



Problems and needs analysis of English communication for tourism service providers at Khao Sok National Park, Surat Thani

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the problems and needs of local tourism service providers who regularly use English for work at Khao Sok National Park in Surat Thani. A questionnaire, including closed-ended and open-ended questions, was used to gather data from 41 purposively selected participants working in five types of tourism service providers in the area. The findings revealed that the most challenging aspects of English communication were idioms, intonation, and limited vocabulary. Listening was identified as the most problematic skill. Participants expressed a need to improve their ability to listen to and answer questions from foreign tourists, as well as understand tourists' requests. They also emphasized the importance of practicing speaking skills, including accents, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and correct grammar usage. In terms of language functions, their needs were primarily related to communicative tasks such as greetings, self-introductions, introducing others, recommending tourist attractions and activities, providing safety information and cultural etiquette advice, and recommending accommodations. These findings were used to tailor English lesson materials to their specific needs.

KEYWORDS

English communication, needs, problems, tourism service providers

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of a globalized world, tourism stands out as a pivotal sector, significantly contributing to economic growth both nationally and internationally. Thailand, with its wealth of cultural, historical, and natural attractions, considers tourism a crucial economic driver. In 2022, Thailand's tourism industry saw a substantial increase in international tourists, welcoming over six million tourists and generating approximately 325 billion baht in revenue, a 3.15% increase from the previous year (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2022). This growth underscores the sector's critical role in the nation's economic strategy, prompting ongoing investment in infrastructure, human resources, and promotional activities aimed at diversifying and enhancing tourist experiences across regions.

Surat Thani province, located on the eastern coast of southern Thailand, is a key player in this sector. It is renowned for its diverse offerings, including popular destination such as Samui Island, Pha Ngan Island, the Ang Thong archipelago, Ratchaprapa Dam, and Khao Sok National Park. These sites are celebrated not only for their natural beauty but also for their potential to foster community-based and nature-based tourism (The Strategic Development Committee of Surat Thani Province, 2019). The province's development strategy

emphasizes creating a sustainable tourism sector by improving service quality and aligning with contemporary tourism trends such as educational and cultural tourism.

Amidst these developments, the importance of English proficiency cannot be overlooked. As the primary language of international communication, particularly in tourism, proficiency in English is indispensable for service providers. The increasing influx of international tourists accentuates this necessity, demanding effective communication to enhance visitor experiences and ensure operational success. However, a significant gap in English language skills persists among local tourism service providers, particularly in less-developed areas like Ratchaprapa Dam and Khao Sok National Park. This gap hinders service quality and the broader economic benefits that proficient communication could bring to local communities.

This study addresses this gap by assessing the specific English language needs of local tourism service providers in Khao Sok National Park. It examines the challenges they face when using English in their work, identifies their preferred English skills, and determines the communication tasks they need assistance with. By providing empirical data on these needs, the study fills a research gap and offers practical insights for improving tourism services. Such improvements are expected to enhance international tourist satisfaction and generate economic benefits for local communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English proficiency in the tourism industry

The importance of English proficiency in the tourism industry is well-established in the literature. Several previous studies have examined the role of English language proficiency in the tourism industry. Leslie and Russell (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of language skills in the hospitality sector, emphasizing the critical role of English as the *lingua franca* of international tourism. English has been considered an important universal language for tourism that allows communication between people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their work demonstrated the importance of targeted language training programs for tourism professionals. According to Baker (2009); Kongkerd (2013), English has become the universal language of communication for people from different countries and cultures to engage with one another while traveling. Bobanovic and Grzinic (2011) found that proficiency in English is essential for tourism professionals to interact with and serve international travelers effectively. Blue (2003) emphasized that tourism professionals require not only language skills but also cultural competence to truly understand and satisfy travelers from distinct cultural environments. Block (2010); Laborda (2009) pointed out the need for both language proficiency and cultural sensitivity skills among tourism experts. Marzouki and Posecion (2019) and Rao (2019) stated that it's important for tourism professionals to continuously improve their English communication abilities, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Setó-Pamies (2012) Osman and Sentosa (2013) found that effective communication plays a crucial role in ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty in the tourism industry.

In the Thai context, several studies have addressed the issue of English proficiency among tourism workers. Prachanant (2012) investigated the English language needs of Thai travel agents and identified significant gaps in speaking and listening skills. Similarly, Pinsirikul et al. (2023) analyzed English communication problems, with a focus on speaking

and listening skills, and investigated solutions for hotel staff who communicate with foreigners. Additionally, Vansook (2021) examined Thai tour guides' perceptions of their English communication skills and identified the main challenges they faced. In this study, problems and needs in terms of English used for communication in tourism services were investigated.

Needs analysis

Needs analysis is a formal, systematic process of identifying and evaluating training that should be done for the specific needs of an individual or group of employees, customers, suppliers, and others. Needs are often referred to as “gaps,” or the difference between what is currently done and what should be performed (Al-Seady, 1998a; Betti, 1990; Igaab, 2010). In addition, needs analysis involves doing some kind of activity with a learner to find out what their learning needs are (Betti, 2021). Therefore, needs analysis is an important means of conducting research before designing and evaluating lessons, materials, or syllabi, and it helps draw a profile of students or courses to determine and prioritize the needs (Betti, 2021; Richards et al., 1992).

Target needs and learning needs are two categories of needs proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The knowledge that students must possess to function effectively in the target or required scenarios is referred to as target needs. It is helpful to think about the necessities, lacks, and wants in the target scenarios. The requirements of the target situation—that is, what knowledge learners must possess to function effectively in the target situation—define necessities. For example, the tour guides are required to know English to communicate in tourist attractions. In terms of lack, it is the difference between the learners' current proficiency and the target proficiency. Therefore, it is critical to understand what students currently know so that the teachers can determine which requirements they still need to meet. Wants are learners' awareness of their expectations for what they hope to learn or their wishes. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) considered the necessities and lacks as the objective, while wants were referred to as subjective. The learning need defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) was what the learners needed to do in order to learn. According to Tahir (2011), the learning need is the prerequisite for learners to effectively learn in the intended environment. As many scholars agree, need analysis is an important first step in designing a syllabus, and devising courses and materials. It refers to the various techniques and procedures used to gather data about learner needs. In the field of English language study, needs analysis was considered to identify general and specific language needs that can be addressed in developing goals, objectives, and content in language programs (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The methodology of needs analysis is central to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hutchinson and Waters' seminal work on ESP (1987) laid the foundation for understanding learners' specific language needs in professional contexts. Their approach emphasizes the importance of tailoring language instruction to the particular communication requirements of different professional fields. Additionally, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) ESP course design model emphasizes the importance of ongoing needs analysis and course evaluation. This model could provide a useful framework for not only assessing current needs but also for developing and evaluating targeted language training programs.

In the context of education, needs analysis is the process through which mentors, teachers, and course designers assume accountability for identifying the requirements for creating and implementing a course. The process of obtaining and supplying all the data and supplies required to begin a journey to a destination is known as needs analysis (Khan et al., 2011). In the 1960s and early 1970s, when ESP was first developing, teachers used a needs analysis to assess learners' communicative needs and the methods for achieving particular educational objectives. On the other hand, in modern times, the goal of needs analysis is to determine the desired setting and environment for an ESP study, as well as to collect data about learners. The activities of requirements analysis become more complex due to the altered objective (Otilia, 2015). In English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis is crucial because it is a technique or instrument that aids in the researcher's examination and analysis of the learners' current abilities and needs. Additionally, a language course for the students might be developed using the valuable knowledge gathered from this procedure.

The Previous Study

In the context of tourism in Thailand, several researchers have applied needs-analysis methodologies to understand the specific language requirements of various professionals in the tourism industry. Phaisuwan (2006) performed a needs analysis of Thai hotel front office staff, identifying key language functions and skills required in their daily work. Tangniam (2006) conducted a study on English language needs of Thai Airways ground staff. Regarding the need analysis in transportation services, Haekawee (2010) surveyed barriers and problems in English language usage among taxi and tuk-tuk drivers in Bangkok. The purpose of this study was to examine the main problems in English language usage and other barriers involving the communication skills of tuk-tuk and taxi drivers in Bangkok. Similarly, Charunsri (2011) conducted a study on the needs and problems of English language skills for the hotel front office staff in Chinatown, Bangkok. The objective of this study was to examine the needs and problems that front office staff in hotels in Chinatown, Bangkok, faced in their use of English skills. Specifically in the tourism industry, Prachanant (2012) conducted a study on the topic of "Needs Analysis on English Language Use in the Tourism Industry." This study aimed to examine the needs, functions, and problems of tourism employees. Yusoff et al. (2023) investigated Thai learners' needs for English speaking in tourism and services, highlighting challenges in comprehension due to various accents, and emphasizing real-world practice for effective communication in the workplace.

Regarding a needs analysis in community-based tourism, Charoenkongka and Nomnian (2019) investigated the needs analysis of communicative English through community-based tourism in Koh Klang community in Krabi province. The study revealed a correlation between communicative English in community-based tourism, community life, local attractions, local food, and occupations. Meunchong (2022) investigated the guidelines for designing English learning media for community-based tourism through stakeholders' needs analysis in Phetchabun province. The analysis identified two key needs: the need for English content in learning media for community-based tourism (CBT) and the need for a specific style of English learning media tailored to CBT stakeholders. In 2023, the researcher examined how homestay entrepreneurs in rural Thailand face barriers due to limited English skills. They need bilingual materials for improving English in areas like greetings, room explanations, and tour itineraries (Meunchong, 2023). Phaiboonnugulkij (2023) focused on enhancing the speaking ability of Thai EFL youth guides in community-based tourism

through language learning strategies, instruction via blended English lessons, benefiting tourism service providers in Thailand.

Although the existing literature offers a robust foundation for understanding the importance of English language proficiency in the tourism sector and outlines various approaches for conducting needs analyses, there is a noticeable lack of research focusing specifically on the English language needs of tourism service providers operating in less-developed, nature-based tourism destinations in Thailand. Much of the current literature tends to emphasize urban or well-established tourist hubs, often overlooking remote or rural regions that are increasingly becoming key attractions due to their ecological, cultural, and experiential value. The current study addresses these underexplored areas by concentrating on a specific and relatively understudied location, Khao Sok National Park, which is prominent for its eco-tourism appeal. Moreover, the study sheds light on the unique linguistic demands that arise in environmentally sensitive and culturally rich tourism contexts, which often require specialized communication strategies to engage international visitors effectively.

In terms of theoretical framework, the study draws on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) model of ESP needs analysis, particularly their tripartite concept of "necessities," "lacks," and "wants." By examining what tourism professionals must be able to do in English (necessities), what they currently struggle with (lacks), and what they express a desire to learn (wants), the study offers a comprehensive understanding of their language requirements. This framework ensures that the findings are not only contextually grounded but also theoretically aligned with well-established principles in ESP research.

The present study

This study investigated the challenges and English language development needs of tourism service providers at Khao Sok National Park in Surat Thani. The current study used a needs analysis questionnaire and open-ended questions to identify those difficulties. The research questions were:

1. What are the English communication problems that the local tourism service providers encounter during their services?
2. What are the needs for developing English language proficiency of the local tourism service providers in their tourism services?
3. What are the English language functions that the local tourism service providers need to improve in their tourism services?
4. What are the English communication tasks that the local tourism service providers need to perform at work?

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected in this research. The quantitative data were collected via the needs analysis questionnaire, and the qualitative data were collected via the open-ended questions.

Participants

A total of 41 participants were from five types of local tourism service providers who work at Khao Sok National Park, including the areas of the park and Ratchaprapa dam, Surat Thani province, where English is used as a medium of communication with international tourists. A purposive sampling method was employed. The participants were representatives from five types of local tourism service providers as follows: (1) local tour guides, (2) boat/bus drivers, (3) accommodation owners, (4) restaurant owners, and (5) shop owners.

Research instruments

The research instruments in the study consisted of a needs analysis questionnaire and open-ended questions. The questionnaire of needs analysis was designed along with Hutchinson and Waters (1997), which revealed the participants' specific target needs and learning needs in terms of necessities, lacks, and wants, along with their information and learning background.

Questionnaire and open-ended questions

The first part of the questionnaire was the demographic information that required the participant to check boxes. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions that required the participant to respond to five-point Likert items about their problems and needs related to English skills for tourism services. In addition, the open-ended questions were launched to address the participants' problems and needs. A panel of three experts, who were university lecturers specializing in English for tourism and English teaching, validated all items in the questionnaire. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was employed to judge the congruence between the questionnaire items and the objectives on which they were based, using a score range from -1 to 1. The items with scores lower than 0.5 were excluded, while the items with scores greater than 0.5 were retained. The IOC value was at 0.75.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was administered to 41 participants, who were five types of tourism service providers in the area, and they were later required to work on the open-ended questions. The researcher administered the needs analysis questionnaire in person and typed it in Thai, ensuring all participants could read and understand it. The consent form was administered to participants before data collection began.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. Percentages, means, and standard deviations were obtained to analyze the results. The mean scores for the questionnaire on the needs analysis were interpreted based on the following criteria:

Table 1. Likert scale, interval, and description of five-point Likert scale questionnaires

Likert scale	Interval	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	strongly agree	Very high
4	3.41-4.20	agree	High
3	2.61-3.40	neutral	Moderate
2	1.81-2.60	disagree	Low
1	1.00-1.80	strongly disagree	Very low

For interpreting the mean scores, a Likert Scale was used for each statement. The mean scores were interpreted as follows: strongly disagree (1.00 -1.80), disagree (1.81 -2.60), neutral (2.61 -3.40), agree (3.41 -4.20), and strongly agree (4.21 -5.00) (Nyutu et al., 2021).

The open-ended questions allow the participants to write their opinions on their problems and needs of English for communication in tourism. The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS

Needs analysis questionnaire

General information of the participants

Approximately 65.85% of the participants were female and 34.15% were male. The majority were less than 30 years old. In terms of their level of education, 24.39% of the participants held a bachelor's degree, while the rest of them had less than a bachelor's degree. 65.85% of the participants had less than nine years of learning English in the education system. The most frequent communicative behavior at their workplaces was speaking and listening, followed by reading and writing. Moreover, there were five types of local tourism service providers in the area. The information is shown below.

Table 2. General Information of the Participants

Items	General information of the participants	No. of the Participants (n=41)	Percentage
1	Gender		
	- Male	14	34.15
	- Female	27	65.85
2	Age		
	- Below 30 years old	25	60.98
	- Over 30 years old	16	39.02
3	Level of Education		
	- Below bachelor's degree	31	75.61
	- Bachelor's degree	10	24.39
4	Experiences in learning English in the education system		
	- Under 9 years	27	65.85
	- Over 9 years	14	34.15

5	English skills are used most at the workplace	
	Listening	
	- Under twice a week	16
	- Over twice a week	25
	Speaking	
	- Under twice a week	14
	- Over twice a week	27
	Reading	
	- Under twice a week	17
	- Over twice a week	24
	Writing	
	- Under twice a week	22
	- Over twice a week	19
	Types of tourism service providers	
6	- Accommodation owner	10
	- Local tour guide	9
	- Restaurant owner	9
	- Boat/bus driver	7
	- Souvenir shop owner	6

English proficiency problems encountered at work

The participants were asked to rate their English proficiency problems for tourism services as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Problems on English Proficiency

Aspects of English Proficiency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1. Accent	3.49	1.25	High
2. Grammar	3.54	1.21	High
3. Vocabulary	3.56	1.25	High
4. Pronunciation/Stress	3.51	1.31	High
5. Sentence Intonation	3.59	1.29	High
6. English Idioms	3.61	1.25	High
Overall	3.55	1.26	High

Overall, all of the English proficiency problems were perceived to a high level of difficulty to the participants. The three greatest problems experienced by the participants were English idioms ($M = 3.61$), followed by sentence intonation ($M = 3.59$), and vocabulary ($M = 3.56$) respectively.

English communication problems encountered at work

The participants were asked to rate the level of English communication problems for tourism services as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Problems on English Communication Skills

English communication Skills for Tourism	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Listening skills			
1. Understand unfamiliar words or technical terms	3.68	1.09	High
2. Understand native or non-native accents	3.63	1.22	High
3. Understand complex sentences	3.83	1.21	High
4. Understand English idioms	3.78	1.14	High
Overall	3.73	1.17	High
Speaking skills			
1. Confidence in speaking English	3.59	1.19	High
2. Pronounce words correctly	3.54	1.15	High
3. Respond appropriately	3.66	1.20	High
Overall	3.59	1.18	High
Reading skills			
1. Guess the meaning of unfamiliar words	3.54	1.29	High
2. Understand the main idea of the text	3.59	1.23	High
Overall	3.56	1.26	High
Writing skills			
1. Spell words correctly	3.56	1.23	High
2. Use vocabulary correctly	3.59	1.15	High
3. Use correct grammar	3.71	1.29	High
4. Use sentence connectors	3.54	1.25	High
Overall	3.60	1.23	High

According to the result, all of the English communication problems of all 4 skills were perceived to be a high level of difficulty to the participants. When considering all skills, it can be seen that listening was the most problematic skill ($M = 3.73$), particularly in understanding complex sentences ($M = 3.83$). Next was writing ($M = 3.60$), with the highest problem of being the ability to use correct grammar ($M = 3.71$). The third was speaking ($M = 3.59$), with the highest issue being able to respond appropriately ($M = 3.66$). The lowest is reading ($M = 3.56$), with the main issue being the ability to understand the main idea of the text ($M = 3.59$).

Needs for developing English proficiency

Table 5. Needs for Developing English Proficiency

Aspects of English Proficiency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1. Accent	4.15	1.05	High
2. Grammar	4.02	1.16	High
3. Vocabulary	3.93	1.16	High
4. Pronunciation/Word Stress	4.10	1.11	High

5. Sentence Intonation	4.02	1.08	High
6. English Idioms	3.82	1.18	High
Overall	4.01	1.12	High

Overall, all of the needs for developing English proficiency for tourism services were rated at a high level. The three needs that participants most agreed upon were accent ($M = 4.15$), followed by pronunciation/word stress ($M = 4.10$), and grammar and sentence intonation, which both had the same mean score of 4.02.

English language functions needed for development

Table 6. English Language Functions Needed for Development

Functions of English Language Communication for Tourism	<i>M</i>	SD	Interpretation
1. Listening to questions from foreign tourists	3.63	1.16	High
2. Listening to requests from foreign tourists	3.63	1.14	High
3. Listening to information from foreign tourists	3.44	1.21	High
4. Responding to show understanding	3.59	1.19	High
5. Conversing in daily life	3.51	1.25	High
6. Answering questions from foreign tourists	3.66	1.28	High
7. Asking for information from foreign tourists	3.46	1.25	High
8. Presenting information about tourist activities and attractions	3.46	1.27	High
9. Recommending products and services to foreign tourists	3.49	1.21	High
10. Providing service information such as directions and prices	3.56	1.13	High
Overall	3.54	1.21	High

Overall, there was a high demand for English language functions in tourism services. Considering the three most agreed-upon statement, the highest mean score was for answering questions from foreign tourists ($M = 3.66$), followed by listening to questions and requests from foreign tourists ($M = 3.63$) and responding to show understanding ($M = 3.59$), respectively.

English communication tasks needed to perform at work

Table 7. English Communication Tasks Needed to Perform at Work

Types of English Communication Tasks	<i>M</i>	SD	Interpretation
1. Greeting	3.68	1.05	High
2. Welcoming	3.66	1.03	High
3. Self-introduction and introducing others	3.68	1.05	High
4. Recommending tourist attractions	3.73	1.21	High
5. Recommending tourism activities	3.68	1.24	High
6. Providing safety information and advice about cultural etiquette	3.68	1.16	High
7. Giving directions	3.61	1.12	High
8. Telling time and making appointments	3.46	1.15	High
9. Stating prices and negotiating	3.56	1.17	High
10. Requesting cooperation and stating prohibitions	3.63	1.26	High

11. Recommending accommodations	3.80	1.09	High
12. Describing types of accommodations	3.88	0.97	High
13. Describing the location of accommodations	3.59	1.19	High
14. Recommending local food	3.27	1.33	Moderate
15. Explaining and recommending products	3.51	1.23	High
16. Saying thank you and goodbye	3.66	1.16	High
Overall	3.63	1.15	High

It can be seen that the English tasks the participants performed most frequently at work were recommending accommodations and describing types of accommodations ($M = 3.80$ and 3.88), followed by recommending tourist attractions ($M = 3.73$). Regarding the aspects of self-introduction and introducing others, introducing tourism activities, and providing safety information and advice about cultural etiquette, all of which had the same mean score ($M = 3.68$). According to the participants' needs, the least communicative task was recommending local food ($M = 3.27$).

The open-ended questions regarding problems and needs yield key information that can be summarized through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as follows:

1. The problems they encountered during the tourism services could be seen as excerpts below.

Excerpts included:

"Many times I don't understand the vocabulary or accent."

"My communication is still hindered; sometimes I understand, sometimes I don't. I want to speak but can't think of the words or use them incorrectly."

"I understand only a little bit."

"It's not enough at all because the foundation is weak."

2. Their needs for developing English language proficiency were seen as excerpts below.

Excerpts included:

"Speaking skills."

"Communication (speaking and listening)."

"Speaking and listening, focusing on speaking as much as possible."

"Conversation skills."

"Online learning to improve speaking skills."

"Training and using language applications for looking up unknown words."

3. Their needs for the communication tasks could be defined as follows
Excerpts included:

“Tourist attractions and their details.”

“Professional tourist attraction introduction, communicating with foreigners, answering every question.”

“Introducing tourist attractions.”

“Information about tourist attractions.”

“Information about various local tourist attractions.”

The responses indicated their problems with English for communication in tourism services, especially the limited vocabulary knowledge and how to pronounce the words correctly. In addition, listening and speaking were English communication skills that they needed for their tourism services. The tasks that they needed to provide the services included introducing tourist attractions and community tourism activities. Although tourists have studied information about the places on the internet, in tourism brochures, or in pamphlets beforehand, most of them still need additional information from local tourism service providers.

DISCUSSION

The quantitative data revealed that the tasks the tourism service providers at Khao Sok National Park, Surat Thani performed most frequently were recommending and describing accommodation and recommending tourist attractions. The qualitative data also pointed out their need to perform tasks introducing tourist attractions in the area. This is in line with previous study that revealed a great need for tourism staff to perform tasks such as room explanations and tour itineraries (Meunchong, 2023).

It is interesting to note that the majority of the tourism service providers in this study rated listening and speaking as highly needed. Listening seemed the most problematic skills, but it is the skill that they need to improve for their job services. This may be explained by the fact that listening to the foreign tourists' requests or questions is important, relating to the hospitality services, as well as speaking skills that they need to master in order to provide the best service to the customers. The findings are consistent with earlier studies that found tourism workers who showed a greater need for listening and speaking skills than for reading and writing skills (Prachanant, 2012)

According to the tasks and needs mentioned above, the participants expressed a need to strengthen their English language skills related to community-based tourism, as they often face communication issues while performing their duties. Specifically, these issues include vocabulary and sentence structures that cannot be effectively used in communication. Having inadequate vocabulary or a lack of idioms knowledge was an obstacle to the participants' abilities to conduct effective communication. The findings are in line with the previous study that explored how tourism personnel in Thailand used English at work and found that having limited vocabulary resulted in communication breakdown (Chomchuen & Rattanasak, 2018). Furthermore, an insufficient understanding of grammatical structure

hindered the participants' communication with foreign tourists. The findings align with prior research indicating that limited grammatical knowledge impedes successful communication (Siwayingsuwan & Tawilapakul, 2016). It is clear from both the quantitative and qualitative data that their usual problems are having inadequate vocabulary and English idioms in speaking, being unable to understand foreign accents in listening, and lacking grammar knowledge to form sentences in speaking.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated English communication problems, needs for developing English language proficiency, the English language functions, and the English communication tasks of the local tourism service providers at Khao Sok National Park in Surat Thani province. The findings revealed that the local tourism service providers at Khao Sok National Park in Surat Thani province experienced several challenges in English communication. The most significant problems were related to the use of English idioms, intonation, and limited vocabulary knowledge. Among the four language skills, listening was reported as the most difficult, particularly when trying to understand foreign tourists.

The service providers expressed a strong need to develop their ability to listen and respond to tourists' questions and understand their requests effectively. They also showed a desire to improve speaking skills, with particular attention to pronunciation, stress, intonation, and grammar accuracy. These improvements were considered essential for providing better communication during tourism services.

There was a notably high demand for English language functions among local tourism service providers in tourism-related services. This reflects the growing importance of effective communication in facilitating positive experiences for foreign tourists. Based on the quantitative data, the three highest-rated needs revealed the most essential English communication functions required in their daily work. The highest mean score was for the ability to answer questions from foreign tourists, indicating that service providers frequently encounter situations where they are expected to provide information, directions, or explanations. This suggests that clear and accurate spoken communication is a priority in their customer service roles. The second most important need was the ability to listen to questions and requests from foreign tourists. This highlights the challenge of understanding diverse accents, pronunciation patterns, and spoken speed, which are common when communicating with non-native English speakers. Developing stronger listening skills would allow the service providers to better comprehend tourist inquiries and offer relevant assistance. Lastly, responding in a way that shows understanding is critical for maintaining effective two-way communication, ensuring that tourists feel heard, respected, and supported. The ability to confirm comprehension through verbal or non-verbal responses fosters trust and enhances the overall tourist experience.

The service providers frequently engaged in English communication tasks that included recommending accommodations, describing types of accommodations, introducing themselves and their colleagues, presenting local tourist attractions, introducing tourism-related activities, and offering safety and cultural guidance. They particularly emphasized their interest in learning how to converse about tourist destinations and community tourism activities, which they considered essential for their roles.

Implications

Local tourism service providers who are involved in community-based tourism can utilize the findings from this study to design lesson or courses for the tourism service providers to strengthen their English communication skills by addressing their specific weaknesses and needs. They can achieve this by designing suitable lessons as a guide to practicing English. This approach will enable them to further enhance their communication skills in English at a more advanced level. Additionally, training to improve English proficiency should focus on effective communication, expanding vocabulary, and idioms related to tourism. It should also emphasize the correct use of English sentence structures and practice pronunciation to closely resemble real-life scenarios. Other groups interested in English communication for tourism, such as students or tourism service providers in other regions, can also apply it.

Recommendations for future research

Future studies should explore similar topics with other foreign languages used by tourism service providers to communicate with international tourists, such as Chinese, Russian, French, and Japanese. Research could also be conducted in other tourist destinations beyond Khao Sok National Park in Surat Thani Province.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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