
***INBOUND TOURGUIDES' PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT THE REQUIREMENTS OF TOURISM
STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
COMPETENCE FOR THE INTERNSHIPS IN
THAILAND***

SUPALUX SRI-SUMANG

Language Department, Faculty Management Science, Silpakorn University Petchburi
It Campus, Thailand

EUCHET SUYANUNE

Freelance Researcher

ABSTRACT

English language has been playing a pivotal role as medium of communication for Tourism industries in Thailand. Thus, At Tertiary studies, the English language courses for Tourism students regarded as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have been attentively attempted to serve the standards for Tourism workforces. The research aimed to identify the requirements of English language skills as well as associated English language competencies of Tourism students to be prepared for the internships in relation to the Inbound Tours in Thailand. This qualitative research applied In-depth interview with 5 qualified Tour guides to seek insightful information and attitudes towards the English language usages for inbound Tour Guides and focus groups with 10 Tourism students who experienced and participated in the internships. The study adopted Luka's model for the development of tourism students' ESP competence (2004) to pinpoint the students' English language competence and related skills for Tourism students for the internships. The results of this study found that the English courses for Tourism studies have been misleadingly emphasized on English language skills. Communicative competence was

found to be inadequate in practices. In addition, Intercultural competence and Professional activity competence that needed for the specific trainings for inbound tourism businesses were seriously deficiency in the English language preparation courses. Therefore, it is significant to highlight on the blind spots of English preparation courses and insufficient skills that occurred when training for the internships and revise the content and activities in the English courses to be able to work effectively through the internships for inbound Tours.

Keywords: Inbound Tourism, Tour guides, ESP competence, Internships

INTRODUCTION

English language has been manifestly continuing its implication towards Thai Education and Thai tourism Industries (Simpson, 2011, Foley, 2005, Diethelm Travel 2006, Todd, 2006). For Undergraduate Programs in Thailand, students are required to take the general English courses and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in relation to their specialized areas of study (Darasawang, 2007, Sanguangarm, 2011). Regarding to ESP courses, tourism is one of the most extensively taught curriculums in Thai universities (Sinhaneti, 1994). Particularly, Tour Guidance is a practical work which involves language skills in order to facilitate the professionals work with confidence. Each skill of English which may be required of different value in terms of their use in that specific field in order to enable students function effectively in their workplaces and academic environment (Ekici, 2003).

To gain and develop appropriate knowledge and skills through English, the students' command of the English language must reach an acceptable level in their specialist subject studies. Students, who have studied ESP during their universities years, would facilitate them to adjust to their work conditions and would be easily employed in their fields (Bracaj, 2014). Nonetheless, the study by Boonyavatana (2000) disclosed that personnel in the tourism industry confronted with listening and speaking in English in a way that was inadequate for their employment. Moreover, Wiriachittra's research discovered that Thai graduates who involve in the tourism industry have insufficient English language proficiency. This has led to fail to serve the demand for English in the workplace (Sanguangarm et al, 2011), particularly in the hospitality sector and incline to give foreign tourist a negative attitude towards Thailand (Wiritachittra, 2002).

As stated earlier, ESP courses for University students involve English language skills and specific content integration. Davis (1993) declares that students perform best when the level of English is slightly above their current competence level in their field of study. However, Thai ESP students have lower both English skills and knowledge (Noom-ura, 2013). Furthermore, Fredrickson (2003) continues that the level of English proficiency of Thai university graduate was surprisingly low. Similarly to the result of the study by Suwanarak and Phothongsunun (2009), half of undergraduate students participating in their study claimed that they were unable to use English to communicate in real situations as they were weak especially in listening and speaking skills. Accordingly, with low English language proficiencies, students inevitably faced learning difficulties when continuing ESP courses. And these consequently hampered teaching and establishing ESP courses.

Even though many researches have been revealed that the failure of Thai Tourism graduates with low English language proficiency negate to meet the demand for English in the workplace, other researchers raised some problematic issues relating to teaching in ESP courses (Barjesteh & Shakeri 2013). With constraints of English teachers, teaching specialized content (Wu & Badger, 2009, Hyland, 2002), lack of cooperation with content teachers (Dudley Evan & St John, 1998, Helsvig & Kolegija, 2001) and inappropriate textbooks (Sierocka, 2008; Jones, 1990; Ahmadi & Bajelani, 2012) became major challenges to develop the ESP courses.

Referring to the ESP courses as supporting students to use a foreign language as the main communications means in communicating and cooperating with foreign partners in the professional field and real-life situations, teaching/learning ESP is believed to be specialty-oriented as it is submitted to specific (professional) needs of the students (Helsvig & Kolegija, 2001). On the other hand, Morrow (2013) proposed an example of his research in a case of ESP courses of a Thai's neighbour country, Cambodia that very few schools offer true to life communication training specifically for tourism. Hence, the people who have key roles in the education and preparation of the Tourism Operators have to be prepared for these new exigencies, with a language which will help all to share knowledge, to communicate and to make tourism an even greater source of enjoyment, of cultural sharing and ultimately profitable for all concerned (Nogueira, 2008). Consequently, the ESP courses should be able to enhance students' English proficiency with the linking of meaningful processes and activities to strengthen the English competence requirements of tourism personnel.

Therefore, this research intended to perceive the English language skills and competences that essentially required for inbound Tour Guides. The results will

continually allow the teachers and course designers expand the provision of establishing the Tourism ESP courses that should be prepared for Tourism student trainees for internships as Inbound Tour job requirements.

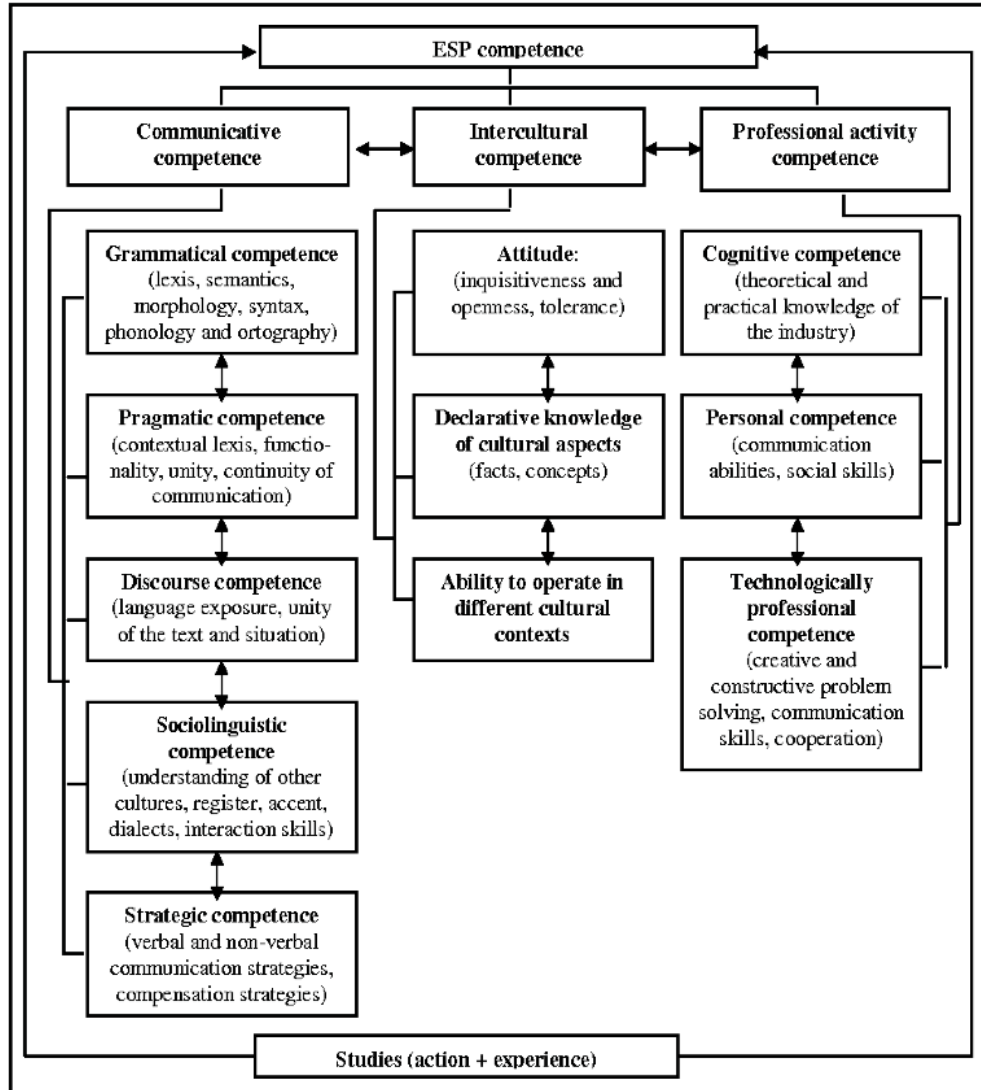


Figure 1: ESP competence for tourism specialists

ESP Competence for Tourism Specialists

To conceptualize and classify the required competencies for Tourism students, the research adopted the Luka's model of the tourism students' ESP competence which has been identified by Luka (2004) to pinpoint the essential competencies in ESP courses for tourism students. This embraces three core competences: Communicative competence (Hymes 1972; Savignon, 1972; Widdowson, 1983; Canale 1983; Bachman and Palmer, 1996), Intercultural competence (Ruben, 1976; Risager 2007) and Professional competence (Fallows & Steven, 2000) with coalition to each of sub-competence that associated with actual action and students' experiences.

Lūka, I. (2004), Development of Students' ESP Competence in Tertiary, The paper presented at the

International bilingual conference "Assessing language and (inter-)cultural competences in Higher

Education" in Finland, the University of Turku, 30.-31 August, 2007, retrieved from [\[komm.eu/system/files/Language_competence.pdf\]\(http://www.mig-komm.eu/system/files/Language_competence.pdf\)](http://www.mig-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

This framework allowed the researcher to gain information about the perceptive viewpoints of the roles of inbound guides, English usages for actual practices, necessary English skills and correlated other skills that qualified for the inbound tour guide characters as well as limitations and deficiencies in the ESP courses for supporting student trainees. These enable the researcher to draw the widen pictures for preparing students to be successful in the studies and practices in applying English language usages and Tourism knowledge necessities for the inbound tour guides' roles.

Methodology

This study was a qualitative research. The data generation applied the in-depth interviews with 5 inbound Tour guides of the Private companies, a governmental organization and freelance Tour Guides to identify the essential English skills and usages in real practices and varied situations, their perspectives in terms of the initial competencies and possibility to develop the ESP courses in relation to plan the courses to facilitate student trainees for internships. The research also adopted focus groups with 10 Tourism

Management student trainees of Faculty of Management Science who experienced and participated in the inbound tour activities to identify the difficulties occurred during the trainings and English skills' deficiencies for internships. The researchers used triangulation theory to check the reliability of information to collect data in a consistent way by performing completeness checks of the information. The collected data was divided into topics and subtopics in relation to Luka's model (2004). The data and significant information were recorded and all the data had been examined and analysed to identify the research results on the subject of the requirements of English skills for Inbound Tour Guides and distinguish the importance of each competence for ESP Tourism specialists.

Findings

English skills for Inbound Tour Guides

One of the focal objectives of this study was to ascertain the English skills' requirements for inbound Tour Guides. According to the results of this matter, all participants agreed that listening skills became the most needed among all four skills of English for the inbound Tour activities that should be prepared for the internships. They continued that in practices they initially listened to the international tourists to justify the mediated ways to apply their English language skills to suit each group of tourist for the effective communication. However, the data from the focus groups with student trainees identified the difficulties when listened to the international tourists who communicated by using varieties of English. They claimed that in classes of the English courses, they were normally introduced to the lessons and practices based on the American or British usages. As a result, listening to different varieties of English of the international tourists found to be challenging and time-consuming for communication. In association with listening skill, speaking skill was similarly regarded as an inevitable usage for inbound tour activities. The tour guides disclosed that communicating with the tourists; giving information and explanations of the attractions by using English speaking skills were the major roles of the inbound tour guides. With less preparations and intensive practices, the student trainees viewed that they were unable to communicate with fluency English and led to be unconfident.

On the other hand, reading and writing skills found to be the minimum usages of English skills in the actual practices for the inbound tour activities. The tour guides claimed that reading and writing skills generally used in the Travel agent offices or indoor activities which were differently focused for the outdoor activities of the inbound tours. All students

also evaluated that these skills were too much emphasized on the English courses which they rarely applied for the outdoor activities. This linked to the perspectives of all Tour guide participants of increasing listening and speaking activities. They recommended that there should be offering more listening and speaking tasks in the English courses, supporting learning activities to serve the requirements of the inbound tour activities and contributing additional English courses for the internships in particular fields of tourism.

It is clear that English skills for Tourism ESP courses have been less emphasized on the authentic skill usages. Listening and speaking skills for tourism ESP courses were found to be inadequate for learning activities. Accordingly, ESP courses were indicated the lacks of the appropriate establishing tasks and activities for the oriented internship courses to increase the proficiency of listening and speaking skills.

4.2 ESP competence for Tourism Students

The research adopted Luka's model (2004) of ESP competence for Tourism specialists to identify the required competences that were considered to be prepared for student trainees for the roles of inbound Tour guides. The model specified that the ESP competence in relation to Tourism specialists includes three core competences; Communicative competence, Intercultural competence and Professional activity competence incorporating with action and experience.

4.2.1 Communicative competence

In relation to the Communicative competence, the result indicated each sub competence was necessary towards being the roles of the inbound tour guides. The tour guide participants agreed that for the imperative roles of Inbound Tour Guides, all sub communicative competence need to be integrated in real practices but each sub competence played varied degrees of usages depending on the purposes and activities.

Referring to Grammatical competence, there was no requirement of using complicated sentences or advanced vocabulary for general conversations, giving information and explanations. To inform the tourists with the clear pronunciations and precise meanings were viewed as the most important components of grammatical competence. However, most of the tour guide participants proposed that this would be

effective if a person in this role could deliver the messages with the accurate English sentence structures and language rules.

For Pragmatic competence, the interview data disclosed that most of the tourists preferred listening to the smooth and clear conversations or explanations for continuity of communication. For the types of English usage, tour guides required to link the sets of vocabulary for particular topics of talks and explanations such as attractions, arts and crafts, Thai architectures, cultures, foods, lifestyles, and so forth. Thus, knowing the sets of English vocabulary, selecting the accurate sets of vocabulary and implementing to the correct context and purposes of usage were needed to be taken into account.

In terms of Discourse competence, varied nationalities of tourists became unexpected and they were amalgamated in some groups of sightseeing program tours. According to the interviews about this topic, tour guides highlighted that they communicated with the tourists in different ways but all communications and interactions must be based on politeness. As one interesting case of a tour guide from a private company, he raised an example of services for the senior British tourists; he had to express the sense of politeness and formality and they were satisfied when he attempted to select and use British English to communicate with them while other tourists disregarded about the formality. As a result, being able to apply English language to suit texts, situations and tourists, could facilitate tour guides to work effectively in various situations and tourists.

Relating to Sociolinguistic competence, explaining Thainess in English was an attractive and sophisticated ways with the general facts and information of presentation because most of tourists interested in the details of Thai cultures and how these show connections and differences from their cultural backgrounds. Also, as mentioned in the previous section about dealing with dissimilar accents of English of international tourists, tour guides needed to understand cultural differences and the cultural background among international tourists. Student trainees claimed these problems that when they could not understand or communicate with some nationalities, they requested the tourists to speak slowly or inform the tour guides to assist them. To understand other cultures and find the mediated way to interact with the tourists allowed tour guides to work without any conflict.

And Strategic competence, both verbal and nonverbal communication were regarded as parts of effective communication for tourism activities. As Interacting with international tourists, most of the tour guides offered that they had to be aware of different meanings of nonverbal communication from varied culture backgrounds. One

case of a tour guide from a governmental organization, she presented an example of using nonverbal communication that when pointing at something, the index finger should not be used but opening a palm hand instead. This allows the Tour Guides to present the awareness of being polite and sensitiv0065. Additionally, smiling presented welcoming for Thais, so before starting the tours, she introduced herself with welcoming facial expression to decrease the gaps and worries between tour guides and tourists. Most of the tour guides proposed to acknowledge student trainees about verbal and nonverbal perceptions. It is therefore being awareness of using strategic competence was considered as the crucial knowledge of tour guides.

4.2.2 Intercultural competence

With Intercultural competence, attitude, declarative knowledge of cultural aspects and ability to operate in different cultural context were vital competencies for tourism specialists. The tour guide participants recommended that being qualified for Thai tour guides, they should be able to explain and present well in English about Thai culture in different aspects, having background knowledge of the histories, attractions and destinations. Furthermore, they should be able to deal with unexpected situations as well as being able to work with others who related to the tour activities. Student trainees emphasized that these sub competences were provided in the Tourism discipline courses rather ESP courses. However, the students were possible to develop these competences and skills along the period of participating in the internships rather than they expected to gain and develop these competences in ESP classes. Then again, ESP courses could build up students' competences by setting related activities that support English usage integrating with building intercultural competence.

4.2.3 Professional activity

Relating to Professional activity competence, Cognitive competence, Personal competence and technologically professional competence were relevant sub competences that were considered as essential competences for one who worked for tourism businesses. These sub skills seemed to be the final action of the integrated usages of grammatical competence and intercultural competence. Student trainees should not expect to develop these kinds of competence in the ESP courses. But the activities for English preparation courses needed to be reviewed to enable students to build self-development awareness

and learner autonomy. Besides, students could increase these sub competences from actual experiences during the internships to gain more abilities and develop their personal performances.

Conclusions

The English preparation courses for the internships indicated insufficient focuses on the practices of Listening and speaking skills. Underlining on accuracy rather than fluency should be improved in the ESP courses. The lack of intercultural competence activities could be paying more attention when setting the tasks to link to the real situations. Furthermore, professional activity competence seemed to be disregarded in the ESP courses. Therefore, it is significant to highlight on the blind spots of English oriented courses to complement insufficient skills and competences that occurred when trainings and revise the content and activities in the ESP courses to prepare student trainees to work effectively through the internship programs in relation to inbound Tours. In addition, the English courses should be able to encourage students to develop their performances based on the realistic practices and authentic English usages for particular purposes.

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