

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Many Thai people who work for or deal with multinational companies have the same problem in applying their English knowledge gained from school and university to communicate with their foreign coworkers. Although these people had studied English language for many years, they still cannot communicate well when they have to use English in the real workplace which needs a lot of interacting skills. The communication problem, therefore, is a big obstacle for people in multinational companies to work together, and it creates a big gap of information acknowledgement. To solve this problem, many companies have arranged in-house English training courses for their employees in order to improve English skills needed for their jobs. Michelin Siam Co., Ltd (Laem Chabang) is one of the companies in this group using in-house English training as a key tool to develop employees' English competency.

Established in 1988, Michelin Siam Co., Ltd (Laem Chabang) is a tyre manufacturing company serving more than 80 different dimensions of its products for passenger cars and light trucks. Michelin, which originated in France, has currently expanded the business to 17 countries worldwide. With its own technology, Michelin has developed its principle called Michelin Manufacturing Way (MMW) which is transmitted throughout Michelin companies all over the world. Therefore, many experts, regardless of their nationality, are rotated to work, share know-how, and be advisors right through all companies in the Michelin Group. That's why English proficiency is necessary for employees.

Currently, Michelin Siam Co., Ltd (Laem Chabang) has 1,826 employees. Approximately 85% of the employees are operators who graduated from high school or vocational college, while the rest are supervisors getting Bachelor's or Master's degree. Supervisors are the group of people who have a high frequency to

communicate with foreign colleagues and bosses according to the chain of command in the organization. There are 12 foreign employees from different countries including France, Scotland, Italy, Canada, Britain, and the Philippines. Most of them are at management level. Besides, many foreign employees from other Michelin plants always visit or work for a short term at the company for various purposes such as meetings, auditing, training, machine installation, new project implementation, etc. Therefore, these foreign workers are the center of knowledge and information.

The nature and frequency of English communication in each department depends on job characteristics. Employees in production, product development, and quality guarantee departments frequently use English, both spoken and written, with their foreign bosses and technical experts with many technical terms. On the other hand, employees in production support departments like personnel, environment and safety, and finance and accounting use English in a different way. These employees sometimes communicate in English when they have to attend a cross functional meeting or handle a special project together with foreign managers. Supply chain employees occasionally communicate with foreign coworkers across the region via phone. However, most English communication in support departments is in written form such as reports and e-mails.

However, some employees cannot communicate effectively in English. Furthermore, the different and unfamiliar accents of foreign workers who are not native speakers also causes problems in conversations which leads to communication errors. As a result, both Thai and foreign employees do not get correct information and cannot fully support their team to achieve their goals because they do not clearly understand data as well as the direction of each other. In addition, communication errors can cause many mistakes forcing workers to spend more time to resolve them.

The training section in the personnel department is responsible for holding the in-house English training courses which aim at improving English skills of employees in order to minimize communication errors. Besides, a minor purpose of the courses is to get some employees ready for training or working abroad as a part of career path development. The researcher also interviewed the training manager and found that

over the past few years that the training section has arranged the in-house English training courses, there has been no evaluation of the program performed. She agrees with the researcher in conducting this research in order to see both strong and weak points of the courses. Therefore, the training section could use the information obtained to develop courses to suit the needs of both company and trainees in the future.

The manager of each department is responsible for selecting trainees by quota system. The qualified trainees are employees who have a high frequency in dealing with foreigners, who are scheduled to go abroad, or whose English competence is not sufficient to cope with their job requirements.

There are 91 trainees from various departments in the organization attending the courses. Regardless of the department they are working for, the trainees are classified by a placement test into five levels in relation to their current knowledge ranging from beginner to pre-intermediate. There are a total of eight groups in which the number of trainees ranges from nine to 13 people as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Training Course Level and Trainee Classification

Level	Textbooks	No. of Trainees
Level 1: Beginner	American Headway (Starter)	One group of nine
Level 2: Low Elementary	New Headway (Elementary)	Two groups of nine
Level 3: Elementary	International Express (Pre-inter)	Two groups of 13
Level 4: Upper Elementary	Business Focus	Two groups of 13
Level 5: Pre-intermediate	Market Leader (Pre-inter)	One group of 12

The trainers are native speakers from a private language institute, and they are responsible for teaching material selection with the company's approval. The 60-hour

training courses are conducted from March to November with a break in June and July. To motivate trainees, the courses are arranged during working time two days per week. At the end of the courses, the trainees will be evaluated by post-test which is in the form of multiple choices and cloze test.

This research focuses on the in-house English training evaluation by the trainees. The trainees will be asked about the trainee selection method, the consistency between the course content and their job requirements, textbooks and teaching materials, trainers, and classroom activities. Some suggestions will also be sought in order to improve the training courses, which will be beneficial to both Thai and foreign employees.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to answer the following questions.

1.2.1 To what degree are the trainees satisfied with in-house English training courses?

1.2.2 What are the strong points and weak points of in-house English training courses according to the trainees' point of view?

1.2.3 What do the trainees suggest to improve or develop the effective in-house English training courses in the future?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 Main Objective

To evaluate the in-house English training courses from the trainees' point of view.

1.3.2 Sub-objectives

1. To find out the degree of trainees' satisfaction with the trainee selection method, the consistency between the course content and their job requirements, textbooks and teaching materials, trainers, and classroom activities.

2. To indicate strong points and weak points of in-house English training courses; and

3. To obtain suggestions for improving in-house English training courses in the future.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- Degree of satisfaction refers to trainees' attitudes or feelings towards the following components of satisfaction.

- The trainee selection method
- The consistency between the course content and job requirements
- Textbooks and teaching materials
- Trainers
- Classroom activities

These components are measured by a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire:

1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Undecided 4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree

- Trainees refer to employees of Michelin Siam Co., Ltd. (Laem Chabang) who attended in-house English training courses in 2007.

- Textbooks refer to the books used in the in-house English training courses in 2007: American Headway (Starter), New Headway (Elementary), International Express (Pre-inter), Business Focus, and Market Leader (Pre-inter).

- Trainers refer to the English teachers from a private English language institute who taught the in-house English training courses in 2007.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the employees who attended the in-house English training courses from level 1-5 (Beginner, Low Elementary, Elementary, Upper Elementary, and Pre-intermediate), in which general English is taught. Only the employees who took the courses in 2007 will be the subjects of this study, so that they can provide relevant data that is still fresh in their mind. The subjects will be

employees from all departments in the company except those who are in the IT department because it had too few employees to get quota for training.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since the company training budget could be spent more effectively if the training courses provide the employees with practical knowledge and skills needed in the workplace, the report of this study will be forwarded to the training manager in the personnel department. Therefore, it can be useful information for developing in-house English training courses in the future. Besides, the findings of this study can provide useful information for people who are interested in in-house English training courses in companies.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study in this paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction including background, problem statement, objectives, term definitions, scope, significance, and organization. Literature review and methodology will be presented in the second and third chapters respectively. The fourth chapter provides the results. The final chapter gives a conclusion, discussions, and recommendations.