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International Conference on Media Studies 2017



School of Multimedia Technology & Communication (SMMTC)

2nd - 4th May 2017



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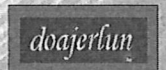
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Hakcipta terpelihara. Sebarang bahagian dalam buku ini tidak boleh diterbitkan semula, disimpan dalam apa cara yang boleh digunakan semula, ataupun dipindahkan dalam sebarang bentuk atau dengan sebarang cara, baik dengan cara elektronik, mekanik, penggambaran semula, perakaman dan sebagainya tanpa mendapat izin daripada Pusat Pengajian Teknologi Multimedia dan Komunikasi, Universiti Utara Malaysia.

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PREFACE

Growing with media

Assamualaikum dan Selamat Datang

First of all, we would like to welcome everyone to the International Conference on Media Studies 2017. This years ICMS 2017 will be addressed comprehensively from the media to social perspectives, aiming at presenting, discussing and disseminating current developments, new approaches, new tools and practical solutions for the media landscape. The conference is targeted to an academic audience (lecturers, researchers and students) and practitioners (media buyer, press and media managers from diverse media organizations).

To introduce the emerging developments of media. Growing with media is essential for every individual. Issues will be presented and discussed in this 360 degrees of media growth.

1. To introduce the importance of media in 360 degrees;
2. To deliberate on the challenges or difficulties associated with the media;
3. To discuss success factors of media;
4. To discuss the future trends of media in 360 degrees;
5. To introduce the state-of-the-art practices in media;

ICMS 2017 seeks high-quality contributions on media academics and practitioners, including theoretical foundations, innovative practices, case studies, experiences, among others.

We would like to extend our gratitude for the overwhelming response from UUM and Universitas Sebelasmaret (UNS), Neville Wadia Institute Of Management Studies And Research, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Hatyai University and Suryadatta Group of Institutes.

Thank you and look forward to seeing you again in Sintok !

The Editors,

Azahar Kasim
Sabrina Mohd Rashid
Norsiah Abdul Hamid

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A Study of the Needs and Problems of English Usage for the Hotel Front Office Staff in Bangkok

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this study was to investigate the needs and problems that front office staff in hotels in Chinatown, Bangkok encountered in their use of English language skills, specifically listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary in order to describe the possible consequences of the front office staff' ineffective communication, create specific plans to improve their English language skills as well as aid in their professional advancement. The study was conducted by questionnaires distributed 60 front office staff. The result revealed that almost all respondents need using English language skill in their job. Most of the respondents had moderate English proficiency. Speaking skill was the most significant skill that front office staff needed to use for communicating in English, whereas grammar skill was the least significant skill. The other English skills listed in order of necessity were listening, vocabulary, reading and writing. On the other hand, listening was the most problematic skill for front office staff when communicating in English. The least problematic skill was vocabulary skill. The other problematic language skills were speaking, writing, reading and grammar, respectively. The result of this study will help the hotels' management to have a clearer understanding of English training course incorporating speaking and listening skills should emphasize. In addition, the results of this study provide some useful suggestions, and can be used as a guideline for creating effective English training courses.

KEYWORDS: Needs; Problems; English usage; Front office staff; Customer

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

One of main economic attractions in Thailand is the tourism industry. The large number of visitors from every corner of the world has continuously increased. At present, hotel industry is the vital part of tourism. One of the famous areas in Bangkok for tourists is Chinatown. There are many small streets and alleys full of shops and vendors selling all types of goods. It is also famous for many varieties of delicious foods, and become food street at night. Many hotels are located around Chinatown. The hotels have to concern about interpersonal skill and language proficiency of staff to make the efficient service. The important function of hotel business is the front office department. Juwaheer and Ross(2003) states that once customers' requirements are clearly identified and understood, hotel operators are more likely to anticipate and fulfil their customers' needs and wants. In addition, front office staff are considered a supporting factor in determining customer satisfaction when deciding to return, to recommend the hotel, or in demonstrating loyalty to a particular hotel (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000)

In Thailand, English is used as the medium of international communication. Furthermore, English skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary are vital for effective and fluent communication. Language proficiency is necessary for the staff in hotel industry, especially the front office staff. However, lack of English skills and difficulty in communicating with foreign customers affect the service and customers' satisfaction. Choi and Chu(2001) mentioned that the more satisfied the customers are, the more likely they are to return or prolong their hotel stay. Therefore, English language skills are the major tool for effective communication in tourism industry. Not only do they communicate with native speakers of English but also other non-native ones.

1.2 Study Objectives

The study consists of three objectives:

1.2.1 To investigate the front office staff's needs for using English skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary in their work.

1.2.2 To investigate problems the front office staff encounter when using English skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary in their work.

1.2.3 To find out the skill front office staff mostly need and the skill they have problems most.

1.3 Study Significance

The research findings express the needs and problems in using English skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary of the front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown. In addition, the information could provide the possible consequences of the front office staff's ineffective communication. Therefore, it is beneficial for hotel management to analyze these findings and organize specific plans to improve the staff's English language skills in the future.

2 REVIEW LITERATURE

2.1 Needs

Mountford(1981) viewed needs as what the institution considers as important knowledge that learners should learn, while Widdowson(1981) defined needs as what people have to learn for their job requirement. According to Hutchinson and Waters(1996), Language needs are divided into two types: the target needs and learning needs. The target needs focus on the use of language that is divided into three subcategories: necessities, lacks and wants. Maslow(1943) stated that once lower-level needs are met, humans move on to fulfil other higher level needs

Referring to needs assessment, there are many theorists who defined needs assessment in various ways. Michael West created the term of "need analysis" in 1920s when he was trying to establish the best way learner should learn English (Brown, 1987). Nunan(1899) stated that needs analysis refer to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design. Moreover, Ellis and Johnson (1994) add that needs analysis is a method of obtaining a detailed description of learner needs or a group of learner needs.

2.2 Problems In Using English Language

It is quite obvious that Thais use Thai language most of the time, so they are inexperienced in the usage of English. They do not speak in English regularly in daily life, thus it decreases the chance to become a potential English language user. Thailand has always been a country with one official language which is Thai.

Arusi Sastramitri, director of the Academic Training Section of the Tourist Authority of Thailand, stated that tourism is the main source of income in our country. However, Thai graduates who are in the tourism industry have a poor command of English. This has contributed to misunderstanding and a negative attitude towards Thailand. Arunee Wiriyaichitra(2002) mentioned that Thais wish they could use English fluently but most of them think that English is too challenging for them to be competent because of interference from the mother tongue(Thai) particularly in pronunciation, syntax and idiomatic usage. According to Natepreeya Chumchaiyo(2002, as cited in Chakrit Phaisuwan, 2006: 6), Thai people are not accustomed to listening to native speaker's accent. They attempt to catch every word they hear and try to analyze the sentence structure. They do not catch the whole picture of what they heard at all. Moreover, the difference accents make the difficulty of listening such as American English and British English. Some people have limited knowledge of vocabulary such as slang, idioms and proverbs.

2.3 English Language Skills

According to Dulek and Dielden(1995), listening is the receptive skill to concentrate on hearing. Harmer(2001) said that when people listen, they must use their background knowledge as they access the process of comprehension. O'Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon(2002) mentioned that speaking is the production in the oral mode to send an oral message. It is the most direct method of communication. According to Anderson(1999), reading is an active process which combines the words or written text with the reader's background knowledge and experiences. It is the process of decoding the meaning of the encoded passage. Barr, Sadow and Blachowicz(1990) have a similar opinion with Anderson. They stated that reading is not a passive process, and the readers have to interact with text to get the meaning from the message of author. Grammar is very important within English language because it holds language together. It is the way in which sentences are structured and the language is formatted. According to Robert J. Sternberg (1987), vocabulary is important, and most vocabulary is learned from context. Knowing vocabulary will allow people to successfully convey their ideas to others, and it can also improve their career outlook.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study are 60 staff who work in the front office department in the hotels in Chinatown. They are considered the subjects because they more often apply their English skills to work than other staff in hotel business.

3.2 Materials

The research instrument is a questionnaire which is adapted and conducted by the researcher. The questionnaire consists of three parts as follows:

Part I: The general information of the respondents

Part II The needs and problems of the English language functions for the front office staff

Part III The form of open-ended question to obtain the respondents' problems and suggestions is presented at the end.

To ensure that the wording in the questionnaire was understandable and did not contain any ambiguity, the questionnaire content validity was reviewed by qualified consultants. Moreover, 20 front office staff were asked to complete the questionnaire and evaluate the content to identify unclear terms and to give suggestions. Then, the irrelevant items were revised for this study. According to the pilot study, its Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaled 0.95 indicating good reliability.

3.3 Data Collection And Analysis

The subjects were asked to answer general information, the needs of English skills for the staff, the difficulties with using English skills and the suggestions. After that, the 50 copies (83.3%) of questionnaires were sent back to the researcher within a week later. Percentage and frequency count are used in the analysis of answers in the first part of personal information. Arithmetic Mean(\bar{x}) and Stand Deviation Mean(S.D.), scale and rank are used to present the outcomes of front office staff' opinions on needs and problems of using English language skills at work.

4 RESULTS

4.1 General Information about the Respondents

According to the study, most of the respondents (66.0%) were female. Most of them had an age between 31-35 years old (30%). 80% of them held a bachelor's degree. Most of them (50%) had

served in the front office department for 1-5 years. For the needs of using English language, most of them (98%) needed English language for their work.

Regarding, the level of the respondents' English proficiency, the subjects rated themselves to have a moderate English proficiency in all English language skills. 76% of the respondents rated themselves to have a moderate proficiency in grammar. 60%, 62% and 60% of the respondents also rated themselves to have a moderate proficiency in listening, speaking and writing, respectively. Only 48% rated themselves to have a moderate English proficiency in vocabulary.

4.2 Needs and Problems of Using English Language at Work

Table 1. Level of Needs and Problems of Using English Language at Work

Level of Needs	Mean	S.D.	Rank	English Skills	Mean	S.D.	Rank	Level of Problems
High	3.98	0.685	2	Listening	3.54	0.542	1	High
High	4.24	0.625	1	Speaking	3.48	0.646	2	Moderate
Moderate	3.48	0.707	4	Reading	3.08	0.634	4	Moderate
Moderate	3.48	0.707	4	Writing	3.10	0.580	3	Moderate
Moderate	3.33	0.621	5	Grammar	2.94	0.550	5	Moderate
High	3.56	0.644	3	Vocabulary	2.90	0.544	6	Moderate

From Table 1, the most significant skill that the front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown needed to use in their work was speaking (mean score= 4.24) which contributed to a high level of needs in using English language. The level of needs in listening (mean score= 3.98) and vocabulary (mean score= 3.56) were also high. The level of needs in reading, writing and grammar were moderate which were rated as 3.48, 3.48 and 3.33, respectively.

The most problematic skill that the front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown encountered when using English language in their work was listening (mean score= 3.54). It contributed to a high level of difficulties. It was followed by speaking, writing, reading, grammar and vocabulary which were rated as 2.23, 2.18, 2.04, 1.97 and 1.84, respectively. All these skills contributed to a moderate level of difficulties.

Moreover, 26% of the respondents would mostly like to improve their speaking skill. 22% of them would like to improve their listening skill. 18%, 14%, 12% and 8% of them would like to improve their writing, reading, vocabulary and grammar, respectively.

The result of this study revealed that almost all front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown, Bangkok needed using English language skill in their job; similarly, Ravisuda Aunruen(2005) showed that the travel agent in Chiang Mai mostly needed English language to communicate with clients. Robinson(1991) mentioned that the English language required by the duty of work is one of five aspects of English needs. It is a goal-oriented need. Professionals need English language skills because they have to use them for their routine jobs. Moreover, Pranee Kullavanich(2004) also show that both employers and employees viewed the English, Chinese and Japanese as the foreign languages which have a high level of need, especially English, which had a higher level of need than the other two language.

Regarding to the findings, speaking skill was the first most necessary skill for the front office staff; similarly, Ravisuda Aunruen(2005) showed that the speaking skill was considered as the skill that the travel agent in Chiang Mai mostly used with their routine job. The previous study of Thawatchai Tangniam (2006) also revealed that speaking were extremely needed skills for Thai Airways ground staffs. In addition, Chakrit Phaisuwan' research supported that speaking skill was the most needed English language skills of Seagate planners in using English.

It is likely that the front office staff often have to communicate with foreign tourists everyday as they are the first people who meet the customers. Hair, Friedrich,& Dixon mention that speaking is the production in the oral mode to send an oral message. It is the most direct method of communication. Front office staff need to use speaking skill for responding the customers' want, solving the problems, giving the information, offering assistance that is the face to face communication even conducting the conversation by phone. They have to use speaking skill to spontaneously communicate with customer at the front desk which is the responsibilities of front office staff. Therefore, it is obvious that front office staff need to use speaking most for their communication at work.

According to the result of this study, the most problematic skill for the front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown is listening skill. The result is similar to Orada Opasruttanakorn (2006) who investigated the type of language skills and functions necessary for Kiriwong people for Tourism Business as well as Janekit Phutirat and Mantana Suwannapatama(2007) who investigated the problems, needs and wants of English for hospital pharmacists. All of them revealed that listening skill was the most problematic skill.

It seems possible that front office staff have the different background knowledge, and lack of practicing. Harmer(2001) said that when people listen, they must use their background knowledge as they access the process of comprehension. People who do not have background knowledge relevant to what they are hearing will find the listening task more difficult. Front office staff mostly have problems listening English when listening to conversation by phone. It seems possible that front office staff do not hear clearly because unclear pronunciation via phone. The other English accent e.g. Indian and Singapore that they do not familiar with can cause the listening problems. To avoid misunderstanding from listening, front office staff should practice English listening skill. There are many way to practice English listening skill such as listening music, watching movie and making conversation with foreigner in different English accent. Brownell (1994) mention that the regularly interaction in conversation will help people to communicate efficiently.

4.3 Problems And Suggestions

According to the open-ended questions to obtain the respondents' problems and suggestions, most of the respondents encountered the problem of listening mostly. They did not understand the idiomatic English and unfamiliar vocabulary. Moreover, they did not clearly understand other English accent. Writing is another skill that they have the problems. The staff did not know the format of business letter including e-mail and memo, so they cannot write in the appropriate way.

5 CONCLUSION

The following conclusion can be drawn from the discussion above.

5.1 Speaking is the skill most needed for front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown, Bangkok. They mostly use speaking skill in conducting conversations by phone, welcoming and greeting including apologizing when mistakes occur. On the other hand, grammar is the skill least needed for using English language skill in their work.

5.2 Listening is the most problematic skill front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown, Bangkok. They mostly encounter the problems of listening to conversation by phone, listening to customers' complaints and listening to what customer want. However, vocabulary skill is the least problematic skill for using English language skill in their work.

5.3 More than a half of the respondents have a moderate level of English proficiency, so they would like to improve their level of English proficiency to be higher.

5.4 Front office staff in the hotels in Chinatown requires to improve their speaking skill, as speaking skill is the most needed skill for their work.

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