

The Designing of English for MICE: Target Language Needed by the Industry

Savika Varaporn

savikav@gmail.com

Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate English target language required in the operation of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) business in Thailand. Data were gathered from 30 employees and executives who have at least 3-year experiences of working in MICE sectors. The questionnaire, supplemented by a semi-structured interview, was designed to explore situations where the English language is necessary for workers to function successfully in the MICE industry as well as to examine issues that might hinder the successful use of English to perform the required tasks in MICE work. Major findings indicated that productive skills of English in the target situations such as briefing and explaining concepts, scopes, and details of a MICE event and delivering a sales pitch to a client in English were the most important. In addition, problems and challenges that frequently hampered the effective English communication among MICE employees were also specified. Findings from this study yielded useful information and had considerable implications for designing the syllabus and materials in English for MICE.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis in ESP, English for MICE

Introduction

MICE comprises four business segments: meeting (M), incentive travel (I), convention (C), and exhibition (E). In Thailand, the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions or MICE industry has increasingly played an important part in the country's tourism sector, as it generates massive economic incomes (Chittungwattana, 2011).

MICE is a type of tourism business aimed at organizing conferences and incentive travel, conventions, as well as exhibits, usually in an international or regional scale (Chaobanpho et al., 2017; Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2015). MICE operators or clients include meeting organizers and attendees, exhibitors and visitors and sponsors of the incentive travel. As such, MICE operates with different providers, whether it be service, venue, food and beverage, tools and facilities, and so on.

Popularity of MICE Business in Thailand

The establishment of the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) in 2004, as a principal agency for business promotion and development in Thailand, has positioned the country as a desired destination for MICE-related activities in Asia (Jurakanit, 2018). In conjunction with this, TCEB's three main strategies, which are 'win, promote, and develop', have built the competitive capacity of the MICE industry in the global marketplace (TCEB, 2015).

According to TCEB (2015), Thailand is the first country in the ASEAN community to implement the development and standard assessment of venues for MICE, through the campaign "Believe in Thailand more and more". Such implementation, together with other attributes such as ease of transportation, experienced human resources, a wide variety of accommodation choices, and excellent hospitality service sectors, have helped Thailand emerge as a hub for MICE activities, which has created positive social, cultural, and economic benefits for the country.

Importance of MICE in English Language Teaching in Thailand

MICE events in Thailand are expected to draw a large number of international tourists and foreign revenues. In 2019, MICE and mega event market size in Thailand were valued at \$6.93 billion and is estimated to reach \$12.23 billion by 2027 (Sangpikul & Kim, 2009). Furthermore, the increase in tourism revenue in Thailand was substantially derived from greater numbers of MICE tourists since the average cost of MICE tourists is 2 to 3 times higher than general tourists' expenses. According to Sorasuchart (2009), MICE tourists have particular business goals, and they are of high purchasing power. This explains why hosting a MICE event is considered to be a highly effective way to augment the country's tourism income.

Despite the severe impact of COVID-19 pandemic, companies that are involved in the MICE industry has enjoyed their strong growth (TCEB, 2020). In response to this substantial growth in the MICE industry, the demand for graduates with the knowledge to perform jobs in the industry soars. TCEB (2015) reported that 5,000 new graduates join the booming MICE sector in Thailand each year.

In June 2020, TCEB and MICE Capabilities Department established the project entitled "MICE Student Chapter". The aim of this project is to train and prepare students for leadership roles in the MICE industry. There are currently 106 universities and colleges listed as partners in this project.

Due to the growth of the MICE industry in Thailand, the education sector needs to ensure that students are well-equipped. This is why English for MICE, which is an English for Specific Purposes course, should be included in the university curriculum.

English for MICE

English for MICE is a type of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course soon to be offered to English-major, undergraduate students at the researcher's university. The course aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills to use English in the areas of the MICE industry. Since the

course was just recently added to the English-major curriculum, little is known about the effectiveness of the course constructs, particularly the content that is valid and relevant. Hence, an analysis to English language features necessary in the MICE industry is greatly required for a robust course design.

Rationale

Despite its prevalent sign of growth, the rise of the MICE industry in Thailand is still in its premature stage. This is not an exception in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), too. English for MICE, which is one of ESP courses that is soon to be offered at the researcher's university, is considered one of the few pioneers in Thailand's tertiary education. This implies that little is known about effective course constructs, particularly content that is valid and relevant. Therefore, there is a need to examine the requirements of stakeholders in the MICE industry to support the implementation of an effective ESP course. These needs will be the fundamental indicators that detail the language features currently in use in the MICE industry in Thailand, requirements and expectations of relevant stakeholders.

Realizing the merits that needs analysis offers to the construction of ESP courses (Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013), this study, therefore, prioritizes the voices and insights of the future employers. Data gathered from the needs analysis will serve as guidelines for building the course content that is authentic in terms of real-world English language use. Students taking this course will, thus, be exposed to and trained with the English language necessary for future professional use in the MICE industry.

Research Objectives

This research study identifies target English language and skills required in the operation of MICE business through the needs analysis of the employers or business operators in the MICE industry.

To be specific, the objectives of the study are:

1. To gather information on the target situation of English language and skills required in the MICE industry
2. To examine issues that hinder the successful use of English in performing the required tasks in MICE work.

Research Questions

Following are the two research questions of this study:

1. What are target situations of English language and skills required in the MICE industry?
2. What are problems of using English frequently found in the MICE industry?

Significance of the Study

This research is the first step towards the construction of the English for MICE course. It aims to give insight into the need for English in the MICE industry. Data gathered from the needs analysis

in this study serve as guidelines for building the course content that is authentic in terms of real-world English language use. Students, therefore, will have an opportunity to be exposed to the actual English language necessary for future professional use in the MICE industry.

Literature Review

Related literature, which covers English for Specific Purposes, English for MICE, an ESP course design and the significance of needs analysis in the course design, is reviewed.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

As the nature of this course entails language learning that focuses on preparing students for the English used in specific disciplines, this section briefly discusses the principles of ESP.

Since 1960, ESP has become an important area in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. It is an approach to language learning whereby the English language skills and content depend on the specific needs of a particular target situation, which can be academic, occupational or scientific (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, as cited in Polsombat, 2015).

Since ESP pertains to language use in a particular field of human activity, the development of an ESP course in terms of language features, activities, tasks, teaching approaches, and content should be based on the requirements and expectations of relevant stakeholders in that specific field. Most ESP courses require special English competency and are designed for adult students, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. In addition, they are focused on language appropriate to various activities in a particular context in terms of syntax, lexis, register, semantics, discourse, genre, and so on. Because of this, most ESP courses offer some basic knowledge of the language systems from the students (Dudley-Evans, 1998). Examples of ESP courses are English for Medical Studies, English for Business, Technical English, English for Tourism, and English for Airlines.

Designing an ESP course: English for MICE

Designing an ESP course is a process of gathering data to plan effective pedagogical activities and tasks as well as to create an appropriate learning context for students to reach the desired objectives. Accordingly, the course should comprise a considerable amount of general English with an integration of a functional terminological language preferred in the targeted context (Razika, 2017). ESP teachers should be aware of such matters so as to not solely teach general English; rather, they should emphasize teaching the specific English needed in a particular field of specialization to their students.

Literature suggests that designing an ESP course should be based on the voices and insights of relevant stakeholders. The first step of designing an ESP course is to assess the needs of all the stakeholders in academic and occupational contexts. According to Robinson (1991), an ESP course usually describes the outcome of three elements: the needs analysis results, the course designer's approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials. Moreover, Razika (2017) suggests that

the syllabus and the materials in an ESP course be determined by the prior analysis of the English language needs in a particular context. As mentioned by Hutchinson and Waters, teachers should know information on the features of English language and skills required in working or functioning in that specific context before designing the course so they can adjust and plan the content accordingly (Polsombat, 2015).

To summarize, designing an ESP course should begin with exploring the needs of the stakeholders in a particular work context in order to determine the specific language needs that students need to learn. Therefore, to design English for MICE, needs analysis is fundamentally needed.

Needs Analysis (NA)

In the present study, the definition of NA adheres to the most common one which refers to a systematic process of gathering information about needs in the context of the workplace and interpreting the information in order to accordingly develop an effective ESP course as suggested by many ESP scholars (e.g., Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, as cited in Chatsungnoen, 2015; Jin et al., 2014).

Gathering empirical data to understand the specific needs in the target situation of language use can be achieved through NA. It is a good starting point for ESP teachers to examine key requirements for a specific context. Such information helps teachers make an informed decision on what to teach their students (Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013). To put it simply, NA is highly recommended for teachers who are designing an ESP course since it provides insights that are useful in outlining the syllabus and designing instructional materials.

In the field of ESP, NA is of utmost importance because it provides a solid foundation to an ESP syllabus. Even though NA can be carried out at different stages of an ESP course: before, during, or after, according to each situation, it has been conventionally conducted during the initial stage of the course development, as the first step before a course starts (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, as cited in Chatsungnoen, 2015; Jin et al., 2014). The main purpose is to set the goals and objectives of the course and to suggest how the course should be taught. Based on this premise, the original definition of NA adheres to the starting line of a course development.

However, in many cases, an on-going NA can be conducted when the course is in place (Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013). During the course, perceptions, expectations, and needs of students, teachers and other stakeholders may change. In this sense, NA can take place at various points of the course to investigate those potential changes of the stakeholders in order to assess whether the objectives of an existing ESP course need to be revised or redesigned (Lowe, 2009; Robinson, 1991, as cited in Chatsungnoen, 2015). The outcome of an on-going NA defines a successful revision of an ESP programme or a course re-alignment in terms of the course objectives and course materials (Ahour & Mohseni, 2015; Prachanant, 2012).

The other definition of NA is related to course evaluation, which aims to pinpoint the effectiveness of a course or a program to ensure continuous improvement. This means NA is to investigate three areas of a course: the fulfillment of the students' needs, the authenticity of materials, tasks and assessments, as well as the students' autonomous learning or their ability to be responsible for what they learn (Tsou & Chen, 2014).

NA approaches and models.

From the review of literature, there are various meanings and types of needs. According to Widdowson (as cited in Polsombat, 2015), needs in an ESP context is considered goal-oriented rather than process-oriented because it gears towards the definition of needs for job requirements, not a series of steps taken in order to acquire the language. In addition, needs can also be interpreted as lack of English language use in a specific situation.

Many ESP scholars (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Robinson, 1991) suggest three fundamental models for assessing the language needs of learners: Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA).

Target Situation Analysis (TSA) refers to an NA that highlights on determining the language requirements in an occupational or academic setting. TSA is the oldest approach to NA (West, 1997). In the 1970s, the Council of Europe employed it to identify students' learning priorities regarding the language to be taught whether it is English, German, or French, etc., learning necessities such as the skills in the chosen language (reading, speaking, writing, etc.), and learning objectives such as functions or activities required for a target situation (speaking on the phone, listening to lectures, etc.). TSA informs language features, tasks, and activities in the target situation. In addition, TSA can best be perceived as a term that includes necessities, lacks, and wants (Mohammed & Nur, 2018). TSA deals with asking questions about the target situation and seeks the insights of the stakeholders; for example, students, teachers, researchers, and possible future employers. TSA usually includes six major questions, which can be further divided into several other questions. The main questions ask about the purposes in terms of which and what kind of language is needed, how the language is used, the content areas, who is involved in the communication process, the context in which the language will be used, and the time when the language will be used.

Present situation analysis (PSA) is another approach of NA. While TSA aims at identifying the kind of language used in the target situation, PSA aims to establish what students are like at the beginning of the course. That is to say, PSA shows the students' weakness and strength in language, their current skills and language use, as well as their learning experience (Mohammed & Nur, 2018). Furthermore, Hyland (2006) suggests that PSA provides both objective data such as age, proficiency, previous learning experience and subjective information that include self-perceived needs, weaknesses, and strengths. Therefore, PSA is best used for identifying students' current level of proficiency.

Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) is an approach that focuses on learning strategies of the students. It provides information about the conditions of the students' learning situation, their knowledge, strategies, and motivation. Compared to TSA, LSA aims to discover how they desire to learn rather than what they need to learn. LSA is, thus, subjective and process-oriented. If TSA determines the destination, LSA shows teachers a direction to take their students from the starting point to the destination (Mohammed & Nur, 2018).

In this study, Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was adopted as the framework in the design of the research instrument because its approach that highlights on determining the language requirements in an occupational setting properly matches the research objectives.

Related Past Studies

Since ESP studies on MICE are still very rare in Thailand, this section reviews ESP studies in other related industries, which are Business English and tourism and hospitality, conducted exclusively in Thai context. The prevalent goal of such studies is to gain insights into the needs and expectations of stakeholders in order to design an ESP syllabus or to adjust pedagogical activities according to the reported needs.

Choompon (2009) investigated needs for English communication in business at Siam Nissan Automobile Company Limited and Thepseenu (2020) investigated English language learning needs and perceptions of ESP for business in civil engineering through a mix-methods research design. Both studies shared similar results. That is, communicative or listening and speaking skills were the most essential to work in this discipline because they need English to communicate with their international clients on a daily basis. However, in the work context, fluency seemed to be put over grammatical accuracy.

Moreover, Changpueng and Pattanapichet (2015) investigated the needs for English writing skills in the workplace by including 110 managerial and operational engineers, 31 ESP teachers, and 354 engineering students from different departments (electrical, civil, mechanic, industrial, chemical, and productive) as the participants of the study. The results from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided information on the specific aspects of English writing skills required by managerial and operational engineers, such as writing e-mails and reports that are important for engineers in their work setting.

In terms of English at work, Polsombat (2015) investigated the need for English language skills as well as analyzed English communication difficulties of employees at a Japanese company in Thailand. The participants were 30 employees in the sales division at the target Japanese trading company and the research instrument was a questionnaire. Findings suggested that speaking and listening skills were the most important skills while listening to a Japanese accent tended to cause communication difficulties that they had to deal with. Moreover, lack of specialized vocabulary,

technical terms, appropriate word choices, and proper grammatical knowledge were also the problems that hinder their successful use of English at the workplace.

For tourism and hospitality industries, listening and speaking seemed to be the most important English skills ones need to master to work in the field. For example, Chantanont (2012) explored problems and needs for English communication of hotel front office staff in Bangkok, Thailand. The results showed that a major problem for hotel front office staff was listening skills since they had to face various English accents that they were not familiar with. Also, another problem is lack of vocabulary which could lead them to English problems in several skills such as speaking, reading, and writing.

Furthermore, Kaewkunha (2021) explored the needs, perceived lacks, and wants of English-language skills among Thai employees in the service industry using a mixed-method approach. The findings showed that Thai employees wished to master speaking the most, followed by listening, reading and writing. The findings also indicated that communicative skills were the most essential skills for service providers.

Lertchalermtipakoon et al., (2021) recently discovered the main English skills needed by students who study in the tourism and hospitality industry and investigated skills that seemed to be their problems in English language learning. The findings showed that integrated English language skills and grammatical structures were mostly needed. Also, the problematic skills for the students were listening and speaking.

Interestingly, common findings in these studies reveal that productive skills, or speaking and writing skills, are undeniably of importance in the ESP course in tourism and hospitality settings. The students need to be reinforced to communicate effectively in both oral and written forms.

Methodology

This study mainly employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection and data analysis. It aimed to provide a systematic description of the needs and problems of English language and skills required in the operation of the MICE business in Thailand through the Needs Analysis (NA) protocol.

Population and Sample

The target population were employers and executives in MICE sectors who serve as stakeholders in the industry. The participants in this study were 30 employers and executives who have at least 3-year experiences of working in the MICE industry in Thailand. They were recruited to participate in the study through purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

Of the 30 participants who completed the questionnaire, 19 participants (63.33%) were at a management level with more than 10 years of working experience in the MICE industry. The longest period of the participants' work experience in the MICE industry was 28 years. The majority of the

participants (19 participants or 63.33%) held a bachelor's degree. Only one participant had a doctorate degree.

Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments were an NA questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was designed to assess the target situations of the English language and skills necessary for workers to function successfully in the MICE industry as well as to examine issues that hinder the successful use of English in performing the required tasks in MICE work. Also, the semi-structured interview was to supplement the data gained from the questionnaire.

An NA questionnaire.

To develop the questionnaire, Target Situation Analysis (TSA) was adopted as the framework. To avoid ambiguity, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding, the language used in the questionnaire was Thai.

The questionnaire consisted of four major sections. It began with demographic information of the participants in the first section. Then, the second section included experiences of the participants regarding the use of English in the MICE workplace and English language skills necessary in the MICE industry. In this section, a 5-point Likert-scale of 32 items of target situations in MICE were provided for the participants to rate based on the level of importance (5 was *very important* and 1 was *least important*). The items were adapted from previous research studies of Chantanont (2012); Choompon (2009); Kaewkunha (2021); and Polsombat (2015). The third section of the questionnaire entailed the participants' expectations and suggestions about English language features and skills necessary for MICE. Multiple-choice and open-ended questions were provided in this section for the participants to suggest more on other necessary English language features and skills for the MICE industry. Finally, the last section encompassed the participants' difficulties and problems related to the use of English in MICE. This section included 8 items of English difficulties and problems adapted from previous research studies of Chantanont (2012); Choompon (2009); Kaewkunha (2021); and Polsombat (2015). The participants could select multiple answers from a list of choices provided. Also, an open-ended question was supplied for more answers from the participants.

The questionnaire was validated through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence or IOC protocol, where it was revised and piloted before its actual use. Three experts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) with teaching experiences in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses were invited to rate the congruence of the questionnaire items with the objective of the study—to inquire about and analyze the needs of the industry in designing English of MICE course. The rating scales included: 1 (*appropriate*), 0 (*questionable* or *unclear*), or -1 (*inappropriate*). The scores of each item from the three experts were added and calculated for mean. The items that receive the mean between

0.5–1.00 were then considered valid, while the items with the mean below than 0.5 were invalid and were duly revised.

A semi-structured interview.

The questions for the semi-structured interview were informed by the participants' responses in the questionnaire. The duration for the interview session lasted approximately 25–30 minutes. In order to eliminate any language problems that may affect comprehension, the interview was in the participant's native language, Thai.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was formatted to Google Forms and distributed online from January 2021 to April 2021. All participants had to read a description and a written consent form on the first page of the questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire by the participant was an equivalent to his or her consent to take part in this study.

The MICE employees and executives who had at least three-year experiences of working in the industry were asked for their voluntary participation. Then, the initial participants were used to help identify other participants who also met the criteria. This snowball sampling process continued until the sample size reached 30 participants.

The interview was conducted via the phone call during the COVID-19 lockdown in May 2021 and a note-taking technique was adopted. The sampling technique for the interview was purposive sampling. Only one participant who had 28 years of work experiences in the MICE industry in Thailand was invited to participate in the interview because the participant provided very interesting and insightful information in the questionnaire. Moreover, with 28 years of work experience in the industry, the participant could constructively recap and understand the industry overview in terms of what is wanted and what is needed the most.

Data Analysis

Different measures of data analysis were employed in this study. Descriptive statistics was applied in the analysis of quantitative data from the questionnaire. Statements that were rated at the level of importance using a 5-point Likert scale were processed to find the mean score of each item as well as the standard deviation. Also, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. The alpha coefficient was 0.96, suggesting that the items were highly consistent.

For items of the Likert scales in the second section of the questionnaire, an interpretation of the mean scores used in this study was suggested by Pimentel (2019).

Table 1

The Interpretation of Likert Scale Responses

4.20–5.00	Very Important
3.40–4.19	Important
2.60–3.39	Moderately Important
1.8–2.59	Slightly Important
1.00–1.79	Least Important

Moreover, the checklist and multiple-choice questions were calculated for frequency count and percentage. For open-ended items in the third and fourth sections of the questionnaire, the data were analyzed by looking for patterns through keywords and repeated words. They were, then, categorized using the thematic coding method.

For the analysis of the data obtained through the semi-structured interview, the participant's responses were refined to a manageable level. The notes taken from the semi-structured interview were shortened into briefer statements.

Findings of the Study

The report on the findings of this study is divided into two major parts. The first part presents the target situation where English is needed for Thai workers to perform successfully in the MICE industry. The second part elaborates on the issues that hinder the successful use of English in performing the required tasks in MICE.

English Target Language Needs in the MICE Industry

In response to the first research question, findings suggest significant target situations in the MICE industry where English is frequently used and highly necessary. Moreover, further analyses showed that, to the same extent, the majority of the participants (63.33%) used both general English and English for MICE that has specific phrases, expressions and vocabulary in their work routine. Even though English speaking skills are deemed prevalent in the industry, almost half of the participants (46.7%) used integrated skills of English to perform tasks in the MICE industry on a daily basis.

Based on the data from the 32 items of the 5-point Likert scale in the second section of the questionnaire, there were 13 target situations that had the mean scores above 4.20 (see Table 2). The interpretation of mean scores suggests that these 13 target English language needs are considered very necessary for Thai workers in the MICE industry.

As shown in Table 2, the most important target situation where English is required in MICE sectors was the ability to brief and explain concepts, scopes, and details of an event (meeting, incentive, conference, and exhibition) to relevant stakeholders ($\bar{X} = 4.8$). It was followed by the ability to deliver a sales pitch to a client in English ($\bar{X} = 4.7$) as well as the ability to listen and understand a client's

needs ($\bar{X} = 4.6$) and respond to their inquiry ($\bar{X} = 4.6$) were also deemed necessary in this industry. The rest of the target situations of English that are considered very important in the industry are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Important Target Situations of English in MICE

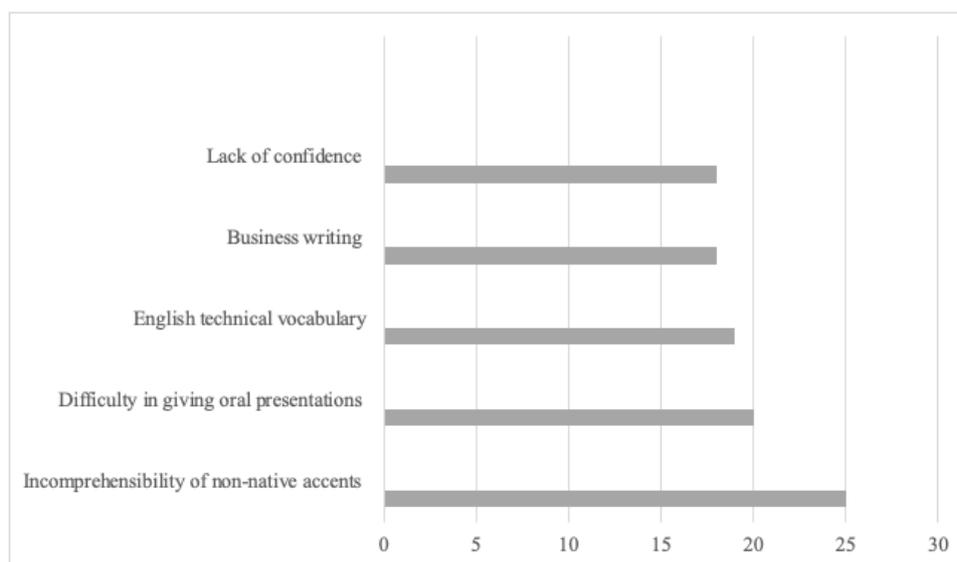
Target Situations	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Brief and explain concepts, scopes, and details of an event (meeting, incentive, conference, and exhibition)	4.8	0.44	Very important
Deliver a sales pitch to a client in English	4.7	0.34	Very important
Respond to clients' inquiries	4.6	0.37	Very important
Ask and identify clients' needs	4.6	0.50	Very important
Handle clients' complaints	4.53	0.83	Very important
Read and write a formal email correspondence	4.5	0.37	Very important
Make and receive a business phone call	4.46	0.43	Very important
Create an effective, professional-looking PowerPoint presentation and infographic	4.46	0.60	Very important
Lead and make a discussion in business meeting	4.43	0.34	Very important
Read memos and relevant documents for MICE such as bid documents, bills of lading, fair passes, brochures, flyers, or certificates of inspection	4.33	0.47	Very important
Make small talk with clients	4.26	0.7	Very important
Write a press release in English	4.23	0.62	Very important
Write a business letter in English	4.23	0.64	Very important

Furthermore, the data obtained from the open-ended items in the questionnaire revealed other necessary target situations for the MICE Industry. To start with, 66% of the participants expected that future employees in the MICE industry should be able to communicate effectively in English business setting and be comfortable to engage in small talk with international clients and business partners. Accuracy and appropriateness of English language are highly valued in the MICE industry. These successful performances of such target English language would play an essential role in their professional and the company's image.

Common Problems of English in the MICE Industry

To answer the second research question, the participants were invited to select from the checklist of the problems and challenges that hampered their effective English communication in the MICE industry. Of all the eight items in the checklist, there are five problems that at least 50% of the participants selected or mentioned about in the open-ended section and the semi-structured interview.

Figure 1

Problems of English in the MICE Industry**Comprehensibility of non-native accents.**

Interestingly, the most common problem found in the MICE industry in Thailand dealt with the issue of the variety of English. Reporting on the participants' experiences, 83.33% of them had very little or no exposure to other varieties of English. Supplemented by the semi-structured interview, the non-native accents that caused such difficulties to the participants were Chinese, Indians, or Saudi Arabians, which represent a large group of MICE customers and tourists in Thailand.

In the MICE industry, there is a high tendency that individuals from a different cultural background and mother tongues would be involved in business communication. This situation cannot be overlooked. It might be true that effective business communication can be as simple as writing an email or greeting people in a meeting. However, it is impossible to guarantee that a business task in the MICE industry would be correctly performed when the people who work in the industry only have acquaintance with a single variety of English. The lack of exposure to a range of varieties of English accents devastatingly impacts their communication in global business.

Giving oral presentation.

Moreover, 20 participants (66.7%) had difficulty in giving an effective presentation in English. In addition to personal reasons such as lack of confidence and anxiety, lack of knowledge on useful phrases and expressions in English presentations was a contributing factor. Based on the open-ended question and the semi-structured interview, the content of the presentation was not at all their concern. However, they seemed to feel anxious when it came to the mechanics of English language for presentation. What they lacked is the so-called signpost phrases for presenting in English. They

considered the use of the signpost phrases as helpful to their presentation and to them as a presenter because it would help in orienting the audiences and navigating their presentation professionally.

English technical vocabulary.

The participants suggested the important role of English vocabulary in performing English tasks in the MICE industry. Especially in formal, business writing where standard English is required. Based on the semi-structured interview, potential employees in the MICE sector should be familiar with writing patterns, core vocabulary, fixed expressions, and useful phrases that are frequently used in English business correspondence. In the opened-ended question, the participants also further provided a list of core vocabulary and useful phrases that they thought necessary and worth knowing. Examples of some vocabulary and useful phrases are *shell scheme*, *space only*, *bill of lading (B/L)*, and *fair pass*.

Surprisingly, 63.3% of the participants had poor linguistic input on the writing mechanics and substantially struggled when it came to writing English business correspondence. In addition, 36.7% of them elaborated more in the open-ended question that they lacked specialized vocabularies or technical words used in the industry. This lexical barrier can interfere with message transmission and reception in their work context since these vocabularies have a restricted meaning and play a key role in communication in the industry. This implies that formulaic English as well as writing mechanics such as punctuation marks, spellings, and capitalizations have their significance in the MICE setting.

Discussion

The findings emphasized the importance of English language in the MICE industry in Thailand as well as highlighted the necessity of English preparation courses for future MICE employees. Evidence from the target situations found in the present study suggests that MICE employees are required to take part in interactive work routines. Productive skills of English, especially speaking, is of utmost significance in MICE professional communication since most MICE employees are responsible for customer relations and take care of operational tasks. Future MICE employees will be required to use English in briefing and explaining concepts, scopes, and details of an event, delivering a sales pitch to a client, responding to clients' inquiries, needs, and complaints, and making a discussion in a business meeting. As the findings suggest, they need to master English speaking skills in order to effectively communicate with colleagues, clients, and relevant stakeholders through meetings and presentations.

Besides the speaking skills, future MICE employees need to be able to communicate considerably well in an English written form with an appropriate level of formality through business correspondence such as emails and letters. This finding informs that the teaching of specialized vocabulary, technical words, and abbreviations used in MICE is necessary in an English for MICE course. Given this, it becomes reasonable to say that productive skills of English allow MICE employees to present themselves and their organizations professionally.

These findings lend support to previous ESP studies in business English and hospitality. As pointed out by Choompon (2009), Kaewkunha (2021), and Polsombat (2015), speaking skills were mostly required by the employees whose works were related to international business and tourism industry. This is in complete agreement that the importance of proficient, fluent, and proper English speaking in the hospitality industry is undeniable. Employees with good business language skills are likely to be entrusted with higher responsibilities and can progress faster to a higher position with a lucrative income.

In addition, issues that affect successful use of English among MICE employees were also reported in the findings such as incomprehensibility of non-native English accents, lack of must-know phrases in business conversation and correspondence, and presentation difficulties. This finding suggests that the integrated skills of English also play an influential role in the enhancement of communication of the MICE employees although the productive skills of English play a significant role in the industry.

The common problems of the English language found in the MICE industry are consistent with the trading industry proposed by Polsombat (2015). The majority of Thai employees seemed to have poor presentation skills and also lack the knowledge of expression. Lack of specialized vocabulary and technical terms, inappropriate word choices and improper grammatical knowledge were the top problems that hinder Thai workers' successful use of English at the workplace.

The other interesting finding is that accuracy and appropriateness of English were valued in the MICE industry. However, this contradicts previous studies, such as that by Choompon (2009) where fluency was valued more than grammatical accuracy in automobile business. The possible explanation would be because the MICE business usually carries the name of the country it represents. Not only that, organizing the MICE events is considered formal, which makes up a large part of the national and global business travels. A proper and accurate English language use would increase the credential of the employees and the image of their corporations and countries. This finding implies that necessary phrases, specialized vocabulary, technical words, abbreviations used in MICE, and etiquette for business small talk and meetings in English should be included in the course.

Implications of the Study

Findings from this study have considerable implications for designing the syllabus and materials in English for MICE course. The course content should include integrated skills of English, with an emphasis on productive skills. English language features and skills that are highly needed in the industry such as briefing and explaining concepts, scopes, and details of an event, delivering a sales pitch to a client, responding to clients' inquiries, needs, and complaints, and making a discussion in a business meeting and making a small talk with clients should be the top priority.

In terms of tasks for English for MICE, presentation should be part of it. Scaffolding is extremely needed especially in terms of boosting confidence and supplementing with useful phrases and specialized words necessary for a presentation.

In terms of writing, apart from writing different business correspondences, writing a press release should be included in the syllabus. Press release are considered an effective promotional tool to publicize relevant information of an event in the MICE industry. Moreover, as the results in Table 1 suggest, visual literacy skills for designing and creating successful infographic and presentation slides are also necessary in the course as these skills will help the MICE employees to communicate more successfully in the multimodal world.

For the course materials, a selection of listening materials that include non-native English speaker accents should also be highlighted. Furthermore, authentic and hands-on materials from the industry should be integrated in the course. Also, the communicative-cooperative pedagogy should be adopted in order to promote interactions among learners in which group work is emphasized to accomplish meaningful tasks.

Limitations and Recommendations

Despite the fact that this study could be a springboard for developing English for MICE and other ESP courses related to MICE in Thailand, a number of potential limitations need to be considered. First of all, the sample of this study was context bound. In other words, they merely were representative of stakeholders in the MICE industry in Thailand. Thus, the findings might not be generalizable to MICE in other ELT contexts.

Secondly, the present study is a survey study with the data supplemented by an interview. The results may reflect the needs of people in the MICE industry. If on-the-job observation is conducted, an in-depth understanding of the needs of English for MICE would be clearer. Equally interesting, future studies may also consider using other data collection approaches such as document analysis to yield other relevant data.

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About the Author

Savika Varaporn is a full-time English lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand. She received her Ph.D. degree in English Language Teaching (International Programme) from the Language Institute of Thammasat University. Her research interests include EFL reading, multimodality in ELT, and multiliteracies. She can be reached at savikav@gmail.com.