A Study of English Language Needs of the Government Savings Bank Staff

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to study the English language needs of Government Savings Bank staff members and their problems in using English in their routine jobs.

The instrument employed was a questionnaire. The sample of the study was 339 employees of the Government Savings Bank. The data were analyzed statistically with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The results of the study showed that Government Savings Bank staff members had a moderate need for the English language. Listening, reading, writing, and interacting skills were needed at the moderate level, while the speaking skill was needed only a little. The staff members faced a lot of problems in listening and in reading English, while speaking, writing, and interacting were considered moderately difficult.

The findings obtained from this research will be beneficial to Government Savings Bank English training course designers.

บทคัดย่อ

เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลของงานวิจัยนี้ คือ แบบสอบถามโดยตัวอย่างข้อมูลคือพนักงานธนาคารออมสินจำนวน 339 คน และข้อมูลถูกวิเคราะห์โดยใช้เทคนิคทางสถิติ (SPSS) ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า พนักงานธนาคารออมสินมีความต้องการด้านภาษาอังกฤษปานกลาง ซึ่งถ้าพิจารณาในแต่ละทักษะ พนักงานธนาคารออมสินมีความต้องการด้านทักษะการฟังภาษาอังกฤษ ทักษะการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษ ทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ และทักษะรวมฟังและพูดภาษาอังกฤษปานกลาง ยกเว้น

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ทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษที่พนักงานธนาคารออมสินมีความต้องการเพียงเล็กน้อยเท่านั้น ส่วนปัญหา
ในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษระหว่างการทำงานของพนักงานธนาคารออมสิน พบว่าพนักงานมีปัญหาด้านทักษะ
การฟังและการอ่านมาก ส่วนปัญหาการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษด้านทักษะอื่นๆ พนักงานมีปัญหาอยู่ในระดับ
ปานกลาง

ผลจากงานวิจัยนี้น่าจะมีประโยชน์ต่อหน่วยงานที่กำหนดหลักสูตรการอบรมภาษาอังกฤษของ
ธนาคารออมสิน

Rationale of the Study

The English language has become the language of international communication
and is therefore crucial for economic development. It plays a prominent role in all careers
including in the banking sector. As the Government Savings Bank of Thailand intends to
provide the best quality services to its customers to locally and internationally in respond to
rapidly changing circumstances, English has now become an important factor in the bank
strategy.

The bank has just established an international trade department and a money
exchange service. As necessary improvements are consistently made, the bank not only tries
to enhance its efficiency but also its employees' efficiency as the staff are the most
important factor in improvement. Hence, the bank training department has included English
language courses in the training programme in order to expand its staff' knowledge of
English.

Accordingly, knowing the needs for the English language of the Government
Savings Bank staff will be beneficial to the organization in order to prepare and provide
training material to suit the employees' needs. It is also necessary to analyse the needs of
the bank staff in order to obtain useful information before implementing appropriate training.

Objective of the Study

1) To explore the needs for English language skill improvement of the Government
Savings Bank's staff.

2) To examine the English language problems that occur during their work.

Research Questions

       1) To what extent do the Government Savings Bank staff need to use English in their work?

       2) What problems in using English do these staff encounter during their work?

Review of Literature

       In the area of curriculum development it is assumed that an analysis of learners' needs should be the base of a well-constructed educational program. Procedures used to collect information about learners' needs are known as needs analysis. Need analysis was introduced into language teaching through the ESP movement. Since the 1960s, when the demand for specific language programs began to grow, needs analysis has been more and more widely used in language teaching. Since the 1980s, in many parts of the world a "needs-based philosophy" has appeared in language teaching, especially in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented program design (Richard, 2001).

1. A Review of Needs Analysis Conceptual Frameworks

       Under the umbrella of needs analysis, various approaches have been integrated: *Target Situation Analysis* (TSA), *Present Situation Analysis* (PSA), and the language audit seem to be the most common.

1.1 Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

       TSA concentrates on the students' target needs at the end of the language course. It consists of two steps: first the identification of the target situation and then the analysis of the target tasks' linguistic features and knowledge requirement of that situation (Robinson, 1980). The best-known framework for TSA was formulated by Munby (1978). The core of his model is the 'Communicative Needs Processor' (CNP) which contains nine variables, relating to the learners' communicative requirements (participant, purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, target level, communicative event, and communicative key) and dynamic interplay between them.

1.2 **Present situation analysis (PSA)**

PSA is a complementary approach to TSA. It investigates the students' state of language development at the beginning of the language course, ascertaining their strengths and weaknesses.

1.3 **The language audit**

The language audit is a combination of TSA and PSA used in language training for business and industry. According to Pilbeam (1979 cited by Robinson, 1991: 10), the first step is to identify 'the precise language skills needed to carry out specific jobs' and establish 'a target profile of language skills as part of a job description'. This is achieved by identifying the tasks or activities performed by the learners in their jobs and then determining the level of language proficiency required for these tasks. The next step is to establish a profile of present ability. Finally, the auditor must determine how much language training is needed to bridge any gap between the employees' present ability profile and the company's target profile.

In this study, TSA was taken into account in order to analyse English language needs of the Government Savings Bank staff. The business skills checklist published in "Teaching Business English" (Ellis and Johnson, 1994: 36) was also used for guidance in designing questions for the questionnaire used in this study.

2. English for Business Purposes

Since English has become the international language of business, most English-medium communications in business are non-native speaker to non-native speaker (NNS-NNS), and the English they use is International English, not that of native speakers (NS) of English-speaking countries (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

As one of the main characteristics of business English is the emphasis on performance, learners will have to acquire and master specific skills in order to successfully carry out the tasks required in their profession (Ellis and Johnson, 1994). A checklist of business skills is given in Table 1.

Table 1 Business Skills Checklist

Speaking	
- Giving a formal presentation - Giving an informal presentation - Giving instructions or demonstration on the job - Giving descriptions and explanations	
Interacting	
- Visiting a company or receiving visitors - Showing visitors around or being shown around - Entertaining or being entertained - Participating in discussions and informal meetings - Participating in formal meetings - Chairing meetings - Interviewing - Negotiating - Telephoning	
Listening	
- Following presentations, lectures, or talks - Following instructions - Following descriptions and explanations - Following training sessions	
Reading	
Documents	*Skills*
- Emails - Letters and faxes - Memos and short reports	Reading for detail
- Professional journals - Textbooks	Reading quickly for general information

Table 1 (Continued) Business Skills Checklist

- Long reports	Scanning for specific points
- Contracts and legal documents	
- Technical specifications and manuals ,	
Writing	
- Emails	
- Letters and faxes	
- Long reports and articles for professional journals	
- Editing the letters or reports of others	

Methodology

1. Data Collection

The population in this study was the 2,165 employees who worked in 48 depart-ments in the Government Savings Bank head office. The sampling method used was stratified random sampling and the main instrument employed to evaluate the English language needs of the bank staff was a questionnaire. Once the sample size of each stratum was determined, the researcher randomly picked out the appropriate number of participants in each stratum and the questionnaire was distributed to the subjects.

2. Data Analysis

The questionnaires were computer—coded and analyzed with the help of statistical techniques (SPSS for Windows version 11.5). The data were analyzed using the following statistical procedures: frequency distribution, percentages (%), arithmetic mean (X), and standard deviation (S.D.). First, the frequency distribution and percentages were used in the analysis of answers, concerning the general background of the participants (Part I). Second, a five-point Likert scale was used to score the levels of necessity, difficulty, needs and problems of English language for the Government Savings Bank staff (Parts II, III, and IV). The criteria used for scoring were as follows.

Scale	Necessity of English language skills	Mean Range
5	Extremely necessary	4.21—5.00
4	Very necessary	3.41—4.20
3	Necessary	2.61—3.40
2	Fairly necessary	1.81—2.60
1	Not necessary	1.00—1.80

Scale	Difficulty of English language skills	Mean Range
5	Very difficult	4.21—5.00
4	Difficult	3.41—4.20
3	Fairly difficult	2.61—3.40
2	Not very difficult	1.81—2.60
1	Not difficult	1.00—1.80

Scale	Needs for English language skills	Mean Range
5	Great	4.21—5.00
4	Considerable	3.41—4.20
3	Moderate	2.61—3.40
2	A little	1.81—2.60
1	Least	1.00—1.80

Scale	Problems of English language skills	Mean Range
5	Most	4.21—5.00
4	A lot	3.41—4.20
3	Moderate	2.61—3.40
2	A little	1.81—2.60
1	Least	1.00—1.80

Third, arithmetic mean (x) and standard deviation mean (S.D.) were used to calculate the average level of necessity, difficulty, need, and problems of English language skills and functions of the Government Savings Bank staff, the former representing the central tendency of the scores and the later measuring the dispersion, that is the extent to which a set of scores varies in relation to the mean.

Findings and Interpretation

Table 2 The GSB staff's English listening skill needs and problems

Listening sub-skills	Needs for Listening			Problems in Listening		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Following presentations, lectures or talks	2.98	1.182	Moderate	3.51	1.122	A lot
Following instructions	2.88	1.139	Moderate	3.49	1.075	A lot
Following descriptions and explanations	3.01	1.149	Moderate	3.56	1.052	A lot
Following training sessions	3.09	1.149	Moderate	3.61	1.065	A lot
Total	2.99	1.156	Moderate	3.54	1.079	A lot

The participants had a moderate need for English listening skills. Among the sub-skills, following training sessions had the highest mean ($\overline{x}$ = 3.09). The subjects also had a moderate need for the skills of following descriptions and explanations, following presentations, lectures or talk, and following instructions. The problems in using English listening skills of the GSB staff were significant. Means of the four skills were similar.

Table 3 The GSB staff's English speaking needs and problems

Speaking sub-skills	Needs of Speaking			Problems of Speaking		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Giving a formal presentation	2.64	1.136	Moderate	3.45	1.240	A lot
Giving an informal presentation	2.57	1.060	A little	3.36	1.226	Moderate
Giving instructions or demonstr ation on the job	2.57	1.057	A little	3.39	1.248	Moderate
Giving descriptions and explanations	2.62	1.105	Moderate	3.39	1.245	Moderate
Total	2.60	1.089	A little	3.40	1.239	Moderate

Table 3 indicates that the GSB staff needed to use English speaking skills a little. However, the participants needed to give a formal presentation and to give descriptions and explanations moderately. Moreover, the staff considered giving an informal presentation

and giving instructions or demonstrating a task as little needed with equal mean ($\bar{x}$ = 2.57). The participants considered using English speaking skills as moderate difficulty. Giving a formal presentation was considered as very difficult with the highest mean ($\bar{x}$ = 3.45) whereas the other sub-skills were rated as moderately difficult.

Table 4 The GSB staff's English reading skill needs and problems

Reading sub-skills	Needs of Reading			Problems of Reading		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos, and short reports for detail	3.28	1.214	Moderate	3.41	1.056	A lot
Reading professional journals and textbooks quickly for general information	3.23	1.153	Moderate	3.40	1.032	Moderate
Scanning long reports, contracts and legal documents, technical specifications and, manuals for specific points	3.16	1.283	Moderate	3.48	1.109	A lot
Total	3.22	1.218	Moderate	3.43	1.066	A lot

The GSB staff had a moderate need for reading skills which consist of reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos, and short reports for detail ($\bar{x}$ = 3.28) ; reading professional journals and textbooks quickly for general information ($\bar{x}$ = 3.23); and scanning long reports, contracts and legal documents, technical specifications, and manuals for specific points ($\bar{x}$ = 3.16). They had a lot of problems in reading English, particularly in scanning long reports, contracts and legal documents, technical specifications, and manuals for specific points, which had the highest mean ($\bar{x}$ = 3.48). Reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos, and short reports for detail was also judged as very difficult ($\bar{x}$ = 3.41). The only skill considered moderately difficult ($\bar{x}$ = 3.40) reading professional journals and textbooks quickly for general information.

Table 5 The GSB staff's English writing skill needs and problems

Writing sub-skills	Needs for Writing			Problems in Writing		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Writing e-mails	2.90	1.190	Moderate	3.39	1.208	Moderate

Table 5 (Continued) The GSB staff's English writing skill needs and problems

Writing sub-skills	Needs for Writing			Problems in Writing		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Writing letters and faxes	2.67	1.132	Moderate	3.39	1.243	Moderate
Writing long reports and articles	2.63	1.173	Moderate	3.37	1.275	Moderate
Editing the letters or reports of others	2.60	1.117	A little	3.37	1.26	Moderate
Total	2.70	1.158	Moderate	3.38	1.245	Moderate

Writing skills were considered by the staff as moderate needs. Writing e-mails was considered as the greatest need. Writing letters and faxes and writing long reports and articles were assessed with slightly different values of mean 2.67 and 2.63, respectively. Editing letters or reports of others was the only skill that was rated as little needed. The staff had moderate difficulty in using English writing skills. All writing skills, writing e-mails ($\bar{x}$ = 3.39); writing letters and faxes ($\bar{x}$ = 3.39); writing long reports and articles ($\bar{x}$ = 3.37); and editing the letters or reports of others, were considered as moderately difficult at very similar means.

Table 6 The GSB staff's English interacting skill needs and problems

Interacting sub-skills	Needs for Interacting			Problems in Interacting		
	Mean	S.D.	Meaning	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Receiving visitors	2.81	1.309	Moderate	3.41	1.200	A lot
Visiting a company	2.87	1.244	Moderate	3.38	1.197	Moderate
Participating in discussions and informal meetings	2.79	1.220	Moderate	3.38	1.219	Moderate
Participating in formal meeting	2.75	1.257	Moderate	3.37	1.297	Moderate
Chairing meetings	2.37	1.155	A little	3.31	1.308	Moderate
Interviewing	2.58	1.241	A little	3.36	1.240	Moderate
Negotiating	2.55	1.270	A little	3.39	1.312	Moderate
Telephoning	2.89	1.280	Moderate	3.44	1.232	A lot
Total	2.70	1.258	Moderate	3.38	1.251	Moderate

The needs of the GSB staff for English interacting skills were moderate. The five interaction functions, i.e. telephoning ($\overline{x}$ = 2.89), visiting a company ($\overline{x}$ = 2.87), receiving visitors ($\overline{x}$ = 2.81), participating in discussions and informal meetings ($\overline{x}$ = 2.79), and participating in formal meeting ($\overline{x}$ = 2.75) were considered needed moderately. On the other hand, interviewing ($\overline{x}$ = 2.58), negotiating ($\overline{x}$ = 2.55), and chairing meetings ($\overline{x}$ = 2.37) were rated little needed. The participants had moderate difficulty in using English interacting skills. Only receiving visitors ($\overline{x}$ = 3.41) and telephoning ($\overline{x}$ = 3.44) were regarded as very difficult whereas the rest of the skills, were perceived as moderately difficult.

Implications of the Study

The present study investigated the English language needs of the Government Savings Bank staff. From the results the researcher was able to identify the English language needs and problems of the participants. Although English language skills were found to be needed moderately, the staff encountered some problems when using those skills. This implies that, despite their moderate needs, the employees were inadequately prepared and trained to use English and that the existing training course did not meet their needs. The findings of this study could be generalized to all the head office employees and could be useful to the training department to design a language course adapted to the employees or to improve the existing one. The suggestions drawn from the analysis of the data could be used in the preparation of curricula to meet the actual needs of the staff.

Limitations of the Study

The present study employed only one instrument, a questionnaire survey, as a data collection method. Employing an interview in addition would have permitted to gather more in-depth information. However, due to the time constraints, the interview could not be used as expected. It should also be pointed out that all the members of the sample were considered equal in this study. Taking into account the fact that the needs for English differed depending on departments and positions would have resulted in more precise findings.

Recommendations

From the results of the study, the following recommendations could be made for further studies:

First, the technique implemented in this research was a questionnaire-based survey. Future studies should consider other types of data-collecting methods. Second, the present study was carried out in the GSB head office while there are about 600 branches in Thailand. Hence, it was suggested that a parallel study to investigate the needs and the problems in using English of the staff should be conducted in all the branches in Thailand. Third, further studies could also develop the present research by investigating in depth the English language needs and problems of the staff at different levels of the bank hierarchy such as management and operational level. Fourth, as diverse departments have different tasks to perform, the English language needs of the employees and problems they encounter likely vary depending on their posts. Investigating the needs and problems of the staff working in different departments could therefore be a possible approach to consider for further studies. Finally, as the business environment continuously evolves, so do the tasks and missions of banks and financial institutions. The needs and problems in using English of the GSB staff are thus likely to change as well. It is hence recommended to conduct a parallel research concerning the needs of the employees in the future in order to determine updated use of English.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicated that the bank staff deemed the five English skills necessary. Four skills were rated very difficult except reading that was regarded as difficult. Considering each skill, speaking was little needed but the four other skills were needed moderately. Reading was rated with the highest mean, followed by listening, writing and interacting respectively. Overall, the bank staff had a moderate need for using English in their job. Nevertheless, they faced a lot of problems in using this language, especially when listening and reading skills were concerned. Listening was indicated as the most problematic skill, followed by reading. The participants thought that following training sessions in English was very difficult for them. It is possible that the staff had problems understanding some terminologies which they were not familiar with. Another cause of the comprehension problem of the participants might be the different accents of both native and non-native English speakers. Moreover, the bank employees had to follow descriptions, explanations, presentations, lectures, talks, and instructions only occasionally and therefore struggled to do so.

As the GSB staff needed to peruse documents and understand materials related to their work, they had to use their reading skills. Scanning long reports, contracts, legal documents, technical documents, and manuals for specific points was the most difficult sub-skill for the staff. The lack of knowledge of banking terminology or specific lexicon is probably the cause of this problem. The informants also had problems in reading e-mails, letters, faxes, memos, and short reports for detail and reading information in professional journals and textbooks quickly for general. This may be due to their grammatical deficiencies and their insufficient knowledge of sentence structure.

Suggestions

Some suggestions concerning the English existing courses given by the participants are: the course should be continuously provided; employees at all levels of the hierarchy should be allowed to study; the course should be provided by reputable institute; more courses should be provided to meet the need of the staff; the bank should set up an English day once a week in order to allow the staff to practice English regularly; the bank should test the English proficiency level of the staff providing the courses; the courses should be designed to suit the need of employees working in different departments; and there should be more sound-lab rooms for the staff to study English.

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