to write regularly about how she coped with situations where she had an opportunity to speak with British people and how classroom teaching influenced her perceptions of learning language and culture.

The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, offered the researcher better insights and information. It also yielded the researcher with an opportunity to explore in-depth aspects of Shirley's behaviour, such as her attitudes and motivation towards language learning and changes in attitude of learning about the target culture in the language class that might be far beyond the scope of diary entries. The combined use of the diary and the semi-structured interview seemed to enhance the researcher's investigation of Shirley's perceptions of British culture.

Every research tool offers unique advantages as well as disadvantages. The challenge for researchers is to choose an appropriate method that will provide the desired type of information for the given study. It is hoped that this paper can contribute to other researchers who may attempt to employ these research tools in future studies and raise their awareness of relevant issues regarding a diary-interview research tool to examine learners' cultural perceptions in the fields of applied linguistics and TESOL.

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