

Thai Entrepreneurs' Needs of English Language for Raft Service Business

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Abstract

This paper discusses the needs of entrepreneurs in raft service business catering to restaurants, accommodation, and entertainment regarding communicative English with international tourists visiting Kanchanaburi province, Thailand. These raft services started as family businesses that have been continuing to grow in tourism industry in Kanchanaburi. Drawing upon focus group discussions with thirty entrepreneurs to analyze their needs of English, there are three key results including firstly, needs for improving speaking skill; secondly, needs for learning English and other languages; and lastly, needs for the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development. These entrepreneurs felt a strong need to improve their speaking skill the most due to the frequency of interactions requiring verbal English skills. They aimed to gain better fluency rather than accuracy because their customers were mostly from 'non-native' English speaking countries such as China and Myanmar. This study recognizes the importance of adult language learning that can allow these entrepreneurs to be more pro-active to gain competitive advantages in their English language skills for occupations. This study is beneficial for promoting and improving entrepreneurs' communicative English proficiency relevant for tourism and service business, which can contribute for a higher quality of Thailand's tourism business in the era of ASEAN Economic Community.

Keywords: Needs analysis; English for raft service business; entrepreneurs; community of practice; ASEAN Economic Community

Introduction

Needs analysis of English language has become prominent in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) because it can help researchers to find out what kinds of specific English use and functions are required for certain occupations (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Since English has been considered as the most important language for communication in the tourism industries, English for Tourism has become one of the key ESP branches, which has been well established and sub-categorized into different areas such as English for Cultural Tourism, English for Sustainable Tourism, and English for Business Tourism (Adorján, 2013). A recent special issue of *English for Specific Purposes Journal* was dedicated to 'ESP Research in Asia' to address trends and changes regarding professional and academic communication in Asia and highlight the interrelationship between educational, economic, and socio-cultural contexts being relevant to ESP research and practice (Cheng & Anthony, 2014).

ESP in Asia has gained more significant since English has become the working language of ASEAN in 2015. As a result, the current demand for tourism English has drastically increased. Being the main language used for international communication, English is essential for tourism business entrepreneurs dealing with international tourists. With regard to this current study, the needs of English language required by a particular group of entrepreneurs in raft service business in Kanchanaburi, Thailand were investigated. Despite the fact that there are materials available in the field of English for Tourism, Hospitality, and Services, Magennis (2002) claims that the literature in this field still requires more studies to fulfill the increasing international demands in English for Tourism at a global scale. However, studies regarding English for Tourism in raft service business, particularly in Kanchanaburi province, are relatively limited in the literature, and that requires further examination.

Tourism business in Kanchanaburi is a growing service industry among international tourists. Figure 1 shows a number of international tourists who were travelling to Kanchanaburi in 2011 according to their

regions.

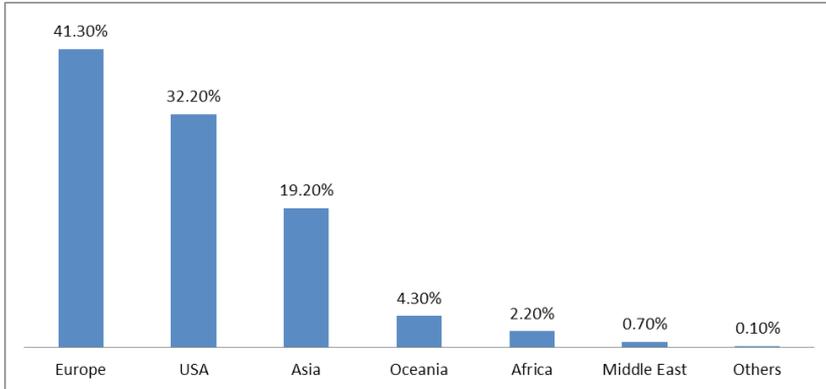


Figure 1: A number of international tourists in Kanchanaburi province according to their regions in 2011

(Source:<http://www.tourism.go.th/2010/upload/filecenter/file/StatSS54/W/KANCHANABURI.pdf>)

According to Figure 1, it is evident that the top three regions where international tourists were from included Europe, USA, and Asia; which means that tourism industry in Kanchanaburi depends on a number of different types of successful tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, travel agencies, tours, and adventure and nature-based tour operations. One of these services is raft service business that is originated from raft houses renovated to be resorts and restaurants to promote tourism in Kanchanaburi; and thus, the most practical function of the raft houses nowadays is for commercial and recreational use that allows tourists to enjoy the river cruise on these raft houses (Denpaiboon et al., 2002). Figure 2 illustrates a number of international tourists according to accommodations they stayed in Kanchanaburi in 2011.

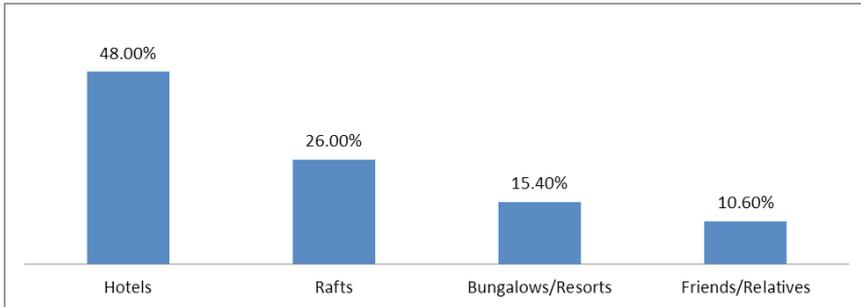


Figure 2: A number of international tourists according to accommodations in Kanchanaburi province in 2011
(Source:<http://www.tourism.go.th/2010/upload/filecenter/file/StatSS54/W/KANCHANABURI.pdf>)

According to Figure 2, it is clear that rafts were ranked the second among different types of accommodations, which suggests that rafts were preferred by international tourists as a place for them to stay while travelling in Kanchanaburi. These raft service business can generally be categorized into three main kinds: restaurant, accommodation, and entertainment rafts. Most raft business entrepreneurs often combine their products and services to provide tourists and visitors with a one-stop-service experience that typically includes several stops at the nearby tourist attractions (i.e. The Bridge over the River Kwai and the Floating Nun), a leisurely lunch, and an overnight stay on the raft. For those with less time to spare, a two-hour jungle raft excursion can be arranged from a mountain pass to the stunning natural surroundings. It is clear that tourism is viewed as a service industry that creates memorable experiences for tourists and visitors who enjoy meeting new friends, sharing their experiences, and exposing to various cultures and languages. The results of this study can potentially provide some practical recommendations with regard to pedagogical implications that can enhance the entrepreneurs' communication for their raft service

business in Kanchanaburi. This development can in turn create positive travelling experiences for international tourists when visiting Kanchanaburi.

Literature Review

This section reviews needs analysis drawn from Hutchinson & Waters' (1987) 'learning-centered approach' whereby the course content, method, and learners' reasons for learning are based. In case of entrepreneurs who are considered adult language learners in this study, the analysis can gain deeper insights into their actual needs that can guide the researcher to provide them with better training courses that meet their required language skills and functions. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) state that the teaching process of any kind of language for occupational purposes should take the analysis as a starting point of the four main skills as well as grammar and vocabulary within an appropriate workplace context.

A large number of studies in service industries including hotels, restaurants, and tourism employ needs analysis to find out what employers and employees need in terms of English and how these needs can be served and improved. In Nigeria, for example, Umera-Okeke (2008) reveals that there is a need for on-the-job training for most hotel staff with regard to their listening and speaking skills for effective intercultural communication in the tourism and hospitality industries. In the Croatian tourist context, effective collaboration between the English language and hospitality teaching program and the Croatia Tourism Authority is highly recommended due to the year-round tourism in the country (Kostic Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011).

English for Tourism in Thailand has been much researched in terms of the needs of English for employers, employees, tourists, and relevant stakeholders such as local people and government agencies. This is due to the fact that Thailand is well-known among international tourists; most of whom use English as a medium of communication. For instance, Aunreun (2005) finds that there is a need for an on-the-job English training for travel

agents, which should be in collaboration with certain organizations such as Tourism Authority of Thailand and local universities. Opasruttanakorn et al. (2006) study Kiriwong community, which is well-known for its tourism management in Nakhon Sri Thammarat province. Local people's needs regarding types of language skills and functions necessary for their actual communicative situations are general English particularly in listening and speaking skills in order to express themselves appropriately.

Drawing upon socio-cultural perspectives, Moore (2009) reveals that communicative competence of hotel staff in Phuket province deals with their personal experience of English, interlanguage and variation in English use, struggles of identity and empowerment, acculturation into the target language group, and appropriate standard of English for Thailand. This shows the interrelationship between local users of English and international tourists who need to accommodate varieties of spoken English and different cultures to promote greater intelligibility. Prachanant's study (2012) suggests that tourism employees view speaking as the most important skill, and relevant speaking functions include giving information, providing services, and offering assistance; however, they are not only unable to comprehend foreign tourists' various accents, understand inappropriate words and expressions, but they also have insufficient vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

Based on these aforementioned studies suggest that English used in tourism contexts should be contextualized by recognizing the specific needs of people in a situated community and bringing in their lived experiences into a language classroom; and thus, they can bridge their current needs with future demands for tourism industry in their socio-cultural contexts. Lave & Wenger (1991) coin the term 'community of practice' which captures the importance of activity in connecting individuals to communities, and of communities legitimizing individual practices. It involves the changing levels of participation in a way that newcomers are empowered to gradually move from peripheral to fuller participation in the activities of the specific community of practice through repeated and frequent interactions with more

experienced members. In this study, it is a mixture of long-term raft entrepreneurs and younger business tycoons. The former have the experience, yet their English is limited. The latter lack experience, but their English skills are much better. This is a space where these two generations can create a learning community that enables the two parties to learn both content and language from one another. This is central to legitimate peripheral participation that provides a way to speak about the relationships between newcomers and experts, and about activities, identities, and communities of knowledge and practice, which allows newcomers to be part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

To conclude, these aforementioned studies show the necessity and importance of English language use and functions in Thai tourism business. It is essential to note that the needs for supports from governmental sectors and local agencies and stakeholders play a crucial role in promoting tourism in local communities in Kanchanaburi. Understanding the needs of entrepreneurs in this study requires effective collaborations from public and private organizations in Kanchanaburi for the further development of this current study.

Research Methodology

Research setting and participants

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study because it enabled the researcher to gain deeper insights from relevant stakeholders who played significant roles in tourism business in Kanchanaburi. Initially, the researcher approached the Director of Kanchanaburi Province Business Development Office under the supervision of Department of Business Development, Ministry of Commerce for the preliminary data for business entrepreneurs in Kanchanaburi province. The researcher was informed that there were more than 70 entrepreneurs in raft service business registered with this Provincial Business Development Office in Kanchanaburi. These entrepreneurs were also members of Kanchanaburi Tourist Boat and Raft Operator Association, who could take part in this research project.

Entrepreneurs in raft service business were then identified as a target group who wanted to improve their English the most because they frequently interacted with international tourists; yet, they did not have the opportunity to be trained and equipped with English skills. Consequently, the Director of Kanchanaburi Province Business Development Office contacted the President of Kanchanaburi Tourist Boat and Raft Operator Association to contact potential participants who were members of Kanchanaburi Tourist Boat and Raft Operator Association whether they would be interested in taking part in this research project. Thirty participants agreed and attended the focus-group interviews set in one participant's raft. The following figures provide a demographic profile of the participants. Figure 3 presents a number of participants by genders.

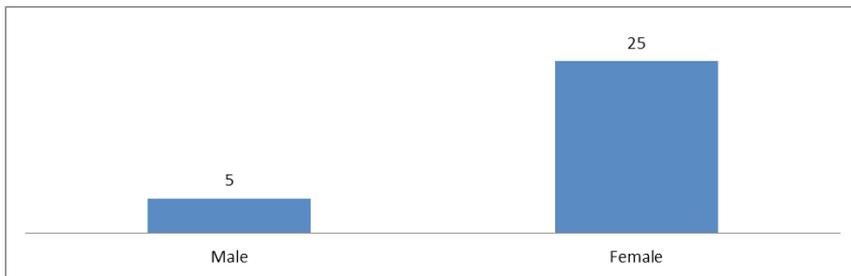


Figure 3: A number of participants according to genders

According to Figure 3, there were 5 males and 25 females participating in this research project, which showed that the female participants were more interested in improving their English. Figure 4 shows a number of the participants according to their age.

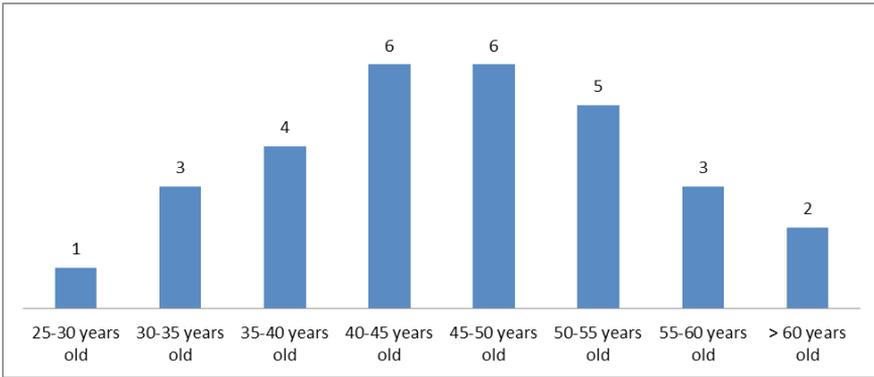


Figure 4: A number of participants according to age

According to Figure 4, there were 17 participants who represented the majority of this research project; 12 of whom were 40-45 years old and 45-50 years old, and 5 of whom were 50-55 years old. It is interesting to note that quite a few of the participants were the elderly; 3 of whom were 55-60 years old, and 2 of whom were more than 60 years old. The elderly participated in this project because they would like to know more about the research project in order to encourage their children, grandchildren, and young staff to learn English for their business development. There was only 1 participant who belonged to the 25-30 years old group because this participant was a family member of the participants who had helped working in the raft service business.

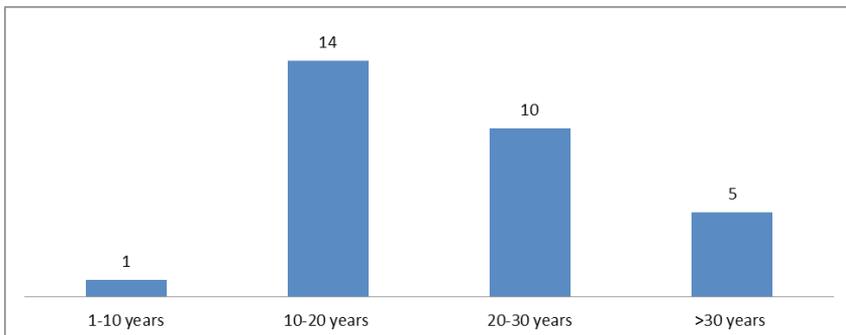


Figure 5: A number of participants according to years of work experience in raft service business

Figure 5 suggests that the majority (14 participants) worked in this business from 10-20 years, while only 1 participant was in this business less than 10 years. Ten participants had run the business for nearly 30 years, whereas 5 participants had more than 30-year working experiences, which created a wide range of business experiences and expertise.

To conclude, on average, the majority of the participants were 40-55 years old. Most of them had been running the raft business for more than 10 years. They found communication in English extremely difficult and challenging. Because their English proficiency was relatively low, their needs of English deserved more attention for future professional development.

Research ethics

From the outset, the participants were greeted and introduced by the Director of Kanchanaburi Province Business Development Office and followed by the President of Kanchanaburi Tourist Boat and Raft Operator Association. Then, the researcher explained in details the significance, objectives, and the outcomes of this project according to research ethics. It should be noted that this research project was approved by Mahidol University – Institutional Review Board in Social Sciences and Humanities (MU-SSIRB). Following the explanation and clarification of the research project, the participants were given the research proposal and informed consent forms which they read and signed. The following section discusses how the data were collected and analyzed.

Data collection

Focus-group interview was employed in this study because it provided a space for sharing ideas and responses to the questions. It also allowed the researcher to learn various opinions on a given topic. The focus group interview is defined as “a research interviewing process specifically designed to uncover insights from a small group of subjects” (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p. 391). According to Berg (1995), the

researcher plays the role of a facilitator in order to mediate interactions among participants in small groups. Billson (2006) suggests that a moderator or facilitator can stimulate participants' motivations, feelings, and values via skillful probing and restating responses, which may not emerge in individual interviews or surveys.

In this study, the participants were divided into four groups; each of which had seven to eight participants. Each group discussion was conducted by one research assistant as a group moderator. There were three research assistants who were master's students who were trained to conduct focus-group interviews. The researcher was also a moderator in one of the groups. During the discussions, the researcher and research assistants took the role of a 'facilitator' or a 'moderator' and introduced topics of discussion, but encouraged participants to discuss the topics among themselves. It is, however, important to note that to create an effective focus group interview; participants should be familiar with one another so that they do not feel hesitant to express their thoughts freely. These participants knew each other very well as they belonged to Kanchanaburi Tourist Boat and Raft Operator Association; and thus, they felt free to express their thoughts and opinions.

Each focus group started with a basic opening question, requesting participants to introduce themselves, their businesses, and work experiences. The rest of the interview questions were as follows.

1. In which situations do you normally use English?
2. What are your problems and challenges of using English?
3. How do you overcome those problems and challenges?
4. What kinds of English language skills would you like to improve?
5. What kinds of English language training would you like?
6. Which English language skills will be relevant for your business?
7. Which suggestions would you like to give to improve English for tourism business entrepreneurs?

The focus group interview took place at the participant's

restaurant raft where they could sit in a group. The interview lasted about an hour. During the discussion, the participants used Thai language to convey their thoughts. The interview was recorded with a digital voice recorder. The recorded interviews were then transcribed. Thai transcripts were then returned to the participants to ensure the validation, which is called 'respondent validation' (Bryman, 2008). This was very useful because some words incomprehensible on the recordings were corrected by the respondents. The validated transcripts were then translated into English and validated by the researcher to determine whether there were any missing points or losses in translations, thus ensuring the validity and reliability of the transcripts which were later analyzed as follows.

Data analysis

Since this study employs four multiple focus groups, the data analysis of this study employed 'constant comparison analysis.' According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), because data from multiple focus groups are analyzed one focus group at a time, analysis of multiple focus groups allows the researcher to assess whether the themes emerged from one group may also emerge from other groups. The English transcripts were gathered and manually analyzed by the researcher to find similarities and differences amongst the emerging themes in the various focus groups. This process was helpful when cross-checking whether certain key themes also emerged in other focus groups to ensure that all the themes were identified. These key themes will be reported in the following sections.

Findings and Discussion

There are three primary needs of English for raft service business entrepreneurs; firstly, needs for improving speaking skill; secondly, needs for learning English and other languages; and lastly, needs for the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development, which will be presented in turn.

1) Needs for improving English speaking skill

Most entrepreneurs strongly agreed that they needed to improve their speaking skill the most because it was necessary for their day-to-day and business communications.

Extract 1

Speaking skill is the most important because I need to explain tourists about raft fares, cruising directions, facilities, and other services information.

Extract 2

I could take orders, recommend some foods and drinks. Moreover, I use English to inform tourists about cruising distance and time, tourist attractions, and travelling activities such as swimming and rafting.

These extracts suggest that English needed by these entrepreneurs was very much related to their business functions that dealt with cruising, facilities, tourist attractions, and activities regarding swimming and rafting, which required them to learn particular words and expressions in tourism. However, their current communicative competence was rather limited as most of them knew very few English words revealed in the following extracts.

Extract 3

I use simple English on the raft like 'welcome,' 'toilet,' and 'disco.'

Extract 4

I can speak simple words like '3 kilometers,' 'left,' and 'right.'

These extracts show that they could only use some words that could be easily remembered and used on a regular basis. Yet, it is also vital for them to develop their self-confidence in terms of pronunciation that might hinder their communication as the following extract reveals.

Extract 5

International tourists asked me 'Do you speak English?' I answered 'No. No speak English.'

Some entrepreneurs found it very difficult to understand other varieties of English accents. The following extract suggests that English for Tourism should include more varieties of English accents to which entrepreneurs could be exposed.

Extract 6

I want to learn English for Tourism that allows entrepreneurs to be able to listen and respond to tourists. I want to improve my listening comprehension because tourists nowadays come from many countries with different English accents that I find difficult to comprehend. Some tourists speak so fast that I cannot understand.

Although listening comprehension was not considered as a priority, it was essential for communication; otherwise, effective conversations could not take place.

Extract 7

The communication problem I have found is that although I can understand the conversation, I cannot respond to tourists because I don't know how to put my thoughts into sentences. I don't know which words to use.

In addition, the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge could hamper entrepreneurs to deliver their ideas properly. Some entrepreneurs, however, used pictures to convey their message.

Extract 8

*If I can't communicate with tourists,
I will use pictures of tourist attractions such as
'museum' with the accompanied descriptions in
English.*

As their daily conversations were primarily about tourist attractions, pictures could effectively help entrepreneurs to communicate. It was nevertheless important for them to elaborate more when tourists asked for further information that might require them to 'think on their feet,' which was something they should seriously consider when running raft service business.

The following extract demonstrates some entrepreneurs' attitudes towards their English pronunciation that did not conform to standard pronunciation features.

Extract 9

*I don't have confidence in speaking
English with international tourists because I am
afraid of mispronunciation like 'tree' or 'three.'*

The word pair 'tree' and 'three' is explicitly addressed in Baker (2006) to emphasize the significance of correct pronunciation for beginner-level learners. Yet, recent studies regarding English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) have provided us with new perspectives for varieties of spoken English for non-native-English speakers (NNESs). Jenkins (2012), for example, argues for the recognitions of the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, which are produced by numerous NNESs from a range of L1s with either /s/ and /z/ or /t/ and /d/, or a combination of both; for instance, 'think' can be

pronounced /sɪŋk/ or /tɪŋk/, not /θɪŋk/, and 'then' pronounced /zen/ or /den/, not /ðen/.

In a Southeast-Asian context in particular, when English becomes the working language in ASEAN, Deterding & Kirkpatrick (2006, p.395) reveal some shared pronunciation features like dental fricative /θ/ as /t/ as in 'thing,' which can be pronounced as /tɪŋ/; and that does not hinder intelligibility. Trakulkasemsuk (2012) also observes that Thai people normally pronounce /θ/ as /t/ in the initial consonant position. Thus, this entrepreneur's pronunciation problem is quite common among Thai speakers, which represents our linguistic identity instead of a sign of inferiority to 'standard' English.

In conclusion, entrepreneurs' primary needs of English mainly focus on speaking skill that includes daily conversations, English for Tourism particularly for raft service business, 'standard' English pronunciation; while their secondary needs concern listening skill that helps them to respond to international tourists. The following section demonstrates their needs for English language training.

2) Needs for learning English and other languages

Entrepreneurs' needs of English language training reflected how their English speaking skill could be improved, which could lead to appropriate teaching methods. The following extracts indicate the actual use and functions of English in their jobs and daily lives.

Extract 10

I want to learn spoken English regarding food recommendations, tourist attractions, and basic conversations that can be used in real situations.

Extract 11

I want to learn main topics for conversations that are necessary for my job such as directions, tourist attractions, and restaurants. The content of teaching materials should represent tourist attractions like caves in Kanchanaburi in terms of how to get there.

Extract 12

The content should directly be about the raft service business such as types of the rafts and accommodations, facilities, and tourist attractions in Kanchanaburi.

The above extracts show that these entrepreneurs were willing to improve their English for professional development because they focused on topics that were normally used in raft service business in Kanchanaburi. Nevertheless, they also recognized the importance of other languages including Chinese.

Extract 13

I want to learn Chinese along with English because there are a lot of Chinese tourists. But, Chinese teenagers nowadays can also communicate in English.

The following extract reveals how English and Chinese language could be beneficial for these entrepreneurs for their business promotional purposes through their websites.

Extract 14

I would like to create a website promoting my raft service business by including pictures and facilities in English, Chinese, and Thai languages, which can facilitate tourists who search for tourism information via Internet.

In addition, Myanmar language has become another important language because Myanmar is right at the border of Kanchanaburi, and the border trade enables Myanmar business people to come to Kanchanaburi for business and leisure activities.

Extract 15

At the moment, there are two main languages: English and Chinese used in our community; and in the next two years, there must also be Myanmar language.

Entrepreneurs also anticipated that there would be more Myanmar people crossing over to Kanchanaburi when the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) officially opens in 2015; thus, they are free to travel from their country to Thailand by way of entering Kanchanaburi.

Extract 16

However, entrepreneurs should also think of the future when ASEAN Economic Community is open because we don't know exactly if there will more international tourists.

Entrepreneurs realized that they really needed to develop advanced English communication skills; otherwise, they might not be able to compete with the strong demands of English in the near future.

Extract 17

At the moment, I think it's important to improve speaking and listening skills for advanced communication rather than fundamental English conversations because in the future there will more demands in English. I notice that Myanmar staff can communicate in English. They are also more patient when working than the Thai staff.

Without developing advanced English communication, entrepreneurs could eventually lose their competitive advantage to Myanmar staff, who are hard-working and capable of speaking English.

To conclude, entrepreneurs' needs for learning English and other languages including Chinese and Myanmar languages were very much related to their current and future demands for tourism and border trades due to the upcoming of AEC. Similarly, Basturkmen (2010) states that ESP focuses on language as situated language use; and as a result, decisions about what and how to teach are based on how English is used in certain socio-cultural contexts of the users. This study shows that entrepreneurs' English language needs are not only about the learning of language, but also the community where teacher and students can create interpersonal and group relations and interactions by exchanging, sharing and negotiating their experiences and worldviews toward tourism industry in Kanchanburi for the betterment of their raft service business and the community as a whole.

The last but not the least needs of the entrepreneurs are involved with the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development.

3) Needs for the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development

This section highlights the needs for the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development by participating in English language training programs and accessing learning materials entrepreneurs preferred; so that they could be facilitated in an appropriate manner. The extract below emphasizes the significance of attending English language training because they believed that they would be better equipped with English in the future.

Extract 18

There should be a training to develop English skills for raft service business

entrepreneurs particularly speaking skill so that we can communicate with international tourists, talk about our business. There is no agency promoting raft service business in English; and thus, international tourists do not know about us.

One of the reasons that entrepreneurs wanted to improve their English was because they wanted their raft service business to be more well-known among international tourists. Currently, it seemed that the promotion of this business in Kanchanaburi for international tourists was so limited that the number of tourists was not as high as they expected. They would like to have some governmental supports as one entrepreneur stated.

Extract 19

Government agencies in Kanchanaburi should set up free training courses for entrepreneurs on weekends because private English courses are very expensive. There should also be English courses for children who will develop their English for their future use.

Some entrepreneurs felt that their voices were not heard by any relevant government sector that should play a more important role in developing their English, which seemed to widen the gap between their business sector and the government one.

Extract 20

I want relevant agencies to listen to entrepreneurs' thoughts, needs, and readiness before asking them to attend any training or providing them with any guidelines that may not be suitable for their needs. Consequently, it is

likely that the entrepreneurs will not collaborate as the agencies wish for. However, the entrepreneurs strongly believe that English is necessary for the raft service business.

Entrepreneurs viewed their future as bright and promising. It is interesting to note that most of them would like their young family members to participate in the training because they were the ones who would take over the family business; thus, it is significant for younger generations to invest in the development of their communicative competence.

Extract 21

In future, there will be a lot more opportunities to communicate with international tourists. There will also be other new services added to the current ones. As an entrepreneur, I need to think of the future by learning English and receiving supports from provincial or governmental agencies. I want the younger generations to have more knowledge in English language.

In addition, disc jockeys should take part in the training because they were more involved with international tourists in terms of the entertainment services including playing music, setting up karaoke, and welcoming tourists on the raft.

Extract 22

I would like family members and staff to learn English because they are the ones who will take over the business so that they should learn and prepare themselves. For example, a disc jockey who works closely with international tourists should be able to communicate with them effectively.

Entrepreneurs noticed that tourists did not speak completely correct grammar with them, but rather used short sentences or words because they knew that Thai people might not understand. Thus, the content of the teaching materials should include possible questions that are likely to be asked and corresponding replies that can prepare entrepreneurs how to answers.

Extract 23

There should be some guided questions normally asked by international tourists and respectively some guided answers for those who do not have any background in English to learn on their own. The questions may be about how to go there?, how far?, how much? The answers do not need to be completely long or perfect. They can be short answers or words because tourists normally ask by words not complete sentences.

This extract suggests that entrepreneurs would like to learn the practical and functional use of English which put their communication at ease because tourists did not use complete sentences either. The following extracts demonstrate how the respondents wished to be trained in English.

Extract 24

The training should be like simulations with teaching materials. I want to have a CD because I have no time to sit in class, and I am tired too. I can continuously play the CD and repeat after what I have heard in the CD. I want to practice speaking in a small group.

Extract 25

I want to learn in small groups because I can gain more knowledge. If there is a book with

a CD, it will be helpful for me to practice on my own in my free time. The book should include conversations, pronunciation in Thai language, and translations with cartoon drawings to make it easy to understand.

The above extracts suggest that the English language training should focus on entrepreneurs' engagement in training activities; otherwise, there will only be trainer-talk. They recognized that 'learning by doing' in a small group was the most appropriate way for them to improve their English. Learning in a small group provides us with some interesting data for the training approach that should allow learners to engage and communicate with one another. Moreover, a compact disc (CD) will be a useful tool for them because the accommodated CD can allow them to practice listening and pronouncing English on their own. In sum, the extracts show that these entrepreneurs have identified the need to take part in English language training. They also indicated the methods they preferred by stating that they wanted small classes with accompanying training kits with a book and a CD because they could develop their autonomy on speaking and listening skills.

In this study, the rapport between teacher and students are important to these adult learners who may think that learning English is a daunting task for them; therefore, feeling secured and successful can motivate them to learn. Hawkins (2005) states that teachers need to realize the attitudes, behaviors, tools, and ways of engaging that learners will recognizably display in constructing their identity as successful students in classrooms. Language teachers should find ways to develop entrepreneurs' oral communication skill that can potentially meet their needs by equipping them with appropriate knowledge and skills relevant to their raft service business.

The findings clearly suggest that these entrepreneurs were adult beginners whose background in English language education was relatively

limited, which led to their low self-confidence when communicating with international tourists. Learning in a small group was their preferred learning style because they felt that they could learn best with colleagues and friends. Role plays can also be helpful to promote students' engagement by working in pairs that can take time to learn from one another. Hawkins (2005) points out that "individuals bring lived histories activities and events in situated environments, and it is through communications and interactions with others in these environments that learners negotiate and co-construct their views of themselves and the world" (p. 61). It is thus vital to encourage these adult language learners to be active language learners by giving them the opportunity to share their experiences, knowledge, and expertise in a small group.

Conclusions

This study explores raft service entrepreneurs' needs of English. The findings suggest three important points regarding firstly, needs for improving speaking skill; secondly, needs for learning English and other languages; and lastly, needs for the promotion of entrepreneurs' English proficiency development. This study offers insights into the opportunities for English language learning of these adult learners. It clearly needs to be extended to account for the significant role played by the teacher in the deliberate planning and responsive involvement and peer relationships so that they can gain more self-confidence when developing their English. In addition, socio-cultural contexts as situated learning communities where these learners have to interact with international tourists on a daily basis should be recognized by language teachers. These communities enable them to practice languages including English and other languages such as Chinese and Myanmar because of the geographical advantage and the increasing opportunities of the transit trade between Thailand and Myanmar. In the near future, when AEC opens doors for wider economic collaborations, these entrepreneurs will play more significant roles; and thus, those who can use English effectively will be in higher demand for the growth of tourism industry in Kanchanaburi. This study recognizes the

importance of adult language learning that can allow these entrepreneurs to be more pro-active to gain competitive advantages in their language skills for occupations needed for AEC. The needs for greater access to opportunities for the development of English and other languages such as Chinese and Myanmar can be implemented by participating in language training programs and accessing to appropriate resources. Government sectors such as Department of Business Development under the Ministry of Commerce and Non-Formal Education under the Ministry of Education should be key resources for enabling raft service business entrepreneurs and strengthening local tourist communities in Kanchanaburi to meet the demand of AEC.

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