

An Investigation of Thai Learners's Needs for English Language Use for Speaking at the Workplace

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Received: 6 March 2023; **Accepted:** 10 April 2023; **Published:** 25 April 2023

To cite this article (APA): Yusoff, A., Abullah, R., Mohamed Ismail, S. A. M., & Shaari, A. (2023). An Investigation of Thai Learners's Needs for English Language Use for Speaking at the Workplace. *Asian Journal of Assessment in Teaching and Learning*, 13(1), 34–41. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajatel.vol13.1.4.2023>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajatel.vol13.1.4.2023>

Abstract

The need analysis of spoken communication for Thai people who use language proficiency are various. This study's research question analyzes students' needs and challenges regarding tourism and services. Hence, data samples were collected from Thai students studying tourism and related programs. The data collection method was performed by distributing questionnaires to students on the needs and challenges of speaking. The quantitative data analysis employed descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data used thematic analysis. The importance of this study lies in the result that learners need and the challenge their speaking abilities in a working environment. Furthermore, the learning purpose must meet the needs of their future career. In conclusion, the staff must provide information related to their work. However, the various English accents and pronunciations is not practical for the students' comprehension.

Keywords: need analysis, speaking abilities, tourism, service student.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most significant industries impacting the economy worldwide (Laosrirattanachi & Ruanjaroon, 2021). International tourists have increased yearly. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that English as a business language is of paramount significance in today's workforce (Namtapi, 2022) to communicate and interact successfully (Rocci & Saussure, 2016; Wharton, 2009). Therefore, the need analysis assists in the planning and processing necessary to meet the needs of students, teachers, universities, and workplaces.

According to Richards (2001), Need Analysis (NA) collects student needs data. NA can occur before, during, and after they learn a language based on the development of the course. Apart from that, NA is the systematic and logical way to obtain and investigate all the data requirements to define and validate, besides making their appearance in language planning (Brown, 2016; Nunan, 1988). NA collects and analyzes all subjective and objective information essential for students who expect validity in the course to be satisfied with their requirements (Brown, 2016). Therefore, students' response needs can be reflected sign the course, choosing and making teaching materials and developing ways to test them (Abrar-UI-Hassan & Fazel, 2018). Note that NA is not just about getting information from students and teachers. It is also about details from business sectors that interest the employee (Huhta et al., 2013).

For specific learning to be maintained, someone needs to employ it in a particular situation, known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is a teaching methodology for students learning a language for a specific reason related to their work or academic studies (Tomlinson, 2003). Brown (2016) claims that ESP seems to work well when it is tailored to the needs of a specific group of students. ESP can change and develop for students, and they can learn ESP with an opportunity to use it in the future (Jendrych, 2013). For example, students study ESP to learn how to play roles in their performances, which helps them use the language in the workplace (Basturkmen, 2014). Other than that, ESP students will be professionals in their fields of work in the future and can promote them (Viana et al., 2019). NA in ESP is usually based on learning and doing at the course's end. Thus, ESP is a better way for students to learn a language than a course syllabus because it focuses on teaching students how language works (Richards, 2001) and being able to specify why students need to study the English language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Moreover, the content and aim of the course are different and specific. The design must have the differences between ESP and general English so that students can learn ESP through their awareness of the target situations. They can communicate in English by classifying their needs into targets and learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest that when ESP is needed, it could clarify the terms of necessity, lack, and want. In this context, students must know the conditions when ESP is required. However, the lack of ESP defines what students need in the current environment. For example, Hartina & Syahrir (2021) indicated that the problems with English lectures are that Logically, if English is being taught specifically on certain subject, it would not it be easier because you already narrowed language jargon to make students easy to understand without needing analysis, which is to personalize the course's content. Hence, students complained that the study did not help them learn English relevant to their field because the teacher taught them English of different fields other than tourism did not meet the expectations. Unquestionably, the lecturers cannot employ the same strategy and learning method for the entire teaching-learning process to run smoothly. This component requires analysis so ESP lecturers can create a more conducive learning environment and experience for their students (Rachmawati et al., 2021). Moreover, ESP students can acquire language skills based on specific learning, namely, genre, skills, and language learning (Paltridge & Starfield, 2014). Viana et al. (2019) suggest that the texts designed for employment in ESP should also be appropriate for the tasks that students do in their daily lives, as they reflect the development of their English skills.

Other than that, it is also in line with the tourism industry's success, in which jobs in tourism claim to be able to communicate in the future. Therefore, the learner should know how to intervene and master English to meet the work goals of using the language outside the classroom and completing tasks in the real world (Basturkmen, 2010). This could be because there are gaps in what students and teachers demand regarding verbal communication in tourism. Therefore, this study investigates what students and teachers need in communication in tourism.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

These study questions investigate:

1. What are students' needs and problems in improving their speaking skills?
2. What are the requirements for using speaking skills in the workplace?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

The population comprised learners enrolling in tourism and services programs in southern province-located universities near the Thai-Malaysian border. The participants of this study comprised 66 Thai students who study in a tourism program located in southern Thailand. Other than that, the student's ages range from 19 to 22 years old, of which 53 are males and 13 are females. In this study, respondents are from first- to fourth-year level and voluntarily provided information and returned the documents.

Research Instruments

This study employed three instruments to collect data. First, the analysis used quantitative and qualitative methods, wherein the quantitative approach was collected through students' questionnaires. For the reliability of the questionnaire verified on process, as the values of scores appear to be 0.91. This means that the questionnaire is 90% reliable. Qualitative data was investigated from open-ended questions for students and collected documents. Three experts, two lecturers and one English lecturer, checked the reliability of interview questions. Subsequently, the literature review adopted the questionnaire. It addresses the issues of speaking skills in the tourism and services industry, students' goals and problems in the workplace, expectations in the course, activities, and teaching methodology. It was compiled in Thai and English versions to minimize ambiguity and misinterpretation. In addition, ten documents were collected in the qualitative data. Correspondingly, three experts verified all instruments to check the validity of questionnaires and research study documents. Note that the pilot study was conducted with the same major but not at the same university.

Data Collection

During the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection used an online platform to conveniently gather information from the respondents. The questionnaires and open-ended questions were collected via Google forms within two weeks. Apart from that, ten documents were written in Thai related to tourism and services about problems and the tourism industry's needs. On the other hand, Creswell (2013) applied a seven-step framework for content analysis to look at the interview results.

Data Analysis

This research employed quantitative and qualitative research designs to answer research questions such as challenges faced by the students in learning speaking skills and strategies implemented to overcome the challenges. Nowadays, speaking mastery is vital due to the position of English as a universal language (Nazara, 2011). For quantitative data, statistical analysis used frequency and percentage, while for qualitative data, thematic data was used.

Expected Outcomes of the Research Study

This study has been targeted to meet the tourism and service needs of adapting some parts of the course. This study has shown that the tourism sector needs to provide the industry with real-world learning opportunities and prepare them to meet the workplace.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As for the current situational study in Thailand, university courses will meet the purpose of the workplace or meet the needs, especially English skills. Thus, this study collected data from three instruments, including students' questionnaires and the needs of workplaces.

According to Table 1, there were 66 students who responded to the survey were almost all female students at 80.3%, and only 19.7% were male.

Table 1 Frequency of genders who were responding to the survey

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	53	80.3
Female	13	19.7
total	66	100

Based on Table 2, students who responded to the survey and are studying service industry management and tourism management programs responded to the questions that did not differ from the majors in the study at 54.5% and 45.5%, respectively.

Table 2 Frequency of majoring study who were responding to the survey

Majors	Frequency	%
Services industry management	36	54.5
Tourism management	30	45.5
Total	66	100

Here in Table 3, 66 students will request to work with an international company with multicultural (ICM), and only three students will work with a Thai company (TC). These responses can reflect the students' needs more in the future. For example, when comparing students working after graduation, they discovered that students would like to work in the airline business as tour guides or in eco-tourism. Seven students, on the other hand, want to work in the food and beverage industry, the service industry for recreation, or the lodging industry. It can be stated that students need to work at workplaces where they have to use their language abilities to perform the job well (Hiranburana,2017).

Table 3 Frequency of students need to work in the future

Workpaces	Frequency	%
ICM	63	95.45
TC	3	4.54
Total	66	100

According to Figure 1, as shown in the line graph, the blue line shows students' needs for English skills, and the pink line indicates students mentioned problems in the future if they lack the skills. The highest blue line on the chart indicates that students request speaking skills necessary for the future. Subsequently, listening skills are receptive skills to respond to communication based on tourism topics to use in the workplace and reading and writing skills, respectively. For problems, the highest pink line of these responses indicates that the students highest problem was skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading, respectively.

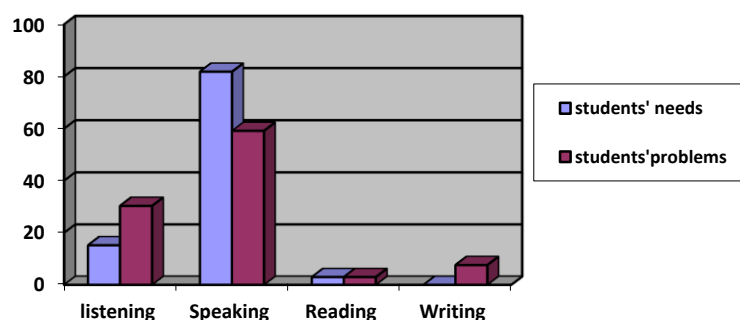


Figure 1 The student's needs and problems with English skills

In line with the topics based on Table 4, students indicated they need a topic related to speaking skills for the workplace as they can use them in daily work ranks the highest; 23 students at 34.81%. The second topic is negotiation at 31.8%. In addition, only 9 students admitted they needed a case of giving information to sell goods and services. However, the topics in communication should consist of first aid and safety guards environments in helping customers. A tourism lecturer with more than ten

years of teaching experience stated that tourists are threatened with verbal or physical threats, making people nervous about visiting Thailand. Therefore, Thai students working in the tourism sector must practice speaking skills to help tourists when they need. On the other aspect, only 2 students needed a topic about assisting tourists, at 3.0%. The activities are needed for students to focus on using their communicative English-speaking ability in the future, respectively.

Table 4 Frequency of topics for students' needs

Topics	Frequency	%
Negotiation with specific careers	21	31.8
Multicultural	6	6.1
Daily life in working	23	34.8
First aid in service and safety guards	2	3.0
Giving data to tourists and customers for selling products and services	9	13.6
Solving problem-based emergency	5	7.6
Total	66	100

Based on Table 5, students are interested in role-playing activities to improve their speaking skills; 22 students answered with this activity (33.3%). In group work, if fewer than 5, students can improve their speaking skills (22.7%). More than 10 students and pair work have similar needs (15.2% and 16.7%, respectively). Four aspects: individual work, presentations, arguments, and business negotiations. But only have two percentage 4.5% and 3.0%, respectively.

Table 5 Frequency of speaking activities for students' needs

Speaking Activities	Frequency	%
The members are not more than five students.	15	22.7
The members are more than ten students.	10	15.2
Pair work	11	16.7
Individual work	3	4.5
Role-play/acting	22	33.3
Presentation and argument	3	4.5
Business negotiation	3	3.0
Total	66	100

According to Table 6, the content of student needs in the future at the workplace is presented. Most students answered details in English to improve their speaking, which they can use after graduation. Therefore, the contents should be authentically working experiences, and they should be from workplaces, at 37.9% and 39.4%. Nevertheless, the students did not need the general concepts that meet the learning objectives at university and are added to other courses at 9.1% and 3.0%, respectively.

Table 6 Frequency of contents in English for tourism and service courses for students' needs using in the future at the workplace

Content Needs		
Details	Frequency	%
The content is general concepts with no specific purposes.	6	9.1
The content will meet the learning objectives of the university.	6	9.1
The content should learn from real-life work and experiences.	25	37.9
The content should learn from workplaces	26	39.4
The content should be added to other courses.	3	4.5
Total	66	100

According to Table 7, Teaching methodology reflects student needs more as a problem-based solving method at 27.3%, and teaching methodology is applied with questions, responses, discussion, and opinions at 22.7%. However, it can be discovered that students need teachers to translate English speaking into Thai at a rate of 15.2%. Only 5 students needed the teaching method through language structure and presentation at 3.0% and 4.5%, respectively.

Table 7 Frequency of students' needs for teaching methodology to improve their speaking skills

Teaching Method	Frequency	%
Lecture	3	4.5
Question and response	15	22.7
Discussion and opinion	15	22.7
A literal translation from English into the Thai language	10	15.2
Presentation	2	3.0
Language structure	3	4.5
Problem-based solving method	18	27.3
Total	66	100

In Table 8, the result showed that the qualitative data showed that students attested to their needs and problems through open-ended questions. There are three factors that affect students' needs and issues, including practical ways, vocabulary, and grammatical rules.

A student needs native speakers to practice speaking consistently and people who speak English from ASEAN countries, South Africa, and other countries. Moreover, students always need to improve their speaking skills by practicing in real-life situations because they only practice speaking skills in a class by memorizing dialogues. As a result, when students communicate in the real world, they lack confidence in speaking because they only remember the dialog they use in class.

Vocabulary is a reason students lack confidence in speaking, as they do not have support. They recommended increasing specific vocabulary when studying English for one class and beginning with easy topics for other steps. In a nutshell, vocabulary is important because it is the foundation of all languages. It is the raw building blocks that students can use to express their thoughts and ideas, share information, understand others, and grow personal relationships as they start their journey in real work life.

Teaching methodologies are focused on activities to support students actively in their speaking. However, the English class does not support active learning, like in terms of grammar rules. A teacher who provides a dialog for students to read and talk does not improve speaking skills. The findings indicated the differences in opinions that each student provided. One provided that grammar rules can improve speaking, and the other should learn to talk. Still, other students do not want to study grammatical rules for speaking ability because they feel it has many structures.

For example, Kaewkunha (2021) studied Thai employees want regarding English language skills, especially speaking ability, which was the highest rank. The staff suggested dialog practice, simulation, language games, and role-playing activities that improve English. The results were gathered from tourism and service students. They argued that speaking activities by practicing dialogs might not help students speak actively and only read as memorization. Hence, this activity cannot communicate in an actual situation when we face honest communication. Other activities did not significantly change the needs of students and staff. Note that students' communication ability becomes much more effective once their language abilities develop.

Table 8 The student's needs and problems responded to an open-ended question

Factors		Needs for English Skills	Problems with Using English Skills
Practical Ways	Native speakers or non-native speakers	"I need to study to practice speaking English with native speakers because they make me brave in speaking."	"I have studied with native speakers. But I do not continue speaking, so I lack confidence in speaking."
	Practical as in the actual situation	"I think speaking should always be practiced and used in real situations."	"I also speak through memorizing dialogs."
Vocabulary	Specific vocabulary	"Specific vocabulary should begin with not being difficult in the learning topic."	"I do not have enough vocabulary to speak, so I always lack confidence."
Teaching Methodology	Active learning	"I think that a student with a student who is communicating with their natural speaking helps improve skills." .	"My major does not focus on language learning, such as speaking skills." "I don't want a teacher showed her feeling when a student is misunderstood because I don't have confidence."
	Activity	"I think that group discussion helps me improve in speaking." "	"English classes don't focus on speaking skills." "Practical speaking skills with dialog are not improved."
	Grammar	"I want to focus on grammar while speaking because it makes me use it correctly."	"I think it should focus more on collecting vocabulary and practical translation rather than grammatical rules."

The outcome of this study also supports Lebark's (2018) study of Thai students' attitudes toward oral performance in the hospitality industry. Students indicated that teachers must create meaningful lessons and use various technical methods and procedures in order to engage the learners in the learning of oral skills, as the similar results of this study showed that the learning contents, activities, and teaching methodology are important.

This result also supports Sittitorn & Rimkeeratikul (2019), which indicated the students were not confident when they had to communicate with customers from various backgrounds. Because it was difficult for them to understand unfamiliar accents, they wanted to practice using their language skills in real-life situations in hotels. These findings are also consistent with Chumphong and Chuai-in (2020), who investigated the use of English in the tourism workplace and discovered that employees used English speaking skills to provide information about hotels and tour services, goods, and tourist attractions.

CONCLUSION

The study surveyed the students' needs and problems in speaking English skills and investigated the need analysis about speaking skills to use in the workplace. In addition, the findings also present that the student's needs and problems are related to staff needs and issues. The results showed that the speaking English course for tourism and services should include student learning through work-based

life experiences, such as internships and learning in the workplace. However, students need to practice with native speakers to enhance their skills. For staff, they demonstrate the results are not different from the student's needs, problems, and lack thereof. These results confirmed that staff could speak to provide directions, offer goods, and clarify questions about facilities. Nevertheless, they had a specific vocabulary, technical terms, and pronunciation issues. The limitation of this study is that it only involves 66 respondents in the survey. Therefore, future studies should involve many participants and collect data from various national contexts.

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