

## การศึกษาปัญหาและความต้องการในการสื่อสารทางภาษาอังกฤษของตัวแทนนักท่องเที่ยวที่พัทยา

### A STUDY OF ENGLISH COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS AND NEEDS OF

### TRAVEL AGENTS IN PATTAYA

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัญหาและความต้องการในการสื่อสารทางภาษาอังกฤษของตัวแทนนักท่องเที่ยวในพัทยาเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะในการสื่อสารทางภาษาอังกฤษ เป็นการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณซึ่งใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือ ใช้วิธีการสุ่มแบบแบ่งชั้นภูมิและการสุ่มอย่างง่ายในการเลือกบริษัทท่องเที่ยวในพัทยา และใช้วิธีการสุ่มตามสะดวกในการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่าง กลุ่มตัวอย่างประกอบด้วยตัวแทนนักท่องเที่ยวจำนวน 150 คน ซึ่งมาจาก 15 บริษัทท่องเที่ยวที่ขึ้นทะเบียนในพัทยา ค่าสถิติที่ใช้คือ การหาค่าความถี่เป็นร้อยละ ระดับประมาณค่า 5 ระดับ (Five-point Likert scale) ค่าเฉลี่ยทางคณิตศาสตร์ และค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน จากผลการศึกษาพบว่าทักษะที่ยากที่สุดสำหรับตัวแทนนักท่องเที่ยวคือ การพูด (ร้อยละ 49.33) การฟัง (ร้อยละ 22) การเขียน (ร้อยละ 15.33) และการอ่าน (ร้อยละ 13.33) ตามลำดับ และทักษะที่ต้องการพัฒนามากที่สุดคือ การพูด (ร้อยละ 49.33) การฟัง (ร้อยละ 24) การเขียน (ร้อยละ 17.33) การอ่าน (ร้อยละ 9.33) ตามลำดับ ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่าปัญหาและความต้องการที่จะพัฒนาเป็นไปในทิศทางเดียวกัน

#### ABSTRACT

In this study, the researcher aims to explore the English communication problems and needs faced by travel agents in Pattaya in order to enhance their English communication skills. The quantitative approach was utilized through a questionnaire. The researcher used Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling to select the travel agencies in Pattaya and used convenient random sampling to select the subjects. The total participants consisted of 150 travel agents working in fifteen registered travel agencies in Pattaya. The statistical procedures in this study were as follows: frequency distribution, percentages (%), a five point Likert scale, arithmetic mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (S.D.). The results show that speaking was the most difficult skill for the majority of the subjects (49.33%), followed by listening (22%), writing (15.33%) and reading (13.33%). And the most needed skill to improve of travel agents was speaking (49.33%), followed by listening (24%), writing (17.33%) and reading (9.33%). From the results, it revealed the problems and the needs to improve were related to each other.

**คำสำคัญ :** ปัญหาการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ, ความต้องการในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษทักษะ,

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**KEYWORDS:** PROBLEMS IN USING ENGLISH, NEEDS FOR ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS, ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS, TRAVEL AGENTS

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many countries all over the world, including Thailand, are extremely interested in tourism development to serve foreign touring demands. Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries since it is a major foreign-exchange earner and job provider worldwide. Tourism also constitutes an opportunity for various investments in the economy, allowing monetary circulation, income distribution, thus bringing development to these countries. Tourism is global; it is big business and will continue to grow.

Because Thai tourism is now worldwide, language is a vital medium for relaying messages and news in the communication process. According to Crystal (1997), English has already become a global language of the tourism industry, as it is used by more people than any other languages. At this point, Thai tourism sector needs employees who have abilities in English language use for communicating with foreign tourists. Therefore, it is widely accepted that knowledge of the English language is of utmost importance for anyone entering the professional field of tourism. The more international communication grows, the more English language is used. English has become extensively utilized as a core complement of business communication all the world.

Thailand has become one of the biggest world centers mainly through its tourism facilities. Pattaya city is now one of the cities where the tourism business has been promoted. Because of its growing popularity, Pattaya Tourism has gained ground. Thai government has evolved many policies and rules to encourage Pattaya tourism. Due to the fast growth of tourism in Pattaya, English language is increasingly important for people who work in the tourism business in Pattaya. And it has become a major language of the tourism industry in Pattaya. It is essential for efficient communication among tourism-related personnel and international tourists, as many foreigners who live or travel in Pattaya regularly use service of travel agencies such as asking for travel information, buying package tours and booking ticket. So, these officers at these agencies are facing is difficulty in communicating with foreign travelers, which sometimes results in inefficient service.

With the importance of English in tourism, the researcher would like to focus in the problems and needs in English communication skills of travel agents in Pattaya. This study may be useful for organizing courses for training travel agents, which will help travel agents to improve their language skills and reach the standard level of English usage.

## **2. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

2.1 To explore the problems in using English the travel agents in Pattaya encountered when dealing with foreigner.

2.2 To explore the needs for English communication skills of travel agents in Pattaya

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 POPULATION AND SUBJECTS

There were 150 travel agents working in fifteen registered travel agencies in Pattaya. There were Malibu Travel, Friend Travel, KS Tour and Properties, M.D. Travel, Joe–Son Travel, Nova Tour Service, Pappa Co, Ltd, Diana Inn. Co, Ltd, Buakhaow Travel Service, Ariston Tour and Transport, Super Travel, Orchid Travel, Y.J. Holidays, Grandpac Service, Global Union Express.

#### 3.2. SAMPLING PROCEDURES AND METHODS

The researcher used various methods of sampling in the study. Firstly, the researcher collected a name list of registered travel agencies in Pattaya from Pattaya Tourism Authority of Thailand Office. And there were 169 registered travel agencies in Pattaya ( last updated 16 Dec 2013). Then, the researcher used stratified random sampling to separate the name list of travel agencies into three zones and used simple random sampling for taking a random of five travel agencies from each zone of Pattaya; North Pattaya Road, Central Pattaya Road and South Pattaya Road. However, there were no records of the whole number of people who working in travel agencies in Pattaya. Therefore, convenient random sampling was used for taking a random of 50 agents among five travel agencies in each zone. Thus, the total is 150 agents in these three zones.

#### 3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The instrument used for assessing the English language needs of travel agents in Pattaya was the questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire were developed based on the varieties of previous related research, book and journal concerning problems and needs to improve English communication skills.

#### 3.4 PILOT STUDY & MAIN STUDY

##### 3.4.1 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire to identify and eliminate ambiguity in the questions before it was used in the main study. Sixty travel agents from six travel agencies in Pattaya were the participants in the pilot study. The researcher encountered that some instructions were ambiguous and confusing. Therefore, the researcher corrected some questions in the questionnaire for the final version.

##### 3.4.2 MAIN STUDY

After the questionnaire was revised and developed base on the pilot study, it was administered to the sample selected for the main study: 150 travel agents in 15 agencies during 7th Jan 2014–15th Jan 2014. Altogether 150 copies of questionnaire were handed to 15 selected travel agencies in Pattaya. The duration for distributing and collecting the questionnaire was about a week. The return rate was 100 %; 150 were completed and used for the data analysis.

### 3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed, categorized and tabulated on computer program, SPSS and were calculated into the statistical values. The data concerning the general information of the participants on part I was presented in percentages. Besides, a five– point Likert scale was used to score frequency of using English and the levels of problems and needs for English skills. Arithmetic Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) are the average of set of scores showing the central tendency. Standard Deviation (S.D.) was used for measuring of the dispersion, giving information on the extent to which a set of scores varies in relation to the mean. Mean was used to interpret the average levels of problems and needs for English skills of travel agents in Pattaya. Other comments or suggestions were also discussed and analyzed to support the study and be beneficial for solving problems of using English skills.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Problems in Listening

Problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Listening to verbal instructions from clients	3.73	1.02	Moderately
Listening to face to face conversations	3.85	0.99	Moderately
Listening to telephone conversations	4.09	0.96	Moderately
Listening to reservation details from clients	3.64	0.96	Moderately
Listening to news related to tourism	3.92	1.07	Moderately
Total	3.84	1.00	Moderately

Table 4.1 shows the problems in English listening skill at the total mean of 3.84 and S.D. was 1.00 rated as “moderately”. The most difficult problem in listening was “*listening to telephone conversations*” ( $\bar{x}=4.09$ ). The second difficult problem in listening was “*listening to news related to tourism*” ( $\bar{x}=3.92$ ). The third was “*listening to face to face conversations*” ( $\bar{x}=3.85$ ). The fourth was “listening to verbal instructions from clients” ( $\bar{x}=3.73$ ) and the least problem in listening was “*listening to reservation details from clients*” ( $\bar{x}=3.64$ ).

### 4.2 Needs of Listening

Needs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Listening to verbal instructions from clients	4.11	0.80	Moderately
Listening to face to face conversations	4.08	0.86	Moderately
Listening to telephone conversations	4.22	0.85	Moderately
Listening to reservation details from clients	3.96	0.85	Moderately
Listening to news related to tourism	4.15	0.88	Moderately
Total	4.11	0.85	Moderately

Table 4.2 shows the average of needs for improving English listening skill of the respondents. The total average was 4.11 and S.D. was 0.85 rated as “moderately”. Listening to telephone conversation was the highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.22$ ). Listening to news related to tourism was the second highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.15$ ). Listening to verbal instructions from clients was the third highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.11$ ). Listening to face to face conversations was the fourth highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.08$ ) and Listening to reservation details from clients was the least need ( $\bar{x}=3.96$ ).

#### 4.3 Problems in Speaking

Problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Conducting face to face conversations with clients	3.85	0.97	Moderately
Conducting telephone with clients	4.15	1.07	Moderately
Giving or suggesting travel information	3.74	1.07	Moderately
Inquiring clients' needs and decisions	3.76	1.05	Moderately
Negotiating for pricing	4.32	0.91	Extremely
Total	3.96	1.01	Moderately

Table 4.3 shows the problems in English speaking skill of the respondents. It revealed the total mean of 3.96 and S.D. was 1.01 rated as “moderately”. The most difficult problem in speaking was “negotiating for pricing” rated as “extremely” ( $\bar{x}=4.32$ ). The second difficult problem in speaking was “conducting telephone with clients” ( $\bar{x}=4.15$ ). The third was “conducting face to face conversations with clients” ( $\bar{x}=3.85$ ). The fourth was “inquiring clients' needs and decisions” ( $\bar{x}=3.76$ ) and the least problem in speaking was “giving or suggesting travel information” ( $\bar{x}=3.74$ ).

#### 4.4 Needs of Speaking

Needs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Conducting face to face conversations with clients	4.29	0.79	Extremely
Conducting telephone with clients	4.42	0.80	Extremely
Giving or suggesting travel information	4.11	0.88	Moderately
Inquiring clients' needs and decisions	4.08	0.89	Moderately
Negotiating for pricing	4.45	0.79	Extremely
Total	4.27	0.83	Extremely

Table 4.4 presents the mean of needs for improving English speaking skill of the respondents. The total mean was 4.27 and S.D. was 0.83 rated as “extremely”. The majority of respondents needed to improve was

the “negotiating for pricing skill” most ( $\bar{x}=4.45$ ). “Conducting telephone with clients” was the second highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.42$ ). “Conducting face to face conversations with clients” was the third highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.29$ ). “Giving or suggesting travel information” was the fourth highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.11$ ) and “Inquiring clients’ needs and decisions” was the least need ( $\bar{x}=4.08$ ).

#### 4.5 Problems in Reading

Problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Reading written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry	3.75	0.92	Moderately
Reading news or article from tourism journals	3.77	0.96	Moderately
Reading faxes, letters and e-mails	3.49	1.08	Moderately
Reading brochures or tourist leaflets	3.61	1.00	Moderately
Total	3.66	0.99	Moderately

Table 4.5 reveals the problems in English reading skill of the respondents. It showed the total mean 3.66 and S.D. was 0.99 rated as “Moderately”. The most difficult problem in reading was “Reading news or article from tourism journals” rated as “Moderately” ( $\bar{x}=3.77$ ). The second difficult problem in reading was “Reading written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry” ( $\bar{x}=3.75$ ). The third was “Reading brochures or tourist leaflets” ( $\bar{x}=3.61$ ). The fourth was “Reading faxes, letters and e-mails” ( $\bar{x}=3.49$ ).

#### 4.6 Needs of Reading

Needs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Reading written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry	3.93	0.86	Moderately
Reading news or article from tourism journals	3.81	0.91	Moderately
Reading faxes, letters and e-mails	3.65	0.96	Moderately
Reading brochures or tourist leaflets	3.74	0.90	Moderately
Total	3.79	0.91	Moderately

Table 4.6 presents the mean of needs for improving English reading skill of the respondents. The total mean was 3.79 and S.D. was 0.91 rated as “Moderately”. The majority of respondents needed to improve was “Reading written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry” most ( $\bar{x}=3.93$ ). “Reading news or article from tourism journals” was the second highest need ( $\bar{x}=3.81$ ). “Reading brochures or tourist

leaflets” was the third highest need ( $\bar{x}=3.74$ ). “Reading faxes, letters and e-mails” was the least need ( $\bar{x}=3.65$ ).

#### 4.7 Problems in Writing

Problems	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats	4.23	0.92	Extremely
Writing for itineraries	3.68	1.04	Moderately
Taking notes for telephone messages	3.67	1.10	Moderately
Writing advertisements to promote agents or company	4.01	0.91	Moderately
Total	3.90	0.99	Moderately

Table 4.7 shows problems in English writing skill at the total mean 3.90 and S.D. was 0.99 rated as “moderately”. The most difficult problem in writing was “Producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats” ( $\bar{x}=4.23$ ). The second difficult problem in listening was “Writing advertisements to promote agents or company” ( $\bar{x}=4.01$ ). The third was “Writing for itineraries” ( $\bar{x}=3.68$ ). And the least problem was “Taking notes for telephone messages” ( $\bar{x}=3.67$ ).

#### 4.8 Needs of Writing

Needs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats	4.23	0.88	Extremely
Writing for itineraries	3.97	0.93	Moderately
Taking notes for telephone messages	3.83	1.01	Moderately
Writing advertisements to promote agents or company	4.13	0.97	Moderately
Total	4.04	0.95	Moderately

Table 4.8 presents the mean of needs for improving English writing skill of the respondents. The total mean was 4.04 and S.D. was 0.95 rated as “moderately”. The majority of respondents needed to improve “Producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats” most ( $\bar{x}=4.23$ ). “Writing advertisements to promote agents or company” was the second highest need ( $\bar{x}=4.13$ ). “Writing for itineraries” was the third highest need ( $\bar{x}=3.97$ ). “Taking notes for telephone messages” was the least need ( $\bar{x}=3.83$ ).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the field of English for tourism, most of the studies have focused on the study of the required skills and needs in work place, adequacy and appropriateness of instructional materials and strategies. Al-Khatib (2007) examined the communicative needs of tourism and banking personnel by shedding lights on their perceptions of needs, wants, lacks, and attitudes toward English in order to include what is needed and exclude what deemed less important to them. The most common reasons for communicating as a travel agency worker were found to be offering destination guides, writing and sending email and faxes, making on-line ticketing, browsing the internet, making on-line hotel booking, etc. In designing a course for students of culture and tourism, Barancic (1998) used an integrated approach to get the students involved in the syllabus he wanted to teach. The application of the approach indicated that the teachers are faced with needs which are of a less academic and more realistic nature.

From the present study, the most difficult skill for the majority of the subjects was speaking followed by listening, writing and reading. For speaking skill, they had problems in negotiating for pricing with the clients most. Some of them required negotiating terms of travel business in order to decrease the problems, followed by conducting telephone and conducting face to face conversations with clients. Most of them could not catch the main idea while communicating with clients. For listening skill, most of them had the problem in listening telephone conversations. The causes were because most clients spoke fastly and some accents were hard to catch. In addition, listening to news related to tourism and listening face to face conversations were also hard for them. For writing skill, producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats was hardest for them because most travel agents are weak in grammar and weak in using the formal formats when writing an e-mail or memo, followed by writing advertisements to promote agents or company and writing for itineraries. For reading skill, reading news or article from tourism was hardest for them, followed by journals reading written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry and reading brochures or tourist leaflets. Also, some technical terms in journals or written documents were hard to understand and they do not often use in their daily life. According to the study of Ravisuda AunRuen (2005), she studied needs analysis of English for travel agents in Chiang Mai to explore needs and problems the travel agents encountered when using English in their job. The key findings showed that the English language was perceived as important. They mostly needed the language to communicate effectively with their clients. The participants thought of speaking was the skill they used most. Listening, reading and writing were also needed. Grammar and appropriate expressions and pronunciation were perceived as the lowest needs. The participants also thought that speaking was the problem which they faced most, followed by grammar and appropriate expressions, listening and translation respectively. And they hardly encountered problems in vocabulary and reading.

By the way, the most skill they needed to improve was speaking such as negotiating, followed by conducting telephone with clients and conducting face to face conversations. This might be because most of them are not confident in their grammar. Next, they needed to improve listening to telephone conversations most, followed by listening to news related to tourism and verbal instructions from clients. Moreover, they



needed to practice listening in different accents to catch the main ideas during the conversations. The third needed skill was writing. They needed to improve producing faxes, e-mails and memos in appropriate formats most, followed by writing advertisements to promote agents or company and writing for itineraries. Some of them required course training at least six hours a week. It is similar to the study of Al-Khatib (2007) examining the communicative needs of tourism and banking personnel by shedding lights on their perceptions of needs, wants, lacks, and attitudes toward English. The most common reasons for communicating as a travel agency worker were found to be offering destination guides, writing and sending email and faxes. Lastly, they needed to improve reading in written documents or detailed information related to the tourism industry most, followed by reading news or articles from tourism journals and brochures or tourist leaflets. They required technical terms in tourism field for improving English reading.

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