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Need Analysis of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for 7-Eleven Employees: a Case Study in Buriram Province

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to analyze the needs of ESP for 7-Eleven employees. The population was employees of 7-Eleven located in Mueang District, Buriram Province, and the sample consisted of 50 employees working at ten 7-Eleven stores. They were selected by using the purposive sampling method. The research instruments were composed of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The statistics employed in this research were frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that they needed to practice speaking and listening skills more than other English skills. Regarding the teaching materials, most of them needed an English brochure or booklet together with a CD of English dialogues. Nine ESP topics were needed by the sample: greetings, polite refusal, asking for customers' needs, asking for product and price, telling price and exchange rate, paying and changing, asking for and offering help, asking customers to repeat, and thanking and saying goodbye. Moreover, they also needed to have a 30-hour training workshop.

Keywords : need analysis, ESP, 7-Eleven employees.



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INTRODUCTION

Need analysis (NA) can be traced back to the 1970s and the development of a perception of need with communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1970s had a widespread influence on needs analysis work (Tudor, 1996). According to Robinson (1991), NA is considered as a basic principal of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and most of the information on NA initially came from ESP (West, 1994). Brown (2006: 102) states that:

Needs analysis is the process of identifying the language forms that students ultimately will need to use in the target language. However, since the needs of the teachers, administrators, employers, institutions etc. also have some bearing on the language learning situation, many other types of quantitative and qualitative information of both objective and subjective types must be considered in order to understand both the situation and the language involved as well as information on the linguistic content and the learning processes. Needs analysis is the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of the

particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation.

Needs analysis is neither unique to language teaching nor within language training but it is often seen as being the corner stone of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and leads to a very focused course (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 122). Wright (2001) emphasizes that the content of any ESP course should only be determined by a comprehensive needs analysis as this first step is seen as being absolutely crucial if ESP practitioners wish to design a course that will maximally benefit their learners.

ESP refers to situations where the student has some specific reasons to learn a language (Harmer, 1983). ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learner's reason for learning. If we know why learners need English, the content of the language can be adjusted accordingly and the teaching process will focus on these needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1992).

Robinson (1991, p. 3) divides the manner of English for specific purposes into four ways:

1. English for Specific Purposes focuses on learning of the students.
2. The course for English for specific purposes must be appropriate for the time.

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3. Curriculum for English for specific purposes for a particular course must be based on the learners' needs and goal.

4. Most students learning English for specific purposes are adults.

7-Eleven was opened in 1989 on Patpong Road in Bangkok. There are 8,334 7-Eleven stores in Thailand, with approximately 50% located in Bangkok. Thailand has the 3rd largest number of seven-Eleven stores after Japan and the United States. There are nineteen 7-Eleven shops in the city of Buriram. About 257 employees work at these shops. Buriram province is located in the Northeast of Thailand. There are a lot of tourist attractions in Buriram, for instance, Phnom Rung Sanctuary, Prasat Muang Tam, Khao Kradong National Forest Park, the I-Mobile Football Stadium, etc. More importantly, in 2015, Buriram was announced by the Tourism Authority of Thailand as one of 12 Cities named Hidden Gems in Thailand (Twelve Cities Hidden Gems, 2016). Consequently, the number of foreign tourists have increased year by year.

7-Eleven is a place where many foreign visitors like to go and purchase a variety of goods. Having interviewed some of 7-Eleven staff, they said that there are a large number of foreigners purchasing products at their shops. Unfortunately, they could not speak well

with their foreign customers. They always use a body language to communicate with foreigners and employ a calculator upon calculating the good prices. They added that it will be good if they are able to speak English with foreigners. Moreover, they need to have an English manual for practicing English and want to have an English communication training workshop. The researcher was, therefore, interested in conducting the research entitled "Need Analysis of ESP for 7-Eleven Staff: a Case Study in Buriram Province" in order to survey 7-Eleven employees' need of English and to provide a proper tool to help them improve their English. The research results would also assist them to develop English capabilities. It was noted that no research on this title has been conducted before.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research was to analyze needs of ESP for 7-Eleven employees

METHODOLOGY

Population and Samples

The population was employees of 7-Eleven located in Mueang District, Buriram Province, and the sample consisted of 50 employees working at ten stores of 7-Eleven, 5 from each store.

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They were purposively selected from the population.

Research Instruments

Two research instruments were utilized: a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of five parts: the first part focused on the general information covering their sex, age, educational background and positions; the second part was about opinions on their needs of English skills; the third part was related to topics needed; the fourth part about English instructional materials needed; and the fifth part was about their other suggestions.

Regarding semi-structured interviews, they consisted of three parts: 1) participants' opinions about English needs; 2) their opinions about needs of ESP; and 3) their other suggestions. Ten representatives out of 50 employees were interviewed.

Data Collection

The sets of questionnaires were distributed to 50 responses. The researcher collected the data by himself. For a semi-structured interview, the researcher interviewed one representative from each 7-Eleven store with a total of 10 interviewees. It should be noted that these two research tools constructed by the researcher were examined by three experts in order to approve the content validity, and the tools' index of item-objective congruence (IOC) were between 0.67 and 1.00.

Data Analysis

The data derived from the responses of the questionnaire were computed by using frequency, percentage mean and standard deviation while the data obtained from a semi-structured interview were descriptively presented.



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RESEARCH RESULTS

The following results were presented in line with the research objective:

1. General information of the sample

The result representing the sample' general information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Personal information of the sample

No	Personal Information	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage (%)
1	Sex		
	Male	15	30
	Female	35	70
2	Age		
	Under18 years	0	0
	18-25 years	20	40
	26 – 35 years	28	56
	36 – 45 years	2	4
	46 - 55 years	0	0
	56 years and above	0	0
3	Education		
	Elementary school	0	0
	High school	22	
	Vocational certificate	16	44
	Bachelor's degree	12	32
	Higher than Bachelor's degree	0	24
	Position		0
4	Manager	8	16
	Employee	42	84

Table 1 revealed that out of 50 subjects, the number of females (70%) was much greater than that of males (30%). their age range was between 26 – 35 years old (56 %), and the major samples graduated high school (44 %). Additionally, most of them were employees (84%).



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2. Their needs of English skills

The English skills needed by the sample were presented in Table 2:

Table 2 English skills needed by the sample

No.	English skills needed	Mean	S.D
1	Speaking is necessary skill for 7-Eleven staff.	5.00	0.00
2	Listening is necessary skill for 7-Eleven staff.	4.90	0.32
3	Reading is necessary skill for 7-Eleven staff.	3.84	.997
4	Writing is necessary skill for 7-Eleven staff.	2.48	1.40
5	English grammar is necessary skill for 7-Eleven staff	1.50	0.51

From Table 2, it showed that their needs of speaking skill were at the highest level and was followed by listening skill while needs of the other two skills of reading and writing and grammar were found at a low level.

3. English topics needed by the sample

The English topics needed by the sample are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 English topics needed by the sample

.No.	English topics needed	Level of opinion	
		($\bar{X}$)	S.D
1	Greetings	5.00*	0.00
2	Polite Refusal	4.73	0.58
3	Asking for Customers' Needs	4.70	0.65
4	Asking for Product and Price	4.77	0.50
5	Telling Price and Exchange Rate	4.70	0.67
6	Paying and Changing	4.70	0.65
7	Asking for and Offering Help	4.77	0.57
8	Asking Customers to Repeat	4.90	0.32
9	Thanking and Saying Goodbye	4.77	0.50

Table 3 showed that 9 topics were needed by 7-Eleven employees. = Moreover, the item 1 ($\bar{X}$ = 5.00) was most needed, followed by item ($\bar{X}$ = 4.90) and items 4, 7 and 9 ($\bar{X}$ = 4.77) respectively.

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4. English instructional materials needed

They needed a portable English booklet. English CD was also needed because they wanted to listen to the native-like English pronunciation and to get familiar with a native accent.

5. The sample's other suggestions

The following points were suggested by the sample:

5.1. They needed a short English dialogue with short sentences.

5.2. The necessary vocabulary should be given at the end of each dialogue.

5.3. The transcription of English printed words should be written in Thai, so they could read the English words correctly.

5.4. Thai translated version should also be presented for better understanding of the contents.

Regarding the data obtained from a semi-structured interview, the interviewees opined that English was very important for them because they have to interact with foreign customer everyday. They needed to practice the two skills of speaking and listening more than reading and writing skills. They did not want to know English grammar. For ESP needs, they wanted to study the English topics for their career and the English contents used in daily life. They needed the nine English topics

proposed by the researcher: greetings, polite refusal, asking for customers' needs, asking for product and price, telling price and exchange rate, paying and changing, asking for and offering help, asking customers to repeat, and thanking and saying goodbye. For their other suggestions, they needed the researcher to design the English course covering these nine topics for them. 30-hour training workshop should also be organized for them. Moreover, they needed a brochure or booklet together with a CD of English conversation, so they can practice English via these tools anyway and anytime they want.

DISCUSSION

The following points based on the research results were discussed:

5.1 The 7-Eleven staff needed to practice two skills of speaking and listening more than reading and writing skills. They did not want to know English grammar. The reason might be that they have to listen to foreign customers and talk to them upon selling goods at their stores. They needed not to read or write to explain things to the foreigners. The English grammar is also not necessary for them upon communicating with their customers.

5.2 They needed the following nine ESP topics. They needed these contents because all topics were relevant to their



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job and English daily use. This goes in line with the theories of needs analysis proposed by many scholars who say that ESP is an approach to language teaching based on the learner's learning and needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, Richard, Platt & Platt, 1992). The ESP contents and course design should only be determined by a comprehensive needs analysis (Robinson, 1991).

5.3 They needed a brochure or booklet of English together with CD of English conversation. The reasons might be that they are able to practice English via these instruments wherever they wanted and whenever they were free. Moreover, they needed these tools because these would help them get familiar with a native accent via the CD recorded with the native-like English pronunciation.

5.4 The data obtained from the semi-structured interview was similar to the data collected from a questionnaire. The interviewee wanted to study nine English topics, a brochure or booklet and a CD of English conversation. They also wanted 30-hour training workshop. The reasons might have been because they could practice the English topics relevant to their job and English used in daily life. The English training workshop would also be helpful and useful for them to establish self-confidence of using English

with a foreigner. This was similar to Brown (2006) who stated that needs analysis is the first step in developing a language curriculum, and Dudley-Evans and St. John, (1998) who said that language training is a corner stone of ESP and leads to a focused course.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on need analysis of ESP for 7-Eleven employees in Buriram province and the research results showed that the sample consisting of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees needed to practice the skills of speaking and listening. The ESP course covering the English topics relevant to their job and daily English use should be designed in line with their needs. This would attract the interests and attention of the sample which would result in better learning than if their needs were ignored. In addition, the ESP contents needed by the sample should also be determined by a comprehensive needs analysis at the first step and the English course should be designed by taking learners' needs into account so as to maximally benefit the learners (Wright, 2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings of this study, some suggestions were made:

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1. The English course designed for the employees of 7-Eleven should be based on the results found in this research, covering nine topics.

2. The instructional materials for this group should be developed in line with their needs, so a brochure or booklet together with an English CD are recommended.

3. A 30-hour English training workshop should be organized for them.

4. The results obtained from this research could be utilized by a company or institute, who provides public services, in order to use the English course including these nine ESP English topics for training their employees.

5. Further studies on need analysis of ESP topics for different professionals such as bankers, lawyers, or taxi drivers, etc. should be conducted.

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