

# The Requirement of English Communication Skills of the Hotel Receptionists at Kamphaeng Phet Province

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## Abstract

The research was conducted to investigate problems and requirement of English communication skills employed by the hotel front office at Kamphaeng Phet Province. The quantitative research was manipulated for data collection to thirteen purposive samples from four hotels in Kamphaeng Phet downtown. The research instrument was a rating-scale and open-ended questionnaire. It was divided into three sections: The participant's demographic, English proficiency and skill requirement, and open-ended questions. It was found that the hotel receptionists in Kamphaeng Phet mostly are women, aged between 20-25 years, graduated bachelor's degree and gain experiences in the hotel 1 – 5 years. The hotel receptionists' lowest abilities were listening to foreigner English accents (Mean 2.77), writing a daily report and business letters in English (Mean 2.85). However, they rated speaking skill (69.24%) and listening skill (30.76%) as the most requirement of English in the workplace. Furthermore, they found themselves obstacle to reading comprehension in a tourist brochure and emails in English. At the open-ended questionnaire, the participants suggested English skill improvements, for instance, frequently made connection with foreigners (61.53%), writing messages in English (69.24%). Based on the research recommendation, a future study should be in realizing of a questionnaire preparation and an interview for qualitative data.

**Keywords:** The Requirement of English, Communication Skills, Hotel Receptionists at Kamphaeng Phet Province

## Introduction

Thailand has been one of the most tourist attraction ranks for international visitors of Asia and the Pacific in 2018 – 2019 (UNWTO, 2019). The amazing of Thailand is fascinated by tourists in domestic and from around the world especially into the iconic of culture, mouth-watering food, landscape for breathtaking and highly premium resort and accommodation. Accordingly, the current increase in demand for international tourism has made English language a mean of communication when dealing with international tourists.

Due to the hotels and resorts in Thailand as well as the wider ranges of tourism industry have been increasing after the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease in 2019 to 2021, a well-qualified staff in a hotel is much more required. One of the increasing needs in the hospitality is the hotel staff' proficiency in English communication. Whereas several hotels and resorts have been increased in Thailand with more required of staff as mentioned, the English communication skills should be provided for the hotel staff including the other qualification and ability. Therefore, an exploration of how the hotel staff use English to communicate with their guests should be conducted.

Kamphaeng Phet is an old town city with the tourist destination to culture and historical sightseeing, eco-tourism as well as a commercial center connected hotels, shopping malls, nightclubs, and local finest restaurants. The businesses vary in terms of the clientele that they target, for instance, hotels and resorts. The international tourists highly recommend Navarat Heritage Hotel, La Riva Boutique Hotel, P. Paradise Hotel, Chakungrao Riverview Hotel, FIG Boutique Hotel with fantastic location and responsive friendly staff (Agoda, 2023; Booking, 2023). Nevertheless, the hotels were referred that the staff lack confidence to speak English.

### **The Importance of English language for Tourism Industry**

Tourism industry is a major contributor to the Thailand's economy. In 2020, the tourism industry contributed around 883 billion Thai baht to Thailand's GDP (Statista Research Department, 2023). The staff in the hospitality industry needs to communicate effectively in English for international dealings. The findings of several studies indicate that the hotel industry cannot achieve complete success when its staffs lack of language skills, particularly English language (Kanyakorn et al., 2021). The level of English proficiency required for each position in hotel industry depends on the standards of the hotels. However, some challenges with staffs in English communication emerge, including patterns of misunderstanding and stress, difficulty in words pronunciation, guessing unfamiliar words due to the limitation of vocabulary, and a lack of grammar knowledge in writing (Firharmawan et al., 2019).

### **Needs Analysis**

Numerous scholars have deliberated on the idea of "needs analysis" in different ways. Nunan (1988) provides the term of "need" within the field of language learning and teaching as "a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study". Robinson (1991) suggests that the essentiality of a needs analysis is focused only on target or end-of-course requirements to aim to the initial needs of students.

Robinson (2001) defines the purposes of needs analysis is to identify the necessary skills that a learner must possess for the effective performance of specific roles and to serves to determine whether students require additional language training and to gather

information about the challenges individuals encounter when acquiring proficiency in the English language.

In Nutshell, a needs analysis is a method used for collecting in-depth data regarding the requirements of learners. This tool is advantageous for pointing a learner's current situation and preferences and a critical factor that is beneficial in creating courses that suits for different learners.

### **English language skills**

Listening skill refers to the process of receiving, constructing meaning and responding to spoken language (Kulam, 2016). To enhance this skill, individuals can take simple steps such as listening to music and watching movies to expose themselves to various accents and new vocabulary (Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995).

Speaking Skill refers to the use of language to communicate by using verbal and nonverbal symbols in different contexts that can be improved through learning language and also known as a productive skill which the main point is to communicate orally (Tambunan, 2018).

Reading is one of the language skills which is important to be learned and mastered by individual. It can be defined reading skill as a thinking and listening in complex process which is used by readers to comprehend writer's purposes (Tambunan, 2018).

Writing Skill is specific abilities which help writers to convey their thoughts in a meaningful form and mentally interact with the message. Moreover, writing is the representation of the language in textual meaning medium thoughts (Tambunan, 2018).

### **Relevant research**

Chamnankit (2015) studied English language competence of 50 receptionists in boutique hotels within the Sukhumvit area. The results indicated that receptionists were at a moderate level of English communication ability. Verbal communication emerged as the most crucial skill for their job, while writing ranked as the least significant. Consequently, enhancing speaking proficiency was the top priority for receptionists to ensure effective communication with their customers.

Firharmawan and Andika (2019) examined the English language requirements and challenges within the context of the hospitality industry staffs at Meotel Hotel Kebumen. The results demonstrated that the most essential language skills were speaking, listening, reading, and writing respectively. The three most prevalent language applications were providing services, conveying information, and offering assistance. Common English language difficulties encountered by participants' guessing unfamiliar words due to a limitation of vocabulary, lack of proficiency in grammar, difficulty in maintaining conversation, and a lack of confidence.

Sermsook, Nakplad and Jantawong (2021) investigated the challenges and requirements of tourism staff in utilizing the English language in their workplace and explored their desires for enhancing their English proficiency for professional purposes. The results revealed that the hotel staff encountered difficulties when using English in their workplace. They encountered the most trouble with English writing, particularly when composing letters or emails in English. The participants expressed a high level of necessity for each aspect of English language skills, with a particular emphasis on English speaking. The hotel staff emphasized the importance of using English to welcome, greet, and bid farewell to foreign guests. The hotel staff's overall desire was to improve their English language skills to achieve a high level. They expressed a strong need for improvements in all aspects of English, with a particular focus on English listening skills.

Namtapi (2022) studied the essential requirements, deficiencies, and desires of tourism professionals in Ayutthaya who utilize the English language in their workplaces. The results indicated that the fundamental needs of the participants predominantly revolved communicative tasks, such as greeting, giving directions, providing information, and offering assistance. Their deficiencies primarily pertained to listening and speaking skills, including challenges in comprehending native English accents, keeping up with the rapid pace of tourists' speech, having a limited vocabulary for meaningful conversation, and lacking grammatical knowledge necessary for maintaining a conversation.

Pham (2023) studied the ways hotel receptionists use their positions and the obstacles they experience on the job. The findings of the study revealed that hotel receptionists used all four English skills in their workplace, but speaking and listening are significantly important. Moreover, hotel receptionists needed support with these abilities, especially when interacting with non-native visitors. The implications of these findings suggested that educators and curriculum designers should include various non-native English accents into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs especially in Asian context.

### **Research objective**

To investigate the problems and a requirement of English communication skills employed by the hotel receptionists at Kamphaeng Phet Province.

## Methodology

A quantitative research method and data collection were primarily focused on hotel receptionists in Kamphaeng Phet Province. The participants of this study were thirteen hotel staff who were working in a front desk office for the two to three stars hotels located in the downtown of Kamphaeng Phet City. The collecting data was through a hand-in questionnaire, a checklist items and series of open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into three sections following to Chamnankit (2016) as follows:

### **Section 1** – The participant's general information

This section introduces the participant's demographic, age, gender, education, and working experience.

### **Section 2** – The participant's English ability and requirement

This section is to investigate the participant's English ability self-evaluated based on their problems and needs while working in the hotel. All the participants were asked to respond to a series of questions and rated their English skills using a Likert Scale.

### **Section 3** – Open-ended questions

This section is to explore an interesting suggestion from the front office staff in regarding to improving their English skills. This part of the questionnaire was divided into two parts for the problems and the solutions. Participants were asked to choose from a total of four answers with four solutions and subsequently asked to elaborate on their answer choices.

To check the validity of the questionnaires, the draft version was modified and revised following the expert, Dr.Wichura Winaitham.

### **Data Collection**

The subjects of this research were thirteen hotel receptionists who were working hotels in Kamphaeng Phet in 2022. The hotels include Chakungrao Riverview Hotel, Navarat Heritage Hotel, Green Park Hotel and Fig Boutique Hotel. The research instrument was a set of questionnaires comprised which written in Thai in order to minimize ambiguity and misinterpretation. The questionnaire comprised of 30 items which adapted from Pandao (2016). There are three part, namely: a check list, a five-rating scale, and an open-ended.

### **Data Analysis**

After gathering the questionnaires, the collected data was then analyzed by the Microsoft Excel. The data were analyzed and explained through in the form of percentage, frequencies.

**Table 1** Level of Listening Ability

Listening ability	5	4	3	2	1	Number	Mean
1. Listening to and understanding what customers want	1	4	7	1	0	13	3.38
2. Listening to customers' comments/advice	1	4	7	1	0	13	3.38
3. Listening to conversations by phone	1	3	5	4	0	13	3.08
4. Listening to idiomatic English	0	4	4	3	2	13	2.77
5. Listening to the accent of foreigners in the European zone	1	3	3	3	3	13	2.69

Table 1 above reveals that the top two skills of the staff were listening to and understanding what customers want and listening to customers' comment/advice. The mean scores show that the receptionists have a mean of 3.38. However, it was indicated that the receptionists have a mean of 3.08 in listening to conversations by phone. The lowest skills for listening were listening to idiomatic English with the mean 2.77 and listening to the accent of foreigners in the European zone with the mean 2.69.

**Table 2** Level of Speaking ability

Speaking ability	5	4	3	2	1	Number	Mean
1. Welcoming and greeting	3	6	3	1	0	13	3.85
2. Inquire about booking and customer decision making.	3	4	5	1	0	13	3.69
3. Explain details of rooms and facilities	2	4	5	2	0	13	3.46
4. Pronounce English correctly, clearly and understandable.	1	4	2	6	0	13	3.00
5. Use polite sentences/idioms to communicate with customers	1	6	1	5	0	13	3.23

Table 2 shows that welcoming and greeting had the highest mean score of 3.85 but inquire about booking and customer decision making revealed the mean of 3.69. Next, explain details of rooms and facilities as well as use polite sentences/idioms to communicate with customers indicated the mean score of 3.46 and 3.23, respectively. The lowest skills for speaking was pronounce English correctly, clearly and understandable with the mean of 3.00.

**Table 3** Level of Reading ability

Reading ability	5	4	3	2	1	Number	Mean
1. Reading customers' travel documents	4	1	7	0	1	13	3.54
2. Reading information from the internet	4	1	7	0	1	13	3.54
3. Reading e-mails about your booking.	4	2	6	1	0	13	3.69
4. Reading minutes of meeting	4	1	4	4	0	13	3.38
5. Reading brochures or tourism magazines and journals	3	2	4	3	1	13	3.23

Table 3 indicates the highest required level of reading skills by the hotel. Reading booking emails has an average score of 3.69. Similarly, the tasks of reading customers' travel documents and extracting information from the internet both have an average mean score of 3.54. Reading meeting minutes falls slightly lower at 3.38. Lastly, the lowest required skill is reading brochures, tourism magazines, and journals, with an average score of 3.23.

**Table 4** Level of Writing ability

Writing ability	5	4	3	2	1	Number	Mean
1. Writing correspondence with customers in the correct format	2	0	6	4	1	13	2.85
2. Writing daily reports	2	1	5	3	2	13	2.85
3. Writing messages for customers	2	2	5	2	2	13	3.00
4. Writing memos	3	2	3	4	1	13	3.15
5. Writing business letters in appropriate formats	3	0	4	4	2	13	2.85

In Table 4, it is demonstrated that the staff's strongest writing skill is composing memos, with a rating of 3.15. However, crafting customer messages received a slightly lower score of 3.00. Engaging in telephone conversations and writing memos garnered a mean score of 3.12, but it was noted that a higher rating of 3.96 was required for this task. Conversely, the skills rated the lowest by the staff were composing customer correspondence in the correct format, preparing daily reports, and writing business letters in appropriate formats, all of which received an identical rating of 2.85.

**Table 5** The skills needed the most improvement

Skill	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Listening skill	4	30.76	2
2. Speaking skill	9	69.24	1
3. Reading skill	0	0	3
4. Writing skill	0	0	3
Total	13	100	

According to Table 5, the data reveals that the speaking skills of 9 out of 13 participants, accounting for 69.24%, require the most improvement. Following this, the listening skills of 4 participants, representing 30.76% of the total, were identified as the next area for development. In contrast, both reading and writing skills did not require immediate attention, as 0% or no people were found to be in need of improvement in these areas.

On the questionnaires, the candidates were asked a series of questions. These questions are presented in different tables as can be seen below.

problems	valid	receptionist	percent
“I am not sure of proper pronunciation”	yes	7	53.84
	no	6	46.16
“I have a hard time listening to Indian accents”	Yes	8	61.53
	No	5	38.47
“Spelling long and specific words in messages”	Yes	5	38.47
	No	8	61.53
“It takes a long time to read a long e-mail from a customer or client”	Yes	3	23.07
	No	10	76.93

**Table 6.** English skill problem statements of candidates

Table 6 shows that 7 respondents out of 13 said that they were not sure of proper pronunciation of words and the 6 receptionists said that they can pronounce them, equating to a percentage of 46.16. Respondents 61.53% have a hard time understanding Indian accents, with this accounting for 8 people; meanwhile, another 5 people are able to understand, which accounts for 38.47%. Reading problem, 38.47% or 5 participants out of 13 said that they find it difficult to spell specific words. However, the other 8 people, which accounts for 61.53%, don't find it hard.

## Conclusion

According to the results of the study, the hotel receptionists in Kamphaeng Phet encounter problems with all four English skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Firstly, the result from speaking ability section revealed that the main problem is incorrect pronunciation in English words due to a lack of awareness in using appropriate pronunciation. Secondly, the findings of listening ability section showed that understanding foreigner accent from European areas is the most difficult. Participants also reported difficulty in understanding Indian accents. In the reading ability section, the major problem is reading brochures, tourism magazines, journals, as well as comprehending long emails from customers or clients. Lastly, in writing section, it was found that all receptionists face difficulties in writing correspondence with customers, daily reports, and business letters in the appropriate format. Although the current survey does not represent all hospitality staffs in Kamphaeng Phet, it is believed that the sampling might give representation of hospitality staffs working around Kamphaeng Phet. This study also expects to be able to provide guideline for developing hotel staff's English language ability and there will be a link and matched between teaching and learning demands in the related jobs of English program students.

## Discussion

This study revealed that hotel receptionists in Kamphaeng Phet area have difficulty in using English at work. These problems were found in every skills of English language, with the most significant issues arising in the area of English speaking skills. Receptionists reported the problems of using polite sentences and idioms to communicate with foreigners. This finding contrasts with Sermsook et al., (2021) whose research reported that the most serious problem for receptionists was English writing, particularly when composing letters or emails in English. Conversely the findings of this study align with Namtapi (2022), who reported that speaking and listening skills are major challenges for receptionists due to limitation of vocabulary for meaningful conversations and a lack of grammatical knowledge necessary for maintaining a conversation. In aspect of English listening ability, the significant problem for hotel receptionists is understanding the English accents of European visitors. This result is different from Pham (2023), who reported that receptionists had difficulties in communication with non-native English speakers and also suggested that English learning curriculum should include non-native English accents in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs and also in textbook materials. Furthermore, the findings in this study support Namtapi (2022) who reported that one of the most serious problems was listening skills because receptionists attempted to comprehend native-English accents. Regarding reading skills, it was found that receptionists faced the

problem when reading brochures, tourism magazines, and journals. They also mentioned taking a long time to read long emails from customers or clients. Lastly, writing skills also presented problems, especially when writing correspondence with customers, daily reports, and business letters in the correct format.

Based on the results, most hotel receptionists in Kamphaeng Phet area need to improve their speaking skills, as this is a crucial skill for communication with people from various countries and nationalities. The findings also indicated a high level of need for improving listening skills, aligning with Sermsook et al., (2021) who explored the problems and requirements of tourism staff in utilizing the English language in their workplace and their desire to enhance their English proficiency for professional purposes. The results revealed that the hotel staff expressed a strong need to improve all aspects of English, with a particular focus on listening skills. Reading and writing skills were rated in this study, as the receptionists considered proficiency in listening and speaking skills to be the most important skills for their positions while moderate level of reading and writing abilities were sufficient. The findings in this section related to Chamnankit (2015) who reported that writing skill was ranked as the least significant for receptionists in Sukhumvit area.

#### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are made for future research. A pilot study should be done prior to the actual distribution of the questionnaire. By conducting a pilot study, researchers can obtain a better idea of what data is being sought. If the pilot study reveals unsatisfactory findings, the questionnaire can be revised in order to get the optimum results. Also, there should be qualitative data, which means interviewing. This can yield greater insight, such as what problems people face. By having the qualitative interview data, the researchers can triangulate the findings to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research. Therefore, the researchers also have a chance to know what can be done to help this group of participants. To collect better data about the sample group, the clarity of the questionnaire should be considered. That means questions should be clarified and go straight to the point. Last but not least, the sample size should be added up in order to increase generalizability and transferability of the findings.

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