



English Communication Problems and Needs of ESP Learners:
A Case Study of Songthaew Drivers in Chiang Mai
ปัญหาและความต้องการภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ
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ในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่

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Abstract

This article is part of research entitled “Development of Self-access Learning Package to Enhance Communicative English Listening and Speaking Skills of Songthaew Drivers in Chiang Mai”. The research objective presented in this article is to investigate the problems and needs of English communication experienced by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The study employed a survey design to administer observation, interview, and questionnaires to investigate the problems and needs of English communication among 114 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. Besides, the study involved investigating the problems and needs of 10 foreign tourists, who encountered Songthaew drivers on duty. The findings revealed that most Songthaew drivers were not satisfied with their English listening and speaking skills. Listening problems were caused by the accent of the English speakers, the limitation of their vocabulary, the speed of speaking, and lacking English grammar knowledge. English speaking problems, however, were the result of insufficient vocabulary, difficulties with English pronunciation, mispronunciation, and lacking English grammar knowledge. They also reflected that their English language abilities were inadequate for their career path.

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Furthermore, the result of foreign tourists' interview showed that problems in English communication of Songthaew drivers were due to inability to communicate in English since the drivers lacked of understanding of English, and they often mispronounced. Based on the findings, the author designed a learning package to serve Songthaew drivers' problems and needs.

Keywords

Problems and Needs, English Communication, ESP Learners, Songthaew Drivers

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของงานวิจัยเรื่อง การพัฒนาชุดสื่อการเรียนรู้ด้วยตนเองเพื่อเพิ่มพูนทักษะการฟังและการพูดภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารของผู้ประกอบอาชีพขับรถสองแถวในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ซึ่งวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยที่นำเสนอในบทความนี้ คือ เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัญหาและความต้องการในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของคนขับรถสองแถวในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ ข้อมูลได้จากการสังเกต สัมภาษณ์ และแบบสอบถาม เพื่อศึกษาปัญหาและความต้องการในการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของคนขับรถสองแถวในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ จำนวน 114 คน นอกจากนี้ผู้เขียนได้สัมภาษณ์นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่ใช้บริการรถสองแถว จำนวน 10 คน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า คนขับรถสองแถวส่วนใหญ่ไม่พึงพอใจกับทักษะการฟัง การพูดภาษาอังกฤษของตนเอง โดยปัญหาการฟังเกิดจากสำเนียงผู้พูดซ้ำจำกดด้านคำศัพท์ ความเร็วในการพูดและขาดความรู้ด้านไวยากรณ์ ปัญหาด้านการพูดเกิดจากข้อจำกัดด้านคำศัพท์ การออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษไม่สามารถออกเสียงได้อย่างถูกต้องและขาดความรู้ด้านไวยากรณ์และกลุ่มเป้าหมายคิดว่าความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษของตนไม่เพียงพอต่อการประกอบอาชีพ ส่วนผลการสัมภาษณ์นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่ใช้บริการรถสองแถว พบว่า ปัญหาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของคนขับรถสองแถวเกิดจากคนขับรถไม่สามารถใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการสื่อสารได้ ไม่เข้าใจภาษาอังกฤษและการออกเสียงไม่ถูกต้อง ผู้เขียนได้นำข้อมูลที่ได้จากการศึกษาไปสร้างชุดสื่อการเรียนรู้เพื่อตอบสนองปัญหาและความต้องการของกลุ่มเป้าหมาย

คำสำคัญ

ปัญหาและความต้องการ การสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะผู้ประกอบอาชีพขับรถสองแถว

Introduction

Thailand has been a member of the ASEAN Economy Community (AEC) since 2015, which has encouraged many English-speaking tourists to come to visit various cities including Chiang Mai, which is the largest city in the northern part of Thailand. As English is regarded as a lingua



franca to communicate among ASEAN countries (Charoensuk & Charoensuk, 2011, 38), it is a necessary qualification for most service careers in Chiang Mai. Unfortunately, many Songthaew drivers (red taxi drivers) are challenged when communicating with English-speaking clients. According to the observation and interviews of Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai by the author, it was found that some of them understood the words that foreign clients used; however, they could not respond in English. This appeared to be a big problem for Songthaw drivers in Chiang Mai. The problem was due to the lack of time to practice English. Also, books and materials available at the present are not specifically designed and arranged to meet their needs. Furthermore, the contents are not suitable to their background and careers. Songthaew drivers obviously need an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) material.

The concept of ESP in this article comes from a synthesis of a number of ESP specialists. As Hutchinson & Waters (1987, 19) state that ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning, while Richards & Schmidt (2010, 198) define ESP as a role of English in a language course or program of instruction in which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the needs of a particular group of learners. A similar idea is expressed by Crystal (2003, 108) who sees ESP as a course whose content is determined by the professional needs of the learner. ESP has always been with needs analysis and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks set by their field of study or work situation. Needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP and its proper application can result into a focus course (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, 121). This implies that the key stage in an ESP course is needs analysis. If needs are clear, the learning aims can be expressed more easily and the language course can become motivating (Albakrawi, 2013, 14).

To follow the concept of ESP developed by aforementioned thinkers, observing the real English problems and needs of Songthaew drivers, and exploring what they are lacking, must be conducted to collect information about learners and classroom activities in order to design a language course and materials that serve their English problems and needs.

Literature Review

Needs analysis is the preliminary stage of designing courses, syllabuses, materials and the sort of educational activities that take place (Jordan, 1997, 22). It is a device to elicit the learner's necessities, needs, and lacks (Fatihi, 2003, 39). The goals of needs analysis are to find out what learners want to use the language for and what level of competencies they have in the language at present. Thus, it is considered to be a key point to develop an ESP course.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987, 54-57) classify needs into two categories; target needs and learning needs. The target needs (what the learner needs to do in the target situation) are categorized into three parts: necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities are the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. Lacks are the necessities that the learners do not possess and wants are the learners' wishes and views toward what they need to learn. The learning needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn) include language items, skills, strategies, subject knowledge. However, Robinson (1991, 8-9) classifies needs into two categories; present situation analysis and target situation analysis. The present situation analysis is to find out the learners' English proficiency level and language needs at the beginning of the course. The target situation analysis is to identify the learners' language needs regarding the target situation.

Needs analysis can be used to find out the required language skills for a learner to perform a particular role such as sales manager, university student, to find out a gap between their present proficiency level and required proficiency, and to find out problem areas of the learners (Richards, 2001, 52). There may be different ways of finding information about learners needs. The main data collection methods are questionnaires, interviews, observations, discussions, assessment (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, 132).

To sum up, the data got from needs analysis allows a course designer to design an ESP course and materials to suit learners' interests and needs, to choose the best approach to language teaching, as well as to make the ESP course and materials more appropriate and relevant.

Conceptual Framework

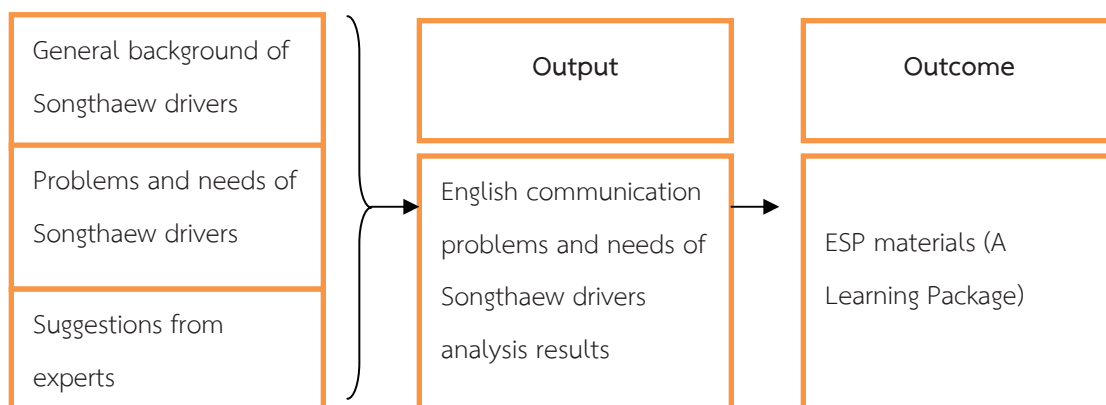


Figure 1: The procedure of studying of English communication problems and needs of Songthaew Drivers in Chiang Mai



Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the problems and needs of English communication among Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai and to study the level of satisfaction of Songthaew drivers towards a course material.

Research Methodology

1. Participants

The participants of this study comprised of 114 Songthaew drivers, all of them had similar job responsibility (homogeneous population) (Akinade & Owolabi, 2009, 73) and worked in the Chiang Mai municipality. This area had a great number of tourist attractions that meant it was necessary for the participants to use English to communicate with English-speaking customers. The researcher also interviewed 15 Songthaew drivers to gather in-depth information. Moreover, data triangulation method (Flick, 2002, 444) was conducted by interviewing another party, namely, 10 foreign tourists, who encountered Songthaew drivers on duty. Both were selected by using simple random sampling technique.

2. Research Instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire set, which was used to gather data concerning the English communication problems and needs of Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The questionnaire was categorized according to key study objectives to ensure that all the objectives were answered. It was presented with a checklist, a 5-rating scale, and open-ended questions and consisted of five parts: Part I: The general information of the respondents, Part II: English communication of the respondents, Part III: The respondents' English Listening problems while communicating with the foreign clients, Part IV: The respondents' English speaking problems while communicating with the foreign clients, and Part V: The topics needed to be communicated with the foreign clients.

To ensure the validity and appropriateness of the questionnaire, a draft was designed, modified, and revised based on the three experts (in research, language, and teaching fields) using "Index of Objective Congruence (IOC)". The IOC of each was 1.0, indicating that all items could be used. After that, a pilot study was carried out to test the effectiveness and to improve the language appropriateness of the questionnaire. The 10 subjects of the pilot study were requested to fill out the questionnaire. The Reliability of the instrument was at 0.84 alpha reliability coefficient which was considered high. Therefore, it could be claimed that the data collecting instrument had

both validity and reliability. Lastly, the final draft was revised and administered to the target group.

In addition to the questionnaire, the study involved interviewing 15 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. This method was used to gather further information concerning the problems and needs of their English communication.

Lastly, 10 foreign tourists, who encountered Songthaew drivers on duty, were interviewed. This method was used to confirm and provide further information about the problems and needs of English communication for Songthaew drivers. The five interview questions used are: (1) What information do you require from red taxi drivers? (2) What topics do you often ask red taxi drivers? (3) What are the problems in terms of language communication when communicating with red taxi drivers? (4) What are the cultural problems with red taxi drivers? (5) What is the biggest problem when you communicate with red taxi drivers?

Again, the interview questions were modified and developed based on the suggestions of the three experts (in research, language, and teaching fields).

3. Data Collection

The researcher studied documents related to the research in a first step and observed the target subjects around the Chiang Mai municipality such as Chiang Mai Night Bazaar, Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, and Nakornlanna Co., Ltd. Then the researcher sent an official letter to request for permission to Nakornlanna Co., Ltd. in order to gather the data for conducting this research. After that, a questionnaire set and interview questions were designed. Distributing the questionnaire and interviewing the target subjects were conducted around the Chiang Mai municipality located in tourist attractions across Chiang Mai such as Chiang Mai Night Bazaar, Wat Chedi Luang, and Wat Phra That Doi Suthep so as to gather the data.

The researcher also used another method to collect data by using data triangulation method; to help confirm the results of the research by using different people who could be involved in the research study (Flick, 2002, 444). This method verifies the data from various sources so that the results would be more reliable. The interviews of 10 foreign tourists, who encountered Songthaew drivers on duty, were expected to confirm the information about the problems and needs of Songthaew drivers.

The collective data was analyzed based on a needs analysis and the experts' suggestions in order to design a learning package. After that, the learning package was created based on a needs analysis and the experts' feedback. Finally, the learning package was used with a sample of 40 volunteered Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai in a 1-day workshop focusing on how to use



the learning package and a 2-week self-study at home. Then, the satisfaction form towards the package was rated and analyzed.

4. Data Analysis

The collective data was used to analyze both qualitative and quantitative content. The content analysis was presented through descriptive writing with examples, and the data obtained through the questionnaire was calculated statistically using a computer software program to find the percentage, the mean, and standard deviation. These statistics were shown in tables and interpreted with descriptive writing. The interpretation of the mean score was applied to evaluate the English listening and speaking problems encountered by Songthaew drivers, the communicative English topics needed at work, and the satisfaction towards the learning package. Regarding to Ruangsuan (1990, 138), the interpretation of the mean score was applied during the data analysis is shown as the following:

4.50 - 5.00 = highest

3.50 - 4.49 = high

2.50 - 3.49 = moderate

1.50 - 2.49 = low

1.00 - 1.49 = lowest

Research Findings

1. Results of the Questionnaire

1.1 The general background of Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai

A general background information regarding the 114 participants; the majority of the sample was male, aged between 51-60 and had at least 15 years of work experience. The majority had a primary level education.

1.2 English communication used by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai

This section presents the information regarding English communication used by 114 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The questions focused on how communicative English was used by Songthaew drivers; the number of foreigners they communicated with per day; what languages the foreigners usually communicated with; what additional English classes they took; as well as other learning sources they used to learn more English; the level of listening and speaking English competency they acquired; and their level of satisfaction with the English language. The data collected from this part is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

English communication used by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai (N=114)

Topics	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
-Number of Foreigners per Day	48.2 % (11-20p)	33.3 % (Less than 10p)	9.7 % (More than 30p)	8.8 % (21-30p)
-Languages of Foreigners	44.7 % (English)	44.7 % (Both English and Other Foreign Languages)	10.5 % (Other Foreign Languages)	0
-Additional English Learning	92.1 % (No)	7.9 % (Yes)	0	0
-English Learning Sources	39.5 % (a Well-informed Person)	37.7 % (Books & Textbooks)	22.8 % (Others)	0
-Level of Listening English Competency	41.2 % (Fair)	30.7 % (Poor)	16.7 % (Moderate)	11.4 % (Others)
-Level of Speaking English Competency	50.0 % (Fair)	21.9 % (Poor)	18.4 % (Moderate)	9.7 % (Others)
-Sufficiency of English Used in Career	68.5 % (Insufficient)	31.6 % (Sufficient)	0	0

As shown in Table 1, the majority stated that they communicated with 11-20 foreigners every day and they were mostly English native speakers. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the respondents claimed that they didn't attend any English classes at the time of responding to the questionnaire. Also, when they needed to know more English, they asked a well-informed person and read books or textbooks instead.

The results also confirmed that most of them were not content with their English listening and speaking skills. They stated that their English listening and speaking skills were at a fair level. In addition, they stated that their English language abilities were insufficient for their career.



1.3 Problems encountered by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai

This section presents the information regarding English listening and speaking problems encountered by 114 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The topics were created as closed-ended questions. The data obtained was calculated to find the mean and standard deviation (SD).

Table 2

English listening problems encountered by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai (N=114)

English listening problems	Mean	SD	Level
-Limited Vocabulary	3.10	1.17	Moderate
-Accent of Foreigners	3.21	0.99	Moderate
-Speed of Speaking	3.37	1.06	Moderate
-Lacking English Grammar Knowledge	3.38	1.09	Moderate

Table 2 depicts the English listening problems encountered by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. It was found that the means of the listening problem can be arranged as follows: lacking knowledge of English grammar (Mean = 3.38, SD = 1.09), the speed of speaking (Mean = 3.37, SD = 1.06), the accent of the foreigners (Mean = 3.21, SD = 0.99), and limited vocabulary (Mean = 3.10, SD = 1.17). The respondents felt that these problems were in moderate level.

Table 3

English speaking problems encountered by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai (N=114)

English speaking problems	Mean	SD	Level
-Limited Vocabulary	3.21	0.94	Moderate
-English Pronunciation	3.26	0.94	Moderate
-Lacking English Grammar Knowledge	3.28	1.03	Moderate

Table 3 illustrates the English speaking problems encountered by Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. It revealed that the means of the speaking problem can be arranged as follows: lacking English grammar knowledge (Mean = 3.28, SD = 1.03), English pronunciation (Mean = 3.26, SD = 0.94), and limited vocabulary (Mean = 3.21, SD = 0.94). These problems were in moderate level.

1.4 The communicative English topics needed at work

This section presents the information regarding English topics needed to communicate with foreigners by 114 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The topics were created as closed-ended questions, focusing on the use in their career. It was also open to provide suggestions and comments. The data collected from this part is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

The Communicative English topics needed at work (N=114)

English Communicative Topics	Mean	SD	Level
-Greeting, Thanking, Leave taking	3.35	1.12	Moderate
-Fares and Bargaining	3.34	1.15	Moderate
-Establishing customer's needs	3.30	1.09	Moderate
-Giving directions	3.15	1.08	Moderate
-Apologizing, Refusing customers	3.02	1.24	Moderate



Table 4 reveals the results of target group's needs regarding communicative English topics. It was found that the need of such topics like Greeting, Thanking, Leave taking ranked highest (Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.12), followed by the need for Fares and Bargaining (Mean = 3.34, SD = 1.15), Establishing customer's needs (Mean = 3.30, SD = 1.09), Giving directions (Mean = 3.15, SD = 1.08), and Apologizing, Refusing customers (Mean = 3.02, SD = 1.24), respectively. The interests of the respondents towards these five topics were in the moderate level.

Results of the Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, the study involved interviewing 15 Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. This method was used to collect further information concerning problems and needs of their English communication.

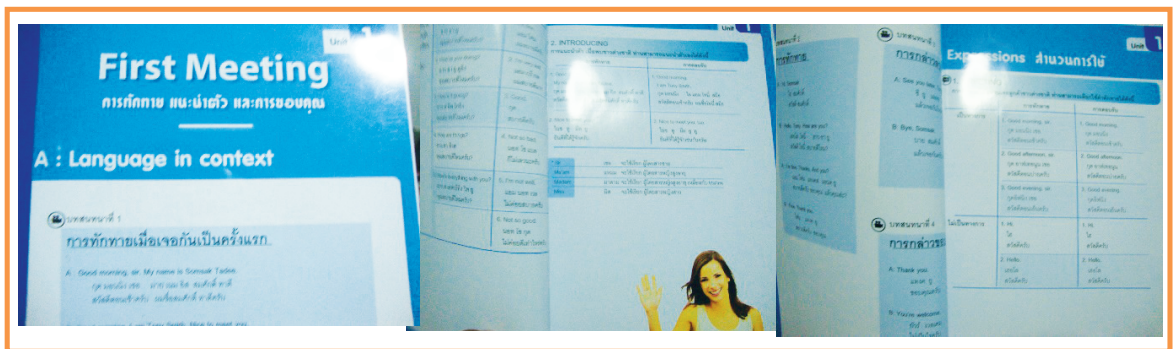
Results in this section are described in accordance to the details of problems and needs in English communication of Songthaew drivers. It was found that the inflexible work schedule was a problem because they had to work in the early morning and finish late at night. Moreover, most respondents stated that they needed to learn English communication in order to communicate with foreign clients and if possible, they needed a pocket book in English with a Thai pronunciation and translation and a CD. This is due to the fact that they did not have time to study in class. Having a learning package in form of a CD was suitable for them since most respondents had a CD player at their car or at home.

Correspondingly, the findings from tourists' needs and opinions were similar to the findings from the questionnaire and interview of Songthaew drivers. The tourists stated that problems in English communication of Songthaew drivers were due to inability to communicate in English since the drivers lacked of understanding of English, and they often mispronounced. Moreover, both Songthaew drivers and the tourists stated that they often engaged in the following situations: giving directions, telling the destination, and informing fares and bargaining.

Overall, problems and needs derived from the prior findings were used as a guideline to design a course material for Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai. The learning package was designed into a pocket book and an audio CD to serve their problems and needs based on prior results. Themes, subthemes, contents, practices, tasks were created from each study concerning Songthaew drivers' problems and needs and the experts' suggestions.

The package with the content in each unit begins with a real life conversation between Songthaew drivers and their foreign clients. In the first part, the learners listen and learn the

pronunciation and the accent of the speakers in the dialogue in English with a Thai pronunciation and translation is provided. For the second part of the learning package, the learners practice listening and speaking the vocabulary and expressions (they have learnt in the first part). They pronounce and repeat the vocabulary and expressions after they hear on the audio CD (English with a Thai pronunciation and translation provided). Lastly, the exercise part, reviews what the learners have learnt, and they have to write the missing sentences that they have learnt from the first part. By the end of the pocket book, key answers are provided to check the users' understanding.



Figures 2-4 The first draft of the learning package



Figures 5-7 The second draft of the learning package



Figures 8-10 The final draft of the learning package

The learning package was used with a sample of 40 volunteered Songthaew drivers in Chiang Mai in a 1-day workshop focusing on how to use the learning package and a 2-week self-study at home. Then, the satisfaction form towards the package was rated and analyzed to find the mean and standard deviation of satisfaction. These statistics were shown in Table 5 with descriptive writing below.

Table 5

Mean and SD of the satisfaction towards the learning package (N=40)

Topics of Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Level
-Content	4.34	0.87	High
-Language use	4.54	0.78	Highest
-A CD	4.62	0.65	Highest
-Design	4.60	0.67	Highest
-Usage	4.73	0.61	Highest
Overall	4.56	0.71	Highest

Table 5 indicates that the overall mean score reached to the highest satisfaction level (Mean = 4.56, SD = 0.71). The usage of the learning package ranked first (Mean = 4.73, SD = 0.61). This means the most respondents agreed that the learning package was very useful in their daily jobs, while the satisfaction towards a CD ranked second (Mean = 4.62, SD = 0.65), followed by the design of the package (Mean = 4.60, SD = 0.67), the language use (Mean = 4.54, SD = 0.78), and the content (Mean = 4.34, SD = 0.87), respectively. It concluded that Songthaew drivers were satisfied with the learning package in terms of content, language use, a CD, the design, and the usage. This is due to the package was created to serve their problems and needs.

Discussion

As shown above, the findings showed that the majority of Songthaew drivers needed English communication skills in order to communicate for their job. They realized the problem in English communication; they were not satisfied with their English speaking and listening skills and also stated that their English language abilities were insufficient for their career. Songthaew drivers were perceptibly self-motivated and ready to learn English communication in order to increase their job satisfaction or quality of life. These findings correspond with Knowles (1980, 44) who states that "People become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks and problems". The results also revealed the need for setting up a self-access learning package with a clear focus on ESP for Songthaew drivers. It is consistent with Hutchinson & Waters (1987, 19) which advocates language teaching in which all decisions concerning contents and learning methodology should base on the learner's reason for learning.

This study also applied Hutchinson & Waters (1987, 19) ESP concept above to deal with the English problems of Songthaew drivers. Most Songthaew drivers did not have time to study in class. Also, books and materials at the present are not specifically designed and arranged to meet their needs and the contents are not suitable to their background and career. These problems could be solved by creating an ESP self access learning material, providing the specific content, designing and arranging the materials which matched with their ESP needs.

The results of the satisfaction of Songthaew drivers towards the learning package showed that the overall satisfaction level of the self access learning package was reached to the highest with the satisfaction towards the usage of the package was ranked at the highest. This was due to the fact that Songthaew drivers realized the importance of the package and they were ready to learn; they were interested in learning that had immediate relevance to their job or personal life. This is in line with Knowles' idea on learning motivation discussed above.



Conclusion

The findings from this study indicated that problems and needs play an important role to design ESP learners' materials. Before creating a self-access learning package, it was necessary to collect information from the learners both their general backgrounds and problems and needs. Apart from these, using a triangulation method could help confirm the research results by using different people who could be involved in this study, foreign tourists, who encountered Songthaew drivers on duty. In order to have appropriate and suitable learning materials, revisions, modifications of the package based on the experts' suggestions were carried out. Lastly, the learning package was the outcome of this study in terms of solving the problem of inability to attend English classes; they could learn anytime when they needed to know more and it responded to English problems and needs. As such the current needs analysis serves as a useful example for how educational materials should be created in order to help not only Songthaew drivers but also it can be adopted as a guideline for people in other professions in Thailand.

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