

The Use of English Language in Tourism Workplaces in Pakmeng Beach Area, Trang Province

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Abstract

This research was conducted (1) to explore English language skills used by front desk staff in tourism workplaces in Pakmeng beach, Trang province, Thailand (2) to identify the frequency of English languages skills used by the front office staff in tourism workplaces and (3) to investigate the interests and needs in improving English language skills by front office staff. By purposive sampling, the samples consisted of 40 front office staff of hotels, resorts and the tourism agencies in Pakmeng beach, Trang province. The questionnaire was collected and analyzed by descriptive statistics using percentage, frequency, Means and Standard deviation. The major findings revealed that listening was the most common skill used by employees, followed by speaking, reading and writing skill. English listening skills such as listening to customers' questions and giving information about hotels/tour services were frequently used by the employees in the tourism workplaces. The most three common interests and needs to improve English language were vocabulary relating to hospitality and tourism, followed by giving information about hotel services and tour services and giving information about tourist attractions. The findings from semi- structured interviews showed that most of the employees considered that the English language was a vital part of their job and had become a core criteria for their career in tourism workplaces, especially listening and speaking skills. Therefore, they wanted to improve their English speaking and listening skills with respect to accommodation booking , tourist attraction information , price quotation and general conversation.

Keywords: use of English language, tourism workplaces: hotel and resorts ,tour operators

Introduction

In Thailand, English has been growing rapidly, particularly in the tourism industries. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019). It is the lingua franca of today's business world and is used for business communication in Thailand. In the hotel business, English is used as the lingua franca and is the most important language in the hotel industry worldwide (Blue & Harun, 2003; Ruiz Garrido & Iborra, 2006). Moreover, the international tourism sectors such as sightseeing and green ecotourism prefer to use English to correspond with their counterparts in other parts of the world. According to G. M. Blue and Harun (2003), English proficiency in hospitality language is important and should include a hospitality management course for those who perform their tasks either in their mother tongue or in a foreign language when serving all types of customers, including foreign customers. The growing worldwide industry wants front office staff in the hotel sector who are able to communicate with their guests effectively. Furthermore, tour guides should possess English proficiency to communicate with their guests in the context of tourism. Therefore, learning English language based on this context is needed by tour guides because it supports and helps them to use English language in their real professional setting. (Johnson, 2002). Therefore, it is believed that English communication skills are useful and important for those who work in the hotel and tourism industries.

Trang Province, a province in Southern Thailand, welcomes a lot of tourists both Thai and foreign every year. Moreover, the number of tourists visiting islands in the Andaman sea is increasing. Trang is separated into 10 districts; Mueang Trang, Kantang, Huai Yot, Yan Ta Khao, Palian, Sikao, Wang Wiset, Na Yong, Ratsada, and Hat Samran. It has numerous interesting tourist attractions in each district. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019). For example, Trang offers various tourist attractions such as beautiful beaches, islands, cultural and historical places and eco-attractions. In particular, Pakmeng beach is one of the most beautiful beaches located in the Sikao district where it is a popular tourist attraction on the Andaman sea. Furthermore, Pakmeng pier serves as the most important ferry port for tourists who travel to the most popular of Trang's islands namely, Kradan island, Muk island, Chaek island and Ngai island. Additionally, visitors can catch speedboats operating by local tour agencies to Rok island in Krabi province.

The tourism industry is one of Thailand's main economic components', accounting for 6-7% of its GDP. According to The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, the recovering tourism sector can enhance the Thai economy, which leads to Thailand's GDP growth (The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019). In addition, Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2016) showed that the total tourism revenues have accounted for THB 2.5 trillion (USD 71 billion) in 2016, with THB 1.6 trillion coming from international markets and THB 870 billion from the domestic market. When considering the tourism context, English language plays an important role as the main language used for the tourism industry. Therefore, it is necessary for the employees who work in the tourism industry in

order to communicate with foreign tourists. However, some staff cannot communicate effectively.

With in specific consideration of tourism context, Prachanant (2012) surveyed 40 employees' English language needs and problems in international tour companies and tourist attractions in Thailand. The findings revealed that English listening skill was rated as the second important skill in the tourism contexts while English speaking skill is still the main problem for Thai employees in tourism workplaces including inability to understand foreign accents, unusual words and expressions, inadequate vocabulary, and a lack of grammatical knowledge. Blue and Harun (2003) investigated hotel staff's hospitality practices and English language usage at four hotels in Southampton in the United Kingdom. The pedagogical implication found that the hotel staff's needs must be exposed to actual hotel reception practices in order to develop some hospitality skills through in-service training. Results from the interview also showed that hotel staff needed English for specific purposes or English for occupational purposes as a requirement of the hospitality in-training. Furthermore, English communication skills are required by human resources managers, researchers and educators in the field of hospitality. Another recent study by Ratminingsih, Suardana, and Martin (2018) investigated local tour agencies. Results also revealed that tour guides had low English speaking skills, and were unable to speak English well. They required English speaking and listening skills, as well as oral English. The ability to converse was considered as the most important learning need. The findings also showed that they needed contextual-based English learning to conduct their jobs in their professional setting. In a similar context, Aldohon (2014) examined the needs, functions and problems of 46 tourist police working in different tourism workplaces in Jordan. The finding reveals that English speaking and listening skills are rated as the most important skills used by the tourist police in Jordanian tourism contexts.

English communication skills are highly important for employees in tourism workplaces. More specifically, English speaking and listening are needed for employees who are involved in the tourism industry as well as oral communication while English reading and writing are required for email communication. These findings are consistent with Spence and Liu (2013) who investigated the English language needs of engineers working at a manufacturing company in Taiwan. The study revealed that the most common English communicative events that engineers face in a Taiwan engineering context included highly frequent writing and reading events such as emails, report, and memos, as well as common oral events including meetings, presentations and teleconferences. The finding also presented that the need for English is important for the engineer's career, with oral skills being in particular demand for customer visits and relationship building. Based on the stated problems above, very few studies have been conducted to survey the employees' needs and interests used in Thailand tourism workplaces. With respect to tourism workplaces in Pakmeng beach, Thailand, some employees still cannot communicate effectively with guests in English. For example, when they give information to foreign customers, some of them cannot explain and use the right vocabulary. They cannot effectively convey matters related to hospitality and tourism due to a lack of appropriate vocabulary.

Consequently, this present study aims to explore the usage of English language skills for employees in tourism workplaces located on Pakmeng beach, Trang, Thailand, and to identify the frequency of English language skills used by the employees in the tourism industry, and to investigate their employees' interests and needs in improving English language skills when they perform their jobs in tourism workplaces. Hopefully, improving the tourism employees' communicative competence in English in Thailand can contribute to the tourism industry in Thailand as a whole.

This research provides several suggestions. First, the tourism workplaces namely hotels/resorts and tour companies at Pakmeng beach, Trang province can discover and provide English skills that are needed for their employees when performing tasks at tourism workplaces. Second, Thai government such as Tourism Authority of Thailand and Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand, as well as educational institutes such as universities can provide an effective English course for hospitality and tourism in order to develop English skills for the employees who directly make contact with their customers and tourists in tourism contexts. Third, these research results could act as a guideline to improve and develop English language skills for the local employees who are preparing to work in the tourism and hotel industry in Thailand.

This research will contribute to and follow the new direction of the country. Moreover, this is the first step for the employees who are planning and preparing to work in the tourism industry in Thailand. It is worth exploring the use of English language in tourism workplaces in order to provide and design an effective English course for staff who are directly involved in tourism workplaces such as hotels, resorts and tour operators. For the above reasons, a study on usage of English language for employees in Tourism workplaces in Pakmeng beach area, Sikao, Trang province was conducted. This research endeavors to develop and apply an English curriculum design and use it to improve English for tourism and hospitality courses which are suited to meet the needs of the learner (employers and employees), teaching organizations, College of Hospitality and Tourism and people who act as front desk staff in the tourism workplaces or who plan to work in tourism workplaces for a future career. As a result, this will increase the efficiency of tourism services in order to support the Andaman's tourism economy. In addition, this study can lead to a clearer understanding of English language needs for the local staff who directly make contacts with customers in the tourism contexts This present study aims to fill this gap in existing literature.

Review of Literature

English for specific purposes (ESP) is defined as “the role of English in a language course or programme of particular group of learners” (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). ESP can be subdivided into 2 main categories as English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for occupational purposes (EOP). EOP consisted of both general and specific occupational purposes (G. Blue, 1988, p. 96). EOP can be divided into various categories such as English for medical purposes (doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians, eldercare, and X-ray technicians), English for hotel purposes (reception,

maids, front desk, concierge, and bell hop), English for construction purposes (construction industry, and so forth). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) stated that ESP should properly be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning.

Needs analysis or needs assessment plays an important role in developing any English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Many researchers define needs analysis in various ways (Brown, 2016; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). For example, Brown (2016) defined that needs analysis is the systematic define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation. The learner-centered approach to language learning builds on the premise that teaching/learning programs should be responsive to learners' needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Savignon & Wang, 2003). According to Dudley-Evans et al. (1998), needs analysis is considered as one of the key stages in ESP, the others being syllabus design, selection and production of materials, teaching and learning, and evaluation. In this paper, the researcher will investigate the usage of English languages skills for hotels, resorts and travel agencies for front desk staff. The needs and interests in improving the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are also included in this study.

Research Methodology

A methodology with involved both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was used in this research. This section begins with samples used, types of participants, data collection , instrument, and data analysis.

Samples used and Participants

The participants of this study comprised 43 Thai employees who work as front office staff in the tourism workplaces located in Pakmeng beach, Trang province. The sampling is purposely selected. They can be categorized into 2 types: 1) the employees who work as front desk staff at hotels and resorts and 2) the employees who work as front desk staff at tour agencies. There were 15 males and 28 females, 20-50 years of age. They have been working in the tourism industry for less than 1, and more than 5 years. In addition, the participants for the semi-structured interviews were also selected purposely.

Data collection and research instrument

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as research instrument in this study. The questionnaire was designed based on a review of the literature and the researcher's experience. The researcher developed a five -point Likert scale to seek respondent's opinions about the use of English language skills in tourism sectors and to discover the English languages skills, needs and interests required for

improving English in tourism workplaces. To secure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was distributed and validated by three experts (two English language lecturers and one hospitality and tourism lecturer). To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaires were revised and developed based on the experts' suggestions by the research.

The questionnaires are written in Thai and the set of questionnaires is divided into 3 sections. Section 1 is about basic information such as the employees' general background, education, and the English skills used in tourism workplaces. In addition, it explores the employees' usage of English skills to find out which skills are mostly used in tourism workplaces. Section 2 examines the front desk staff's frequency of English language used within four skills consisting of listening (listening to news or information, listening to customers' questions, listening to descriptions of tour/hotels); speaking (giving information about hotel and resort/tour operators, giving information about tourist attractions; giving advice /opinion, introducing products /services, general conversations), reading (reading books, magazines and newspaper, reading letters, reading travel /hotel/resort documents, brochures and leaflets, reading e-mails), and writing (writing business letters, writing advertisements, writing e-mails). Section 3 examines tourism employees' interests and needs in developing the four English Language skills.

In addition, the semi-structured interviews consisting of two open ended questions were employed in this research. The first question concerns the four English language skills used in tourism workplaces and the second question concerns the interests and needs in improving all English skills. The two questions are "Which English language skill plays an important role in tourism workplaces?" and "What are your needs and interests in improving the English language skills used in tourism workplaces?". Ten participants were selected for the semi-structured interviews and the interviews were conducted in Thai.

Data was collected by questionnaire and semi-structured interviews in the tourism workplaces. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants and collected by the researcher at the hotels, resorts and tour companies. The researcher sent the letter to ask for permission from the human resource. 43 questionnaires were distributed to the participants and collected by the researcher at hotels, resorts and tour agencies. The questionnaire seeks respondent's opinions about the use of English skills in tourism sectors and to discover English languages skills, needs and interests in improving English in tourism workplaces.

Data Analysis

The descriptive analyses employed to investigate the English language skills used by front office staff were frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The semi-structured interview was analyzed by content analysis. A 5-point Likert scale was

used to score the level of employees’ English language usage in tourism workplaces. The mean score was interpreted based on the following criteria:

<i>Mean Range</i>	<i>Need Level</i>
4.50 - 5.00	Very High
3.50 - 4.49	High
2.50 - 3. 49	Moderate
1.50 - 2.49	Low
1.00 -1.49	Very Low

Results

The first part of the questionnaire seeks background information with respect to gender, age, educational background, status, working position, company, the period of working in the company, the period of English study and the English language skills used in tourism workplaces. The questionnaire’s results indicate that most of the respondents (65.1%) were females. The age range is comprised mainly from a group of 20-30 years (46.5%) to 31- 40 years (34.9%). Most of them (55.8%) held a Bachelor’s degree, 41.9% of participants had 1-5 years of working experience at hotel, resorts and tour operators. Most of the respondents were working as front office staff in hotels/resorts (53.5%), followed by front office staff in tour agencies (46.5 %), In addition, 76.7% had studied English from primary school and 65.1 % had studied English more than 5 years. The number of respondents who thought that they used English 1-3 days a week in their careers was 37.2%. When the tourism employees were asked to rate the usage of English language skills in tourism workplaces, they rated all four core English language skills as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

English Language Skills Usage in Tourism Workplaces

Skills	M	S.D.	Levels
1. Listening	3.81	1.09	High
2. Speaking	3.70	1.22	High
3. Reading	3.14	1.28	Moderate
4. Writing	2.86	1.37	Moderate
English language skills	3.38	1.11	Moderate

As show in Table 1, most tourism employees rated all core English skills as important. The finding indicated that “listening and speaking skills were ranked as the most important skills for their careers. When considering each English skill used, it was found that listening is considered as the most common skill for their tourism workplaces where the mean was ($M = 3.81$, $S.D. = 1.09$), followed by speaking skill ($M = 3.70$,

$S.D.=1.22$), reading skill ($M = 3.14, S.D.= 1.28$) and writing skill ($M = 2.86, S.D.= 1.37$). The total score is ranked in importance for the tourism employees ($M = 3.38, S.D.= 1.11$) Second section.

When the tourism employees were asked to choose how frequently they used English skills in tourism workplaces, the results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

The frequency of English skills used by employees in tourism workplaces

Title	M	S.D.	Levels
1. Frequency of English listening skills			
• Listening to customers' questions	3.70	0.98	High
• Listening to descriptions of tours/hotels services	3.42	1.00	Moderate
• Listening to news or information	3.16	1.04	Moderate
2. Frequency of English speaking skill			
• Giving information about hotels/tour services	3.67	1.08	High
• Introducing products and services	3.60	1.17	High
• Giving information about tourist attractions	3.56	0.98	High
• General conversations	3.44	1.14	Moderate
• Giving advices and opinions	3.42	1.02	Moderate
3. Frequency of English reading Skill			
• Reading emails	3.09	1.28	Moderate
• Reading hotel/resort tourism documents, brochures and leaflets	3.07	1.24	Moderate
• Reading books magazines and newspapers	2.86	1.22	Moderate
• Reading letters	2.77	1.25	Moderate
4. Frequency of English writing skills			
• Writing emails	2.81	1.31	Moderate
• Writing product advertisements	2.63	1.19	Moderate
• Writing business letters	2.53	1.20	Moderate

Note. M= mean; S.D. = Standard deviation

The results for the frequency of English skills used by tourism employees are illustrated in Table 2, where it was found that the greatest frequency of listening skill usage was listening to customers' questions ($M = 3.70, S.D. = 0.98$), followed by listening to descriptions of tours/hotels services ($M = 3.42, S.D. = 1.00$). While listening to news or information was reported as the lowest frequency usage ($M=3.16, S.D = 1.045$).

Accordingly, English speaking skills used by employees in tourism workplaces when giving information about hotels /tour services is rated as the highest frequency of usage ($M= 3.67, = S.D. = 1.08$), followed by introducing products and services ($M= 3.60, S.D.= 1.17$) and giving information about tourist attractions ($M= 3.56, S.D.= 0.98$),

respectively. Whereas, giving advices and opinions was rated as the least frequency usage. ($M= 3.42, S.D. = 1.029$).

It can be seen that the frequency of English reading skills in their workplaces related to reading emails and was rated as the most frequency of usage ($M= 3.09, S.D. =1.28$), followed by reading hotel/resort tourism documents, brochures and leaflets ($M = 3.07, S.D. =1.242$) whereas, reading letters was reported as the least frequency usage. ($M= 2.77, S.D. = 1.25$).

In relation to the frequency of writing skill usage by tourism employees in their workplaces writing emails was rated as the most frequency of usage ($M= 2.81, S.D. =1.31$), followed by writing product advertisement ($M= 2.63, S.D. =1.19$), whereas, writing business letters was reported as the lowest frequency usage. ($M= 2.53, S.D. =1.20$).

To sum up, when considering the frequency of four core English skills used by tourism employees, listening skills such as listening to customers’ questions and giving information about hotels/tour services were rated as the highest frequency used by the employees in the tourism workplaces. Whereas, reading emails, and writing emails were regarded as the main reading and writing skills which they frequently used while performing their work.

The third section presents the interests and needs in improving English language skills by tourism employees in tourism workplaces when they do their work. The employees were asked to choose their interests in course study. The results are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Interests and needs in developing in English Language Skills

Interests and needs	M	S.D.
1.Vocabulary relating to hospitality and tourism	4.33	0.83
2.Giving information about hotels and tour services	4.26	0.84
3.Giving information about tourist attractions	4.26	0.81
4. General information	4.23	0.84
5. Reading letters and emails	4.00	0.90
6. Listening to conversations in situations	4.16	0.92
7. Listening to questions	4.12	1.00
8. Greetings and giving introductions	3.98	1.24
9. Writing emails	3.77	1.06
10.Writing business letters	3.72	1.00

As shown in Table 3, the three most relevant interests and needs in developing English language for employees in tourism workplaces were vocabulary relating hospitality and tourism ($M= 4.33, S.D.= 0.83$), followed by giving information about hotels and tours services ($M=4.26, S.D.= 0.84$), and giving information about tourist

attractions ($M= 4.26$, $S.D.= 0.81$) respectively. In contrast, the interests and needs in writing business letters were reported as the lowest interest in improving English languages skills in their careers. The results of the questionnaire also show the employees' needs and interests in English vocabulary relating to hospitality and tourism.

The findings from the semi – structured interview questionnaire are as follow:

Question 1 Which English language skill used in your current job in tourism workplaces?

The results show that most of the employees consider that the English language is a vital part for their career in tourism workplaces, especially the speaking skills. The employees suggested that using the English speaking skills such answering customer's questions and giving advice to customers were frequently used in tourism workplaces. Writing skills such as writing Emails are used to contact foreign tourists via online channels for example, Facebook and line.

Question 2 What are your needs and interests in improving English language skills used in tourism workplaces?

The participants claimed that they lacked English language skills in their career. Therefore, they were interested and wanted to improve their English speaking and listening skills with respect to accommodation booking, tourist attraction information , price quotation and general conversation.

The findings from the semi – structured interview questionnaire clearly show that the front office staff at hotels, resorts and tour agents in Pakmeng beach have a lack of English language skills in their career. Therefore, they were interested and wanted to improve their English speaking and listening skills. Most of the employees consider that English language skills play a vital role for their career in tourism workplaces, especially listening and speaking skills.

Discussion

This paper is carried out in order to investigate English usage by employees working in 2 different types of tourism workplaces located in Pakmeng beach, Trang; hotels/resorts and tour agencies. The paper also explores the frequency of English language skills used by employees and the needs and interests in developing English language skills used in their professional setting. The findings from this present investigation are summarized in the following points.

The English language skills used in tourism workplaces

The findings showed that among the four skills, English listening skill was used by the employees the most. The majority of the tourism employees in tourism workplaces at Pakmeng beach area rated listening as the most important skill that was used as the main function in their tourism workplaces, which suggests that most employees involved needed listening skills to conduct their daily job. This may be explained by the fact that Thailand has promoted an extensive campaign to travel. As a result, many foreign tourists visit and travel to the most famous tourist attractions in Trang Province, Thailand. Therefore, it can be said that communication skills are a very important element of hospitality and tourism. When we consider this in a tourism context, the tourism

employees' ability to communicate with foreigner tourists is regarded as the most important function when they perform their work. The findings of this study are consistent with the studies of (e.g Aldohon, 2014; Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012; Ratminingsih et al., 2018). These results indicated that the four English skills, especially listening and speaking, are the most important elements for communication in hospitality and tourism and reading and writing emails were also rated as highly important for tourism employees.

The frequency of English Language Skills used in tourism workplaces

With regard to the frequency of English language skills used in tourism workplaces, the employees in tourism workplaces frequently used the English listening skill for listening to customers' questions and listening to descriptions of tours/hotels services, while listening to news or information was reported as the least frequency of usage. While the employees in tourism workplaces frequently used English reading skills for reading emails and used English writing skills for writing emails when they performed their jobs in tourism workplaces. This finding supports Blue and Harun (2003) that English proficiency is very important for hotel staff and those who plan to perform their work in the hotel and tourism industry and employees are required to have a good command of English. These findings also accord with Prachanant (2012) who examined the English needs of tourism employees providing services. Similar to Spence and Liu (2013) revealed that English reading and writing skills are required for writing emails and reading emails for employee in the workplaces. These results show that all four English language skills are used frequently and make a vital contribution to the tourism industry of Thailand. Based on the evidence presented, these English communication skills are widely used in the hospitality and tourism context in tourism workplaces such as tour agencies, hotels and resorts.

Interest and needs in developing English Language Skills in Tourism Workplaces

It is generally accepted that the development of English language skills for the employees in tourism workplaces are needed and required in order to perform their daily tasks effectively. The three most relevant interests and needs in developing English language skills in tourism workplaces are vocabulary relating to hospitality and tourism, followed by giving information about hotels and tour services, and giving information about tourist attractions respectively. This means that tourism employees require a special English communication training course emphasizing on both listening skills such as price, discounts and sales and speaking skills such as describing tourist attraction information, price quotation and general information. Therefore, English is the most common used language in the hotel and tourism industries and tourism employees need to learn how to speak clearly, become involved in cross cultural communication and learn vocabulary relating to hospitality.

Limitations and suggestions for future study

There are some limitations to this research and its findings. First, this study focused on the tourism workplaces that were active in the Pakmeng beach area. The tourism workplaces that were not active are not included in this study. Secondly, this research did not test for English proficiency of tourism employees. Therefore, any future study should assess and test the employees in the tourism workplaces. The research instruments should be adapted to test English proficiency for the tourism employees. In addition, considering, the different types of the workplaces or organizations, the needs of English language skills would be different.

Conclusion

The present study examined the usage of English language skills for the employees in tourism workplaces located on Pakmeng beach, Trang, Thailand. It studied the frequency of English language skills used by employees as well as their interests and needs required for improving English language skills. As the result, the research showed that tourism employees used listening and speaking skills the most in order to perform their jobs in the tourism context. In so doing, this study can be used as a guideline to design Hotel and Hospitality English course focused on price, discounts and sales, greeting guests, describing tourist attraction information, and general information. This research contributes to design special English training courses in order to meet the needs and interests of front office staff in the tourism workplaces and those who need English for the hospitality industry such as employees in hotels resorts and tour agencies, as well as for students in the program of hospitality and tourism, while tourism employees could improve their English language competency in their professional settings in Thailand.

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