

การสำรวจการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษฐานสมรรถนะของพนักงานโรงแรม:

การศึกษาวิเคราะห์ความต้องการ

INVESTIGATING A COMPETENCY-BASED ENGLISH COMMUNICATION OF HOTEL EMPLOYEE: A NEED ANALYSIS STUDY

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความต้องการในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษและสำรวจสมรรถนะที่พนักงานโรงแรมจำเป็นต้องมี โดยเฉพาะพนักงานในแผนกส่วนหน้า ได้แก่ แผนกต้อนรับ พนักงานอำนวยความสะดวก พนักงานยกสัมภาระ และพนักงานในร้านอาหาร ผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยแบ่งออกเป็นสองกลุ่ม คือ พนักงานโรงแรมจำนวน 20 คน และผู้บริหารระดับสูงของโรงแรมจำนวน 2 คน โดยโรงแรมที่ทำการศึกษามีคุณภาพตั้งแต่ระดับ 3 ดาวไปจนถึง 5 ดาว การเก็บข้อมูลใช้วิธีแบบผสมผสาน รวมทั้งการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ

ผลการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณพบว่าความสามารถด้านภาษาอังกฤษ ได้แก่ คำศัพท์เฉพาะ สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษที่หลากหลาย ระดับของภาษาที่ใช้ในอุตสาหกรรมบริการและทักษะทางวิชาชีพที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการโรงแรม ได้แก่ การมีจิตบริการ การแก้ไขสถานการณ์เฉพาะหน้า และบุคลิกภาพ เป็นปัญหาสำคัญในสภาพแวดล้อมนี้ อย่างไรก็ตาม ผลการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพชี้ให้เห็นว่า แม้พนักงานโรงแรมจะมีทักษะภาษาอังกฤษเพียงพอสำหรับการทำงานในภาคการโรงแรมแต่ยังขาดทักษะเฉพาะที่จำเป็นในแต่ละแผนก รวมถึงการขาดความตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีความสำคัญต่อการสื่อสารกับชาวต่างชาติ

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ, สมรรถนะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ, ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ, ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการโรงแรม

Abstract

This study aims to examine the communication needs and explore the English language competencies required by hotel employees, particularly those working in front-line departments such as reception, concierge, bell service, and restaurant staff. The participants

are divided into two groups: 20 hotel employees and 2 senior hotel managers. The hotels studied range from 3-star to 5-star quality. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

The quantitative analysis reveals that English language proficiency; terms and vocabulary, accents and level of language used in hospitality industry and professional skills related to the hospitality industry; service mindset, problem solving skills and personality are the most pressing issues in this environment. However, the qualitative analysis shows that while hotel employees generally possess adequate English skills for the hospitality sector, they lack specific skills needed for each department and exhibit a deficiency in cultural awareness, which is crucial in their roles.

Keywords: English Communication, Competency-Based English Communication, English for Specific Purposes, English for Hotel

Introduction

The hospitality industry is of significant global importance, influencing tourism, economic development, government support, lifestyle changes, and career opportunities. In 2022, the global hospitality market experienced growth, rising from \$4,390.59 billion to \$4,699.57 billion (EHL Insights, 2023), with expectations of continued expansion. This growth necessitates skilled hospitality staff who are proficient in foreign language communication and hospitality competencies. Hospitality management is not merely a career; it is a blend of creativity and precision that focuses on satisfying guests, understanding their needs, and creating unforgettable experiences. To succeed in the competitive hospitality sector, hotels prioritize customer service and actively recruit self-directed professionals to enhance human capital and career development (Savickas, 2011).

Several studies have highlighted the significance of competency-based English communication for professional development. For instance, Outemzabet and Sarnou (2023) emphasized the need for English proficiency among professors at Bejaia University for professional development, institutional communication, work-related travel, and social encounters. Similarly, research from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia has underscored diverse language proficiency needs for medical students and professionals (Wahyuni, 2021). In Thailand, students agree that English for specific purpose prepares

themselves to be successful in the competitive society among ASEAN countries (Ruankam & Chuenchaichon, 2016).

In the hospitality industry, English communication is essential not only for general interaction but also for its impact on business performance. Proficiency in English is vital for staff training, serving as a means of international and intercultural communication to deliver efficient and effective services (Ying Lu & Adler, 2009). Studies examining the communication needs of hotel front office staff have identified a demand for skills such as note-taking, effective listening, English speaking, and reading business letters and emails (Chantanont, 2012). Sittitoon (2018) found that trainees majoring in Business English in various hotels expressed the need to improve all language skills, particularly in listening and writing.

Needs analysis plays a crucial role in designing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs that adopt a learner-centered approach. Needs refer to the requirements learners must address in a foreign language, considering both their language proficiency and the target situation during their training period (West, 1994). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) classify needs analysis into two components: "target needs" and "learning needs." Target needs refer to what learners must accomplish in the target situation, while learning needs encompass what learners must do to achieve their learning objectives. Target needs can be further categorized into necessities, lacks, and wants, which highlight the gap between learners' actual needs and the instructional materials (Brindley, 1989). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize the importance of understanding learning needs, target needs, and present needs as fundamental elements of ESP needs analysis. With an increased demand of English proficiency in workplaces in Thai context, the investigation of need analysis would be advantageous for the curriculum designers to meet learners' needs, stakeholders' needs and market trends (Sukying et al. 2023).

Despite existing research, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into the specific communication competencies required by hotel employees and the effectiveness of competency-based English communication training programs. This study aims to explore the specific communication competencies needed by hotel employees to develop effective English for Specific Purposes courses.

Objective

The objective of this study is to identify the specific needs for competency-based English communication among hotel staff, particularly those working in front-of-house departments.

Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology, including: 1) research questions, 2) participants, 3) instruments, 4) data collection methods, and 5) data analysis techniques.

1) Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) What challenges do hotel employees face in their daily tasks? 2) What specific English communication skills do hotel employees require in their daily tasks? 3) What other competencies do hotel employees need to perform their daily tasks effectively?

2) Participants

The researcher employed a survey questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who could provide relevant and valuable information (Kelly, 2010). This method effectively optimizes the use of limited research resources (Palinkas et al. 2015). Twenty participants who graduated from the English for International Communication program at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University were included, all of whom currently work in hotels. Additionally, two executives from five-star hotels in Chiang Mai were targeted participants. An in-depth interview was conducted through one-on-one conversations, using open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses related to all three research questions.

3) Instruments

This mixed-methods study aims to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of competency-based English communication in the hotel industry. A convergent mixed-methods design was utilized, incorporating both questionnaires and interviews. The online questionnaire consisted of twenty-four questions divided into three parts: four open-ended questions for demographic profiles, sixteen closed-ended questions on English communication competencies needed in daily tasks and interactions with hotel guests, and four open-ended questions about the challenges hotel employees face and areas for improvement. The interview consists of five open-ended questions which provide the insightful data.

Questionnaire is the common instrument to collect data in the survey research. The design of the questionnaire can lead quality, quantity and result of the data. A well-designed questionnaire promotes the participants to provide the answers as accurate and adequate as possible (Taherdoost, 2022). To design questions in questionnaire and interview that assess hotel employees' English communication skills, integrating Likert scaling theory and self-

efficacy theory with frameworks like competency-based language teaching (CBLT), English for specific purposes (ESP), needs analysis in ESP, communicative competence theory, and task-based language teaching (TBLT) provides a strong foundation. Likert scaling is particularly useful in competency-based contexts to gauge the degree to which employees feel prepared to handle specific tasks, such as interacting with guests or managing complaints (Likert, 1932). Framing questions on a Likert scale (e.g., from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") enables a systematic measurement of the employees' self-perceived abilities in essential competencies (Boone & Boone, 2012). For instance, questions grounded in needs analysis theory can assess present and target situations, asking participants to rate their comfort with current language tasks compared to job requirements (Richards, 2001). Further, self-efficacy theory supports questions that probe confidence levels in performing various linguistic functions (Bandura, 1997). For example, in assessing communicative competence, a Likert scale could capture confidence in using strategic competencies like managing misunderstandings, or discourse competencies, such as maintaining conversation flow (Canale & Swain, 1980). By applying these frameworks, questionnaire design can systematically evaluate both specific competencies and employees' confidence, ensuring insights into areas for targeted language training. The instruments incorporated the study are as followed.

a. Questionnaire: The three-section questionnaire included:

i. Part 1: Demographic Data

This part collected respondents' personal information, including the name of the hotel they work for, their department, position, and years of experience in the hotel industry.

ii. Part 2: Opinions on English Communication Competencies

This section assessed English skills related to the hotel business (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Respondents rated the importance of these skills on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) regarding their usage in hotel settings and the language barriers they encounter in their work.

iii. Part 3: Challenges in English Communication Competencies

Participants provided their opinions on competency-based English communication and other knowledge areas required in the hotel setting through the open-ended questions: 1) "What are



the two challenges regarding English communication you usually face in your work?" and 2) "What are the three lessons that should be taught in an English for Hotel course?"

- b. Interviews:** The interview consisted of five open-ended questions designed to gather insights from the two hotel executives about the competency-based English communication skills of their employees. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams.

4) Data Collection

Data collection utilized two primary methods: questionnaires and interviews. For the questionnaire phase, the researcher-initiated contact with participants through popular social media platforms like Facebook Messenger and Line. An initial audio call was made to clarify the research objectives and data collection process. The questionnaire, created using Google Forms, was distributed through these platforms to accommodate participants' diverse locations, including some working abroad. Respondents were given a 15-minute window to complete the three-part questionnaire for convenience.

For the interviews, participants were notified via email with an attachment detailing the research objectives and data collection process. The researcher followed up with a personal call to confirm the appointment. Individual 30-minute interviews were conducted via online meetings, and data were captured through note-taking and video recording for thorough analysis.

5) Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. Demographic data (e.g., hotel name, positions, years of experience) from Part 1 were presented in frequencies and percentages. Data from Part 2 were analyzed using means to describe average responses for Likert scale questions. A qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended questions in Part 3 and the interviews to identify needs related to English communication competencies.

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
1. The ability to speak multiple languages enhances guest interactions.	5% (1)			10% (2)	85% (17)	4.9000

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
2. Non-verbal communication plays a significant role in guest interactions.	5% (1)	5% (1)	5% (1)	30% (6)	55% (11)	4.4500
3. English Reading skills are essential in daily tasks involving guests.	5% (1)			30% (6)	65% (13)	4.7000
4. English writing skills are essential in daily tasks involving guests.	5% (1)	5% (1)		35% (7)	55% (11)	4.5500
5. English listening skills are essential in daily tasks involving guests.	5% (1)			5% (1)	90% (18)	4.9500
6. English speaking skills are essential in daily tasks involving guests.	5% (1)			5% (1)	90% (18)	4.9500
7. Guest complaint resolution relies heavily on effective English communication skills.	5% (1)		10% (2)	30% (6)	55% (11)	4.5000
8. Providing clear and concise information to guests requires proficient English communication.	5% (1)			35% (7)	60% (12)	4.4500

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
9. Engaging guests effectively in the different departments require specific English communication skills.	5% (1)		10% (2)	45% (9)	40% (8)	4.1500
10. Time constraints significantly hinder effective communication with guests.	5% (1)		35% (7)	35% (7)	25% (5)	3.7500
11. English Language barriers pose substantial challenges in guest interactions.	5% (1)		5% (1)	50% (10)	40% (8)	4.2000
12. Managing situations promotes the ability in English communication effectively.	5% (1)		25% (5)	35% (7)	35% (7)	3.9500
13. Ongoing training significantly enhances communication skills of hotel employees.	5% (1)	5% (1)		20% (4)	70% (14)	4.3500
14. Hotel employees' English language proficiency meets the job requirements.	5% (1)		5% (1)	50% (10)	40% (8)	4.2000

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
15. Hotel employees effectively convey complex information to guests.		10% (2)	10% (2)	40% (8)	40% (8)	4.1000
16. Language proficiency directly impacts guest satisfaction with hotel employees' interactions.	5% (1)	5% (1)		35% (7)	55% (11)	4.3000

Table 4 Questionnaire on the role of English language proficiency

The data analysis from the two open-ended questions, 1) "What are the two challenges regarding English communication you usually face in your work?" and 2) "What are the three lessons that should be taught in an English for Hotel course?", provides a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and competencies related to English communication in the hotel industry. The findings were categorized into two main themes: challenges and course content.

Challenges

In response to the first question, "What are the two challenges about English communication you usually face in your work?", two key challenges emerged: managing diverse accents and vocabulary limitations. A significant portion of participants (45%) highlighted that the variety of accents, both native and non-native, makes comprehension difficult due to differences in pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Some illustrative responses include: *"Guests do not speak English as their first language, so it is difficult to understand them because they speak with their native intonation, like Chinese English, French English, and Filipino English."* Another participant noted: *"Guests don't understand what I'm saying because of my Thai accent,"* while another shared: *"It takes me longer to respond to guests with different accents."*

Vocabulary limitations were the second major challenge, identified by 30% of participants. They acknowledged that their English vocabulary was often insufficient for their work, which negatively affected communication. This lack of advanced language skills leads to unclear or incomplete communication, particularly in unusual situations where guest expectations may not be met. Examples of participant feedback include: *“I struggle when I don’t understand certain words guests use; just one unfamiliar word can cause major miscommunication,”* and *“I often get stuck when guests use slang or idiomatic expressions.”* Another participant mentioned: *“When I’m unsure of the correct word to use, I resort to body language or ask AI for help. This slows down communication and reduces guest satisfaction.”*

Course Content

Regarding the second question, “What are the three lessons that should be included in an English for Hotel course?”, participants emphasized the importance of English proficiency and service-related knowledge. Half of the participants (50%) suggested that English for hotel courses should focus on the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Specific content should include industry-specific terminology, formal language structures (especially for writing and speaking), active listening to meet guest needs, and taking food orders. Some responses emphasized: *“Students should learn the terms and abbreviations used in different hotel departments for efficient daily work.”* Others noted the need for formal English skills: *“Replying to emails requires formal sentence structures, which is particularly important for departments like sales and marketing,”* and *“Hotel staff need to use formal words and sentences when speaking with guests.”* Active listening was also highlighted as crucial: *“Satisfying guest needs is the most important part of a hotel staff’s job, especially for front-line workers. Schools should provide lessons with authentic listening materials to improve students’ ability to serve guests at reception or take orders in a restaurant.”*

In addition, participants stressed that providing excellent service is a core value in the hospitality industry, making service-oriented lessons essential in ESP courses. Topics such as cross-cultural competency, human relations, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving were considered vital for guest interactions. Many participants recommended role-playing activities to enhance students’ problem-solving skills, along with hands-on experiences like hotel inspections and training programs. As one participant explained: *“Training and observation allow students to understand real-world contexts,”* and another added: *“Learning from experts provides invaluable insights into hotel operations.”*

Based on these insights, it can be concluded that the key lessons for an English for Hotel course should focus on both English proficiency and service skills. These responses reflect the essential competencies required for success in the hotel industry and provide valuable guidance for designing a course that enhances English communication skills in this dynamic field.

Managerial Insights

For another group of participants, the interview consists of five open-ended questions; 1) Which English communication skills are essential for hotel employees to demonstrate competency? 2) How do different English communication skills play important roles in various hotel departments? 3) What challenges do hotel employees typically encounter regarding their English communication skills while working? 4) How do you assess your employees' English proficiency, and what training programs do you provide to improve their skills? 5) What should universities do to prepare students with the necessary hotel-related competencies to meet the expectations of stakeholders?

With the two senior managers—a Learning and Development Manager and a General Manager—offered further insights into the English communication skills necessary for hotel staff. Both managers emphasized the importance of listening and speaking skills, particularly in terms of understanding and extracting key information, as these skills are critical in guest interactions at the front office. For back-office roles, such as reservations and marketing, writing and reading proficiency were highlighted as essential.

The managers also identified specific challenges faced by hotel staff, including understanding diverse accents and navigating cross-cultural communication. To address these challenges, both hotels provide ongoing English training through online platforms and plan for future classroom-based sessions. They noted that staff English proficiency is generally high due to rigorous recruitment processes and continuous training. Additionally, the managers stressed the role of higher education in preparing students for the hotel industry, particularly in communicative English, personality development, grooming, self-confidence, decision-making, 21st-century skills, business writing, and presentation skills.

Overall, the data collected from these interviews underscores the multifaceted nature of English communication in the hotel industry and highlights the strategic efforts in place to enhance staff proficiency and overcome communication challenges effectively.

Discussion

The results of this study provide comprehensive answers to the research questions, shedding light on the challenges, English communication skills, and other competencies needed by hotel employees in their daily tasks.

Research Question 1: What challenges do hotel employees encounter in their daily tasks?

The findings indicate two major challenges: coping with different accents and limited English vocabulary. Participants frequently mentioned difficulties understanding various English accents, both native and non-native, as a barrier to effective communication with guests. This aligns with recent studies, which highlight how accent variability in global hospitality contexts poses significant challenges for hotel staff, especially when interacting with guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Li & Kline, 2022; Tran & Phuong, 2023). The second challenge, limited vocabulary, particularly in dealing with unexpected situations or guest complaints, suggests that employees often struggle to find appropriate words, leading to communication breakdowns. The findings align with the results of the study conducted by Evan and Green (2007). Most learners provide insightful findings that they learn that understanding technical terms was one of the challenges in hospitality classes, Learners need to learn the useful technical terms used in hospitality business, not only in their textbooks (Bravo & Cervetti, 2009) but also other terms used in the real works (Hwang & Lin, 2010). The issue of vocabulary limitation has been widely recognized in ESP research as a critical factor affecting performance in service industries (Jung & Lee, 2022).

Research Question 2: What specific English communication skills do hotel employees need in their daily tasks?

The data suggest that English proficiency across all four skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—is essential, with a particular emphasis on speaking and listening. This reflects the findings of both the survey and interviews, where hotel staff highlighted the importance of these skills in guest interactions, especially in handling complaints and providing clear information. The high mean scores for speaking and listening (4.95) confirm that these are the most crucial skills for front-line employees. In addition, the importance of active listening and formal language use in professional email correspondence was also highlighted, suggesting the need for tailored ESP training to meet the specific demands of various hotel departments. Some previous researches have also emphasized that English language proficiency is needed for hospitality employees (Prabhu & Wani, 2015). Kim and Kim (2022)

conduct the study on the adaptation of text mining analysis from online reviews of five-star hotels in Seoul. The findings interestingly present the relationship between non-verbal attitudes and English communication resulted in enhancing guest satisfaction.

Research Question 3: What other competencies do hotel employees need in their daily tasks?

Beyond language proficiency, the results indicate that hotel employees require a range of other competencies, such as cross-cultural communication skills, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities. These findings are consistent with recent research, which identifies intercultural communication competency practices as crucial for improving service quality and enhancing guest satisfaction and ensuring smooth operations in multicultural environments (Yang et al., 2022). The participants' suggestions to include service-oriented topics, such as teamwork and role-playing activities, in ESP courses further support the idea that effective training should go beyond language skills to include interpersonal and cultural competencies, which are key to success in the hospitality industry.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the main challenges hotel employees face in their daily tasks stem from language barriers, particularly in managing accents and vocabulary. To address these challenges, hotel staff require a well-rounded skill set that includes English communication proficiency and additional competencies like cross-cultural understanding and problem-solving. The results reinforce the importance of incorporating both language skills and service knowledge into ESP courses for hotel employees, ensuring that training programs are aligned with the real-world needs of the industry. As supported by the literature, targeted ESP training plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the dynamic context of hospitality (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Additionally, ESP curriculum can be designed in several ways based on need analysis such as mapping, inserting lacking or required skills which are global job competencies and redesigning content and language in order to meet stakeholders' expectation (Aniroh, 2015).

Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made for further research.

1) Future research should expand to include a broader range of geographic regions, hotel types, and hospitality sectors, such as budget hotels, luxury resorts, or cruise ship

services. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of English communication needs across various hospitality contexts.

2) Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the development of English communication skills among hotel employees over time. This could include examining how ongoing training and real-life work experiences contribute to improvements in language proficiency and customer service outcomes.

3) Future studies could focus on designing, implementing, and testing specific ESP curriculum models tailored to the needs of the hotel industry. This would involve assessing the effectiveness of various teaching methods, such as role-playing, authentic task-based learning, and blended learning approaches, to determine the most effective strategies for improving communication skills in real-world hospitality settings.

By addressing these areas, future research could significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of English communication in hospitality and offer practical recommendations for improving language training and service quality in diverse hotel environments.

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