Thai Conversation Learning and Teaching for Foreigners Based on Thai Culture Context in the CTLF Program at Kasetsart University: Evolution and Inno-Creative Approach

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Abstract—The objectives of this research article were to survey the evolution of Thai conversation learning based on Thai culture studies for foreign students in the International B.A. Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (CTLF) at Kasetsart University from the Program’s beginning up until the present day, and to explore the inno-creative approaches to be added in the digital era. The findings revealed that Thai conversation for foreigners was first offered as one of the core subjects in the International B.A. Program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University, which was founded in 2008. It has evolved and grown from the first program to the current program. Its course outlines have been revised based on content relevant to Thai culture studies. This has helped to achieve success in learning. To help Thai conversation learning become more successful in the digital era, the following 10 inno-creative approaches should be focused on, namely, 1. Digital and Innovative Learning and Teaching 2. Touch screen materials and inno-creative textbooks 3. Intellectual Networking and Joint Thai Learning and Teaching 4. Cross-cultural Communication through Inter-culture Diffusions 5. Learning and teaching based on multiculturalism 6. International Student Exchange Programs 7. Knowledge-career-life Skills 8. Continuing and Thai Language Learning and teaching Networking 9. High Technology-based Learning and teaching in the Digital Era and 10. Buddhist Moral knowledge and balanced development in the digital era. Furthermore, digital technologies and inno-creative learning such as devices and innovative textbooks as keys to success should be taken into account in order to drive Thai conversation learning.

Index Terms—Thai conversation, foreigners, evolution, new approach

I. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the digital world and the pandemic of the past two years have undoubtedly impacted language learning and teaching. Especially, the learning and teaching of conversational language definitely has been impacted because on-site learning and teaching of conversational language at universities or other institutions where native speakers play an important role as instructors has seen shifts to other paths and forms due to the changes in the world situation.

Due to the problems mentioned above, many universities and other institutions have chosen to close their on-site conversational language learning offerings and instead have begun providing online conversational language learning opportunities for foreign students since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the light of the above, important lesson about the impact of Covid-19 on conversational language learning and teaching should be learned, rethought and taken into account very much indeed. Post-Covid-19 instructors must consider how to design and develop conversation classes using new approaches in order to improve conversation learning. In particular, the teaching of Thai conversation for foreigners of the CTLF program at Kasetsart University needed to develop inno-creative approaches for international learners.

The course 01363132 Thai Conversation in Everyday Life I has been offered as one of the core courses in the Bachelor of Arts Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (CTLF Program) at Kasetsart University from 2008 up until the present day (Pimpuang, 2018). Actually, the objective in opening this course was to help foreign students practice Thai conversation at the basic level (Department of Thai Language, 2008). The foreign students who have enrolled in this subject come from the CTLF Program (International Program) of the Department of Thai Language, Faculty of Humanities and from the Kasetsart University Student Exchange Program (KUSEP) under the management of International Studies Center (ISC), Kasetsart University.
The number of the CTLF and KUSEP students who enroll in the Thai Conversation in Everyday Life I course has been increasing since 2008 through the thorough bilateral internal cooperation between International Studies Center and the Department of Thai language, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University (Pimpuang, 2018, p. 12).

However, the world situation has been changing continually. To find what the evolution of the subject Thai conversation in everyday life has been and to illustrate what new inno-creative approaches can be incorporated in the course as offered in Kasetsart University from early times up until the present day, therefore the researchers have been interested in and have focused on a study of the evolution of Thai conversation learning and teaching through the Thai culture-based learning of foreign students at Kasetsart University. More importantly, the researchers will also wanted to study new inno-creative approaches of learning and teaching Thai conversation in everyday life that might be provided for those foreign students in the digital era.

Regarding the new inno-creative approach, it will be able to help Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners become more successful in the digital era. Especially, it is strongly believed that after this research study, the course concerned ‘Thai Conversation in Everyday Life’ will surely meet the great needs of learning and teaching development for foreign students in the digital era and it will be beneficial for the further management of Thai conversation learning and teaching in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Thai Teaching for Foreigners in the Present Day

Witayasakpan (2005, p. 217) stated that Thai teaching for foreigners requires not only good lessons but also media or devices to help students learn. The educational innovation as mentioned is new things for educational solutions or development created through new thinking, methods, processes, and media.

Pimpuang (2022) observed that currently, instructors and foreign students who would like to look for learning innovations can easily access important innovational media for Thai learning including Thai conversation for foreigners because they are available everywhere in such forms as innovative books, digital media, e-books, and QR code. Regarding this point as mentioned by Pimpuang, Witayasakpan et al. (2002) and Poomsan Becker (1995) stated that learning about Thai conversation today is very convenient to access and practice if lessons including media are available.

Thai Conversation Teaching through a Thai Culture-based Approach

With respect to the culture-based approach, it will be able to help Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners become more successful in the digital era. Especially, it is strongly believed that after this research study, the course concerned ‘Thai Conversation in Everyday Life’ will surely meet the great needs of learning and teaching development for foreign students in the digital era and it will be beneficial for the further management of Thai conversation learning and teaching in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University.

Witayasakpan et al. (2002) produced the textbook Introduction to Thai Teaching on the Thai Studies Context for Foreigners. Its contents were arranged in several chapters and the contents of the textbook were in the frame of Thai studies and culture. It is strongly believed that those foreign learners who learned Thai language based on this Thai studies context and culture studies can speak Thai well and also understand Thai culture.

Furthermore, culture, traditions, way of life, and beliefs of people in Thai society in Thai conversation books are also beneficial for foreigners because this can help foreign learners understand cultural differences and help reduce prejudices arising from misunderstanding of cultural differences. Not only this, it also fosters a good atmosphere and feeling between foreign learners and instructors as well (Labyai, 2016, p. 45).

In addition, Pimpuang (2018) suggested that Thai language learning based on the Thai studies context and culture will help foreign learners recognize and understand the Thai language and culture in a rapid way and this will support and stimulate foreign learners to have better success in learning conversational Thai. Thus, Thai learning and teaching for foreign students based on the Thai studies context and culture is regarded as a strategy in helping foreign students to understand, practice, and speak fluently.

With respect to the culture-based approach mentioned above, Iaupuni (2007) said that based on the literature indicated below, there are five basic elements that comprise culture-based education. The look and feel of these five varies from setting to setting, depending on culture specific ways of being, knowing, and acting as follows.

1. Language: recognizing and using the native or heritage language.
2. Family and Community: actively involving the family and the community in the development of curricula, everyday learning, and leadership.
3. Context: structuring the school and the classroom in culturally-appropriate ways.
4. Content: making learning meaningful and relevant through culturally grounded content and assessment.
5. Data and Accountability: gathering and maintaining data using various methods to insure student progress in culturally responsible ways.
According to the learning based on culture context as specified in the above, it can be said that the following five important points, namely, 1. language 2. family community 3. context 4. content and 5. data and accountability, should be taken into account in the learning and teaching process focused on the culture-based approach.

Thai Conversation Learning with Inno-creative Approach at KU

In the CTLF program at Kasetsart University, recently Pimpuang (2022) has produced an innovative set of Thai conversation materials to help learning and teaching. This innovative package consist of three books as follows: Thai Conversation in Everyday Life (Basic Level) has a total of 228 pages, Thai Conversation in Different Situations I (Intermediate Level) has a total of 240 pages, and Thai Conversation in Different Situations II (Advanced Level) has a total of 264 pages.

In these three books, a phonetic alphabet has been used together with Thai and English orthography to make pronunciation clear. This feature is in line with Kanchanawan (2007), who recommended that the use of a phonetic alphabet in learning Thai is basic to teaching and learning the pronunciation of Thai and will help foreign learners understand easily.

In the three books of Kowit Pimpuang mentioned above, each native Thai spoken dialogue has a QR code scanable with a mobile phone. It is very convenient for those foreign students who would like to practice conversation anytime and anywhere because they can listen to the sound of the native Thai speaker by scanning the QR code. In addition, there are also cartoon pictures for each lesson which add interest and help in understanding the content of the lessons.

Furthermore, each lesson in the three innovative books has exercises together with answers at the end of the lesson. Not only this, there is a generous amount of vocabulary related to the content of each lesson collected at the end of book for reference by foreign students. In addition, a Thai conversation CD is also available with the book for those foreign students who have no Internet access and want to listen and practice conversation along with the native Thai speakers in the CD.

Therefore, the three innovative books consisting of Thai Conversation in Everyday Life, Thai Conversation in Different Situations I and Thai Conversation in Different Situations II represent the inno-creative approach of the CTLF program at KU in order to help foreigners learn to speak and participate in the practical Thai conversation.

After this review of the relevant literature, the researchers were able to devise a conceptual framework and proceed to conduct this study to survey the circumstance and evolution of the learning and teaching of Thai conversation through the Thai culture-based program for foreign students at Kasetsart University from early times up until the present day, and to explore the new inno-creative approaches to be added to help the learners succeed in the learning Thai conversation in the digital era.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population in the Research

This study is survey research focused on the circumstances and evolution of the Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on a Thai culture context. Descriptive writing of research was adopted through data collection from four curricula of the international B.A. program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University, namely, 1. The Curriculum of Bachelor of Arts Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (International Program) Kasetsart University in 2008, 2. The Curriculum of Bachelor of Arts Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (International Program) Kasetsart University revised in 2013, 3. The Curriculum of Bachelor of Arts Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (International Program) Kasetsart University revised in 2017, and 4. The Curriculum of the Bachelor of Arts Program in Communicative Thai Language for Foreigners (International Program) Kasetsart University revised in 2022.

Sampling

Among 20 foreign students who were studying in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University, five students, and teaching staff members will be selected for interviewing by purposive sampling technique according to certain goals and criteria. Research will be conducted by a qualitative method within an overall inductive framework. The methodology used in the study was as follows:

Methodology

1. Data surveying and data collection of the four curricula of the international B.A. program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University related to the topic of research were performed. Interviewing of the foreign students and teaching staff members related to the international B.A. program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University was done and taken into account.

2. The collected documents were classified into groups, categorized, analyzed and explained.

3. Descriptions and analyses of the evaluation and new approach to teaching Thai conversation for foreign students at Kasetsart University were written.

4. The results of the research and concluding remarks were presented.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

The objectives of this study as mentioned mainly dealt with surveying the circumstances and evolution of Thai conversation learning and teaching based on Thai culture for foreign students at Kasetsart University from early times
up until the present day, and to explore inno-creative approaches to be added in order to help foreign students become more successful in Thai conversation learning in the digital era. The findings were as follows:

A. Evolution of Thai Conversation Learning for Foreigners in the CTLF Program at KU

According to the first curriculum of the international B.A. program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University (Department of Thai Language, 2008), the course Thai Conversation for Foreigners was first offered in the program for foreigners in 2008. Contents of the course mainly dealt with Thai conversation skills in various situations in everyday life. Later, in the curriculum of the B.A. program in the CTLF in 2013, the contents of the course remained the same as in the curriculum of the B.A. program in the CTLF in 2008 (Department of Thai Language, 2013). However, the contents of the course in the B.A. program in the CTLF in 2017 was revised because it focused on learning and teaching about formal and informal Thai conversation in daily life situations, Thai conversation in social media, and Thai conversation in contemporary contexts.

Not only this, the course code number was also changed from number 01363132 to 01363251 (Department of Thai Language, 2017). Currently, in the curriculum of the B.A. program in the CTLF in 2022, the contents of the course mainly deal with Thai conversation in various situations in everyday life. It seems to be similar to the Thai conversation for foreigners course that was first offered in the program for foreigners in 2008 (Department of Thai Language, 2022).

Therefore, it can be stated that from early times up till the present day, there have been a total of four curricula of the program belonging to the Department of Thai language, the Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University. The contents of the course may have been different due to the revision of each program. However, the purpose of Thai conversation learning and teaching still stands as helping foreign students acquire skill in Thai speaking and conversation based on a Thai culture studies context.

In the light of the above, it can be conclusively said after making a comparison between the four curricula, the contents of the course have been changed a little due to change on the situation of the world and the Thai socio-culture context, but the purpose of building up and developing the practical Thai language skills for those foreign students who face language psycho-motor domain challenge at Kasetsart University has not changed.

B. New Approach to Learning and Teaching Thai Conversation for Foreigners

Pertaining to the new strategies to drive Thai conversation learning and teaching in this digital era, the following new inno-creative approaches should be applied for learning and teaching and taken into account. They are as follows.

(a). Digital and Innovative Learning and Teaching

In this digital and innovative age, the number of students will slowly increase, and this point will directly impact on the holistic view of the learning and teaching system in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University. Therefore, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies should turn crisis into opportunity by raising the quality of learning and teaching through the thorough design of an interesting curriculum. Especially, it should be done by an emphasis on digital and innovative Thai conversation learning and teaching for the learners. Such a curriculum will be one of the best programs for building qualified foreign students who will be leading global graduates.

(b). Touch Screen and Inno-Creative Textbooks

Amidst the age of digital technologies and innovation, it is easy to access information, and learning and teaching technology will play a vital role as a major tool in educational innovation. To be a global leader of inno-creative Thai conversation learning and teaching, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should include research plan and present approaches and strategies in order to help students understand the circumstances in the future. At the same time, the CTLF program should emphasize developing and enhancing the potential of foreign students to become global leaders among Thai conversation learners with high technology via modern platforms and inno-creative devices like touch screen and media.

(c). Intellectual Networking and Joint Thai Learning and Teaching

It is important to say that a single skill is not enough for those foreign students in this very innovative world. Options for gaining other skills must be available, and this will be benefit foreign students in the world. Hence, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should be designed to foster learning and teaching through more challenging new approaches such as joint Thai learning and teaching. Not only this, Thai culture studies-based learning should also be focused on and taken into account. These things will stimulate and support foreign students of Thai conversation class to gain advantages, and especially it will help them enjoy and speak the Thai language fluently.

(d). Cross-Cultural Communication Through Inter-Culture Diffusions

Due to the growth of digital and innovative technologies, inter-culture diffusions from abroad have entered Kasetsart University, Thailand rapidly. This will impact the good and beautiful culture of Thai people in the nation directly. Hence,
Thai conversation learning for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should manage Thai conversation learning to support students in their own values and in their pride in their own traditions and cultures and at the same time to respect other international cultures and to be proud to learn about them. Furthermore, the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should provide a leadership development plan to build foreign students able to deal with diffusion of new information and culture that enters Thailand.

(e). Learning and Teaching Based on Multiculturalism

Phenomena of multiculturalism are occurring in all places in the present world. Thus, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should manage learning and teaching via research study in order to prepare basic knowledge including philosophical thought for foreign learners. The learners with multicultural knowledge and leadership through management skill and challenge will play a vital role in the area of multiculturalism. Amidst multiculturalism, Thai conversation learning and teaching will be challenging and it will make the Thai conversation course an intersection for foreign learners in the digital world.

(f). International Student Exchange Programs

The number of students in Thailand seems to be in decline, and this, truly speaking, will impact input to all learning systems. Thus, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should adapt planning for creating a good package for skillful learning of Thai conversation that responds completely to the desires of foreign teenagers. At the same time, the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should build planning in order to import foreign students from all regions of the world to enroll in the curriculum through international student exchange programs as well.

(g). Thai Language-Career-Life Skills

Presently, learning and teaching Thai conversation for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University needs to change the old paradigms that emphasized only the role of the lecturer in the classroom. A new paradigm to teach foreign students Thai language-career-life skills should be applied and taken into account. This can help foreign students develop themselves with Thai language-career life skills.

(h). Continuing and Thai Language Learning Networking

The future learning and teaching will be changed to become a learning system which has a wider area by emphasizing the learning process through networking systems more than face-to-face systems. Thus, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreign students based on Thai culture studies in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should progressively work toward one-stop technological management and co-operation in continuing and inno-creative learning and teaching through networking systems embracing other institutions and universities. Thai conversation learning and teaching in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should create students according to the expectations of society with three skills, namely: Thai language speaking skills, career skills, and life skills. Foreign students can learn all the things involved in Thai conversation through networking systems in the practice of which innovative technology plays an important role.

(i). High Technology-Based Learning in the Digital Era

In the digital and innovative era, old curricula with old ideas may not be good enough in digital and innovative learning and teaching. Hence, the CTLF program at Kasetsart University should devise a new curriculum suitable for supporting foreign students through research-driven learning and teaching. Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies should aim for inno-creative learning through different types of learning with high technology such as online project-based learning in which students ‘learn by doing’.

(j). Buddhist Moral Knowledge and Balanced Development

In the world today, it is said that material development has become greater than spiritual development. People in society are afflicted with mental illness and their numbers will increase more and more due to their facing internal and external problematic factors. This makes people behave selfishly with a lack of social interaction and with moral degeneration. The same causes are responsible for several tough problems in society. In order to protect against the above problems, Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreigners based on Thai culture studies in Thailand should prepare a research plan covering all dimensions of society to design a learning process and skills emphasizing not only the learning of Thai conversation, but also the realization of Buddhist morals and the application of this knowledge to achieve balanced development between the material and the spiritual based on the fundamental doctrines of all religions.

The Innovative Learning as the Key for Success in Digital Era

In the digital era, Thai conversation learning and teaching in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University is focusing on digital and innovative learning; especially, instructors in the CTLF program are now awakened and support reform of their own instructional approaches. To encourage improvement of all instructors, educational innovations must be produced for use in Thai conversation learning and teaching for foreign students.
It is said that digital technologies have a profound impact on economies and societies and are changing the way people work, communicate, engage in social activities and enjoy themselves. They also drive innovation in many different spheres of life. The innovative capacity of technology is very much conditioned by the level of digital skills of the population. No wonder there is a very strong correlation between education and skills and the uptake and use of digital technologies in various spheres of life. The role of education and skills in promoting the educational innovation is critical (Linden, 2016).

The words ‘instructional innovation’ mentioned above are regarded as an important tool that plays very large role in driving education. Here, the educational innovation means new methods, ideas and products in education. However, innovation is also viewed as the application of education solutions that can meet new requirements or existing educational needs.

Such the innovation takes place through the provision of more-effective products, processes, services, technologies, or educational models that are made available for education of foreign students in Thailand. This can drive the approach strategies for learning and teaching Thai conversation for foreign students in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University.

Interviewed students and teaching staff members of Thai conversation learning and teaching in the CTLF program at KU stated that the innovative books with QR codes and devices for Thai speaking and conversation for foreign students prepared by Kowit Pimpuang are very beneficial for foreign students who need practice in Thai speaking and conversation. Especially, they are regarded as good inno-creative books to help develop learning and teaching and enhance the potential of Thai conversation for foreign students. In the books, there are also different situations in the lessons based on the Thai culture studies to allow the learners play roles in practice.

Hence, the innovative books with QR code for Thai speaking and conversation for foreign students play a large role as an important innovative tool to improve Thai speaking and conversation in everyday life for foreigners because the satisfaction of learners and the better learning results in Thai speaking and conversational development of foreign students were obvious after they had been used in teaching foreign students.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the research results revealed above, it can be concluded that there have been a total of four curricula of the international B.A. program in the CTLF at Kasetsart University from 2008 until 2022. The course ‘Thai conversation’ was first offered in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University in 2008. Since then, it has been revised continually and as a result, there may be differences due to revisions. Although it has been revised and changed in terms of the course code and course outline, yet its objective has not changed. It still mainly deals with building up and developing practical Thai language skills for those foreign students who need to meet the language psycho-motor domain challenge at Kasetsart University. Nowadays, there has been continuous growth of learning and teaching. Especially, many students from overseas universities and other institutions join the CTLF program at Kasetsart University. In the last five years, the number of students who were interested in learning and participating in the Thai conversation class has increased.

Learning and teaching Thai conversation for foreign students in the early days of the CTLF program Kasetsart University as compared with the present time was beset with inconveniences or problems such as the lack of inno-creative instructional media and suitable textbooks and other materials. However, these points have been remedied. The CTLF programs have been revised and developed in terms of the structure of the CTLF program, the content and the teaching media. Especially, the inno-creative teaching methods, devices and sources are very beneficial to foreign students who are interested in learning Thai conversation in the digital era.

The above developments seem to be reflected in the thought of Pimpuang (2018, p. 1) who stated that at the present time, learning and teaching Thai conversation can be improved not only by providing classes with native Thai instructors, but also by enabling students to develop their Thai speaking by employing innovative and technological methods and devices including sources available via the Internet. These innovative and technological methods, devices and sources can help the students speak Thai confidently and properly. At the same time, instructors are striving to produce and develop different tools to help students speak Thai and make learning conversational Thai very easy and convenient for the students.

Based on Thai culture studies, the new inno-creative approaches to Thai learning and teaching for foreign students in the CTLF program of Kasetsart University in the present digital era must basically guide foreign students into the right way to realize multiculturalism and help them practice through more serious cross-cultural communication. Meanwhile, co-design of international programs should be developed to increase intellectual, academic and research collaboration such as international dual degree and joint degree programs via learning systems such as innovation-based learning in response to the needs of today’s world focusing on digital and innovative education (Pimpuang, 2016).

The inno-creative learning and teaching mentioned above is very close to the thought of Hoinbala (2022, p. 27) and Byrne (1976) because they stated that learners have fun in learning activities through gamification and gain simple knowledge. The teaching of thinking and speaking through dialogues as described by Beyer (1987) is also needed. In particular, dialogues in lessons based on culture studies of the language learners will be very beneficial for foreign students indeed.

In the CTLF program, foreign students are equipped with high Thai language-career-life skills by the course of Thai Conversation in Everyday Life. After finishing the course, foreign students can speak and participate fluently in Thai
conversations in different situations. Equipped with higher Thai language speaking skills, they are ready to work in enterprise. In order to modernize learning Thai for foreign students, continuing learning and networking systems via high technology and inno-creative media or books are essential. Last but not least, Buddhist moral knowledge including the balanced development between the material and the spiritual dimension should be emphasized to enable students of the Thai conversation class to realize a happy life while learning Thai language conversation.

The above seems to be similar to the view of Witayasakpan (2005) who stated that Thai studies context and culture-based learning are the important strategies and play a large role in helping Thai teaching for foreigners achieve the ultimate goal of learning.

Labyai (2016) explained how to manage Thai class for foreigners as follows: 1. Knowing and accessing the learners and their basic knowledge in order to categorize learners into groups 2. Creating the lessons which are adaptable to the Thai society and culture and 3. Creating a good learning environment to support effective teaching will contribute to the effectiveness of Thai teaching. Especially, understanding of the socio-cultural differences is one of best practices for Thai teaching for foreigners as well.

Furthermore, for the learning and teaching of Thai conversation for foreign students in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University Thailand to develop further in the digital era, new inno-creative approaches must be embraced. Especially, greater and more serious emphasis should be given to the mentioned new approaches so that they can yield results in learning and teaching with high effectiveness for foreign students who study in the CTLF program at Kasetsart University.

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