

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVE

This study aims to explore the extents of needs and problems of using English for communication on the job for the staff of the IT department of Thai Airways. An interview was conducted as a pilot for a questionnaire design. The questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data from the subjects.

THE SUBJECTS

The subjects of the study were 30 staff members of the IT department of Thai Airways International PCL.

THE INSTRUMENT

A questionnaire was designated to be the study's instrument. There were three main parts in this questionnaire, i.e., background information, opinions on needs, problems, and wants regarding using English for communication on the job. The contents consisted of multiple-answer questions and five-point Likert type scale items.

THE FINDINGS ARE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWINGS:

Table 8 and Table 9 on page 22-25 exhibit the comparison of mean scores of all activities. In Table 8, items are ranked by need mean scores, meanwhile, in Table 9, items are ranked by problem mean scores. For both Table 8 and Table 9, the abbreviations in column "ref. no." are used as references to the corresponding skill items in Table 3 to Table 6. Meanings of abbreviation are that SP. stands for speaking, LS. for listening, RD. for reading, and WR. for writing. The associated numbers refer to the corresponding items. For examples, SP.1 refers to speaking activity number 1 in Table 3 and WR.25 refers to writing activity number 25 in Table 6.

Table 8. Need Mean Scores Comparison for all Activities

| Need | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------------|--|-------------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Need 1 | 1 | RD.13 | Read textbook, manual, technical text, article regarding IT system | 4.43 |
| | 2 | RD.21 | Read E-Mail | 4.27 |
| | 3 | WR.33 | Write E-mail | 4.20 |
| | 4 | RD.18 | Read a message generated by IT system, i.e., alert, error, help. | 4.10 |
| Need 2 | 5 | RD.14 | Read a study report regarding IT system | 3.97 |
| | 5 | RD.17 | Read work instructions | 3.97 |
| | 7 | RD.16 | Read presentation handout regarding IT system | 3.93 |
| | 8 | WR.23 | Write user manual or reference for IT system | 3.63 |
| | 9 | WR.27 | Write work instructions | 3.57 |
| | 10 | RD.15 | Read contracts-related documents, i.e., TOR, MOU | 3.53 |

Table 9. Problem Mean Scores Comparison for all Activities

| Problem | | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|--|-------------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Problem 1 | 1 | SP.6 | Lecture or present, e.g., presentation or demonstration of IT system | 3.33 |
| | 2 | SP.7 | Being a host in an event, e.g., a seminar | 3.27 |
| | 3 | WR.23 | Write user manual or reference for IT system | 3.20 |
| | 3 | WR.24 | Write study report regarding IT system | 3.20 |
| | 5 | SP.2 | Ask or discuss for clarification | 3.13 |
| | 6 | SP.3 | Persuade or negotiate the business related to IT in order to meet objectives | 3.10 |
| | 7 | WR.26 | Write handout for presentation | 3.00 |
| Problem 2 | 8 | LS.11 | Understand the non-face-to-face conversation, e.g., telephone conversation | 2.97 |
| | 8 | SP.5 | Converse in non-face-to-face communication, e.g., telephone conversation | 2.97 |
| | 8 | WR.31 | Write minutes of meeting | 2.97 |

(Tables continue)

(Table 8. continued)

| Need | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------------|---|-------------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Need 2 | 10 | WR.28 | Write message to be displayed in IT system, i.e., alert, error, help | 3.53 |
| | 12 | SP.1 | Ask for information from users or vendors regarding IT system, e.g., requirements, problems, or suggestions | 3.50 |
| | 12 | SP.2 | Ask or discuss for clarification | 3.50 |
| | 12 | LS.8 | Understand conversation regarding IT system | 3.50 |
| | 15 | WR.26 | Write handout for presentation | 3.47 |
| | 16 | WR.24 | Write study report regarding IT system | 3.33 |
| | 17 | RD.22 | Read charts or diagrams regarding IT system | 3.30 |
| | 18 | WR.29 | Take notes to record the conversation regarding IT system, i.e., requirements, problems, suggestions | 3.27 |

(Table 9. continued)

| Problem | | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|---|-------------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Problem 2 | 11 | SP.1 | Ask for information from users or vendors regarding IT system, e.g., requirements, problems, or suggestions | 2.93 |
| | 12 | LS.8 | Understand conversation regarding IT system | 2.87 |
| | 12 | LS.9 | Understand face-to-face presentation regarding IT system | 2.87 |
| | 14 | WR.25 | Write contracts-related documents, i.e., TOR, MOU | 2.83 |
| | 15 | WR.32 | Write memorandum | 2.73 |
| | 16 | RD.15 | Read contracts-related documents, i.e., TOR, MOU | 2.70 |
| | 17 | WR.33 | Write E-mail | 2.67 |
| | 17 | WR.27 | Write work instructions | 2.67 |

(Tables continue)

(Table 8. continued)

| Need | | | | |
|--------|------|----------|--|------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Need 2 | 19 | LS.9 | Understand face-to-face presentation regarding IT system | 3.23 |
| | 19 | LS.12 | Understand non-face-to-face presentation or demonstration, e.g., demonstration video | 3.23 |
| | 19 | RD.20 | Read a memorandum | 3.23 |
| | 22 | LS.11 | Understand the non-face-to-face conversation, e.g., telephone conversation | 3.20 |
| | 23 | RD.19 | Read minutes of meeting | 3.17 |
| | 24 | SP.3 | Persuade or negotiate the business related to IT in order to meet objectives | 3.13 |
| | 25 | SP.5 | Converse in non-face-to-face communication, e.g., telephone conversation | 3.10 |

(Table 9. continued)

| Problem | | | | |
|-----------|------|----------|--|------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Problem 2 | 19 | SP.4 | Give work instructions regarding IT system, e.g., in servicing or helping users | 2.63 |
| | 20 | LS.12 | Understand non-face-to-face presentation or demonstration, e.g., demonstration video | 2.53 |
| | 20 | WR.30 | Take notes in presentation | 2.53 |
| | 22 | WR.29 | Take notes to record the conversation regarding IT system, i.e., requirements, problems, suggestions | 2.47 |
| | 23 | RD.13 | Read textbook, manual, technical text, article regarding IT system | 2.40 |
| | 23 | RD.14 | Read a study report regarding IT system | 2.40 |
| | 25 | LS.10 | Understand and follow work instructions provided by others | 2.37 |

(Tables continue)

(Table 8. continued)

| Need | | | | |
|--------|------|----------|---|------|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Need 2 | 26 | SP.4 | Give work instructions regarding IT system, e.g., in servicing or helping users | 3.03 |
| | 27 | LS.10 | Understand and follow work instructions provided by others | 3.00 |
| | 27 | WR.25 | Write contracts-related documents, i.e., TOR, MOU | 3.00 |
| | 27 | WR.30 | Take notes in presentation | 3.00 |
| Need 3 | 30 | WR.32 | Write memorandum | 2.97 |
| | 31 | SP.6 | Lecture or present, e.g., presentation or demonstration of IT system | 2.83 |
| | 32 | WR.34 | Write charts or diagrams regarding IT system | 2.73 |
| | 33 | WR.31 | Write minutes of meeting | 2.67 |
| | 34 | SP.7 | Being a host in an event, e.g., a seminar | 2.27 |

(Table 9. continued)

| Problem | | | | |
|-----------|---------|----------|--|---|
| | Rank | Ref. No. | Activities | Mean |
| Problem 2 | 26 | WR.28 | Write message to be displayed in IT system, i.e., alert, error, help | 2.33 |
| | 26 | WR.34 | Write charts or diagrams regarding IT system | 2.33 |
| | 28 | RD.17 | Read work instructions | 2.27 |
| | 29 | RD.16 | Read presentation handout regarding IT system | 2.23 |
| | 30 | RD.21 | Read E-Mail | 2.17 |
| | 31 | RD.19 | Read minutes of meeting | 2.10 |
| | 32 | RD.18 | Read a message generated by IT system, i.e., alert, error, help. | 2.00 |
| | 32 | RD.20 | Read a memorandum | 2.00 |
| | Prob. 3 | 34 | RD.22 | Read charts or diagrams regarding IT system |

Considering Table 8, all activities are classified into 3 groups based on the need mean scores with descriptions according to Table 1. Need1, all items got mean scores greater than 4.00 and English is considered great in need. Need2, all items got mean scores ranged from 3.00 to 3.99 and English is considered moderate in need. Lastly, all items in Need3 got lowest mean scores of less than 3.00 and English is considered little in need.

Regarding Table 9, likewise, all items are categorized based on their problem mean scores with descriptions according to Table 1. Problem1, all items got mean scores greater than 3.00 and problem in using English is considered moderate. Problem2, all items got mean scores ranged from 2.00 to 2.99 and problem in using English is considered little. Lastly, the item in Need3 got mean score less than 2.00 and problem in using English is considered very little.

Concerning English needs, for activities in the group Need1, all items got mean scores greater than 4.00 meaning that English is considered great in need. Skills where respondents felt English is great in need are reading and writing with such activities as reading textbook or manual about IT, reading and writing E-mail, and reading system generated messages.

Considering group Need2, English is considered moderate in need for all activities in this group. However, if one looks at their mean scores, each item receives different levels of need in relation to one another based on their mean scores. The seven highest-score items entail only reading and writing skills. This means that English is more needed in these particular activities compared to items in the lower ranks. Such activities include reading a study report, reading work instructions, reading presentation handout, writing user manual or reference, writing work instructions, reading contracts-related documents, i.e., TOR, MOU, writing messages to be displayed in IT system. On the other hand, the rest of the items in Need2 are activities where English is moderate in need as well but the need level is lower than the top seven items. In this lower range, skills involved are the combination of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The last group is Need3 where all items got mean scores lower than 2.00; thus English is little in need. Interestingly, skills involved in this group are productive skills, writing and speaking. Types of activities include writing a memorandum,

lecturing or presenting, writing charts or diagrams, writing minutes of meeting, and being a host. It can be implied that IT staff rarely use English in performing such activities.

The next topic to be considered is problem in using English to communicate on the job, with data presented in Table 9. The respondents felt that using English in all activities presented very little to moderate problem, indicated by mean scores ranging from 1.90 to 3.33.

Based on the mean scores, items with the highest range are in the group Problem1. Seven activities in the group got mean scores ranging from 3.00 to 3.33, meaning that using English is a moderate problem. Skills involved are productive, writing and speaking, with such activities as lecturing or presenting, writing user manual or reference, writing study report, asking or discussing for clarification, persuading or negotiating the business, writing handout for presentation.

Considering group Problem2 and Problem3 simultaneously, using English is considered of little problem for Problem2, in which all items got mean scores ranging from 2.00 to 2.97. Meanwhile, for Problem3, using English is considered of very little problem with the mean score of 1.90 for only one item. Concerning the group Problem2, ranks 8th to 26th, skills involved in this range are the combination of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

However, if we look at the seven lowest-score items, all of them are in reading skill. This means that respondents felt using English is least problematic for these seven activities compared to items in the higher ranks. Such activities include reading work instructions, reading presentation handout, reading E-Mail, reading minutes of meeting, reading system generated messages, reading a memorandum, reading charts or diagrams.

LEARNERS' WANTS REGARDING ENGLISH TRAINING

Referring to Table5, respondents indicated that the most common three reasons to attend English training course are to apply the knowledge to the job, to gain knowledge, and to gain the opportunity for career advancement.

Most of the respondents, 43.30% indicated that speaking skill is the area they want to improve the most, while 30.00% of respondents prefer to improve their writing skill. Part of the respondents, 23.30% felt they wanted to improve the listening skill and only one respondent said reading is the area for improvement.

DISCUSSION

From the study's findings, there are some interesting issues for further discussion as following.

1. Mean scores of English need for reading and writing are ranked high.

As presented in Table 8, the top ten ranks are reading and writing activities and this aspect is harmonious with the overall mean scores shown in Table 2. Reasons behind this aspect could be that, for the IT department of Thai Airways, staff members are working in a Thai language environment. Therefore, the medium of oral communication is mainly in Thai. However, the nature of working in the IT field requires the staff to engage in various activities that involve a great deal of English, especially reading and writing activities. IT is a field of knowledge that primarily originated in English speaking communities. The medium of communication used in most of the IT documents is, thus, apparently English. Likewise, the language designated to be the medium between humans and the IT system can be nothing else but English as well. Dealing with such tasks as reading or writing a manual, messages for an IT system, and work instructions in English, is very common for the IT staff. These are the factors that influence IT people to read or write a lot of English documents. In addition, IT has a distinct nature of being a fast moving field. It is very common for IT staff to update knowledge consistently. As a result, activities such as reading IT texts in English or using E-mail or Internet technology is normally a part of these people's everyday lives.

2. Needs of English for speaking and listening are ranked lower.

Considering speaking and listening activities, the need mean scores are lower because such tasks can take place only when the IT staff has to deal with foreigners in

their jobs. There were times when IT staff had to handle projects involving foreign experts and sales persons or working on IT systems with foreign staff. Such tasks require using English as we can see from Table 8 ranks 12 to 27. However, chances to use English in dealing with foreigners are fewer compared to chances of using English to gain knowledge in IT. As mentioned above, English plays a dominant role in the IT field, consequently, the staff needs to handle a great number of reading and writing activities in order to access and exploit the IT knowledge base.

3. Needs of English is lowest for particular productive-skill activities.

Considering the lowest five items in Table 8, English need for such activities are little, according to descriptions in Table 1. Chances to use English in such writing tasks as writing a memorandum or meeting minutes are rare since the activities are performed mostly in offices in Thailand. Although English is used in writing IT charts or diagrams, the usage usually involves only English technical terms. Tasks such as lecturing or hosting an event in English are very rare.

4. Problem in using English is high for productive-skill activities and low for reading activities.

The seven highest-score items of Table 9 are in the group Problem1. All activities are in speaking and writing skills. In my opinion, performing productive skills normally requires more effort than receptive skills. One must produce, that is, speak out or write in order to get communication through. In Table 9, ranks 1 and 2 present an interesting point. As mentioned above, such activities as lecturing or hosting an event are of little need for IT staff, but the problem levels are ranked relatively highest. This is not surprising because performing such tasks require substantial efforts even in the Thai language. Therefore, respondents felt that it is more difficult to accomplish the tasks in English. For the writing skill, three activities in group Problem1 are writing user manuals, study reports, and presentation handouts. It is significant that respondents rated these three items in relatively higher positions than other writing items. In order to create such texts, respondents need a variety of language knowledge such as text discourse, grammar, vocabulary, rhetorical patterns,

etc., to perform effectively. Efforts required are more than rendering a system's short messages, writing E-mail, or work instructions.

On the other hand, seven reading activities got the lowest mean scores, ranks 28 to 34 in Table 9. This fact is predictable because reading is the activity that one can perform at one's own pace. There's no need to produce spontaneous reactions to get communication through. Readers can always consult a dictionary and go back and forth through the text in order to comprehend. Interestingly, these seven lowest problem scores involve reading short texts and diagrams. Respondents felt that it is less problematic than reading such long text as a manual, the TOR or MOU, or a study report which ranks higher in Table 7.

5. Disparity between the level of need and problem for reading and speaking skills

The disparity between the level of need and problem for reading and speaking skills can be found in Table 2, 8, and 9. First of all, reading is the skill that ranked high in need mean scores, in group Need1; however, most of the reading activities are ranked low in problem mean scores, in group Problem2 and Problem3.

As a matter of fact, reading is a necessary activity for people working in the IT field. English is the dominant language in IT. In order to keep up with the fast changing technology, IT people need to read a lot of English textbooks, manuals, and articles. In addition, English is the language designated to be an interface between human and IT equipments. Therefore, IT staff have to be able to understand messages produced by the IT system correctly in order to work effectively. Thus, reading is an inevitable part of working in this field. However, respondents rated problems in reading English as very little to little problem, all items scored lower than 3.00 (see Table 9). This could be because reading is the activity that one can perform at one's own pace. A reader is not required to produce spontaneous speech in order to get the communication through, as in speaking. For comprehension goal, a reader can always consult a dictionary or go through the text repetitiously. These are some reasons why reading English is not a great problem to the respondents.

On the other hand, needs of English for speaking activities are relatively lowest compared to others. In contrast, their problem scores are relatively highest.

The need level is low because speaking tasks can take place only when the IT staff has to deal with foreigners on their jobs but chances are quite rare. However, when looking from the problem side, the problem level for speaking is relatively highest (see Table 2). This is not surprising for respondents who are non-native speakers. In speaking, a speaker needs to possess not only knowledge of grammar patterns or vocabulary, but also need the phonetics knowledge. Moreover, a speaker has to use such knowledge and correctly produce connected speeches. A speaker has to integrate all mentioned aspects together in a short time in order to communicate effectively. For these reasons, speaking seems to be relatively most problematic to the respondents.

SUGGESTIONS

The findings from this study can provide useful information regarding English training courses for IT staff. Firstly, we can see the picture of what English skills are needed, the difference in level of needs, and the types of discourse involved. At the same time, problem analysis gives us similar ideas of the problems respondents have faced in using English. Moreover, the parallel view of both needs and problems create the picture of relationships between level of needs and problems for each activity, whether they correspond or contrast each other. The findings also reveal what respondents want and why they want English training.

From the obtained information, suggestions could be that, the course contents should exclude items where problem ranks are lowest, regardless their need ranks, for example, reading work instructions, presentation handouts, a memorandum, an e-mail, and so forth (see Table 9). The reason is that learners felt they already have abilities to perform such activities and they could be demotivated learning things that are not problematic. In my opinion, seven reading items ranked lowest in problem scores are not attractive for the course content. On the other hand, the decision for the lowest need scores items should be carefully considered. For any low-need-score item, in my opinion, we should be concerned the items' problem scores as well. The items with low need scores but very high problem scores should be included in the course because they can be very interesting to learners; for example, lecturing or presenting about IT systems. After considering the lowest-score items for both need and

problem, the decision for the rest of the items should take other factors into account, such as, learners' wants, time, or the resources available. In my opinion, after excluding five lowest-need-score items and seven lowest-problem-score items, the rest of the productive skill items, e.g., lecturing or presenting about IT systems, writing user manuals, or writing a study report, should be included because respondents felt speaking and writing skills are what they want to learn the most (see Table 6) and the overall problem scores of such skills are highest as well (see Table 2). The rest of the listening items, e.g., listening to a face-to-face and indirect conversation, and listening to a presentation, should be included since both listening and speaking are important parts of the oral communication. Finally, the rest of the reading items, e.g., reading contract-related documents, reading textbooks, and reading a study report, will be of most benefit to learners if the course offers some reading strategies that can enhance learners' existing potential to be even better.