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Voices of Tourism-Related Personnel Regarding Their Problems and English Language Needs: A Case Study of the Tourism Industry in Phang Nga, Thailand

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Abstract

English is widely used in Thailand's tourism industry by tourism-related personnel for communication, negotiation, and transactions with foreign tourists. This study aimed to examine the problems and needs relating to improving English language skills among 150 tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province and the communication problems experienced by 50 foreign tourists. The researchers employed questionnaires and interviews to collect the data and analyzed the collected data using percentages, means, standard deviations, and content analysis. The findings indicated moderate English-language problems among tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga (Mean = 3.39, S.D. = 1.04) and confirmed by foreign tourists (Mean = 3.40, S.D. = 0.68). The most problematic area was writing skills (Mean = 3.57, S.D. = 1.18), followed by reading skills (Mean = 3.42, S.D. = 1.04). However, it was also observed that tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province needed to enhance their listening skills (Mean = 3.60, S.D. = 1.09), followed by speaking skills (Mean = 3.53, S.D. = 1.08). The majority of personnel (83.3%) expressed a desire to attend English training. The study suggests developing an English training program tailored to the specific needs of tourism-related personnel to enhance their English proficiency for effective communication at work.

Keywords: English Language Need, English Problems, Tourism-Related Personnel, Tourism Industry

1. Introduction

Tourism is a crucial sector that significantly contributes to socio-economic development and employment (Hassan, 2017). In Thailand, it is one of the fastest-growing industries, ranking second in terms of income among service sectors. Approximately 20 percent of Thailand's GDP comes from tourism revenues (WTTC, 2020), highlighting its vital role in the country's economy. The popularity of Thailand as a tourist destination is attributed to its natural attractions, cultural heritage, delightful cuisine, traditional customs, and excellent service.

Located near Phuket in southern Thailand, Phang Nga is a breathtaking tourist destination known for its beautiful beaches, cultural attractions, exceptional dining choices, and peaceful national parks. The tourism offerings in Phang Nga have generated substantial profits, positioning the province as an economically significant area in Thailand. It ranks eighth among Thailand's top provinces in tourism revenue, showcasing consistent growth (TAT Newsroom & TAT Newsroom, 2019). Enhancing the English language skills of tourism personnel in Phang Nga is essential for improving the industry's quality, impressing tourists, and showcasing the country's tourism potential.

Effective English communication plays a crucial role for tourism personnel in various sectors across Thailand (Piriyasilp, 2014). Despite efforts to enhance the tourism industry, concerns about English proficiency among tourism-related employees persist (Piriyasilp, 2014). Many studies have demonstrated that strong English skills are essential for interacting with foreign visitors and leaving a positive impression (Chaichana et al., 2017; Kaewkasi & Hetthong, 2019; Promwatcharanon & Chatreepinyo, 2018; Pulket et al., 2015; Yomyao, 2017). These studies also emphasize the need to improve language skills in different tourism-related roles (Chaichana et al., 2017; Kaewkasi & Hetthong, 2019; Promwatcharanon & Chatreepinyo, 2018; Pulket et al., 2015; Yomyao, 2017).

Phang Nga was chosen as the primary focus of this study due to recognized challenges in English proficiency within the local tourism industry (The Office of Strategy Management, Andaman, n.d.). Phang Nga's tourism sector plays a substantial role in Thailand's economy, attracting an increasing number of foreign tourists and generating significant revenue (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). Despite the adverse effects of the pandemic, it is imperative to persist in efforts to strengthen Thailand's tourism industry as a vital economic force. Enhancing the competitiveness of tourism-related personnel, particularly in Phang Nga, holds great importance. Proficient English communication among tourism-related personnel can enhance business management, boost personnel confidence, and create a favorable impression on foreign tourists, ultimately bolstering Thailand's tourism potential.

To adapt to the changing demands and direction of the tourism industry, this study aims to investigate the English communication problems and needs of tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga Province. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the specific English skills needed to enhance work efficiency and explore the problems related to English communication with foreign tourists. The valuable findings from this study can be utilized to develop effective strategies and techniques to equip tourism-related personnel to support tourism growth in Thailand. These insights aim to enhance the preparation of personnel to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, thereby contributing to the overall progress of Thailand's tourism industry. Moreover, the results of this study can be utilized to design English training programs tailored to the specific needs of tourism-related personnel, enabling them to utilize English in their careers effectively.

2. Literature Review

According to statistics from Phang Nga Provincial Tourism and Sports Office (2020), the number of foreign tourists visiting Phang Nga Province is increasing. Therefore, to cater to the growing number of tourists, tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga must be able to communicate effectively in English. The English used in tourism-related services differs from everyday English and requires a specialized structure based on the service's purpose. This difference highlights the importance of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in the present study.

2.1 English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be defined in various ways, but this study encompasses viewpoints from different ESP scholars. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) perceive ESP as a type of language instruction that considers learners' motivation to learn when determining the content and delivery. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), ESP involves using English in language courses or instructional programs that are tailored to the specific needs of a particular group of learners. Dudley-Evans (1998) distinguishes ESP from general English by stating that it primarily targets adult learners at the tertiary level or in professional settings, aiming to address their specific needs. Additionally, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) argue that ESP is built upon the foundation of

need analysis, and its successful implementation leads to a focused course. Albakrawi (2013) supports this perspective by highlighting that accurately identifying needs makes learning objectives more attainable and enhances the appeal of the language course.

Based on these definitions, the focus of ESP in this study is to examine the actual English language problems and needs of tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province, Thailand. When studying problems and needs, need analysis is a method used to identify the learners' goals, requirements, and challenges. Therefore, need analysis is considered critical in designing an ESP course that suits the learners' needs, and all educational programs should be based on a needs analysis to ensure effectiveness (Albakrawi, 2013).

2.2 Need Analysis

Needs analysis is a comprehensive process for gathering information about learners' needs. Graves (2000) defines it as a systematic and ongoing process of collecting information about learners' needs and interests, analyzing and interpreting the data, and making curriculum decisions to meet their needs for success. Similarly, Fatihi (2003) suggests that needs analysis is used to identify learners' necessities, needs, and gaps. Jordan (1997) emphasizes its importance in course development, stating that it is the first step in creating courses, syllabi, materials, and educational activities. According to Richard (2001), needs analysis serves three primary purposes: providing input into the content, design, and implementation of a language course; helping develop goals, objectives, and content; and evaluating existing programs. Widdowson (1990) argues that needs can be expressed as objectives and relates to what learners need to accomplish to master the language effectively. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) classify needs into two types: target needs and learning needs. Target needs encompass necessities, lacks, and wants, while learning needs refer to how learners acquire the foreign language in terms of the skills or strategies they prefer.

Based on these definitions, needs analysis can be utilized to identify the language skills necessary for learners to perform specific jobs, such as language learners, educators, officers, or staff. The information gathered from the needs analysis enables course designers to develop English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses or materials that cater to the learners' interests and needs, select the most effective language instruction method, and ensure the relevance and applicability of the ESP course and materials. Additionally, the data obtained from the needs analysis can be utilized to develop English training courses or materials that meet their needs and enable them to use English more effectively in the workplace. Therefore, researching the problems and needs of tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga in using English is beneficial to prepare them for supporting the growth of Thailand's tourism industry.

2.3 Previous Studies

Several studies have investigated the problems and needs that arise when tourism-related personnel communicate in English in their workplaces. Scholars such as Ahmmed, Sinha, Khan, & Islam (2020), Bach (2015), Chan (2019), and Yi-Ling Lu (2018) have conducted studies on this topic. This issue has also been recognized in Thailand, with several researchers investigating the problems and needs of tourism-related personnel in various parts of the country. For example, Thinrat (2020) investigated the difficulties and needs of Buriram airport staff in developing English communication skills for interacting with foreign passengers, while Pulket, Supakavanich, & Wimuktanon (2012) focused on the English communication abilities of villagers in homestay village communities. Chaichana, Chiewcharn, & Thongnern (2017) examined hotel personnel's English communication problems when dealing with foreign guests. Yomyao (2017) studied the English language proficiency of registered nurses, while Kaewkasi and Hetthong (2019) analyzed the English communication problems encountered by tour guides. Phongpichitphoom (2017), Charoensuk, Chuai-in, & Wate cho (2018) investigated the English language problems experienced by travel agents, while Chomchuen and Rattanasak (2018) examined the English communication needs of public vehicle drivers. Thongsai and Sitipragan (2019) investigated the problems and solutions for improving English communication in local tourism businesses. Praesrisakul, Chaibunruang, & Purisarn (2019), Promwatcharanon and Chatreepinyo (2018), and Rungsavang and Clarke (2016) examined how tourist police officers dealt with English-speaking tourists. In a study conducted by Namtapi (2022), the researcher investigated the requirements, limitations, and preferences of tourism personnel who utilize English in their job in Ayutthaya province. Despite these studies, a limited number of research studies have investigated other tourism-

related personnel's communication problems and needs when using English. Piriyaasilp (2014) conducted a large-scale study on the English language needs of tourism personnel in various settings in Khon Kaen, a northeastern province in Thailand. She collected data from 300 participants through questionnaires and interviews with a selected group. Her findings indicated how needs analysis could be used to develop ESP courses or materials that meet the learners' interests and needs. However, there has yet to be comprehensive research on how English is used by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga, one of Thailand's most beautiful tourist destinations. As a result, the present study aims to address this gap.

3. Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate the English language-related problems faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province. To achieve this, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the problems tourism-related personnel faces in Phang Nga province when using English in their workplace?
2. How do foreign tourists' attitudes towards the English skills of tourism-related personnel affect their work in Phang Nga province?
3. What are the English language learning needs of tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province to perform effectively at their work?

4. Method

The current study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing quantitative and qualitative research methods. Specifically, a survey research design was used to collect data from participants.

4.1 Participants

The research participants were divided into two groups for this study.

The first group included 150 participants purposively selected from tourism personnel working in Phang Nga Province. These participants were chosen from three districts (Takua Pa, Thai Mueang, and Muang) where English is commonly used for communication due to the presence of tourist attractions. A stratified purposeful sampling method was employed to account for the variation in tourism organizations' definitions and the difficulty in accurately predicting the number of tourism personnel in the province. Participants were selected from three types of tourism organizations: governmental organizations, private organizations, and community members, with 50 participants from each category. Each of the 150 participants completed a questionnaire, and 20 were further selected for semi-structured interviews.

The second group consisted of 50 foreign tourists visiting Phang Nga Province. These tourists were chosen using convenience sampling to provide insights into the English language problems faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga province.

4.2 Instruments for Data Collection

Questionnaires

There are two questionnaires in this present study, including:

Questionnaire for tourism-related personnel:

The questionnaire used in this study was derived from previous studies conducted by Piriyaasilp (2014) and Pochakorn, Chantarangkul & Sermsook (2018). It consisted of five sections:

1. General information
2. English skill problems encountered at work

3. Need for English skills at work
4. Need for English communication training to improve skills
5. Other comments

The first and fifth sections required participants to provide brief responses or select options. In contrast, the second, third, and fourth sections utilized a five-point Likert scale for participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement.

Questionnaire for foreign tourists:

The questionnaire used in this research consisted of three parts:

1. General information
2. Difficulties with English skills encountered by tourism workers in Phang Nga Province
3. Open-ended comments about the English skill problems faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga Province

The original questionnaire was initially written in Thai, translated into English, and validated by experts to ensure clarity and eliminate potential content ambiguity. In the first part, participants were required to choose from given options, while the second part used a five-point Likert scale for participants to express their opinions. The third part included open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely share their perspectives on the English skill problems experienced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga Province.

Before distribution, the two questionnaires underwent a pilot test with 20 tourism-related personnel and 20 foreign tourists who were not part of the study. The questionnaires were evaluated by three experts, one from the tourism industry and two English lecturers, using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), which ranged from -1 to 1. Items with an IOC score below 0.5 were excluded, while those above 0.5 were retained.

Semi-Structured Interview

The researchers utilized semi-structured interviews to gather detailed information for this study. The interview questions were created and tested with ten tourism-related personnel working in southern Thailand. After receiving feedback from these individuals and confirmation from three experts, five interview questions were selected for the study. The questions are as follows:

- How significant do you believe English is in your job?
- What English language skills are required for your work?
- What problems do you experience when utilizing English at work?
- Would you like to improve your English skills through training?
- How should English training be organized?

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection for this study was conducted in two stages.

In the first stage, the researchers obtained permission from 150 participants who were purposefully selected from the population of tourism-related personnel working in Phang Nga and 50 foreign tourists. The researchers then distributed the questionnaires to each participant and collected them after completion.

In the second stage, with their consent, 20 tourism-related personnel were purposefully selected to participate in interviews. The interviews were conducted in Thai and lasted approximately 20 minutes, depending on the participants' responses. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent for transcription, translation, and analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data from the questionnaires underwent analysis, including the utilization of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient to assess the questionnaire's reliability. A 5-point Likert scale was used to rate the English skill problems encountered by the participants at work, the need for English skills at work, and the need for English communication training to improve skills. The mean and standard deviation (S.D.) were used to calculate the average level of English skill needs, with higher mean scores indicating more significant levels of English skill problems and a higher need for English skills at work among tourism-related personnel and foreign tourists, as well as a need for English communication training among tourism-related personnel. The distribution of participants based on their general information was analyzed using frequency and percentage, while the standard deviation (S.D.) was used to measure the dispersion of scores among participants.

Finally, the information from the open-ended style questions in the fifth part of the questionnaire for tourism-related personnel and the third part for foreign tourists, as well as the semi-structured interview, was analyzed through a content analysis involving categorization, interpretation, and analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

Of the 150 participants, 95 were female, and 55 were male. The highest percentage of participants fell between the ages of 21-30. The majority of participants (60%) had obtained a bachelor's degree. A significant number of participants (23.3%) reported using English daily at work. When asked to self-evaluate their proficiency in English communication, most participants (56.7%) rated themselves as being fair in their English communication skills. The information collected from these 150 participants was analyzed and presented in alignment with the research objectives as follows:

5.1 Problems Faced by Tourism-Related Personnel in English Language Skills

Table 1: Tourism-related personnel's problems in using the four skills of English

English Skills	Mean (S.D.)	Level of Problems
Listening	3.31 (0.95)	Moderate
Speaking	3.29 (1.01)	Moderate
Reading	3.42 (1.04)	Moderate
Writing	3.57 (1.18)	High
Total	3.39 (1.04)	Moderate

According to the data analysis from Table 1, tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga encountered moderate English problems in their work, with a mean score of 3.39 (S.D. = 1.04). This moderate English problem extended to all skills, with writing being identified as the most challenging skill, with a mean score of 3.57 (S.D. = 1.18). These findings aligned with Kaewkasi and Hetthong's (2019) study, which reported similar difficulties in writing among tourist guides in the southern Gulf of Thailand. Limited opportunities for writing practice in the workplace contributed to a lack of confidence and increased fear of making mistakes. Interviews with a government officer and a barber in the community revealed that participants felt more confident in speaking English than writing due to apprehension about grammatical errors and limited education, respectively. However, both participants recognized the importance of communication skills in their work, emphasizing speaking and listening more than writing. These findings differed from Namtapi's (2022) study, which identified listening as the most problematic skill for tourism-related personnel. Nevertheless, the study highlighted the significant writing challenge for tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga. Addressing this problem could enhance overall English proficiency and improve their ability to communicate effectively with foreign tourists.

Upon examining the data for each skill, the findings suggested that the biggest challenge in listening skills for tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga was understanding idioms and slang words related to services, with an average score of 3.67 (S.D. = 0.94). This result indicated a moderate level of difficulty in comprehending these language aspects. These findings aligned with previous studies conducted by Charoensuk et al. (2018), Namtapi

(2022), and Phuyathip (2019), and where participants also reported problems in understanding slang words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and technical terms used by foreign tourists.

According to the participating personnel in the present study, the difficulty in understanding idioms and slang words led to misinterpretation or misunderstandings during communication, resulting in a loss of confidence in their English-speaking ability. One participant shared their experience, stating, "I could not understand my customers' specific needs due to the use of slang words, and it made me hesitant to engage in further conversation. I felt embarrassed when my colleagues explained the meaning to me later." This highlighted the practical implications of the problems, as it can hinder effective communication and potentially impact customer satisfaction.

Interestingly, listening to complaints was the least problematic aspect of listening skills, with an average score of 3.03. This finding contradicted the results of Phuyathip (2019), who reported that logistic staff needed help comprehending problems that might arise during work. However, an interesting comment from a private staff member shed light on a different aspect of this issue. He highlighted that different accents used in complaints could also cause difficulties in understanding and create problems in the workplace. This observation was consistent with the research conducted by Polsombat (2016), which indicated that participants encountered difficulties associated with accents, obstructing the efficiency of mechanics employees in performing their tasks. Overall, the results indicated that tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga faced problems with their listening skills, particularly in understanding idioms and slang words. These problems can lead to miscommunication and a loss of confidence. While listening to complaints was relatively less problematic, different accents still needed help understanding. These findings emphasized the importance of addressing these listening problems to improve the English proficiency and communication effectiveness of tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga.

The analysis revealed that tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga faced problems using English in their work, particularly in listening, speaking, and writing skills. Regarding speaking skills, introducing and providing details about tourist attractions was identified as the most problematic aspect (Mean = 3.61, S.D. = 0.90), followed by explaining the causes of problems during service (Mean = 3.60, S.D. = 1.04). However, greeting, welcoming, and saying goodbye were the least problematic aspects (Mean = 2.83, S.D. = 0.96), as these skills were considered fundamental and frequently used in communication with foreign tourists.

The interviews conducted for this study supported the finding that greeting, welcoming, and saying goodbye in English pose no problem for most participants. One private company employee stated, "I can greet and talk with my foreign customers about their everyday life. I don't see greeting foreigners and asking them about their daily life as my problem." Basic English communication skills, such as greeting or saying goodbye, are crucial for tourism-related personnel to perform their job effectively, as noted by Piriyaasilp (2014). Ahmmed et al. (2020) also found that everyday communication activities, such as greetings and responses, were frequently observed and considered ordinary, with participants not perceiving them as problematic.

Regarding reading skills, the study found that the most challenging aspect for tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga was reading announcements and news in English (Mean = 3.57, S.D. = 0.85), followed by reading information about travel documents (Mean = 3.54, S.D. = 1.04). However, reading advertisements in English was manageable. Phuyathip's study (2019) supported the importance of reading skills in the tourism industry, with participants in her study also struggling with reading and comprehending news updates or announcements in English. The interviews conducted for this study revealed that participants needed help with unfamiliar vocabulary, mainly when dealing with academic or lengthy texts with complex grammar. One participant expressed, "I find it challenging to read news in English. The vocabulary and grammar are quite complicated, and I struggle to understand them. If I want to comprehend it, I might rely on an application to assist me." These findings highlighted the specific problems faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga, emphasizing the need to address these problems to improve their English proficiency and effectively communicate with foreign tourists.

Moving on to writing skills, writing a report was identified as the most challenging problem for the participants (Mean = 3.93, S.D.=1.35), followed by writing letters, emails, or important notes to interact with foreign tourists.

This finding aligned with a study by Charoensuk, Chuai-in, & Wate cho (2018), which found writing tour trading documents from customer messages obtained through telephone conversations problematic. However, in contrast, Namtapi (2022) found that tourism personnel in Ayutthaya needed help with note-taking. Writing directions to tourist attractions was this study's least challenging aspect (Mean = 3.42, S.D. = 1.28). Participants explained their writing difficulties, with one stating, "I struggle with writing reports because I do not have much experience with it. It takes me much time to organize my thoughts and express them clearly in English." Another participant added, "I find writing emails to customers difficult because I need to be careful with my wording and tone. However, writing directions is not a problem for me because it is mostly about giving straightforward instructions."

In essence, while the English language proficiency of tourism-related personnel may be considered moderate, there was still a pressing need to improve their efficiency and achievements in their respective roles. This highlighted the significance of addressing the need to utilize the four essential English language skills in the workplace, as examined in this study.

5.2 Needs for Using the Four Skills of English at the Workplace

Since Phang Nga is a frequently visited destination for foreign tourists, tourism-related personnel must have English proficiency in their workplace. Table 2 presents findings from the questionnaires that support this claim.

Table 2: Tourism-related personnel's needs for using the four skills of English

English Skills	Mean (S.D.)	Level of Needs
Listening	3.60 (1.09)	High
Speaking	3.53 (1.08)	High
Reading	3.47 (1.13)	Moderate
Writing	3.42 (1.09)	Moderate
Total	3.50 (1.09)	High

This study found that tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga had a high need to use English at work, encompassing all four skills of English. This corresponded with previous research conducted by Chaweewan (2019), Kaewkunha (2021), Piriyaasilp (2014), and Poonket, Supakwanit, & Wimonnkanon (2012), which also emphasized the importance of all four English skills for tourism-related personnel serving foreign tourists.

Listening skills emerged as particularly important among the four English skills, consistent with the findings of Kaewkunha (2021) and Kalasin and Charumanee (2015). Poonket, Supakwanit, & Wimonnkanon (2012) also identified listening and speaking skills as crucial for individuals in the homestay village community. The interview results in this study supported these findings, with a tourism-related staff member in a governmental organization highlighting the significance of practicing listening skills to understand and address the needs of foreign tourists. Similarly, a local seller emphasized the importance of strong listening skills for effectively selling food to foreign customers.

Upon analysis, it was found that the most critical aspect of listening for the participants was listening to the service needs of foreign tourists, with an average score of 3.76 (S.D = 0.98). This finding aligned with the ideas presented by Shen, Qian, & Chen (2020), who emphasized the significance of listening skills in face-to-face interactions, particularly for understanding customer needs and enhancing customer satisfaction. Additionally, the research conducted by Kalasin and Charumanee (2015) uncovered that listening to customers' demands emerged as the paramount proficiency essential for hotel staff across different travel destinations in Thailand, including Phuket, Koh Samui, and Hatyai.

The results of the study indicated that among tourism-related personnel, the skills of listening to various accents (Mean = 3.57, S.D. = 1.05), engaging in general conversation (Mean = 3.56, S.D. = 0.93), handling customer complaints (Mean = 3.54, S.D.= 1.22), and understanding slang words (Mean = 3.46, S.D.= 1.10) were perceived as less essential. This suggested that effective communication in the hospitality industry may emphasize the specific purpose and context of communication, as supported by previous research (Shen, Qian, & Chen, 2020).

The analysis of participants' English language needs revealed that the most critical need in terms of listening skills was listening to the service needs of tourists, with an average score of 3.76 (S.D.= 0.98). This was closely followed by the need to take notes or gather information about the tourists, with an average score of 3.69 (S.D.= 1.24). Interestingly, listening to idioms or slang words, the most challenging area in English skills was perceived as the least necessary aspect of listening (Mean= 3.46, S.D.= 1.10). These findings aligned with the research conducted by Shen, Qian, & Chen (2020), which emphasized the significance of listening skills in face-to-face interactions for understanding customer needs and enhancing satisfaction. Additionally, the study by Kalasin and Charumanee (2015) found that listening to customers' needs was the most vital skill required by hotel staff in various travel destinations in Thailand.

Overall, the study results suggested that while specific listening skills may pose challenges for tourism-related personnel, it was crucial to prioritize active listening to understand and cater to the service needs of tourists. By focusing on the essential aspects of listening identified in this study, professionals in the hospitality industry can improve their communication effectiveness and enhance customer satisfaction.

Regarding speaking skills, the essential aspect for tourism-related personnel was the ability to ask for information and needs from tourists, with an average score of 3.94 (S.D.= 0.87). The majority of the participants emphasized that communication confidence and negotiation skills were more critical during communication with customers. This finding was consistent with the study conducted by Phonsomboon (2020), which found that Thai vendors on Khaosarn Road identified difficulties in appropriate expressions, negotiation, and apologizing during communication with customers as their primary areas for improvement. Additionally, explaining the causes of mistakes during the service was considered necessary, with an average score of 3.76 (S.D.=1.03), followed by the need to say apologies, with an average score of 3.72 (S.D.=1.01). Correct intonation based on the situation was deemed the less necessary aspect of speaking skills, with an average score of 3.29 (S.D.=1.26). The need for speaking with correct grammar was the least essential aspect, with an average score of 3.07(S.D.= 1.36). These findings aligned with Phonsomboon's (2020) study, which showed that although Thai vendors faced challenges when communicating with foreign customers, they perceived speaking with correct grammar tenses to be a minor difficulty.

The study's findings revealed that the overall need for reading skills among tourism-related personnel was moderate, with an average score of 3.47 (S.D.= 1.13). However, when examining specific aspects, the need for reading tourist information and travel documents emerged as the most crucial skill, with an average score of 3.69. This highlighted the significance of comprehending and interpreting relevant travel documents for effective communication and customer service in the tourism industry. This finding was consistent with previous research by Poonket, Supakwanit, & Wimonkanon (2012), who identified the importance of reading skills for individuals in the homestay village community. Their study emphasized the need to read various information related to tourism activities and services. Similarly, Kaewkunha (2021) found that reading skills were essential for tourism personnel to access and understand information to meet customer needs.

On the other hand, reading emails and business letters was identified as the least necessary aspect of reading skills among tourism-related personnel, as indicated by the lower average score of 3.26. While these skills may still be relevant for specific job roles within the tourism industry, they were considered less critical than other reading skills. Overall, the results suggested that while reading skills were essential for tourism-related personnel, the specific aspects of reading skills that hold the highest importance may vary depending on the nature of the job. Understanding and effectively utilizing tourist information and travel documents were crucial areas of focus to enhance communication and customer service in the industry.

The study's findings suggested that writing skills were essential for Phang Nga tourism personnel. However, among the four English skills examined, the participants rated writing skills as the least essential skill, with an average score of 3.42 (S.D.= 1.09). This indicated that while writing skills were necessary, they may be perceived as less critical than others. Further analysis revealed that filling in English forms was the most crucial aspect of writing skills, with an average score of 3.73(S.D.= 0.94). This finding was supported by the study conducted by Poonket, Supakwanit, & Wimonkanon (2012), which highlighted the importance of filling in various forms

related to tourism activities and services for individuals in the homestay village community. Accurately completing forms was essential for efficient communication and proper documentation in the tourism industry.

On the other hand, writing emails and letters in English was considered the least critical aspect of writing skills among tourism-related personnel, with an average score of 3.14 (S.D.= 1.16). While this skill may still be relevant in specific job roles, it was deemed essential compared to other writing skills. These findings suggested that there may be variations in the specific aspects of writing skills that were deemed essential among tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga. Professionals in the tourism industry can utilize this information to identify the specific areas of writing skills that require improvement and tailor their training programs accordingly.

In conclusion, English language skills are indispensable for tourism-related personnel, but the importance of different skills may differ. Ensuring that tourism professionals possessed the necessary English language proficiency for their specific roles was crucial for their professional growth and success. By addressing the specific areas of writing skills that require improvement, professionals in the tourism industry can enhance their overall competence and effectively communicate with tourists and stakeholders.

5.3 Language Problems of Tourism-Related Personnel in Foreign Tourists' Perspectives

The researchers also collected data from foreign tourists to investigate the problems in English communication faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga. The questionnaire responses revealed that 78% of the participants were male and 22% were female, with the majority aged between 41 and 50. Most tourists (52%) reported visiting Phang Nga to be with family.

Table 3: Language Problems of Tourism Personnel in Foreign Tourists' Perspectives

English Skills	Mean (S.D.)	Level of Problems
Listening	3.33 (0.64)	Moderate
Speaking	3.18 (0.71)	Moderate
Reading	3.44 (0.66)	Moderate
Writing	3.65 (0.73)	High
Total	3.40 (0.68)	Moderate

The findings presented in Table 3 shed light on the communication difficulties faced by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga, specifically regarding their writing skills. The data revealed moderate problems (Mean = 3.40, S.D. = 0.68) when using English to communicate with foreign tourists, with the task of accurately documenting important information from direct conversations being the most challenging (Mean = 4.08, S.D.= 0.72). This contrasted with the findings of Chaichana, Chiewcharn, & Thongnan (2017), who reported that foreigners perceived a high level of communication problems in English at work, with speaking and phone conversations being the most problematic for tourism personnel. Writing announcements, notices, or regulations in English was also identified as a significant obstacle (Mean = 3.90, S.D.=0.82). An enlightening comment in response to an open-ended question emphasized that difficulties arise from the similarity in sounds between Thai and English, which could lead to potential misunderstandings when processing announcements. Additionally, writing to give directions to different locations (Mean = 3.90, S.D.= 0.82) posed a challenge, while filling out English forms was considered less problematic (Mean = 3.08, S.D.= 0.77) according to foreign tourists' perceptions. This difference may be attributed to the familiarity with writing patterns used when completing forms, as revealed in a comment from an open-ended questionnaire question.

The consistency between the perspectives of tourists and tourism-related personnel regarding the problems in writing skills supported the findings presented in Table 3. This suggested that the limitations in writing skills among tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga may be influenced by time constraints that limit opportunities for practice and usage. Additionally, the problems encountered in writing can be attributed to challenges in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, leading to an inability to construct coherent sentences with correct grammar usage. The unique nature of writing, compared to other language skills, further compounded the

problems faced by personnel. These observations aligned with the research conducted by Phuyathip (2019), which also emphasized the difficulties faced by tourism staff in employing correct grammar when writing.

In summary, the findings highlighted the importance of addressing the writing skills of tourism-related personnel to enhance their communication abilities with foreign tourists. Training programs and interventions that focus on improving writing skills, particularly in terms of documenting information accurately and effectively, may be beneficial in addressing the identified challenges.

5.4 Needs for Engaging in English Communication Training

The study's findings highlighted the importance of improving the English language proficiency of tourism-related personnel to address their specific language-related problems and need effectively. By implementing a questionnaire, the researchers acquired a valuable understanding of the participants' eagerness and enthusiasm toward English communication training. The results revealed that most participants (83.3%) demonstrated a strong interest in participating. Among those interested, a notable proportion (62.4%) preferred weekend training sessions, typically lasting 1-2 days (34.4%). Additionally, participants expressed a preference for 3-4-hour training sessions, with a majority (78.4%) desiring the involvement of both Thai and foreign instructors.

These findings corresponded with previous studies by Prayaongkul (2021) and Piriyasilp (2014), which similarly documented participants' preference for training replicating real-life English situations. This agreement further underscored the importance of prioritizing practical English usage outside the conventional confines of classroom settings, as Walker (1995) advocated in his promotion of English for Specific Courses.

Nevertheless, it was essential to recognize the problems faced by participants in attending English training conducted in traditional classroom settings due to inflexible work schedules, as highlighted in studies by Prayaongkul (2021), Promwatcharanon & Chattrapeinyo (2018), and Su-ya-ai (2018). In light of these challenges, participants expressed a significant demand for portable English pocketbooks that include Thai pronunciation and translation, complemented by accompanying CDs. These resources enable them to engage in English practice conveniently, at their own pace and convenience.

Overall, these findings highlighted the significance of creating customized English training programs that cater to tourism-related staff's particular preferences and limitations. By incorporating the favored training techniques and tackling the identified obstacles, these programs can effectively boost personnel's English language skills and provide exceptional experiences for foreign tourists exploring the area.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study shed light on the problems encountered by tourism-related personnel in Phang Nga when communicating in English with foreign tourists. The results underscored the significance of improving writing skills, which emerged as the most problematic area for personnel. Additionally, problems in giving directions, comprehending slang and accents, and reading announcements and travel documents were identified. These challenges underscored the importance of addressing and enhancing the English language proficiency of tourism-related personnel to facilitate effective communication with foreign tourists. The study also revealed participants' preferences for English communication training, including weekend sessions, interactive teaching methods, and the involvement of both Thai and foreign teachers. The need for self-study materials for practicing English at home was also emphasized. By incorporating these preferences and developing customized training programs, tourism-related personnel can enhance their professional competence and contribute to a positive experience for foreign tourists visiting Phang Nga.

7. Suggestions

1. Effective English proficiency training is crucial for all tourism-related personnel, regardless of their specific roles within the tourism industry. It is vital to equip them with the necessary English language skills tailored to

their job needs. Ensuring that every tourism-related personnel possess strong English communication abilities significantly increases the potential for success in the tourism industry.

2. Tailoring training programs and providing self-study materials to tourism-related personnel improves their effectiveness and professional competence. This, in turn, enhances communication and service quality when interacting with foreign tourists in Phang Nga.

3. Increasing the number of participants, both tourism-related personnel and foreign tourists, is advisable to enhance generalizability. A larger sample size would offer a more comprehensive exploration of the problems and needs regarding English skills in the tourism industry, leading to a more vital understanding and reliable conclusions about English proficiency in this sector.

4. Besides questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the researchers suggest incorporating other data collection methods, such as focus groups or observations. These methods can provide richer insights into the problems faced by tourism-related personnel and foreign tourists' perceptions regarding English communication.

5. To gain valuable insights and promote English proficiency in the tourism industry, it is recommended to compare research findings across different regions in Thailand, as this could reveal regional disparities in English usage and provide valuable best practices for skill enhancement.

6. The researchers advise longitudinal studies to evaluate the enduring effects of English training programs on the language proficiency of tourism personnel, sustainability, and emerging challenges.

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