TOURISM ENGLISH FOR THAI EFL TERTIARY STUDENTS: FOCUS ON NEEDS ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Needs analysis plays an important role in English for specific purpose course design and development. This study investigated the needs and contents of English language for tourism as well as the teaching method preferences. The samples were 320 Thai EFL tertiary students who enrolled in Tourism English Courses. The research instrument was a set of questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that all four macro English skills were needed at the highest level. Speaking is considered as the most important skill, followed by listening, writing and reading while the vocabulary and expressions should be as the basic for each mentioned skill development. The contents of English language for tourism included tourist attractions, transportation, accommodation, festivals and events, Thai foods, shopping and organizing a tour. When considering the teaching method preferences, the students indicated that the role playing, simulation, task-based and problem-based techniques can encourage them to achieve the goals of Tourism English courses. Based on the findings, it is suggested that for designing Tourism English Courses, the needs and contents of English language use as well as the teaching method preferences found should be considered and emphasized. The implication of these results may be as the guidelines for organizing a Tourism English syllabus which leads to the improvement for all Thai EFL tertiary students.

Keywords: Needs analysis, English language, Tourism industry, Thai EFL tertiary students

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English language has been recognized as a lingua franca; in other words, it is the world language used as a means to communicate in various countries and various career fields. Presently, it is accepted that the English language is more powerful and increasingly significant in Thailand as well as many countries around the world. Thai people use English for business, technology, education, etc. We use English in many job positions such as a tour guide, an air hostess, a hotel receptionist, a businessperson, etc.

Nowadays, the role of English is very crucial for the tourism industry as a means to communicate, negotiate, and execute transactions with tourists by the tourism employees. Since the tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing businesses in Thailand, which plays an important role in the Thai economy as the main business earning the second highest income compared to the other service industries (e.g., it earned more than 32,000 million Baht in 2019), and creating a variety of jobs in business activities (e.g., it created more than 200,000 positions in the service industry) as reported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand : TAT (2019), many education institutions both governmental and private, including Buriram Rajabhat University, offers undergraduate level English courses related to the tourism business for students who intend to work in the tourism or hospitality industry after graduation. These English courses are involved with the language as mentioned by Blue and Harun (2003) who state that English

which is associated with host-guest interaction in the service business, should be termed "the language of hospitality" which refers to all linguistic expressions related to and represented in hospitality concerns.

However, most businesspersons, who have obtained a Bachelor's degree in field of hospitality and business and were trained in using English for tourism cannot effectively use the English skills presented to achieve the goals for doing business after graduation (1994). Additionally, most Thai graduates who are in the tourism industry have a poor command of English language. This has contributed to misunderstanding and a negative attitude towards Thailand. Promsiri, Prapphal and Vijchulata (1996) states that the causes of these problems might have resulted from all of the factors involved; i.e. teachers, students, schools, and curriculum.

At Rajabhat Universities in Thailand, Tourism English has been provided as a compulsory courses for both Tourism Industry, and Business English major students since 1999. Although these students have been trained to use English in the real situations with the syllabus written by the experts, a formal need analysis to determine the requirements of the Tourism English courses from the learners has never been conducted. English has so far been taught without systematical survey of needs. Therefore, the syllabus is not based on the real needs of the learners as it should be. It seems inevitable to carry out a formal needs analysis of both Tourism Industry, and Business English major students who will learn English for tourism in terms of their needs, contents and teaching method preferences. The findings of this study will then serve as a guideline to develop or expand the existing Tourism English courses as well as the English language courses related to hospitality industry at the Rajabhat universities all over Thailand so that the more effective English for tourism courses can be developed in the future.

2. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs analysis has been defined in various ways. According to Iwai et al. (1999) and Brown (1995), needs analysis generally refers to the activities that are involved in gathering information which will serve as the basic for developing a curriculum or course that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students. Nunan (1988) defines needs analysis as a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study. Such parameters include the criteria and rationale for grouping learners, the selection and sequencing of course content, methodology, and course length, intensity and duration. For Johns (1991), needs analysis is the first step in course design and it provides validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities.

As we know, needs analysis plays a crucial role in English for specific purpose course design and development. According to different experts, needs analysis is significant in many ways. Hawkey (1980) states that needs analysis enables the course designer to achieve two things; to produce a detailed profile of what the learner needs to be able to do in English in an occupation or study for which he or she is being trained, and to produce a specification of the language skills, functions and forms required to carry out the communication described in the needs profile. In addition, Weddel and Van Duzer (1997) suggest that it is essential to do needs analysis for one important reason, that is, to determine what students need to learn. Also, they

claim that it is aids administrators, teachers, and tutors with learner placement/ directives and in developing materials, curricula, skills assessment, teaching approaches, and teacher training. Importantly, Robinson (1998) argues that one of the chief values of needs analysis is its ability to demonstrate the teacher's interest in the students and to lead to some useful discussion.

Graves (1996) mentions that needs analysis involves finding out what the learners know and can do, and what they need to learn or do. In other words, needs analysis involves seeking and interpreting information about one's learners' needs. Richterich (1980) conceptualizes needs into objective and subjective. Objective needs are defined as derivable from different kinds of factual information about learners, their use of language in real-life communication situation as well as their current language proficiency and language difficulties while subjective needs are as the cognitive and affective needs of the learners in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factors, such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners' wants, and expectations with regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive styles and learning strategies. Graves (1996) suggests that in analyzing objective needs, we can include information about students' backgrounds – country and culture, education, family, profession, age, languages spoken, and so on; students' abilities or proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing; and students' needs with respect to how they will use or deal with English outside of the classroom. In analyzing subjective needs, we can include information about students' attitudes toward the target language and culture, toward learning, and toward themselves as lecturers; students' expectations of themselves and of the course; students' underlying purposes - or lack thereof - in studying English; and students' preferences with respect to how they will learn. Both objective and subjective needs can be seen as corresponding to a Target Situation Analysis (TSA), a Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), and a Present Situation Analysis (PSA) (1998). Robinson (1998) states that TSA and LSA focus on students' needs at the end of a language course; whereas, PSA seeks to establish what the students are like at the beginning of their course. In the present study, PSA is used to investigate the needs of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), contents, and teaching method preferences of Tourism English courses in order to determine appropriate course language to be taught according to the students' needs.

3. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

3.1 To study the needs of Tourism English courses of Thai EFL tertiary students.

3.2 To investigate the contents of English language for tourism courses of Thai EFL tertiary students.

3.3 To find out the teaching methods preferences in studying Tourism English courses of Thai EFL tertiary students.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.1 To what extent do Thai EFL tertiary students need the English language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing in studying Tourism English courses?

4.2 What are the contents do Thai EFL tertiary students need in studying Tourism English courses?

4.3 Which teaching methods do Thai EFL tertiary students prefer in studying Tourism English courses?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Population and Samples

The population of this study included all Thai EFL tertiary students who enrolled in Tourism English Courses in 2020 academic year. They were from all 38 Rajabhat universities located in all over Thailand.

The samples were 320 Thai EFL tertiary students who enrolled in Tourism English Courses in 2020 academic year. They were from eight Rajabhat universities: two from each region (Northern, Northeastern, central and southern regions), selected by cluster random sampling. Also, they were from 40 students from each Rajabhat university.

5.2 Instrument

The research instrument was a set of questionnaires which was used to gather data concerning the needs and contents of English use as well as the teaching method preferences in studying Tourism English Courses. The questionnaire included three parts, namely checklist, a 5-rating scale, and open-ended form. The questionnaire was written in Thai language in order to minimize problems of ambiguity and misinterpretation. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the draft questionnaire version constructed by the researcher was modified and revised based on the suggestion of two English instructors and one statistics expert. After that, a pilot was to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire and to improve language appropriateness of the questionnaire. The 38 Buriram Rajabhat university students of the pilot study were requested to fill out the questionnaire, to comment on the content and wording, and to give suggestions on items that should be added or excluded. Finally, the final draft of the questionnaire was revised before administrating with the target group. In terms of the reliability of the questionnaire, alpha coefficient of Cronbach was calculated. The result revealed that the alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was .9125 which was accepted with high reliability. Therefore, it could be justifiable to claim that the data collecting instrument of the present study had both validity and reliability.

5.3 Data Collection

After sending the official letter to request for permission and cooperation to gather the data, the research distributed the target subjects in each Rajabhat university in Thailand. The researcher collected some data by himself and the two friends of the researcher who work in Rajabhat universities help to collect the data. The questionnaire was administered with the target group from October 2020 – March 2021 with the total of six months.

5.4 Data Analysis

After checking the completion of each questionnaire, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The statistical devices employed in this study were as follows:

1) Alpha coefficient of Cronbach was used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire.

2) A 5-point Likert scale was used to score the levels of the English language needs of the Rajabhat university students based on the following criteria:

Scale	Mean range	Need level
5	4.50-5.00	The highest need
4	3.50-4.49	High need
3	2.50-3.49	Moderate need
2	1.50-2.49	Low need
1	1.00-1.49	The lowest need

3) Mean ($\bar{x}$) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) were used to calculate the average level of English skill needs of the Thai EFL tertiary students. The higher mean score ($\bar{x}$) of each activity reflected the more needs in English of the Thai EFL tertiary students when doing that activity. By the same token, the lower mean score showed the needs of that activity while standard deviation (S.D.) depicted the spread or dispersion of the score of the respondents within group.

4) Frequency (f) and percent (%) were used to calculate the contents of Tourism English Courses and teaching method preferences of the Thai EFL tertiary students in studying Tourism English Courses.

6. RESULTS

Based on the research purposes, the results of data analysis were as follows:

6.1 English Language Skills Need of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

When asking the Thai EFL tertiary students to rate their English language skills need in studying Tourism English Courses, they rated all macro four English language skills as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: English Language Skills Need of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

English languages skills	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
1. Listening	4.74	0.87	Highest	2
2. Speaking	4.92	0.62	Highest	1
3. Reading	4.52	1.05	Highest	4
4. Writing	4.65	0.96	Highest	3
Total	**4.71**	**0.86**	**Highest**	**-**

As shown in Table 1, most Thai EFL tertiary students rated all four skills at the highest level ($\bar{x}$ = 4.71, S.D. = 0.86). When considering in each English skill needed, it was found that

speaking is considered the most important in their study ($\bar{x}$ = 4.92, S.D. = 0.62), followed by listening ($\bar{x}$ = 4.74, S.D. = 0.87), writing ($\bar{x}$ = 4.65, S.D. = 0.96) and reading ($\bar{x}$ = 4.52, S.D. = 1.05), respectively.

In addition, the Thai EFL tertiary students indicated that both vocabulary and expressions should be added in the Tourism English Courses because they can be as the basic for developing all four macro skills.

6.2 Contents in Studying Tourism English Courses of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

When asking the Thai EFL tertiary students selected at least three contents in studying Tourism English Courses, the results revealed as Table 2.

Table 2: Contents in Studying Tourism English Courses of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

Contents	Frequency	Percent
1.Tourist attractions	320	21.28
2. Transportation	287	19.08
3. Accommodation	248	16.49
4. Festivals and events	198	14.16
5. Thai foods	174	11.57
6. Shopping	152	10.10
7. Organizing a tour	125	8.31
Total	**1,504**	**100.00**

As shown in Table 2, Thai EFL tertiary students stated seven contents employed in studying Tourism English Courses, namely tourist attractions, transportation, accommodation, festivals and events, Thai foods, shopping and organizing a tour. The three most relevant contents in studying Tourism English Courses of the Thai EFL tertiary students were tourist attractions (f=320, 21.28%), followed by transportation (f=287, 19.08%), and accommodation (f=248, 16.49%), respectively.

6.3 Teaching Method Preferences by the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

This section presents the teaching method preferences by the Thai EFL tertiary students when they study Tourism English Courses. The Thai EFL tertiary students were asked to write the teaching methods that can help them to achieve the goal of Tourism English Courses. The results were illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Teaching Method Preferences by the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

Teaching methods	Frequency	Percent
1. Role playing	285	36.87
2. Simulation	210	27.17
3. Task-based learning	182	23.54
4. Problem-based learning	96	12.42
Total	**773**	**100.00**

Table 3 depicts the four teaching methods preferences mentioned by the Thai EFL tertiary students in studying Tourism English Courses. It was found that role playing was the most preferred teaching method (f=285, 36.87%), followed by simulation (f=210, 27.17%), and task-based learning (f=182, 23.54%), and problem-based learning (f=96, 12.42%), respectively.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings from this present investigation can be discussed in the following points.

7.1 English Language Skills Need of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

The finding showed that most Thai EFL tertiary students rated all four skills at the highest level. This may be explained by the fact that these students used to study some Tourism English Courses when they were at the first two or three years; therefore, they have already known that all four English skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as vocabulary and expressions are very important for them to achieve Tourism English Courses. Moreover, after graduation, most of them will work at the hospitality industry sectors, such as Tour Company, hotel etc; therefore, English language skills as well as vocabulary and expressions are crucial for them in order to get a better job about hospitality industry as well as to communicate with the foreigners. This finding is consistent with Jiranapakul (1996) and Prachanant (2012) which indicated that English is highly important as a tool for communication.

Also, the results showed that most Thai EFL tertiary students perceived speaking as the most important skill, followed by listening, writing and reading, respectively. The followings are the discussion of each skill: Speaking is needed for the Thai EFL tertiary students when they study Tourism English Courses. It is perhaps explained by the fact that speaking is commonly important in the course description of Tourism English Courses which are indicated that the learners (as tour guides) have to provide tourism information in English to the tourists (foreigners) who visit Thailand, such as greeting, asking for and giving information. This finding obviously supports of Keyoonwong's study (1998), Pingyoad's study (2005), Pitchayawisitkul (2010) and Prachanant (2012) in which the learners believed that speaking is their greatest needs in study. Listening is rated as the second most used skill. This clearly explains that listening is important because it is the key factor that leads the Thai EFL tertiary students to comprehend the lecture. In addition, they will use listening skills in order to understand the foreigners' enquiries and things that the foreigners' needs and wants when they ask for tourism information if they work as the hospitality service personnel in the future. The result supports the studies of Currie (1991), Piyanapa (2004) and Prachanant (2012) which stated that the ability to identify and comprehend the listening information from communication was crucial. Regarding the writing skill, it is ranked in the third most used skill. This may be explained that writing is used when the Thai EFL tertiary students prepare and outline the information assigned by the lecturer, such as the tourism monologue, itinerary and so on. This finding is consistent with Prachanant (2012) which mentioned that writing is used in preparing monologue and itinerary.

Compared with the other three skills, reading was viewed as the least important use by the Thai EFL tertiary students. This is perhaps explained by the fact that reading skill will be only used when they need more in-depth information about the tourist attractions as well as the tourism products, such as the prices and characteristics of souvenirs, foods and facilities as mentioned in the course description. This finding supports that of Sinarkorn (2003) and Prachanant (2012) which ranked reading as the less important skill used. In addition, the Thai EFL tertiary students stated that the vocabulary and expressions should be as added in studying Tourism English Courses. This can be explained that both vocabulary and expressions should be the first priority to study Tourism English Courses, that is, the students have to know and learn them first since they are as the basic for each mentioned skill development.

7.2 Contents in Studying Tourism English Courses of the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

In terms of the main contents used, the Thai EFL tertiary students stated seven contents employed in studying Tourism English Courses, namely tourist attractions, transportation, accommodation, festivals and events, Thai foods, shopping and organizing a tour. This clearly explains that all seven types of contents are specific and crucial in the tourism industry as well as in the course description, and always occurred when the Thai EFL tertiary students (as the tour guides) want to guide, provide and escort tourist information to the foreign tourists who visit Thailand after graduation. Based on Blue and Harun's (2003) notion, these contents are viewed as the hospitality language topics that frequently used in the hospitality industries like the tourism industry. In addition, the finding supports Piriyasin' s study (2014) which mentioned that the contents of tourist sites, transportation, accommodation, souvenirs, cultures, festivals and tour operation are needed in tourism industry.

7.3. Teaching Method Preferences by the Thai EFL Tertiary Students

The findings revealed that the Thai EFL tertiary students point out only four methods that should be employed in teaching and learning Tourism English Courses. The role playing was the most preferred teaching method, then simulation, task-based learning, and problem-based learning. According to the course description, the Thai EFL tertiary students indicated that these methods will help them to achieve this course. They thought that four methods (especially, role playing and simulation) set in class are close to real life situation and could develop their oral English proficiency. In addition, these techniques could enable them to express opinions and stimulate them to participate in the activities provided by the lecturer. Obviously, these methods were used by many researchers; role playing by Armstrong (1999), simulation by Tantiwong (2009), task-based learning by Worrapattarakit (2006), and problem-based learning by Intanark (2003), respectively.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study is carried out in order to provide an insight into the needs, contents of English use as well as the teaching method preferences of the Thai EFL tertiary students when they study Tourism English Courses. It is hoped to provide a baseline for obtaining a wider range of input into content, design and implementation of an English programme by involving

such people as learners, teachers, course developers and employees in the planning process. Although the present investigation does not intend to represent all Thai EFL tertiary students who study Tourism English Courses, the researcher does believe that the sampling frame might give a relatively good representation of the Thai EFL tertiary students who study Tourism English Courses. Needs analysis is part of curriculum development/design and is basically required before a syllabus developed for English language teaching. The findings from this study might be as the guidelines for organizing a tourism English syllabus which leads to the improvement for all relevant people. It is anticipated that the conclusion of the present investigation might be utilized to those responsible for policy and planning as well as related to the organizations in order to have a clearer understanding of English needs of Thai EFL tertiary students who plan to work in the international tour companies all over Thailand.

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