

# A Needs Analysis of Thai Massage Employees' (Thai Massage Therapists, Receptionists, and Managers) English Communication Skills in the City of Pattaya, Chonburi

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Article Information	Abstract
<p><b>Article History:</b> Received: 30 June 2020 Accepted: 2 December 2020 Available online: 30 December 2020</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Needs Analysis (NA) English communication skills Thai massage employees English for Specific Purpose (ESP)</p>	<p>English communication has gained its importance for Thai massage employees who are required to interact and provide massage services to foreign customers due to the popularity of Thai massage among foreigners. This study attempts to explore and analyze the needs and problems of Thai massage employees towards English communication in their workplaces located in Pattaya City, Thailand. This is a mixed-methodology research collecting data from 132 Thai massage employees through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with five Thai massage employees to obtain insight data and further information. The key findings show that speaking and listening skills are the most needed skills including English vocabulary knowledge. In terms of the most problematic skills, speaking, listening, and writing respectively were rated as high while reading skill reported as moderate. According to the interview, the results reveal that English competency may not greatly affect the quality of Thai massage service; however, being able to use English properly increases customers' satisfaction and reduces time for the employees to communicate with foreign customers. The findings also indicate that the Thai massage therapists use their body languages, pictures, and memorized English patterns and sample phrases to communicate with foreign customers as their solutions for English communication problems. This research which was conducted under a fund of the Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University reports the needs and problems of these groups of people in order to design an English for Spa course based on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles to foster English communication skills for the Thai massage employees as well as for business students who are interested in ESP courses.</p>

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## INTRODUCTION

Thailand is known as "The Land of Smiles" and has undergone rapid growth and development of its hospitality industry, a sector that is interconnected with other industries such as tourism and travel (Sinhaneti & Apichatrosjanakul, 2012). As the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) points out, more than 40 million foreign visitors had come to Thailand by 2020. This increased

number of tourists coupled with the growing importance of hospitality has led to a high demand for employees who can communicate effectively in English. English has become an international language. Therefore, people around the world use English as a means of communication in different aspects of life such as education, travel, music, science & technology, work, and business (Luankanokrat, 2011). Business English proficiency has become a crucial factor in determining whether or not a business is successful. This is especially true for international businesses (Zahedpisheh, 2017). As Patanasorn et. al. (2018) elaborates, customer satisfaction and the quality of services are based on employees having effective English communication skills.

In addition, according to the National Strategy for Thailand 4.0 and the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) has been introduced in a major effort to develop and invest in the three-province development zone of Rayong, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao. Within this area, the city of Pattaya, located in Chonburi, is one important economically growing city that both Thais and foreigners have chosen for their travel destination (Suraprajit, 2017). Pattaya has gained popularity because of its tourist places, beaches, and entertainment, as well as its health tourism consisting of medical, wellness, and spa tourism. As a result, it is a key area where the needs and problems related to English communication skills among massage businesses should be explored.

Thai massage is a traditional medical healing method and is reflected in the people's culture (Chia, 2005; Kanchanoo, 2012). It is claimed to be a 'healing art' and a traditional technique for the body that is related to Buddhist philosophy (Kogiso, 2012). Sawaddee (2016) makes an interesting point in that Thai massage is becoming more successful as part of the Thai tourism industry. As a result, Thai massage therapists are needed in Thai massage businesses. However, there are still many problems that Thai massage and spa therapists are facing, such as communicating in English with their customers (Patanasorn et. al, 2018).

Previous studies have investigated the need for English communication in different careers such as Thai vendors working on Khaosan Road (Pruksanubal, 2006), employees at HSBC (Luankanokrat, 2011), and Thai nurses working in international hospitals accredited by JCI in the Bangkok area (Chetsadanuwat, 2018). However, there are few studies examining the needs and problems of Thai massage employees in regards to speaking English. To be noted, there is one study conducted by Patanasorn et al. (2018) that examined English needs among spa and massage therapists, receptionists, and customers. The study was conducted using three groups of participants in the city of Khon Kaen. The study revealed that the most needed English communication was related to asking customers questions during the massage process. These included greeting customers, asking about pain, and asking customers to change positions. Customers needed information about the massage program and information about pain. The study provided information from the customer's point of view as well as the point of view of the spa and massage workers. However, for the present study, the researcher aimed to investigate the insights and perspectives of massage employees—a group of people working with foreign customers in the Pattaya area—in order to understand their true needs and problems.

In order to solve communication problems and improve the quality of Thai massage service standards, it is very important to examine the problems and find ways to improve English communication skills for Thai massage employees. An English for Specific Purposes (ESP) knowledge and needs analysis plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of English learning and for planning materials that can be used by Thai massage employees who work in Pattaya, Chonburi. The results of this research will be very useful for many sectors in understanding these needs and problems. The Pattaya municipality, ESP curriculum and course developers, Thai massage businesses, and business students who are interested in English communication in Thai massage shops can all benefit from this research.

### Research questions

1. To what extent do Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya need English communication skills?
2. What English communication problems do Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya encounter when communicating in English in the workplace, and what are the causes of the problems?
3. What are learning topics to be covered by an English course for Thai massage employees?

### Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the needs of Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya in terms of English communication in their careers.
2. To examine English communication problems of Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya when communicating in English in the workplace.
3. To suggest learning topics that should be included in an English course for Thai massage employees.

### Scope of the study

This research focused on Thai massage employees who work in Thai massage shops located in Pattaya, Chonburi in order to investigate the needs of Thai massage employees there and indicate whether there are English communication problems. The samples used in the study were 132 Thai massage employees for the questionnaire, and five Thai massage employees (Two Thai massage therapists, two receptionists, and a manager) served as representatives to provide further information in the interview.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become one of the most important branches of Teaching

English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and generally falls into the Applied Linguistics field. The development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) had begun since the early 1960s and 1970s when there was a shift from a linguist-based curriculum to a functional curriculum. English language was studied in the contexts of use rather than the linguistic dimensions of the language. As Hutchinson & Waters (1987) point out, there are three main reasons of the emergence of ESP which are an increase of technology and commerce after World War II, the development of linguistics, and the learner-based approach.

To begin with, English has become a very crucial language in the world. As a result, there is a need for good English competency, which brings about a necessity for teaching and learning English in different situations and for various purposes. General English courses in schools or universities have not only taught elements of English grammar or linguistics, but have also evolved to serve real world requirements. As Robinson (1991) and Dudley-Evans (1998) point out, the needs of EFL learners are mostly related to skills and language suitable for their profession, future profession, or specific lines of work. Therefore, in ESP instruction, the methods and content are based on the reasons for learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

For these reasons, ESP courses are designed for occupational purposes and job requirements such as for airline staff, international operators, or international companies' employees, guides, spa therapists, etc. Moreover, ESP teaching and learning materials are created from the learners' needs and problems. They are related to real-world situations and the learners' workplaces. According to Robinson (1980), ESP course is considered as a goal-oriented course which the learners do not only learn the language but also the way to use it for their careers or their academic degrees. Importantly, with different groups of learners, the teachers need to understand their learners' needs, so that their needs analysis is included within the curriculum development. Thus, needs outcomes are beneficial for the teachers in designing a suitable course, as well as creating materials for teaching and testing.

### **Needs Analysis (NA)**

Needs Analysis (NA) is used as a tool to collect and evaluate information which is related to course designing (Flowerdew, 2013). This refers to the learners' backgrounds and goals, their reasons for learning, their language proficiencies, their teaching and learning preferences, and the situations in which they need to communicate. These factors influence the teachers or course developers to focus on the needs of the learners as their main objective. Moreover, needs analysis is used to demonstrate the learners' perspectives, provide useful data from various sources, and offer detailed information. Richard (1986) also suggests that needs analysis helps to define the general and specific language needs used to design a learning course with suitable objectives, goals, and content. In addition, as Lawrence et al. (1991) point out, the use of surveys to examine problems of a target group in detail can depict the potential solutions by comparing the present situations to the preferred situations.

According to Hutchinson & Waters (1987), ESP defines 'target needs' and 'learner needs.' Target needs are described by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) as being what learners need to do in the target situation in order to succeed in communicative purposes. To elaborate more on this,

the target needs can be categorized into three aspects. Firstly, 'necessities' which means what learners need to know in order to perform well in the target situation. Secondly, 'lacks' which refers to the absence of learners' necessities. Lastly, 'wants' which are related to the requirement of learners. Apart from these types of needs to be considered, the educational backgrounds of the learners are important in terms of their job requirements, the necessity of their English learning, and their lack and/or need of English competency (Robinson, 1991). The key to analyzing the learners' needs is not only knowing 'what the learners need to learn', but also 'How will the learners learn?' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Another important point about needs analysis is its process. The researcher can follow the process in order to investigate and search for the needed information. Grave (2000:100) introduces the steps of needs analysis as follows: decide what information to gather and why; decide when, from whom, and how to gather it; gather information; interpret it; act on it; and evaluate the effects of the action.

### Curriculum and course design

As Cater (1983) points out, three common characteristics of an ESP course are: material authenticity, purpose-related orientation, and self-direction. In the target situation, an ESP course should apply authentic materials, as well as interactive activities and tasks that provide a simulation of target situations where needed language is used. Most importantly, students should be trained to be English users rather than learners. To design an effective ESP course, students should be introduced to various communicative situations that they are likely to encounter in their current or future careers. Moreover, texts, genres, specific terminology, and relevant topics should be included in the provided course. In addition, Chovancová (2014) states that in order to link between the target situation and the classroom situation, needs analysis is required. To elaborate more on this point, the ESP course designers should investigate the target needs of their learners which are their requirements for their careers. They should also include similar learning situations that are based from real-working situations through classroom activities such as role plays and simulations in some training programs. The content for the course should be created gradually and should be based on the students' language competency and skills. Moreover, it should help students perform well or at least successfully improve their performance in the target situation.

Dudley-Evans (1997) highlights that the course developer or the teacher should focus on the students' preferences. Three important elements to consider are needs analysis, the use of teaching methodology in the course, and analysis of the genres and languages that are related to the students' needs. The teacher may also use the information from their in-service students who are familiar with their working contexts and are able to identify their actual needs in order to design useful and effective content for the course (Chovancová, 2014). Understanding the learners' needs facilitates the ESP teachers in designing an ESP course for the learners to achieve their real-world goals and required language competency. As Basturkmen (2010) points out, the ESP teachers are required to explore language-based objectives that manifest in the target situations or in learners' careers. They must assure that the ESP course is designed for their students' academic discipline and learning objectives.

In terms of syllabus design, Brown (1995) explains that needs analysis can be applied to identify goals and objectives. This is the basis for creating materials, teaching and learning activities, tests, and evaluation processes that include a precise needs assessment. Moreover, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) points out that an ESP course is also concerned with general and specific questions about the syllabus, materials, and methodology. The course developer should consider the students' learning needs, the learning setting, and the learning period. They should also consider the participants involved in the process, the teaching materials, the course learning theory and methodology, and the required proficiency levels.

Basturkmen and Bocanegra-Valle (2018) write that most ESP materials are developed by focusing on vocabulary related to the students' work or areas of interest. Many ESP teachers first identify suitable source materials and then decide how to use authentic texts by thinking about real-world tasks. Providing good materials is an important aspect in order to achieve a successful teaching and learning process. Good materials consist of interesting texts, enjoyable activities that engage the learners' thinking capacities, and opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills. All materials, content, and language use emerge from the learner and should describe the real situation in the learner's workplace. An effective ESP course's language content, objectives, and assessments are the three main elements that reflect the purpose of learning. Course designers should focus on findings from needs analyses, creativeness, and using new and well-conducted teaching materials & approaches in order to appease the needs of the learners.

### **Communication problems**

The communication problems happen between two people, the speaker and the listener. When the listener is trying to decode the message in a different way while the speaker is trying to send the message in another way based on their previous experience or their own references. It seems likely that oral communication is one of the major problems for learners who do not have enough English knowledge, limited exposure to English or lack of experience with English interaction (Khakhai, 2014). This can be very difficult for the learners who are not native speakers. Therefore, there are several studies aimed to investigate not only needs of the learners, but also the communication problems that usually occur in the real situations or in the workplaces.

Studies about English communication problems by Luankanokrat (2011), and Khakhai (2014) indicate that speaking seems to be the weakest of the four main English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Based on real working situations, foreign customers might feel uncomfortable talking with employees who do not have good English proficiency. Moreover, Sinhaneti (2012) and Khakhai (2014) indicate that most employees considered themselves beginner speakers who are not familiar with speaking in English or with different English pronunciations. As a result, the participants want to have learning materials that provide topics related to their careers. This way they can practice speaking using learning materials with clear instructions, explanations, useful examples, and correct pronunciation, and they can master the language functions.



As Prachanant (2012) and Khakhai (2014) explain, another problematic skill is listening which is linked to other knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar as well. The participants indicate that they were not able to understand their customers because of unfamiliar pronunciation, different accents, insufficient of grammar knowledge, incorrect words choice and expressions. Another interesting point was when the customer spoke fast. The participants could not understand the meaning of the conversation. Therefore, they were silent and did not respond to what the customer asked or said. Moreover, listening skill is also reported as the most problematic skill for the hotel front office staff in Charunsri's study (2011). The study indicates that the staff face listening problems while dealing with their customers through conversations by phone.

In terms of reading and writing skills, most of the studies related to needs and problems towards English communication do not indicate that these two skills are the most problematic skill; however, they are required as one of the necessary skills for people's work. For example, Khakhai (2014) points out that the respondents had difficulty understanding the brochures written in English because of their lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge which are considered as the main factors of their reading and writing problems.

### Relevant research

There are a large number of needs analysis studies which covered various subject areas of ESP such as hotel staff, Thai nurses, Thai vendors, Thai government officials, etc. The findings can be useful for designing ESP courses and used as the model for the future research. However, there are a few studies focusing on English needs and problems of Thai massage employees especially conducted in Pattaya area. The following studies are some examples of relevant research used as references within this research.

Khakhai (2014) investigated English language needs of Thai massage therapists at spas on Khaosarn Road. The participants of this study were 51 massage therapists. Questionnaires and structured interviews were used to elicit the data which were analysed by statistical applications. The findings showed that all four skills in English were needed the most. In terms of the most problematic skills, writing, reading, listening, and speaking were ranked respectively. There were also other elements which led to the effectiveness of English communication of the Thai massage therapists such as the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, word spelling, and cultural awareness.

Patanasorn et.al. (2018) conducted a needs analysis of 20 foreign customers, 40 massage therapists, and 20 receptionists in spa and massage shops located in Khon Kaen Municipality. A questionnaire and two semi-structured interview forms were used in the study. The findings showed that the most needed English functions were asking customers about pains and changing postures, and greeting customers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The participants of the study included two groups. The first group were 132 Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, managers, and receptionists) who work in Thai massage shops located in Pattaya City, Chonburi. They were selected by using snowball sampling to complete the form via Google Forms. The second group, there were five Thai massage employees (Two Thai massage therapists, two receptionists, and a manager) who joined a semi-structured interview. They were chosen by applying quota sampling in order to participate in the interview.

### Research methods and procedures

A questionnaire and semi-structured interview forms were used to collect data from the massage employees. The research aimed to investigate the needs and problems related to English communication skills from the point of view of massage shop employees. Needs and problems were interpreted using a 5-point Likert Scale. This study was a mixed method design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In terms of quantitative data, a set of questionnaires for the survey was created in order to carry out an initial assessment of Thai massage employees' needs related to their English communication skills. The results that were obtained were analysed by calculating percentages of each response in the questionnaire. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews.

### Research instruments

#### 1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Firstly, the personal information of the Thai massage employees was taken. This included gender, age, educational background, work experience, English competency, and English use in their Thai massage business. In the second part, questions with a five-point scale were designed to investigate Thai massage employees' perceptions about the needs and problems they had encountered while performing their jobs. As Gray (2009) describes, scale questions are used for variable measurement. The response choices provided were very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. The Thai massage employees were asked to read the given statements and indicate their responses. As Denscombe (2010) notes, the benefits of using questionnaires are that they are easy to arrange, are economical, and supply standardized answers. The questionnaire was conducted online via Google Form so that the results of the data could go straight to a data file. Denscombe (2010) points out that this format is one way of avoiding factors related to human error that may play a part if the researcher needs to enter the data manually.

#### 2. Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was used as a second data collection tool. This type of interview can be used to collect qualitative data in an effective way. The interview was conducted with



five participants who worked in Thai massage shops with different educational and work-experience backgrounds. The main content of the interview questions related to the respondents' need to use English for career advancement, as well as the problems of using English in their workplaces. The five questions focused on language communication in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, idioms, and grammar. The questions were open-ended and the interviewees answered them based on their perceptions and their work experiences. The benefits of interviews are, in general, that they are a flexible method for collecting data. The interviews also allowed the researcher to receive the data from multiple sensory channels in terms of verbal and non-verbal messages (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

## **Data collection and data analysis**

### **1. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed by using Google Form, which provided a link for the participants to answer the questions. The participants were Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) who worked at Thai massage shops in the city of Pattaya, Chonburi. Due to the spread of Coronavirus, the researcher decided to use the online questionnaire as a data collection tool to gather as much information from the Thai massage employees as possible. The data that was obtained from the online questionnaire was collated onto a data spreadsheet and summarized. The results were analysed by using descriptive statistics such as percentages of frequency, and were presented using tables.

### **2. Semi-structured interview**

The interviews were recorded, transcribed in full, and translated from Thai to English. The researcher identified concepts from this information source. The interview transcripts were used as coded data and were paired with theoretical knowledge in order to generate relevant theory.

### **3. Pilot test**

The questionnaire and interview questions were tested with three respondents who had experience in the field of Thai massage business and English language teaching. The respondents read the given questionnaire and interview questions. Afterwards, they provided some useful feedback in order to adjust the format, the number of questions, and the content. This pilot was conducted to reduce evidence of the researcher's subjectivity and improve the quality of the questionnaire.

### **4. Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were one of the researcher's concerns. The researcher completed the appropriate forms and sent them to the ethical consideration team to ask for their permission to conduct research with human participants. A consent form was designed and then provided to the participants who were willing to join the research program. They were informed about the all aspects of the research and other factors that may have influenced their decision to participate.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The online questionnaire consisted of two sections: 1) personal information and 2) perceptions of Thai massage employees towards the needs and problems of English use in their workplaces. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed by percentage.

### *Personal information of the participants*

In part one of the questionnaires, five questions were used to collect data about the respondents' personal information with 132 respondents answering the questionnaires. The findings are represented in the given figure in terms of percentage.

Gender	Age	Level of Education	Working Experiences	Level of English Ability
Females: 93%	20-30 years old: 13%	Elementary: 11%	Less than 1 year: 4%	Listening: 66% (Moderate Level)
Males: 7%	31-40 years old: 43%	Secondary: 39%	1-5 years: 47%	Speaking: 53% (Moderate Level)
	41-50 years old: 27%	Vocational or Diploma: 17%	6-10 years: 27%	Reading: 55% (Moderate Level)
	50 years above: 17%	Bachelor's degree: 30%	11-15 years: 15%	Writing: 54% (Moderate Level)
		Master's degree and above: 3%	More than 15 years: 8%	

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya need English communication skills?

### *Needs for English in the workplace during the working process*

In the second part, the respondents were asked to rate the needs and problems when using English in Thai massage shops using closed-ended questions ranked on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = High, and 5 = Very High). The perceptions of the respondents in each statement were analyzed by percentage and ranking.

**Table 1**  
**The findings of the listening skill needs**

Statements	Needs	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Understand customers' needs	62 %	Very high
2. Understand customers' satisfaction towards the massage service	61%	Very high
3. Understand English conversations	59 %	Very high
4. Understand detailed information by customers	62%	Very high
5. Understand the meanings of vocabulary and idioms in English	60%	Very high

Table 1 shows that listening skills, in terms of the respondents' needs, 61% of the respondents ranked the listening skill as a very high rate, especially for the purposes of understanding the needs and detailed information of the customers. This is similar to the interview's results which indicate that listening skill was rated remarkably high for the respondents' needs. They explained that listening skill is one of the primary skills required when they need to take care of foreign customers. Moreover, they also found it is particularly important to acquire good listening skill to understand customers' needs as well as the information provided by customers. To further explain the requirement for this skill, the Thai massage employees pointed out that they need to listen to customers' speaking at the beginning of the massage, during the massage, and the end of the massage.

**Table 2**  
The findings of speaking skill needs

Statements	Needs	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Welcome and greet customers	55 %	Very high
2. Ask customers about their requirements	54%	Very high
3. Explain about the massage programs	56%	Very high
4. Provide help for customers	55%	High
5. Make requests in a polite manner	51%	Very high
6. Make conversation with customers	55%	Very high
7. Apologize for mistakes	53%	Very high
8. Pronounce English words correctly	53%	High
9. Stress English words correctly	52%	High

Table 2 shows that, in terms of speaking skill needs, the respondents answered that they aimed to use English for several purposes, as given in the table. However, it should be pointed out that welcoming and greeting customers, asking customers about their requirements, explaining about the massage programs, requesting in a polite manner, making conversation with customers, and apologizing for mistakes were rated at a very high level which is above 50%. To elaborate more on speaking skill, it plays an important role to enhance the satisfaction of the customers. As in the interview, the Thai massage employees agreed that speaking is needed for their job because they are required to greet and talk with foreign customers in English such as asking customers about their requirements, explaining about the massage programs, making conversation with customers, apologizing for mistakes and requesting in a polite manner. These are ways of English communication which are mostly used in their working process. In addition, the Thai massage employees also mentioned in the interview that language competency might not be the most influential factor in their work; however, it is a crucial element that creates more impressive experience for customers if they can communicate in English with the customers well.

**Table 3**  
**The findings of reading skill needs**

Statements	Needs	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Search for information on the internet	46%	High
2. Understand the working orders	46%	High
3. Communicate via e-mail	41%	High
4. Understand the passages in English magazines and brochures	40%	High
5. Communicate using online social media such as Line, Facebook, and Twitter	44%	High

Table 3 shows that reading skill was perceived as an important requirement for each working purpose. However, searching for information on the internet and understanding the working orders were considered to have the highest rank (46%) among other purposes. However, the respondents in the interview answered that they did not usually require to read in English in their workplace. The most frequent reading activity was searching for information on the internet and understanding the working orders which are similar to the results in the questionnaire. They also added that these activities happened sometimes during their working hours; however, reading is not the most needed skill in their careers.

**Table 4**  
**The findings of writing skill needs**

Statements	Needs	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Write messages or notes to customers	43%	High
2. Write daily reports	42%	High
3. Respond to emails	40%	High
4. Take call notes	40%	High
5. Write messages or content in the announcement or advertisement	41%	High

Table 4 demonstrates that writing skills are required for Thai massage employees at a high level, accounting for 41%. However, they are not the most needed skill. Based on the interview's results, writing skill was rated as the least needed skill for the Thai massage employees. On the other hand, other skills such as speaking and listening skills were rated as 'very high requirement'. The respondents reported that writing notes to customers and daily reports may be necessary for some Thai massage employees based on the positions they are responsible for.

**Table 5**  
The findings of vocabulary needs

Statements	Needs	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Use vocabulary about working process	52%	Very High
2. Use vocabulary about food	43%	Very High
3. Use vocabulary about traveling	46%	Very High
4. Use vocabulary about health	53%	Very High
5. Use vocabulary about the body	53%	Very High
6. Use vocabulary about Thai herbs	54%	Very High

Table 5 indicates that vocabulary is the most needed knowledge for working in the Thai massage business according to the given statements, such as using vocabulary about Thai herbs and the body, which were ranked at a ‘very high’ level and accounted for higher than 50%. From the interview, the respondents also agreed that the content about Thai herbs and body are useful for making a conversation with their customers. They also added that vocabulary in English plays an important part for them to understand and communicate with their customers successfully. They also suggested that having a wide range of vocabulary encourage them to communicate more in English.

**Research Question 2:** What English communication problems do Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in the city areas of Pattaya encounter when communicating in English in the workplace, and what are the causes of the problems?

**Table 6**  
The findings of the listening skill problems

Statements	Problems	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Understand customers' needs	49%	Moderate
2. Understand customers' satisfaction towards the massage service	47%	Moderate
3. Understand English conversations	45%	Moderate
4. Understand detailed information by customers	46%	Moderate
5. Understand the meanings of vocabulary and idioms in English	47%	Moderate

Table 6 shows that listening problems were informed as moderate. The most problematic topic from the given information is understanding customers’ needs which is accounted for 49%. It seems likely that other topics are problematic for the respondents’ listening comprehension. According to the interview, the Thai massage employees informed that they could communicate necessary topics which the customers need to know before receiving Thai massage services. They also explained that their English are considered as broken English because they cannot

use English correctly and appropriately. Regarding the results of the research, one of the most problematic skills of the respondents is listening skill.

**Table 7**  
The findings of speaking skill problems

Statements	Problems	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Welcome and greet customers	52%	Moderate
2. Ask customers about their requirements	55%	Moderate
3. Explain about the massage programs	54%	Moderate
4. Provide help for customers	43%	Moderate
5. Make requests in a polite manner	45%	Moderate
6. Make conversation with customers	55%	Moderate
7. Apologize for mistakes	47%	Moderate
8. Pronounce English words correctly	40 %	Moderate
9. Stress English words correctly	42 %	Moderate

Table 7 indicates that speaking skill is also one of the most problematic skills that the Thai massage employees face with. Asking customers about their requirements is likely to be difficult for them to handle. According to their response, although the result reported in a moderate level, it is relatively high with 55%. Based on the interview, the employees realized that politeness was one of effective ways to provide a good service; however, they had struggled with producing proper language forms when they communicated in English with foreign customers. Another point was that they preferred to memorize sample sentences such as greeting, providing information about massage and treatment programs, and asking customers about health and other general topics.

**Table 8**  
The findings of reading skill problems

Statements	Problems	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Search for information on the internet	48%	Moderate
2. Understand the working orders	45%	Moderate
3. Communicate via e-mail	43%	Moderate
4. Understand the passages in English magazines and brochures	45%	Moderate
5. Communicate using online social media such as Line, Facebook, and Twitter	45%	Moderate

Table 8 shows that 48% of the respondents face a difficulty in using English to search for information on the internet; however, it was ranked in a moderate level. It means that reading skill is not considered as a major problem for the respondents. In the interview, the respondents



informed that they did not read in English much. Although reading skill is their English weakness, they prefer to focus on the two most problematic skills which are speaking and listening skills.

**Table 9**  
The findings of writing skill problems

Statements	Problems	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Write messages or notes to customers	39%	Moderate
2. Write daily reports	39%	Moderate
3. Respond to emails	39%	Moderate
4. Take call notes	40%	Moderate
5. Write messages or content in the announcement or advertisement	39%	High

Table 9 shows that writing messages or content in announcements or advertisements is the most problematic issue for the respondents during the process of their work. Meanwhile, 39% of the respondents answered the other topics concerning writing skills were perceived as moderate. From the interview, the Thai massage therapists informed that writing notes to customers and daily reports may be necessary for some Thai massage employees based on the positions they are responsible for.

**Table 10**  
The findings of vocabulary problems

Statements	Problems	
	Percentage	Rank
1. Use vocabulary about working process	40%	Moderate
2. Use vocabulary about food	43%	Moderate
3. Use vocabulary about traveling	40%	High
4. Use vocabulary about health	40%	High
5. Use vocabulary about the body	39%	Moderate
6. Use vocabulary about Thai herbs	40%	High

Table 10 indicates that vocabulary knowledge especially about body and Thai herbs are two topics that the Thai massage employees perceived as interesting lessons to learn. Learning vocabulary is required for the development of all other skills. Therefore, teaching vocabulary should be arranged in the first place and followed by other problematic skills. They also mentioned that some employees hardly understood meanings of vocabulary, phrases, or sentences that they used. These issues were major problems that they were facing with towards communication problems.

**Research Question 3:** What are learning topics to be covered by an English course for Thai massage employees?

According to the data obtained from the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, the English course outline for Thai massage employees is introduced in this section. The findings indicate that speaking and listening skills are the most needed skills; however, the course should also include reading and writing skills. Therefore, the most suitable course is likely to be designed as the four core English skills training program or course for this particular group of learners.

To design an effective course, needs analysis plays an important role to identify needs of the learners. Therefore, the main factors that affect the course design can be referred to needs analysis, language descriptions, and theories of language teaching and learning. Within this course design, target needs (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and learning needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn) from Hutchinson & Waters (1987) are used to design the training program. Therefore, the terms of necessities, lacks, and wants are main elements to create a student-based course which the learners indicate their needs to learn English for their careers.

Based on the findings of the study, the interviewees indicated that they would prefer an online course that enables the students to learn from home or elsewhere. They also suggested that the most important factors influencing them were the issues of flexible timing and free of charge. If the course developer could design the course to be conducted online for free such as via a YouTube channel with online exercises, it would be extremely useful for them. Therefore, the suggested training program should be recorded as video clips and online worksheets. In the given table, there are topics that should be covered by the course. The sample course outline is for 30-hour online lessons comprising 15 topics of which Thai massage employees can choose one to start; however, the course should provide pre-and post-tests for self-assessment.

#### **An English course outline for Thai massage employees (30 hrs.)**

<b>Lesson(s)</b>	<b>Topics</b>
1	Self-introduction
2	Greeting and welcoming customers
3	Explaining about Thai massage programs and other related topics such as herbs and health
4	Offering help
5	Requesting and giving permission in a polite manner
6	Describing objectives which are related to materials in Thai massage shops
7	Giving advice and recommendations
8	Discussing about different accents
9	Practicing English pronunciation
10	Giving information about tourist attractions in Thailand
11	Learning about I do and don't in different cultures
12	Giving directions
13	Saying goodbye
14	Useful expressions for service providers
15	Conversation practice

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research attempted to elicit information from an online questionnaire and an interview in order to analyze the needs and problems of Thai massage employees (Thai massage therapists, receptionists, and managers) in Pattaya city, Chonburi as well as seeking for some interesting topics that should be included in an English course for Thai massage employees. The results revealed that speaking and listening skills are the two most needed skills among other skills such as writing, reading, and vocabulary. Moreover, the key findings showed that the most problematic skills are (in order of importance) speaking, listening, writing, and reading. For vocabulary, the respondents indicated that they were incapable of using vocabulary effectively because of their educational background knowledge and lack of experience in using English. There are also other studies that attempted to investigate needs and problems of employees who worked in various career industries such as applied Thai traditional medicine practitioners (Junplord, 2016), spa therapists (Khakhai, 2014), spa therapists (Sinhaneti & Apichatrosjanakul, 2012), spa therapists (Patanasorn et. al., 2018), hotel receptionists and housekeepers (Chumtong, 2014; Suparan, 2014), and 7-eleven employees (Pochakorn, 2012). The main results indicated that speaking skill and listening skill are the highest needs to make mutual understandings between them and their customers. Apart from the four fundamentals in English, vocabulary also plays a crucial role to help those employees perform well in their careers. In terms of problems for each skill, Suparan (2014) pointed out that writing and reading skills were the two skills that were considered as the most problematic skills for the participants who worked as hotel receptionists in the study. On the other hand, within this study, the most problematic skills were not reading and writing skills. It means that although the participants in both research work in the tourism industry, they encounter different difficulties, requirements, and challenges.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study offers useful and insight information or guidelines for researchers, English for Spa curriculum developers, and teachers to understand basic needs and problems which Thai massage employees in different working positions such as managers, receptionists, and massagers currently have. This will be a primary source of information which helps the course designers or teachers create effective English lessons and learn materials for ESP courses. Moreover, this study is also beneficial for Pattaya municipality who receives research information to prepare their organization and be ready for the growth of foreign tourists in the future and the expanding of Thai massage businesses within the area.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The designs of the questionnaire and interview questions should cover more aspects of English communication in Thai massage shops such as the frequency of English using in their workplace, the English influences towards the difficulty to work among foreign customers, the motivations of improving English skills, and other factors that cause the communication problems of Thai

massage employees. Moreover, for future research, it could be conducted with a larger number of participants and in wider settings. Observation can be added as another method of the data collection to make a greater difference to provide information from different angles.

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