Needs Analysis of English Skills at Ban Manik Community in Phuket as an International Community

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze the needs for English language by the members of Ban Manik Community in Phuket as an international community. They need English to create media to inform the public of their community and local products. The researchers used a questionnaire and semi-structured interview to collect data from 60 participants on a voluntary basis. Their responses of the questionnaire were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean scores and standard deviation. The data derived from the open-ended questions and the interviews were coded and analyzed by categorized contents. The results indicated that the members of Ban Manik Community need English skills for communicating with tourists or foreign customers, ranked first from speaking, followed by listening, reading, and writing, respectively. They preferred speaking practice in class with native English teachers. In addition, they also wanted to have picture books of objects and products displayed in the learning center labeled with both Thai and English words.

Keywords: *Needs analysis, English language, speaking skill, community-based tourism, Ban Manik Community*

1. Introduction

Communication in English has been required since Thailand joined the ASEAN Community in 2015 to cope with the members' local cultures, identities, and languages, as stated in ASEAN Charter Article 34: "The working language of ASEAN shall be English." This requirement does not only cover the use of English in the government sector but also the increasing use of English in all sectors of each country under the ASEAN Association (Onwimol, 2012). Therefore, the need in improving English skills is an urgent agenda for all sectors—in the

public and private sectors all alike. One of the industries that have a strong need for English is undoubtedly the tourism industry.

Tourism industry in Thailand plays an important role in developing the country's economy. Thailand has been recognized for its beautiful cultural attractions, historical sites, eco-tourism and mountain-to-sea scenery appealing to Thai and foreign tourists. Tourism in Thailand helps the country's economy to grow as planned and in turn brings in money and good living to the communities concerned. Therefore, the Thai tourism industry has received continuous support from various government and private agencies to assure the economic growth as well as people's well-being, particularly in community-based tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, 2018; Jetjiroj, 2021).

As known, the new tourism trend deals with "the Free Independent Travelers." This is when a tourist or a small group of tourists travel to tourist attractions by themselves. The Free Independent Travelers will allow tourists to experience the lifestyle of people in small communities closely and as a result, they boost the community's income directly by buying local products. This type of tourism allows both Thai and foreign tourists to immerse themselves in the Thai way of living in small communities. In order for tourists to gain full traveling experiences, people in the community need to be able to use English to communicate with guests or visitors in their local environment. Local people should be able to communicate and recommend the community and its signature products to foreign tourists fluently (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, 2018).

Each year, a large number of tourists from various countries come to the southern part of Thailand as one of the most beautiful destinations. Particularly, Phuket has been known as the pearl of Thailand for its white beaches and beautiful sea-sand scenery, local house architecture, Thai food, relaxing atmosphere, and friendly locals (Thai AirAsia, 2015).

Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a threat to the tourism industry in Phuket and affected other socio-economic aspects of Thailand. The province has to work under the government's Sandbox Project to revive tourism. The vital issue of English proficiency required of service providers has still lingered for concrete improvement to facilitate contacts between the locals and foreign visitors in Phuket.

One community in Phuket, named Baan Manik has merged as a community-based tourist destination. This community of a thousand households is located at Si Sunthon Subdistrict in Thalang District. The community has grown economic crops under the scheme of sufficiency economy initiated by King Bhumibol for six years. Under the guidance of Phuket Rajabhat

University, the community has developed and processed products from plants grown in the community to generate income for its members. In 2018, Ban Manik Community was selected by the province to join the OTOP Inno-life tourism-based group as a model tourism community for incoming Thai and foreign tourists. The community's various products are promoted to strengthen its economy for sustainability (Ban Manik School, 2019).

2. Ban Manik Community

Ban Manik Community is located at Moo 7, Si Sunthon Subdistrict, Thalang District in Phuket, Thailand. In the past, Ban Manik was known as Manikram, a name in Tamil language used by Chola people, the first group of people residing around this area. "Mani" means ruby and "Kram" from "Nagaram" meaning "City"; therefore, Maniram means "a city of ruby." Later on, the name was diluted to "Ban Manik." However, according to the agricultural area evidence, this place has been known among the inhabitant as "Ban Muang Yai" or "a big city" (Ban Manik School, 2019).

The community leader, Songyos (2016) reported that nowadays, the social surrounding has been changed from a local to an urban society. People in the community no longer farm, but turn to labor work for several kinds of local business. They have no time to take care of their health, eat instant food and, toxic products in the area. Therefore, a group of people in Ban Manik tried to find ways to prevent eating intoxicated food and improve their health. They agreed to form a group to grow non-toxic plants for their diet. This project was guided by the principles of King Bhumibol's sufficiency economy philosophy, by which 10-30 people from the community have united and formed a group to work collectively. Each member put 1,000 baht to set a fund for the project; the members took care of each other and exchanged their agricultural knowledge and local wisdom, particularly using herbs to eliminate pests instead of using chemical pesticides, and producing organic fertilizers. This project has become a unique characteristic of Ban Manik that signifies sufficiency economy philosophy in its implementation stage. The Learning Center was established by Suparoth Songyos as the founding leader since then (Department of Non-Formal Education in Kaodin Subdistrict, Kaopanon District, Krabi, 2018; Ban Manik School, 2019).

Once established, Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center has been known for New Agriculture Theory of King Bhumibol. In 2019, the Center was chosen to be one of OTOP Inno-life Tourism-based Communities. It should be noted that the government agent--Phuket Rajabhat University helped the Center develop products made from okra, which is the main plant grown at the Center. The developed okra products make an income of 150,000 baht per month for the community members (The Government Public Relation Department, 2019; Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, 2018; National News Bureau of Thailand, 2019).

The researchers recognized the goal of the community and its urgency in improving English proficiency to communicate with incoming tourists. It is a must for the researchers to assess the community members' needed skills in English to plan for (1) a short training course prototype, (2) writing a basic English guidebook to provide information on the community's products, and (3) making product-price labels and English signs for visiting points in the community's area. In so doing, the researchers aimed at transforming Ban Manik into an international community for tourism purposes.

3. Literature Review

This section briefly reviews (1) definitions of needs, (2) needs analysis, and (3) English language and community-based tourism, for clear understanding of the research background.

3.1 Definitions of Needs

Need is a condition that something must be fulfilled for maintaining or completing the desire (The Free Dictionary, 2011). In the same way, need is the effort which forces action for its fulfilment. Needs which are satisfied by necessities ranging from general living needs to cultural, intelligent, and social needs (altered by places and ages). Needs are limited while wants (occur from desires and wishes) are boundless (Business Dictionary, 2016). According to Brindley (1989: 65), it is hard to find the utilize meaning of "needs" in the second language learning contexts. Hence, it is beneficial to take some from the field of adult education in which need is identified as "the gap between what it is and what it should be." The crucial note is that what it should be must be designed by someone. It can be said that the definitions of needs are open to situational interpretation and involve value judgement. Kaufman & English (1979) pointed out that need can be defined as a gap between current outcomes or outputs and desired (or required) outcomes or outputs. In the educational context, needs refer to the gap between the entry and exit of students' skills, knowledges, and attitudes. Also, they are gaps between existing and requested of students' skills, knowledges, and attitudes, but ones would be much higher priorities in order to accomplish educational achievement.

3.2 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the term commonly known to language practitioners for many years. It takes an important part in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) because it is the tool leading to the development of courses and syllabus designs which can fulfil what target learners need or lack. Needs Analysis is the way to analyze and assess the needs of the group of people. Analyzing needs can explain the problems of particular learners and plausible resolutions to their problems (Titcomb, 2000). McCawley (2009) claimed that the target people can identify the status of their knowledge, ability, profession, attitude or learning style or their desire from a

needs analysis. Also, the analysts will be able to illustrate the gap between what the target people have and what they need by processing data. Filling the gap serves as the purpose of academic work on course design and instruction. In addition, needs analysis consists of all activities employed to compile the information concerning learners' learning needs, wants, desires, wills, and the like. Sometimes, the methods include searching for the anticipation of other concerned factors; for example, teachers, managers, financial supporters. Needs analysis can be both official--expanded and time consuming, and unofficial--narrowly emphasized and fast (Casper, 2003).

3.3 English Language and Community-based Tourism

The expansion ratio of tourism in Thailand is 5.7 per year. Also, Thailand was ranked as the 21st out of the top 40 countries visited by most tourists around the world. There were 10.6 million tourists in Thailand, 20.3 million in 2012, and 38.27 million in 2018; therefore, the income from tourism in Thailand was 2 trillion baht (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, 2018). Recently, in order to attract foreign tourists, Thailand has promoted internal tourism especially community-based tourism, together with OTOP Inno-Life Tourism-based Communities. The OTOP Inno-Life Tourism-based Communities are the project to promote and develop local products from the communities in the designated areas, using natural resources in the communities identified as the tourists' destinations (Kakham 2020).

Accordingly, English serves as a vital tool to develop both community-based tourism, and OTOP Inno-Life Tourism-based Communities. Both government agencies and private organizations have organized English language training programs for several communities in Thailand to improve English language skills of local people in those communities. For example, Khon Kaen University as the government agency held a workshop on the topic of "The Development of English and Chinese Communication Skills for Groups of Community Leaders." The workshop focused on basic knowledge of English and Chinese. As for English, there was additional training on the topic of English for Fun 1 and 2 on four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Communication Affair Division, Khon Kaen University, 2018).

The Department of Non-Formal Education in Kaodin Subdistrict, Kaopanom District, Krabi (2018) organized a short course of 30 hours, on the topic of "English Language and Tourism" for local people living in Kaodin Community and the nearby areas. The course emphasized the use of English expressions in giving information about tourist attractions, restaurants, and accommodation.

Moreover, Thai AirAsia was well aware of the importance of English in community-based tourism and therefore organized English for its Community-based Tourism Project. The emphasis was on four basic English language skills for communication. The project was for local people in

three communities: Baan Huathung (Chiang Dao District, Chiang Mai), Ban Kukasing (Roi-Ed), and Ban Phrom Lok (Nakhon Si Thammarat) (Thai AirAsia, 2015).

As mentioned above, it is obvious that all sectors are fully aware of the importance of English language development for community-based tourism. There were various training courses and workshops organized by the government agencies and private organizations to improve English language skills of local people in the target communities. Those courses and training programs were meant to support the government's policy on community-based tourism. It was expected that language training for vocabulary and language patterns for specific situations serves as the key to success in communication between local people and foreign tourists.

4. Research Objectives

There were two objectives in this study:

1. To assess English language skills for communication as needed by the members of Ban Manik Community, and

2. To identify English language problems encountered by the members of Ban Manik Community.

It was expected that the obtained results can generate a guideline for the researchers to create a short training course prototype, medias to inform the public of the community and products, a basic English guidebook about the local products, and product-price labels and signs on visiting points for the community.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 60 local people at Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center. Their participation was on a voluntary basis. They provided both quantitative and qualitative data for the study.

5.2 Instruments

- Questionnaire: The questionnaire with closed- and open-ended question items was based on the results of a preliminary study. The questionnaire contained four parts on (1) Personal Information and Levels of English Proficiency of the participants (8 items), (2) Problems in English language use at Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center (4 items), (3) their most needed English skills (4 items), and (4) critical aspects for language improvement (1 open-ended question).

- Semi-Structured Interview: Ten participants were willing to give data for semi-structured interviews. The interview of 12 questions for each participant lasted for 15-20 minutes and all responses were digitally recorded with permission from the participants.

6. Data Collection

After getting permission from the leader and the members of Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center, the researchers arranged to meet with the voluntary participants to explain the objective and details of the research, and to distribute a questionnaire to each member. The researchers collected the questionnaires three days after the distribution and prepared for data analysis.

As for the semi-structured interviews, only ten participants were willing to give data on their experience and problems in using English at the Center. The interview of each participant lasted for 15-20 minutes and was digitally recorded with consent from the participants. The researchers transcribed and classified the obtained data according to the research objectives.

7. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the participants' responses to the questionnaire by frequency, percentage, mean scores and standard deviation. The data derived from the open-ended question and the interviews were coded and analyzed by categorized contents.

8. Research Results

This section reports the participants' levels of English proficiency, English skills needed at Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center, and the problems in English language use encountered by the members of Ban Manik Learning Center.

8.1 Participants' Levels of English Proficiency

The participants' levels of overall English proficiency were at a fair level (Mean=1.83, S.D.=0.53). It was found that their proficiency levels in four skills were at a fair level: Listening (Mean=1.95, S.D.=0.46), Speaking (Mean=1.71, S.D.=0.61, Reading (Mean=1.95, S.D.=0.59, and Writing (Mean=1.70, S.D.=0.46), respectively. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' Levels of English Proficiency

Levels of English Proficiency	Mean	S.D.	Meaning

Listening skill	1.95	0.46	Fair
Speaking skill	1.71	0.61	Fair
Reading skill	1.95	0.59	Fair
Writing skill	1.70	0.46	Fair
Total	1.83	0.53	Fair

8.2 Needed English Skills

The participants identified their most needed skill as Speaking (Mean=4.45, S.D.=0.49), followed by Listening (Mean=4.28, S.D.=0.60), Writing (Mean=4.26, S.D.=0.89), and Reading (Mean=4.03, S.D.=0.57), respectively. The results are presented below in Table 2.

Table 2: Needed English Skills at Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center

Needed English Skills	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Listening skill	4.28	0.60	High
Speaking skill	4.45	0.49	High
Reading skill	4.03	0.57	High
Writing skill	4.26	0.89	High
Total	4.25	0.63	High

8.3 Problems in English language Use

The participants specified their overall problems in English language use at a high level. The most problematic skill was Listening (Mean=4.52, S.D.=0.48), followed by Speaking (Mean=4.50, S.D.=0.45), Writing (Mean=4.42, S.D.=0.48), and Reading (Mean=4.23, S.D.=0.40), respectively.

Table 3: Problems in English language Use at Ban Manik Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center

Problems in English Skills	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Listening skill	4.52	0.48	Very high
Speaking skill	4.50	0.45	Very high
Reading skill	4.23	0.40	High

Writing skill	4.42	0.48	High
Total	4.42	0.45	High

8.4 Critical Aspects for Language Improvement

The researchers analyzed the contents of the participants' responses to the open-ended part of the questionnaire and the interview data, and found similar results that the participants lacked the key vocabulary in conveying the intended message to foreign visitors. They were also worried about grammatical errors made in their speech. In this regard, the first critical aspect for language improvement happened to rest upon listening and key vocabulary learning to facilitate their communication in English. It should be noted that drills of formulaic expressions could help alleviate their anxiety over pronunciation and grammatical errors. For language improvement, the participants need to express themselves in language training via intensive drills to gain confidence in communicating with foreigners. In addition, they need clarifying technique as well as nonverbal features or gestures to convey their intended meanings to the visitors.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This research identified the English language needs of the community members of Ban Manik in Phuket Province (Ban Manik School, 2019). Sixty participants joined the study on a voluntary basis, and they perceived their language skills at a fair level (Mean=1.83, S.D.=0.53), while requiring practice in listening and speaking skills in priority for language training. These results were not a surprise to the researchers for the fact that the community members rarely use English in daily life. Currently, frequent exposure to visitors will prompt their use of English and their proficiency will definitely improve with time (Communication Affair Division, Khon Kaen University, 2018; Kakham, 2020). The Learning Center and the project on OTOP INNO-life Tourism-based Communities developed about six years back have now provided them with good local products and agro-production activities that could attract more tourists and hence give an ample opportunity for the host members to use English for daily communication. Language training courses and workshops can serve as a good platform for language training preparation (Brindley, 1989); this is meant for the growth of community-based tourism in the area and its vicinity.

The participants rated the speaking skill at the forefront for training (Mean=4.45, S.D.=0.49), followed by listening (Mean=4.28, S.D.=0.60), writing (Mean=4.26, S.D.=0.89), and reading (Mean=4.03, S.D.=0.57). They explained that the limitation in language use prompted them to turn to translation applications to facilitate face-to-face communication with tourists (Business Dictionary, 2016). However, the participants wanted to improve their speaking and listening skills to be able to perform well in interacting with their foreign visitors. They preferred

speaking practice in class with native English teachers. They also wanted to have picture books of objects and products displayed with Thai and English labels at the Learning Center. The results of the study can help the local university to provide language training directly responsive to the identified needs of the target learners (Casper, 2003).

10. Implications and Future Research

As for implications of the study, the researchers expected to use the obtained information to plan for a short training course prototype, a basic English guidebook to provide information on the community's products, and product-price labels and English signs for visiting points in the community's area. In so doing, the researchers meant to provide assistance in transforming Ban Manik into an international community for tourism purposes.

In future research on community-based tourism, researchers could consider the topics in the areas of specific training techniques, evaluation of language performance in the traditional or digital mode, and the issues on learner autonomy and characteristics of spontaneous speech data. A future study should include a larger sample size--people in the community and tourists--to ensure validity and reliability of the concluded findings.

11. The Authors

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