

English for Community-Based Tourism: Barriers and Challenges of Local Entrepreneurs in Thailand

ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชน: อุปสรรค และความท้าทายสำหรับผู้ประกอบการท่องถิ่นในประเทศไทย

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims to investigate the barriers and identify challenges to the English language by local entrepreneurs in Thailand. Thirty-five participants were selected by snowball sampling and purposive sampling as the key informants. The research instruments were the researcher, interviews, observations, and focus group discussion. The data was analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings reveal that problems and barriers to English used by Thai people still are the main issue, especially in a rural communities. It was found that background knowledge and education in English language learning are crucial factors for CBT entrepreneurs in communication with international tourists. The findings demonstrate the challenge that CBT entrepreneurs face in using English for communication and promoting their tourist sites. According to their needs for English development, they would not like to learn English in a traditional style, for example, short training for 2-3 days, however, they would like long-term learning by integrating with online and offline learning that can construct their knowledge by themselves as well as create sustainable learning.

Keywords: English; Community-Based Tourism; Local entrepreneurs

บทคัดย่อ (Abstract)

การศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยใช้วิธีการศึกษาวิจัยแบบชาติพันธุ์วรรณฯ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอุปสรรคและความท้าทายของการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการท่องเที่ยว

Received: 2022-12-25 Revised: 2023-03-20 Accepted: 2023-03-22

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โดยชุมชนของผู้ประกอบการท่องถิ่นในประเทศไทย กลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ ได้แก่ ผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย ด้านการท่องเที่ยวชุมชนในอำเภอห้วยหนาน จำนวน 35 คน โดยใช้วิธีการสุ่มแบบบล็อกหิมะ และการสุ่มแบบเจาะจง เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยในครั้งนี้ ได้แก่ ตัวผู้วิจัย แบบสัมภาษณ์ แบบสังเกต และการอภิปรายกลุ่ม โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลแบบการวิเคราะห์แก่นสาระ ผลการศึกษาวิจัยพบว่า ปัญหาและอุปสรรคในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับผู้ประกอบการการท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชน พบว่า พื้นฐานการศึกษายังคงเป็นปัจจัยหลักที่เป็นอุปสรรคต่อการสื่อสารของผู้ประกอบการในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษสื่อสารกับนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติ ผลการวิจัยในประเด็นดังกล่าวแสดงให้เห็นถึงความท้าทายของผู้ประกอบการท้องถิ่นในประเด็นของการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นในเรื่องของการสื่อสาร หรือการประชาสัมพันธ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว นอกจากนี้ผลการศึกษาความต้องการ พบว่า ผู้ประกอบการไม่ได้ต้องการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษแบบเดิม เนื่อง การอบรมในระยะเวลา 2-3 วัน แต่ต้องการเรียนรู้แบบประยุกต์ โดยการใช้เทคโนโลยีมาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการเรียนรู้จะทำให้สามารถสร้างองค์ความรู้ได้ด้วยตนเองและเกิดการเรียนรู้อย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ (Keywords): ภาษาอังกฤษ; การท่องเที่ยวโดยชุมชน; ผู้ประกอบการท่องถิ่น

Introduction

It is argued that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a form of alternative tourism that allocates the benefits of the tourism business to the underprivileged members of the community (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016). As part of its goal to promote local tourism for sustainable development, CBT has engaged a wide range of interested parties, businesses, and community people (Nomnian et al., 2020).

Phetchabun is one of a number of second-tier provinces in Thailand, each of which offers a unique experience thanks to its wide range of tourist offerings and notable landmarks. There are numerous CBT in the province of Phetchabun. (Phetchabun Tourism and Sports, 2022). In the Phetchabun Tourism and Sports development plan, a number of CBT areas are being prepared to become tourism attractions, particularly in the Nam Nao district. Furthermore, several Nam Nao homestays fulfilled home lodge standards and is a growing service industry among international visitors.

However, little research has examined the extent to which English has a role in CBT, which has been promoted since the 1990s, notably in Phetchabun. However, Thailand rates low on existing indices of English competence, and the majority of foreign visitors cannot communicate in Thai or other local languages (Kaur et al., 2016). According to Nomnian et al. (2020), the main issues of local communities' perceived English needs for tourism purposes in Thailand are the limitations of

communication between host and guests, the need for English communication among tour guide assistant communities, and the sociocultural and linguistic identities of language users. English competence is a crucial variable that poses a challenge for English users who use the language in a distinct context and communicative style to acquire cultural knowledge in order to fulfill communication goals and comprehend their counterparts, particularly in ASEAN (Phumpho and Nomnian, 2019). Consequently, tourism businesses should be most concerned with English language development, particularly in CBT contexts.

In this study, an ethnographically-informed approach was used to assist rural community members in discovering the barriers and identifying the challenges of English used in CBT by local entrepreneurs in order to investigate the most effective means to develop their English language skills based on a needs analysis for English for Specific Purposes. In addition, this research contributes to a dissertation named "a foresight study of English for community-based tourism in Phetchabun province." which plans to do some forward-thinking English language development with attention toward community-based tourism in Phetchabun province. This article, however, discusses the difficulties encountered by local business owners, which can serve as key data in developing an English for CBT business owners in Phetchabun, Thailand, as a foresight model. In addition, the findings of this study will serve as the means and guidelines for the English language development of CBT entrepreneurs based on the authentic needs of stakeholders and respond to the needs of the target group, as well as being applicable to a tourism strategic plan in English for community-based tourism for the tourism organization concerned with sustainable development.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the barriers and identify challenges of the English language used by CBT entrepreneurs in Phetchabun, Thailand.

Research Methods

Research Design

An ethnographically-informed study was employed in this study to collect data. The researcher was a key instrument along with using other methods which consisted of interviews, observation, and focus group discussion.

Participants

The thirty-five participants in this study were community-based tourism stakeholders in the Nam Nao district. They were the vice governor, the officers of the Phetchabun Ministry of Tourism and Sport, the chief of SAO in Nam Nao District, the Head of the homestay and CBT groups, and Homestay entrepreneurs who were selected by purposive sampling.

Research Instruments

Confirming to ethnographic study, several research instruments were employed in this study, namely the researcher, interviews, focus group discussion, and field notes.

Regarding interview questions and focus group discussion, the researcher mainly points out the barriers and challenges of the English language in order to be used by CBT entrepreneurs. The examples of the interview questions are as follows:

- In your opinion, is English important in tourism in your community? How?
- How often do you communicate with international visitors? What information that you provide to them?
- Do you have problems communicating with foreigners? If you have a problem, what strategy do you use and how do you overcome this situation?
- Do you think what are the barriers when you have to communicate with a foreigner?
- Would you like to improve your English skills? And do you think what skills are the most important in tourism contexts in your community?
- What contents do you need to improve? And what kind of English learning materials would you like?
- In the COVID-19 situation, do you think how English for tourism should be used?
- In post COVID-19 situation, do you think how English for tourism should be used?

Data Collection

To achieve an understanding of the villagers, CBT entrepreneurs, and stakeholders' general information about CBT, functions, barriers, problems, and necessities of English for homestay tourism, the researcher visited the research site over a period of roughly two months; two times per month. In this phase, field notes, interviews, and observations were used for data collection.

First, in July 2021, the researcher requested in-depth interviews with CBT stakeholders who are CBT policymakers and supporters at the provincial and district levels (The Vice Governor, the officers of Phetchabun Ministry of Tourism and Sport, and the Chief of SAO in Nam Nao District) in order to investigate the general contexts of tourism in Phetchabun province and the CBT development plan.

The researcher then visited the research site to collect field notes by creating rapport with locals, being familiar with the area and situation on the ground, examining the general tourism settings in the town, and interviewing CBT entrepreneurs. These members of the community owned restaurants, homestays, and souvenir shops. The interview questions focused on the functions, obstacles, issues, and requirements of English for CBT entrepreneurs. The researcher first visited the site in August 2021 and will continue to do so around two to three times per week until April 2022.

In addition, the researcher occasionally undertook unscheduled visits, depending on the situation and the particular event at which attendance was required for data collection. Nonetheless, the study faces certain obstacles. As the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, whenever there was a COVID-19 violation in the community, the researcher had to stop visiting the site until the situation was resolved, thereby affecting the duration of data collection and necessitating telephone interviews with key informants. In addition to staying on-site, the researcher joined their LINE application discussion group to study their CBT management practices on an internet platform during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Data Analysis

All data will be analyzed by using content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Research Results

According to field notes, interviews, and focus group discussions, the findings indicate that challenges and hurdles to English used by Thai people continue to be the primary concern, particularly in a rural community that has been promoting community-based tourism. As evidenced by the interviews and focus groups, the ability of CBT entrepreneurs to communicate with international tourists depends heavily on their level of background knowledge and schooling in the English language. The majority of them did not study English at university, and some of them had only

elementary school educations. In terms of public relations, sharing information about tourist sites, lodging, and the local cuisine (all of which can provide a welcome boost to the local economy), etc., these are all restrictions and constraints that contribute to disadvantages. They also lack the ability to converse smoothly because English was not a common language in their daily lives.

Extract 1

“My maid, did not study English before, thus, she cannot speak”
(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

Extract 2

“Most foreign tourists came with Thai wives or came with a tour guide. We seldom used English.”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

Extract 3

“The problem is skills, we can read but we cannot understand when we listen English language. I used to attend an English training course but when listened to the foreigners I did not understand everything they said (laugh). There were foreigners who came to my homestay they saw a dragon fruit they said “Oh..dragon!! and they said something to me but I did not understand. Actually, they would like to buy a dragon fruit but I could not speak so I gave them for free! (laugh).”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

Extract 4

“I cannot listen to foreigners comprehensively. Sometimes I can use only words to communicate with them.”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

Extract 5

“I have a problem but I try to practice speaking and body language so we can communicate.”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, in-depth interview)

Extract 6

“Our barrier is language knowledge background, we have to improve English language skills because we have to use it.”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, in-depth interview)

Since English was used mostly with foreign tourists in the Nam Nao Sub-District, the above-mentioned hurdles may have contributed to difficulties in communicating in English. Entrepreneurs trained in CBT can only use short, uncomplicated language in English. But they get around this by resorting to Google Translate.

Extract 7

“If Ajarn asked do we have problems in communication with foreigners? I thought it has to be, if there were international visitors we have to communicate with them but we could not speak long sentences, we could speak only words. However, I we really do not understand we would google translate. “

(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

Extract 8

“I thought that English is necessary but I could not use it fluently. If I did not understand I would google translate.”

(Homestay entrepreneurs, focus group discussion)

According with the results, it is evident that CBT entrepreneurs' limited English proficiency is the primary obstacle to effective communication with foreign guests. They are unable to follow lengthy conversations because they cannot understand spoken English. In any case, they get around this by using Google Translate.

As a result, the need to communicate effectively in English is a significant barrier to entry for CBT businesses in the local market who frequently interact with tourists from other countries. The issue of creating effective English language learning materials for the CBT setting falls squarely on the shoulders of English language teachers.

Research Discussion

Nam Nao has become a leader in geotourism and natural tourism in the province of Phetchabun as a result of its diverse natural resources. In all subdistricts, a number of tourism attractions, including Nam Nao Canyon, waterfalls, Archosaur Footprints Cliff, and Loei Dun Potholes, have been investigated and developed for

Thai and international tourists. The group of entrepreneurs is capable of developing tourism attractions in the neighborhood and is eager to enhance their English abilities in preparation for future interactions with foreign visitors.

The study on the barriers and challenges of the English language used by CBT entrepreneurs in Thailand reveals intriguing findings that problems and barriers to English used by Thai people continue to be the primary issue, particularly in a rural community that has been promoting community-based tourism. Prior knowledge and education in English language acquisition are key considerations for CBT businesses to consider when communicating with overseas tourists, according to interviews and focus group discussions. The majority of them graduated with a degree in a discipline apart from English, and several of them only learned English in elementary school. This includes public relations, providing information about tourist sites, accommodations, and their traditional food, which can generate more cash for the local population.

In addition, they rarely used English for conversation in their daily lives, therefore they cannot speak smoothly. The results are consistent with the findings of Thongsai and Sitipragan (2019), who investigated the difficulties and potential solutions that local tourism entrepreneurs in Khanom district, Nakhon Si Thammarat province faced when communicating in English. There is a serious issue with tourists' ability to understand and speak English in the area.

Research Suggestions

Recommendation for applying the research results

This research has the potential to broaden the horizons of English for tourism with respect to CBT in Thailand and serve as a guide for future strategic planning in the industry following COVID-19 in this regard, specifically for community-based tourism organizations concerned with sustainable development.

Recommendation for further research

The findings of this study are limited to the Nam Nao district; further investigation into the tourism industry in other parts of Phetchabun province is recommended.

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