

A SURVEY OF TASKS WITH ENGLISH SKILLS AMONG THAI DON-MUENG RAIWAY STAFF

Thanaporn OVASIT¹ and Abhinan WONGKITTIPORN¹

¹ College of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand; thanaporn.su62@rsu.ac.th
(T. O.); abhinan.w@rsu.ac.th (A. W.)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Thai Don Mueng Railway staff's English skills and activities that needs English in their professions. This study was a purposive sampling method. The sample was ten full-time employees at Thai Don Mueang Railway Station. The instrument in this study was an in-depth interview. The results showed that the participants had the with listening and speaking difficulties. When talking to foreigners, it was difficult for them to catch the foreigners' accents. Even though they could employ basic conversations, it was so difficult for them to respond their interlocutors immediately. This leads one to have speaking anxiety. Some participants could read in English in general, but unfamiliar words were the causes of misunderstanding the texts. Most participants could write basic English with simple sentence structures. Most participants knew general vocabulary to perform their everyday tasks, such as ticket sales, but they could not explain complex travel destinations once asked by foreign passengers. Accordingly, most employees at Thai Don Mueng Railway need to develop their English skills, especially in speaking to be able to communicate with foreign passengers more effectively. This leads to their better services for foreign passengers visiting Thailand.

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INTRODUCTION

Thailand is a country where a large number of foreigners visits annually for their vocation. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, the amount of money spent by foreign tourists to visit Thailand was 2,003,837 trillion baht (Jindapol, 2021). When they come to visit Thailand, it is unavoidable to say that they need to travel to different places with various modes of transportation. Therefore, it can be seen that English is necessary as a medium of communication between service staff at local transportations places and foreign tourists. If the employees are unable to communicate with guests, this may cause communication problems or misunderstandings between staff and tourists (Arunchai, 2021). Accordingly, this study focuses on a needs analysis of activities and English skills among Don Mueng railway employees in Thailand.

Regarding abilities, the Ministry of Education (2019) said that there are 7 important components of ability including knowledge, skills, attitude, application, practice, tasks, and success. In addition) explained that the ability consists of 5 elements. Firstly, *knowledge* that is knowledge specific to the subject that must be known. Secondly, *skill* is something that needs to be done effectively, such as reading skills, speaking skills, writing skills etc. Opinions are attitudes, values, and opinions about image or what a person believes themselves to be, such as self-confidence, etc. Fourthly, *person's personality* are somethings that describe that person, such as trustworthy and leadership characteristics. Fifthly, *motivation* is the motivation or internal drive to success. (Wachaichom, 2018; Chucherd, 2022; Pattanamethada, 2022; Truangthonglang et al., 2020). Therefore, needs in this study refer to activities and English skilled required to accomplish the tasks given for one to perform to reach accomplishment.

The skills that employees in the field of tourism needs is likely to be different from other careers. Ho (2020) explained that the components of tourism communication competencies are as follows. *Linguistic competence* is the ability to interpret and use grammatical knowledge. *Discourse competence* is the ability to summarize meaning between feelings. *Sociocultural competence* is social linguistic ability. This is considered a social sensitivity to language use, such as its relevance to social functions and audience relations. *Interactivity* is the ability to express verbal actions such as asking questions, apologizing, begging, comforting, and exchanging information.

When it comes to English skills, Tong et al. (2021) explained that ability of English communication includes language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The employees should have the ability to use language correctly according to linguistic or grammatical principles. The employer should pronounce words in connected speech correctly. Sociolinguistic abilities mean that the employs have knowledge about the social environment, culture, and social status in different situations to match that person's age, qualifications, job position, and intention to communicate. Therefore, English skills include listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, writing skills and sociocultural competence.

A number of previous studies focuses on the use of English skills among different service sectors. The employees should have certain characteristics of services that users actually receive. The employers should be able to provide fast and impressive service to tourists. The quality service is the delivery of good, appropriate services in terms of time, place, and format to meet the needs and expectations of service users, causing service users to gain maximum satisfaction from using the service. The service was positively impressed, and I wanted to come back to use the service again. This has a positive impact on the image of good service as well. (Areerattanasak, 2019; Berliansyah & Suroso, 2018; Thiamkaew, 2018). Interetingly, Berliansyah and Suroso (2018) explained that service quality is related to repeat service.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

English skills

The Ministry of Education (2017) explains that English skills include 1) listening skills, 2) speaking skills, 3) reading skills, 4) writing skills, 5) information exchange skills.

Wachaichom (2018) explained that English skills for communication consists of listening skills, speaking skills, and skills in using specific vocabulary, and cultural knowledge skills as the following details 1) Listening skills, speaking skills in communicating and promoting tourism effectively with foreign audiences. The substance or message should be verified for accuracy and completeness by the end user of the language. 2) Skills in using specific vocabulary, such as in the case of health tourism. Tour leaders should also have skills in using specialized health and medical terminology, etc. 3) Cultural knowledge skills that the messenger should also be aware of the importance of using English from a cultural background different from that of the Thai messenger. This is because different languages can reveal differences in values. Different cultural concepts and beliefs can exist. The messenger can communicate by educating the receiver about the culture of a specific case.

Ho (2020: 2) explained that the components of tourism communication competencies are as follows. 1) Linguistic competence is the ability to interpret and use grammatical knowledge. Expertise in vocabulary, spelling, meaning, syntax, phonology, and other language elements. 2) Discourse competence is the ability to summarize meaning between feelings. 3) Sociocultural competence is social linguistic ability. This is considered a social sensitivity to language use, such as its relevance to social functions, and audience relations. For example, hotel front staff should use different language to address hotel guests and hotel staff. Moreover, sociocultural competence should include cultural awareness, language interpretation Proper social and cultural etiquette. 4) Strategic competence is the ability to use language to communicate to achieve goals. Lack of this ability may cause communication errors. The interlocutor may not understand, and the result of communication may not be successful. 5) Interactivity is the ability to express verbal actions such as asking questions, apologizing, begging, comforting, and exchanging information. Interactivity also includes conversation capabilities (opening, pausing, etc.). (Changing the conversation, etc.), and nonverbal abilities (nodding, eye contact, gestures, etc.) where proper gestures and body language help achieve tourism communication goals when interacting with customers, 6) Sentence structure competence is the ability to use sentences for communication according to fixed language structure patterns correctly.

Tong et al. (2021) explained that ability of English communication include language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural abilities.

Silpee (2016) said that for a person to be able to communicate in English. It is necessary to have knowledge and abilities in all 4 areas, which consist of 1) The ability to use language correctly according to linguistic or grammatical principles means having knowledge of language at a level that can be used in writing meaningful sentences. must be pronounced correctly up to and including conversation Accents and rhythms that native speakers can understand that classified as follows: 1.1) Vocabulary Knowledge 1.2) Knowledge of word types (Morphological Knowledge) 1.3) Knowledge about sentence structure (Syntactic Knowledge) 1.4) Knowledge about the meaning of words (Semantic Knowledge) 1.5) Phonetic Knowledge 1.6) Knowledge of spelling principles (Orthographic Rules) 2) Sociolinguistic abilities (Sociolinguistic Competence) refers to the ability to use language correctly according to social regulations, that is, having knowledge about the social environment, culture, and social status, and a person's role in society that can choose to use language correctly and appropriately for different people and occasions, such as knowing what level of politeness is required when present. In a formal situation informal Choose to match that person's age,

qualifications, job position, and intention to communicate. 3) The ability to use relationships between texts (Discourse Competence) means having knowledge of relationships between sentences by using knowledge of grammar and ability to link language meanings together correctly, such as having a sequence of storytelling and communication which has a consistent and logical message. 4) The ability to use strategies to communicate meaning (Strategic Competence) means using techniques to make speaking communication successful. It involves adapting to the situation as well as using gestures. Facial expressions and tone of voice play a role in conveying meaning. Using this strategy is both verbal and non-verbal. and don't use words is the use of body language (Body Language) For example, expanding the meaning with other words instead of words you don't know or can't think of at the time effort to explain using gestures. Smiling and greeting or starting a conversation with a stranger you meet without knowing each other's social status before. This may be done by observing the age and personality of the interlocutor in order to choose the correct and appropriate level of language. Therefore, English skills include listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, writing skills. Including language ability's rhetorical ability sociocultural competence strategic language ability's ability to interact and ability in sentence structure.

Language barriers

Language is clearly an important aspect of communication. Any potential language barrier will certainly decrease the potential of employees in a multinational organization leading to issues for a particular company. A mistake in communication may cause the business to lose money and experience unnecessarily high costs. (Sanjit & Clarke, 2015)

The lack of good and effective communication will become troublesome for businesses to respond to customer's needs which could cause a shift to competitors. The main cause of the lack of effective communication is language barriers. A misinterpreted message could result in costly delays; poorly written reports could lead to wrong decisions being made; complicated instructions may cause damage, damage to expensive equipment or the loss of an important customer. English is now seen as one of the skills that businesses need to manage effectively and efficiently in order to maximize their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Erreygers & Jacobs, 2006).

Blundel (1998) argued that communication barriers in humans arise due to psychological factors, physiological factors, social factors, cultural and political barriers, and technological barriers including technical failure, selecting an inappropriate channel, or failing to use it effectively. Blundel proposed a three-part solution, which involved considering the receiver, thinking clearly, and delivering the message skillfully, in order to overcome language barriers. Thus, the code used to transfer the message is clearly important. As stated by Krizan et al. (2002: 31), "the main language barriers can occur by different accents, word choice, denotative versus connotative meaning and grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure". Another factor which affects efficiency in communication is cultural differences. These will be discussed in the next section.

Needs Analysis

The definition of needs has been defined differently by many scholars depending on their different perspectives. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1997), needs can be described from the view of both outsiders and insiders. From the outsiders' view, needs can be seen as objective or perceived ability, while from the insiders' view, needs can be seen as subjective or felt, which can also depend on the different situations. Moreover, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1997) stated that "Needs analysis is the process of establishing what and how of a course." From the view of Hutchinson and Walter (1987), needs can be categorized into two categories, which are target needs or "what the learners need to do in the target situation" and learning needs or "what the learner needs in order to learn" .

For the target needs, they can be divided into three terms, which are necessities, lacks and wants. According to Robinson (1991), needs can be categorized into three types. In the aspect of what is expected from the students at the end of the course, this is called goal oriented. In the situation where the focus is on the matter of what the learner needs to do in order to achieve the goal of learning, this can be called process oriented. In the process of need analysis, the target situation and the present situation are considered to assess the learners' current ability and decide what to do for them to acquire the knowledge and meet the requirements at the end of the course.

Language Needs

Blue and Harun (2003) provides a good example of a study on the language needs of Hotel and catering on the use of hospitality language at front office of four hotels in Britain. The study focused on the need of specific language for first speakers of English. The research concluded that the hospitality industry entails a specific type of language that is hospitality language. This study had initiated the issues of language use in the hospitality industry. Similarly, Kardijan (2017) also studied the gap between learning needs and its implementation in English for hospitality specific purposes program at the Hospitality Department of State Vocational High School 1 of Tasikmalaya. The study found that there was inconsistency between learning needs for the student communicative competence and the learning process. The research suggested a re-instructional design of English learning for the hospitality specific purposes program. Although this research was conducted for vocational the finding also tells that hospitality language can be regarded to be in the area of English for Occupational Purposes with a substantial overlap with General Purpose English (GPE). Similarly, Kardijan (2017) also studied the gap between learning needs and its implementation in English for hospitality specific purposes program at the Hospitality Department of State Vocational High School 1 of Tasikmalaya. The study found that there was inconsistency between learning needs for the student communicative competence and the learning process. The research suggested a re-instructional design of English learning for the hospitality specific purposes program. Although this research was conducted for vocational high school students, it strengthens the urgency of link and match between learning needs and learning materials for hotel employees that the writer is seeking through this research. Keyoonwong (1998) conducted a survey of needs and wants of English in tourism career. The results showed that the tourism personnel in Chiang Mai considered listening and speaking skills the most important and necessary. The employers, as well as the staff themselves, were not satisfied with the English language proficiency. They needed to practice the skills including listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Similarly, Boonyawattana (1999) studied needs analysis of English in tourism business. The results found that listening and speaking skills were greatly important in tourism business careers more than reading and writing skills. Speaking was needed the most, followed by listening, reading and writing. People who worked in tourism business also encountered the most problems of using English in listening skills, followed by speaking, writing and reading skills.

Hypothesis:

Employees need to participate in English development activities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary.

From the literature review, the conceptual framework can be drawn as shown in Figure 1.

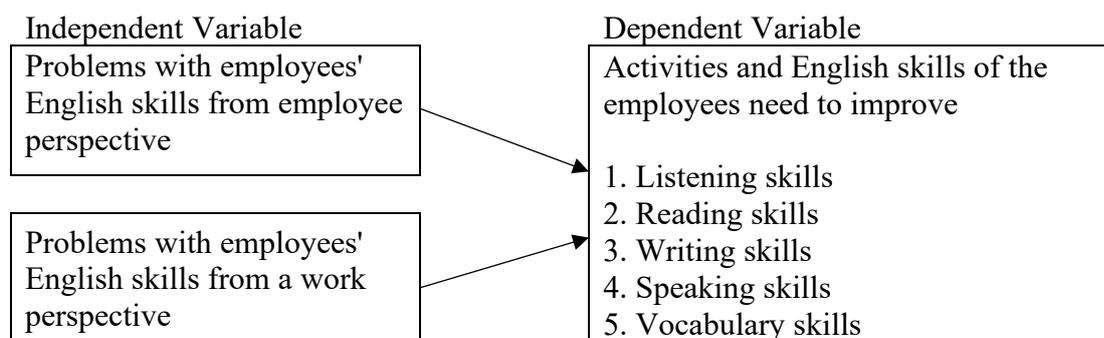


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population is Don Mueang railway employees. Therefore, the researcher selected 10 key informants were selected, including of Don Mueng railway employees and executives in Thailand.

The tools of this study are structured in-depth interviews about Activities and English skills of the employees need to improve. This in-depth interview consists of 3 Sections as follows:

Section 1: Problems with employees' English skills from employee perspective.

Section 2: Problems with employees' English skills from a work perspective.

executive perspective

Section 3: Activities and English skills of the employees need to improve.

- 1) Listening skills
- 2) Reading skills
- 3) Writing skills
- 4) Speaking skills
- 5) Vocabulary skills

Data Collection for this study has collected primary data from a survey using interview forms in a survey of 10 people of Don Mueang railway employees and executive in the qualitative research. In addition, secondary data were collected from documents related to the English skills, Problem of English skills and the needs to develop employees' Activities and English skills.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Problems with employees' English skills from employee perspective.

1) Listening skills

Most of employees have trouble hearing the accents of foreigners in different countries, such as Indians and Russians, which are unfamiliar and difficult to understand. They understand basic conversations which can communicate and listen well.

2) Speaking skills

Most of the employees understand basic conversations and can communicate. If they listen to unfamiliar words, they will not be able to respond and they cannot compose correct sentences causing them to have anxiety in speaking.

3) Reading skills

Some employees can read in English, but there are difficult and unfamiliar word, such as business letter or long article with unfamiliar vocabulary, as a result, they cannot read and understood.

4) Writing skills

Most of the employees can only write the simple communications they are used to at work. But they are unable to write academic lectures or write explanations of difficult sentences because

they do not know the principles of correct writing, which makes writing skills rarely used in daily life.

5) Vocabulary skills

Most employees know the vocabulary used in common tasks such as ticket sales and basic communication, but they don't know many words, especially the terminology for explaining complex travel to foreign passengers.

Problems with employees' English skills from executive perspective

1) Listening skills

Most of employees have problems with listening skill in English are not able to understand the accents of foreigners, most of employees can listen to English but cannot respond because they lack knowledge of vocabulary.

2) Speaking skills

Some employees can speak English, but their accents may not be correct, causing foreigners to not understand them. As a result, employees are afraid to speak English again.

3) Reading skills

Some employees can read English. but the word is unfamiliar, the employee will not be able to translate it. In cases where foreigners bring brochures or books for employees to read and ask questions, the employees are unable to answer or explain.

4) Writing skills

Some employees can write English at work. But cannot explain in long sentences. For example, when a foreigner asks for directions, they cannot answer that is understandable but cannot explain further how if the foreigners want to change directions, where to take the next line of Railway.

5) Vocabulary skills

Some employees still lack knowledge of a variety of vocabulary. Some people only know frequently used words. This is the first problem with other English skills for example, when employees don't know the vocabulary, they cannot listen to understand or speak for respond.

Activities and English skills of the employees need to improve:

1) Employee perspective

Most of the employees need to participate in English development activities. Especially, listening, speaking and vocabulary skill to better communicate with foreign passengers. Because them work requires communicating prices, bringing the best travel packages to foreign passenger and solving the stressful situation in servicing foreign passengers to understand. The skills that employees urgently need to develop are essential vocabulary and how to compose sentences to make conversations easier for foreign passengers to understand.

2) Executive perspective

Executive perspective, they think that employees' English skills should be urgently developed. It may be training to provide knowledge or recreational activities that give employees the opportunity to talk with native English speakers or other foreigners to practice listening to different foreign accents and practice talking and interacting and should be a training course specifically for railway employees. Also, practice using vocabulary necessary for communicating effectively in English with foreign passengers in various situations. In providing activities to develop employees' English skill, there must be create motivation for employees to develop their own abilities, such as providing morale and encouragement for using English at work, whether it is awarding certificates, honoring those with English language skills, as well as giving small gifts to provide positive reinforcement to employees, etc.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The results concluded that Don Mueang Railway employees still have problems with English skills. Especially listening skills, speaking skills and vocabulary, such as they are not able to understand the accents of foreigners, they can listen to English but cannot speak to respond because they lack knowledge of vocabulary as for reading and writing skills, there are also problems because they are not often used in work, which are agreeable with the study of Jeharase (2014) who found that Thai employees could not understand foreign customers because they were not familiar with the different accents of foreigners and this problem also affects speaking English for communication. For this reason, employees need to improve their English skills. Especially, listening, speaking and vocabulary skill to better communicate with foreign passengers because they work requires communicating prices, bringing the best travel packages to foreign passenger and solving the stressful situation in servicing foreign passengers to understand, which are agreeable with the study of Sanjit and Clarke (2015) who found that the employees perceived that they have mastered most of the important skills required for their duty. However, the customer service employees remain in need of improving their English communication skills. In addition, the opinions of the executives were found that employees have problems with listening, speaking, and vocabulary and they need to urgently improve their English skills. Which are agreeable with the opinions of employees. Which are agreeable with the study of Firharmawan & Andika (2019) who found that the skills needed from the most required to the least one are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The three most dominant language uses are to give services, to give information, and to give help. Problems in using English encountered included guessing unknown words due to limited vocabulary, lacking grammar knowledge, inability to follow the speed, and lacking confidence. Executive should create motivation to develop employees' English skills, which are agreeable with the study of Leovani & Hasibuan (2017) who explained in the role of English communication competence and speaking motivation perception toward employee performance of hotel staffs, which shown that when employees are motivated to improve their English skills, they will be more effective at work.

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