

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Thai Airways International PCL. conducts its business in the airline industry. The company's business areas include such departments as Corporate Planning & Information Technology Services, Operation, Accounting and Finance, Marketing and Commerce, Special Project, Corporate Secretariat, Corporate Support, Office of the Internal Audit, Cargo & Mail Commercial, Catering, Ground Customer Services, Ground Support Equipment Services, and Technical department. In an airline industry, the business nature requires that staff in all areas engage in communication using English. Each business activity presents different communication aspects, namely, communication skills, channels, content, audiences, etc., depending on the nature of each situation.

Since English communication is unavoidable and very important in order to work effectively in the airline business, English proficiency of employees is taken into account by Thai Airways' management. In the recruitment, several English tests are parts of the selection process of every business area, or otherwise, English tests can be waived in the case that the candidates submit satisfactory TOEIC results. Minimum score requirements are varied according to each department's policy, ranging from 450 to 650. In customer-contact departments such as ground and air customer service, especially, it is mandatory that candidates must exhibit acceptable English oral proficiency in an interview in addition to passing written tests.

For the IT department, its responsibilities include planning, designing, and delivering business solutions and enhancements for Thai Airways , as well as maintaining and administering IT infrastructure to function effectively with minimum interruption. The IT department arranges responsibilities into two primary areas, business application service and infrastructure service. People working in the IT field always got involved with English communication since English is the primary language used in the accumulation of IT knowledge.

From the above reasons, Thai Airways places much importance on consistent development of English skills for staff in IT and other departments. The company takes this issue into account and has set up a division directly responsible for staff language training, that is, the Language and Culture Institute. The division is in charge of coordinating and arranging language training courses for Thai Airways' staff. Currently, there are English courses that are both work-specific and generic. The specific English trainings have been offered to flight operation and ground customer service areas while general trainings, such as, reading comprehension, basic writing, and basic conversation, etc., are offered to staff in all other departments.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Consistent improvement of language training quality has always been one of the primary missions of the language institute. Courses are aimed to satisfy learners from all areas and contribute benefits to Thai Airways. One of the initiatives the institute is developing to improve training quality is to take learners' needs, wants, and problems in using English into account. With the awareness of learners' needs, wants, and problems, the training administrators will have clear guideline for designing reasonable and acceptable language courses , as well as a clear vision of what learners' potential can be exploited.

From the above mentioned reasons, the institute has initiated a project that will collect such information from learners in different departments of Thai Airways. For the IT department, this study is conducted as a part of the whole project to explore needs and problems in English communication at work, as well as the learners' wants regarding English training, particularly for the staff members of the IT department. The study aims at answering the following questions;

1. To what extent are there needs of English communication at work for the IT staff of Thai Airways?
2. To what extent are there problems of English communication at work for the IT staff of Thai Airways?
3. To what extent do Thai Airways' IT staff have wants English training?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Subjects included 30 staff members from a total of 300 staff of Thai Airways' IT department. The extent of the subjects' needs and problems to communicate in English in the working context, as well as the subjects' wants regarding English training, will be explored.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- a. **Needs** refers to the aspects of English communication at work, e.g., skills, channels, and discourse types in which the IT staff need to function effectively.
- b. **Problems** refers to the difficulties in using English to communicate on the job.
- c. **Wants** refers to the preference of IT staff regarding English training provided by Thai Airways.
- d. **IT** refers to information technology.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Findings from this study can be useful for both improving English training and the recruitment process of Thai Airways. The findings could be a useful guideline for the recruitment administrators on what English skills and contexts are relevant in selecting and testing the candidates for the IT department. The findings will also be useful for the improvement of the company's training program. Knowing the needs and problems to communicate in English will raise the awareness of how learners need English skills at work. Such awareness will shed some light on how to create the appropriate training courses and also how to exploit the potential of the learners.