



Foreign Language Skills and Content Needed to Be Used in Hotels in Khon Kaen Province, Thailand

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Abstract

The purposes of this survey were to investigate (1) foreign languages needed to be used at hotels in Khon Kaen Province, (2) foreign language skills and content needed to be used, and (3) foreign language skills and the content the hotels need their staff to be trained. The target group was 100 three-five-star hotels in Khon Kaen. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size specification, 80 hotels were purposively selected. The research tool was Likert's five-rating scale questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions. The data were analyzed by means of percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings from 56 returned questionnaires (70.00 %) show that the foreign languages used are English, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Korean, and Laos. The language skills and content used at a high level are listening to requests for information concerning tourist attractions, services, the city, suggestions, souvenir shops and message leaving, and listening to different English accents. For speaking, the hotel staff use it most in greetings, giving information on services and tourist attractions, thanking, and offering help. At a high level, they use it in making requests and suggestions, giving information on the city and souvenir shops, asking for permission, apologizing, saying goodbyes, offering sympathy and congratulations, answering questions, giving advice, responding to message leaving, expressing wishes, and ending a conversation. They use the reading skill at the highest level for reading hotel documents, room reservations, and contact. At a high level, they use it for reading about the city and tourist attractions in the province. In terms of writing, they use it at a high level for business email, reports, and letters. The hotels need their staff to be trained on conversations, English for hotels, offering services, listening to a variety of English accents, giving information on traveling, writing business email and letters, cultures of other nationalities, formal language and grammar.

Keywords : Foreign languages, language skills, content, hotels.

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1. Introduction

Thailand must develop its tourism business more when entering the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), since the tourism industry is singled out as one important sector needed to be on par with required production standards (Department of Trade Negotiation, 2011).

The promotion of tourism is an important means of ASEAN'S tourism cooperation among its Tourism Association (ASEANTA), aiming to offer more varieties of world-famous tourist attractions under the slogan "Southeast Asia Feels the Warmth" (Department of Trade Negotiation, 2011: 89).2

To elevate the quality of tourism services in ASEAN, the Minister of ASEAN Tourism concluded in the mutual recognition arrangement (MRA) in January, 2009 that the purposes were to provide convenience for the transfer of experts in tourism in the region, and to create equality among the regional tourism personnel. The mutual recognition can promote confidence in terms of the quality and the effects of training programs on tourism to help promote tourism investment and the transfer of human resources in this region (Department of Trade Negotiation, 2011).

At present, the hotel business is considered very important in the tourism business. To be able to offer better services to foreign guests, the hotel staff members in different sections must be able to communicate well in foreign languages, especially in English which is a popular international language and the language of business in the AEC.

English aside, other foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean can guarantee that the hotel staff members who can communicate in those languages will have stable jobs and can compete with others in the AEC, especially when ASEAN is the hub of ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Area, ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership, ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, and ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (Department of Trade Negotiation, 2011).

Thailand is one of the countries in the AEC, located in the center of communication of the region. Khon Kaen Province is one of Thailand's major cities in the Northeast. It is the center of education and technology, fully equipped with convenient public utilities and all kinds of comforts. Interestingly enough, Khon Kaen is blessed with natural resources, history, fascinating tourist attractions, hotels of various types and services. Needless to say, all are regarded as important components of the tourism industry.

The College of Asian Scholars is one of the private higher educational institutions in Khon Kaen Province, certified by the Office of Higher Education Commission and also by the Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) (2011-2015). The Office of the Civil Service Commission has certified that the college's qualifications are compatible to those of the governments' in all respects.

The foreign languages offered at the College of Asian Scholars include English,



Chinese, and Japanese. The researcher is an English lecturer teaching English for Tourism and English for Hotels at the college, and is interested in finding out what foreign languages and content are actually used in the hotels in Khon Kaen for the improvement of foreign language courses and the planning of language training programs for other work units.

2. Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were to investigate:

2.1 what foreign languages needed to be used at the hotels in Khon Kaen,

2.2 the foreign language content needed to be used, and

2.3 what additional language skills and content the hotels need they staff members to be trained.

3. Research Methods

3.1 The Target Group

The target group of this research was the three-five-star hotels in Khon Kaen.

3.2 The Sample Group

The sample size was specified by means of Krejcie and Morgan's sample specification. Out of 100 hotels, 80 were purposively selected as the sample group.

3.3 The Research Tool

The research tool was a Likert five-scale close-ended questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questionnaire was

divided into three parts: the first part was about the respondents' status; the second, foreign languages and the content needed to be used at the hotel; and the third, the language skills and content the hotels need their staff members to be additionally trained.

3.4 Data Collecting

3.4.1 The researcher asked for a letter from the dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts to be sent to the personnel manager of each hotel in the sample group requesting for cooperation.

3.4.2 The researcher and her assistants delivered the questionnaire to each hotel.

3.4.3 The researcher and the assistants went to the hotels to collect the questionnaires.

3.4.4 The returned questionnaires were checked for completeness before being analyzed.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 The data from the close-ended questions from 56 returned questionnaires (70.00 %) were analyzed by means of percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

3.5.2 The data from the open-ended questions were categorized and calculated for frequency and percentage.

4. Research Results

The findings from the first part of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.



Table 1 Respondents' Status

Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1. Sex		
Male	12	21.43
Female	43	76.79
Unspecified	1	1.79
2. Age		
Under 25 yrs.	4	7.14
25 – 30 yrs.	21	37.50
31 – 35 yrs.	15	26.79
36 – 40 yrs.	11	19.64
41 – 45 yrs.	4	7.14
Unspecified	1	1.79
3. Work Experience at the Hotel		
Under 5 years	27	48.21
5 – 10 years	25	44.64
11 – 15 years	4	7.14
4. Position		
Front-office personnel	36	64.29
Managers	10	17.86
House-keepers	6	10.71
Receptionists	3	5.36
Unspecified	1	1.79

The information in Table 1 shows that most of the respondents were females (76.79%), only 21.43% were males; one was unspecified. Their ages were 25-30 years old (37.50%), 31-35 (26.79%), 36-40 (19.64%), 41-45 (7.14%), and under 25 (7.14%). One was unspecified. Their work experience at the hotels was less than 5

years (7.14%). The respondents' positions include front-office personnel (64.29%), managers (17.86%), house-keepers (10.71%), and receptionists (5.36 %), and one unspecified.

The findings concerning the foreign languages used at the hotels are presented in Table 2.



Table 2 Foreign Languages Used at the Hotels in Khon Kaen

Foreign Languages Used	No. of Hotels	Percentage
English	56	100.00
Mandarin Chinese	27	48.21
Japanese	16	28.57
German	15	26.79
French	9	16.07
Korean	5	8.93
Laos	1	1.79

In Part 2, the findings reveal that the foreign languages used at the hotels in Khon Kaen included English (100.00%), Mandarin Chinese (48.21%), Japanese (28.57%), German

(26.79%), French (16.07%), Korean (8.93%), and Lao (1.79%).

In terms of foreign language skills and content, the key to the interpretation of the mean (\bar{x}) was as follows:

(\bar{x})	Meaning
≥ 4.50	the highest
3.50 – 4.49	high
2.50 – 3.49	moderate
1.50 – 2.49	less
≥ 1.49	the least

For the standard deviation (S.D.), if the number is closer to zero, it indicates the less difference.

The findings in Part 2 concerning the language skills and content needed to be used at the hotels are shown in Table 3.



Table 3 Language Skills and Content Needed to Be Used at the Hotels

Skills	Contents	(\bar{x})	S.D.
Listening	1. Requests for tourist attractions	4.46	0.71
	2. Requests for services at the hotel	4.39	0.71
	3. Requests for the information on Khon Kaen	4.27	0.82
	4. Different accents	4.25	0.72
	5. Asking for advice	4.25	0.84
	6. Questions in general	4.25	0.84
	7. Asking about souvenir shops	4.13	0.90
	8. Making requests	4.13	0.90
	9. Message leaving	3.95	1.02
Speaking	1. Welcoming	4.79	0.49
	2. Giving information on hotel services	4.70	0.50
	3. Thanking	4.63	0.70
	4. Giving information on tourist attractions	4.52	0.71
	5. Offering help	4.50	0.66
	6. Making polite requests and giving advice	4.45	0.76
	7. Giving information on Khon Kaen	4.45	0.81
	8. Giving directions	4.41	0.87
	9. Asking for permission	4.39	0.78
	10. Apologizing	4.38	0.75
	11. Responding to requests	4.34	0.79
	12. Saying goodbyes	4.32	0.83
	13. Expressing sympathy	4.30	0.74
	14. Congratulating	4.30	0.81
	15. Giving information about souvenir shops	4.29	0.82
	16. Introducing oneself	4.29	0.87
	17. Answer questions in general	4.25	0.77
	18. Compromising	4.20	1.02
	19. Giving advice	4.16	0.80
	20. Responding to message leaving	4.16	0.97
	21. Expressing wishes	4.09	0.94
	22. Ending a conversation	3.70	1.11



Skills	Contents	(\bar{x})	S.D.
Reading	1. Documents on the hotel	4.68	0.58
	2. Room reservations	4.64	0.70
	3. Contact with the hotel	4.63	0.59
	4. Documents on Khon Kaen and tourist attractions in the province	4.46	0.79
Writing	1. Business email	4.02	0.92
	2. Reports	3.91	0.94
	3. Business letters	3.75	0.86

The language skills and content needed to be used at the hotels show that the listening skill is used at a high level covering requests for tourism attractions, services at the hotel, the information on Khon Kaen, different accents, asking for advice, questions in general, souvenir shops, requests, and message leaving.

The speaking skill used at the highest level encompasses such topics as welcoming, giving information on hotel services, thanking, giving information on tourist attractions, and offering help. A high level of the speaking skill centers on the topics of making polite requests and giving advice, giving information on Khon Kaen, giving directions, asking for permission, apologizing, responding to requests, saying goodbyes, expressing sympathy, congratulating,

giving information about souvenir shops, introducing oneself, answering questions, compromising, giving advice, responding to message leaving, expressing wishes, and ending a conversation.

The reading skill is used at the highest level for reading documents on the hotel, room reservations, and contact with the hotel. At a high level, it is used for reading the documents on Khon Kaen and tourist attractions in the province.

As for the writing skill, it is used at a high level for writing business email, reports, and business letters.

What the hotels in Khon Kaen need their staff members to be trained is presented in Table 4.



Table 4 Foreign Languages Skills and Content the Hotels Want Their Staff to Be Trained

Skills	Content	No. of Hotels	Percentage
Listening	Listening to a variety of English	4	7.14
Speaking	1. Conversations with foreigners	29	51.79
	2. Offering services	12	21.43
	3. Giving traveling information	3	5.36
Writing	1. Business email	3	5.36
	2. Business letters	3	5.36
Others	1. English for hotels	7	12.50
	2. Cultures of other nationalities	3	5.36
	3. Formal language	1	1.79
	4. Grammar	1	1.79

The hotels in Khon Kaen need their staff members to be train on the following topics: conversations with foreigners (51.79 %), offering services (21.43 %), English for hotels (12.50 %), listening to a variety of English accents (7.14 %), giving traveling information (5.36 %), writing business email and letters (5.36 %), cultures of other nationalities (5.36 %), formal language (1.79 %), and grammar (1.79 %).

5. Discussion

One finding of this research reveals that the hotels in Khon Kaen have to use seven foreign languages. Similarly, Kim, Kim, Seo, and Hyun (2011) reported in their research that the knowledge of foreign languages is a major factor of hotel human resources. It is also in agreement with what Siwalai and Sornsuparp (2014) recommended that hotel staff members with keen knowledge of foreign languages are

required by the hotels, especially those in the AEC.

The findings concerning the foreign language skills and the content needed to be used at the highest and high levels in terms of listening and speaking are similar to the results of a research study conducted by Charunsri (2011), showing that speaking is the most important for front desk personnel who need to communicate in English. In terms of content, the finding is the same as that of Low and Pongsukvachakul's (2014) on these topics: offering help, giving advice, apologizing, self-introducing, welcoming, saying goodbyes, thanking, congratulating, and making wishes. However, the findings of this research concerning other topics are different from other research studies.

The findings concerning reading and writing skills are found to be different from others as far as the exact content of what



the hotel staff members have to use are concerned.

The foreign language skills and the content the hotels need their staff members to be trained are similar to what Kim, Kim, Seo, and Hyun (2011) have suggested. That is the hotels should have training programs on what the staff members need such as on foreign languages so that that they can communicate with foreign guests. Their findings coincides with what Lertpipattananon et al. (2012) have concluded in their survey that foreign language training, especially English, is what the hotel staff members want to have. In addition, this research is in agreement with what Lin and Vajirakachorn (n.d.) have recommended that the quality of hotel services should be improved. Some similar basic findings of the research studies by others aforementioned notwithstanding, one major concern of this research was to concentrate specifically on exactly what the hotel staff members need to be trained.

6. Suggestions

6.1 Suggestions for Further Research

There should be more research studies on what is needed to serve foreign guests in different types of accommodations such as resorts and homestays in provinces with popular tourist attractions among foreigners.

6.2 Suggestions for People Involved

6.2.1 Hotels and personnel providing services for foreigners should support their staff members to participate in training programs on the skills and content found in this research.

6.2.2 Educational institutions can make use of these research findings to arrange foreign language training programs for hotel staff members and those who need to communicate with others in foreign languages.

6.2.3 Writers of a curriculum on tourism and hotels can use the findings of this research to revise some content.

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