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The Readiness of English Communication Skills of Tourism Employees in Bangkok for Entering the ASEAN Community

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to study the readiness of English communication skills of tourism employees in Bangkok for entering the ASEAN community. The scope of this research included the employees from 26 tourism companies. A sample group was determined by utilizing multiple-stage sampling. At least three samples were collected from each tour company. A total of 100 samples were collected. Four skills of English communication included listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Questionnaire was designed to collect data. Statistics analysis included percentage, means, and standard deviation. The research findings revealed that the employees of the tourism industry in Bangkok seriously need to develop and improve their skills in English communication especially listening and speaking which are the skills that is required to communicate with foreigners.

Introduction

Every day toward the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in the end of 2015 is a vital step for each ASEAN nation, especially in the area of tourism industry (Ushakov, 2014). Employees in this area need to improve their communication skills, especially in English communication, because tourism industry is a major source of foreign currency. There are many obstacles that ASEAN member countries may not be able to take advantages of this vital economic opportunity (Rujiwant, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary that human resources must be enhanced in order to take full advantage of the single market of AEC (Wongleedee 2012). In fact, tourism industry, which is a major source of foreign revenues, contributed to at least 4.6 percent of ASEAN country's GDP and about 3.2 percent of the job in ASEAN countries (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2008). Thailand used to have many advantages in terms of tourism in the past such as good hospitality, friendly local people, variety of tourist destinations, and good foods. Now the situation is very different. Today, Thailand has a severe competition in terms of tourism with other ASEAN countries (Andreeva &

Ushakov, 2016). This is an important wake -up call for Thai tourism to improve its tourism standard quality to maintain its competitive advantages (Ushakov & Simasathiansophon, 2016). However, the Thai tourism industry needs to prepare its human resources in terms of communication skills for the ASEAN competition in tourism. It is important to investigate the level of readiness of its employees to meet with ASEAN standard of tourism quality. And the objective of this research was to study the readiness of English communication skills of tourism employees in Bangkok for entering the ASEAN community.

Methodology

The purposes of this study were to study the level of readiness of English communication skills of the employees of 26 tourism companies in Bangkok areas. The population of this study included all employees in tourism industry during the first quarter of 2015. Bangkok was chosen as the main area of study because it provided many tourist companies. Therefore, more demographic variety of samples would be obtained. The sample of 400 respondents were determined by Taro Yamane table with a 0.05 level of significance but since there was limited time and budget only 100 respondents were surveyed (Yamane, 1973). On the other hand, the study aimed to find the insight information from the sample. Since there were limited numbers of sample, the accidental sampling was utilized. Also, the data collation for this research was performed via an English questionnaire to elicit respondents' opinion. There were three parts to the questionnaire. Part one was about the demographic information. Part two was about level of readiness in each activity and part three allowed respondents to provide opinion, comment, and suggestions. The validity of each question in the questionnaire was conducted by using Item-Objective Congruency or IOC index (Yamane, 1973). In addition, 10 respondents were selected as small group of pilot study in order to search for ways to make it creditable for each question and to obtain an acceptable Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of more than or equal to 0.75.

Findings

The findings revealed that the majority of employees in tourism industry were female or about 86 percent and about 43 percent with the age between 30-39 years old, about 29 percent with the age between 20-29 years old, about 27 percent with the age of 40-49 years old and about 1 percent with the age of above 50 years old.

In terms of education, the majority of the respondents or about 80 percent had an undergraduate degree, about 15 percent had degree lower than undergraduate degree, and about 5 percent had a master degree.

In terms of income, the majority of the respondents or about 86 percent had an income between 15,001-25,000 baht per month, about 12 percent had an income below 15,000 baht and about 2 percent had an income higher than 45,000 baht.

In terms of occupation, the majority of the respondents, about 65 percent, had a job of selling tickets, about 18 percent had a job of advertising, and about 2.6 percent had a job of tour guide or room reservation.

In terms of experience, about 42 percent had 5-9 years of experience, about 38 percent had below 5 years of experience, about 19 percent had 10-14 years of experience and only 1 percent had more than 15 years of experience.

In terms of skills in English communication in four areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the mean was 2.48 with a 0.65 standard deviation (see Table 1). It was a medium level. In each category, listening skill had a mean of 2.65 with a 0.73 standard deviation. It was a medium level. Speaking skill had a mean of 2.60 with a 0.78 standard deviation. It was a medium level. Reading skill had a mean of 2.85 with a 0.75 standard deviation. It was a medium level. Finally, writing skill had a mean of 2.67 with a 0.78 standard deviation and it was a medium level.

Table 1. Language skills statistics

SKILLS	$(\bar{x})$	(S.D.)
LISTENING SKILLS		
1 . You can understand English without translating into Thai before.	**2.86**	**0.67**
2. You can listen and get the main idea.	**3.00**	**0.73**
3. You can understand to listen to long sentences.	**2.54**	**0.72**
4. You can listen to the accents that distinguish it from what country.	**2.21**	**0.82**
Total listening skills	**2.65**	**0.73**
SPEAKING SKILLS		
5. You can respond timely.	2.69	0.86
6. You can speak English clearly and correctly.	**2.72**	**0.65**
7. You can speak long sentences.	**2.54**	**0.83**
8. You can transfer the information to customers to understand correctly.	**2.45**	**0.78**
Total speaking skills	**2.60**	**0.78**
READING SKILLS		
9. You can read and get the main ideas quickly.	**2.95**	**0.70**
10. You can read long articles.	**2.97**	**0.74**
11. You can translate the terminology without a dictionary.	**2.70**	**0.83**
12. You can understand the context of that content without a dictionar in translation.	**2.77**	**0.71**
Total reading skills	**2.85**	**0.75**
WRITING SKILLS		
13. You can dictate the needs of customers correctly.	**2.87**	**0.70**
14. You can be written grammatically.	**2.70**	**0.78**
15. You can write official English.	**2.50**	**0.86**
16. You can write by using the terminology correctly and appropriate.	**2.60**	**0.77**
Total writing skills	**2.67**	**0.78**
OVERALL 4 SKILLS	**2.48**	**0.65**

In term of the readiness of the employees for entering the ASEAN community in six areas: the readiness in the area of human resources had a mean of 3.60 with a 0.70 standard deviation and it was a high level. The readiness in the area of employment had a mean of 3.35 with a 0.67 standard deviation and it was a medium level. The readiness in the area of law had a mean 2.36 with a 0.74 standard deviation and it was a low level. The readiness in the area of service had a mean of 3.83 with a 0.78 standard deviation and it was a high level. The readiness in the area of technology had a mean of 3.65

with a 0.78 standard deviation and it was a high level. The readiness of job knowledge had a mean of 4.26 with a 0.82 standard deviation and it was a high level.

The research findings revealed that the employees of the tourism industry in Bangkok need to develop and improve their skills in English communication especially listening and speaking which are the skills that are required to communicate with foreigners. Since the majority of the employees had the average age between 30-39 years old which was the age of working and raising family, they did not have time to study English. Therefore, the short course training should be provided in order to improve their skill. Moreover, the readiness in terms of law was rated at a low level and there should be an improvement in this area to be able to improve their readiness for entering the ASEAN in full scale.

Conclusion

In order to enhance Thai human resources for ASEAN standard of tourism quality, there are five guidelines to implement as follows. First, there should be a promotion of fair competition to offer tourism employees in Thailand. Healthy domestic competition will generate the efficiency of Thai tourism industry. Second, there should be a center of standard English Communication skills available in Bangkok in order to provide a study center for employees. Third, there should be a strong collaboration between all Thai tourist companies to set up reasonable rules and regulation to enhance communication skills. Fourth, there should be a regular collaboration among local tourism employees, local government officials, and non-government organization in the area of tourism and hospitality to promote English communication skills for the local tourism employees. Fifth, there should be a strong support from the government to support employees in tourism as a national policy and enhance to the highest standard quality for Thai tourism industry (Wongleedee, 2012).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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