



Professional Needs and Challenges for the Development of English language Proficiency at a Research Institute Pathum Thani : A Situational Analysis

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Abstract

This study examined workplace challenges, professional English language needs, and the design of tailored activities to address these issues among 80 researchers at the Research Institute Pathum Thani. Data collection involved questionnaires and interviews, with questionnaire analysis conducted through descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and interview data analyzed using Lichtman's (2013) Three Cs Analysis Technique. The findings revealed that all four English language skills presented moderate challenges, with listening and reading identified as high-priority needs. Researchers expressed preferences for Academic English training courses emphasizing speaking (45.07%) and writing (43.67%) skills. Directors highlighted the necessity of a comprehensive training program encompassing all four skills to support professional development. This study offers valuable guidance for designing English language courses that enhance researchers' professional competencies and workplace communication. Recommendations for future research should consider broadening the participant base and including various locations to enhance the generalizability of the results. It would also be valuable to examine English language skill needs and challenges across different professions to facilitate comparative analysis. The use of observational methods could provide additional context to subjective reports, offering deeper insights into internal factors, personal learning preferences, and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, conducting a language proficiency test could help reveal any gaps between participants' current language skills and their actual language needs in real-world situations.

Keyword: Challenges, Professional needs, Situational Analysis



Introduction

English is a globally recognized language and functions as a universal medium of communication across diverse contexts. Beyond its role in international interactions, it has been adopted as an official language by numerous countries. According to the Statista Research Department (2020), approximately 1.27 billion individuals, including native and non-native speakers, use English as their primary language, representing around 16 percent of the global population. Furthermore, English has achieved the status of a global language, widely utilized in key domains such as education, business, entertainment, politics, and international relations (Chamnaktan, 2022).

The widespread use of English underscores its significance in both personal and professional development. As noted by Sugarin (2020), English facilitates not only communication but also access to academic and career opportunities. Proficiency in English is increasingly regarded as essential for career advancement, with employees demonstrating strong language skills often receiving higher salaries. Akther (2022) highlights the importance of effective English communication in the modern job market, emphasizing that job seekers with strong English skills have a competitive advantage.

Recognizing the critical role of English in the workplace, particularly for organizations engaged in international collaboration, this study focuses on addressing language barriers encountered by researchers. The researcher, working as a research assistant at the Research Institute in Pathum Thani, has identified challenges related to English proficiency in professional tasks. This study aims to investigate these challenges, assess the specific English language needs of researchers, and provide recommendations for enhancing English training programs tailored to their professional requirements.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the situations involving the use of English by researchers in the workplace
2. To identify the professional needs for English language use among researchers in the workplace
3. To design guidelines for the professional development of English language use in the workplace for researchers



Literature Review and Concepts

This chapter reviews Professional Needs and Challenges for the Development of English language Proficiency at a Research Institute Pathum Thani. The literature study covers Needs analysis, Present Situation Analysis, and Challenges in English used.

Needs analysis

Several researchers have defined the concept of needs from different perspectives. Widdowson (1981) viewed needs in terms of learners, describing them as what individuals must learn to meet their work demands. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) introduced the terms necessities, lacks, and wants to explain the concept of needs. Necessities refer to the skills learners must acquire to achieve their goals, while lacks pertain to their current language limitations. Wants reflect learners' perceptions and aspirations to fulfill personal goals and language requirements. Need analysis, as defined by Lawrence and Springer (1991), is a tool for identifying learners' needs and difficulties in language use. Brown (1995) described needs analysis as the process of collecting and analyzing information to develop a curriculum that addresses learners' demands. The theoretical basis of needs analysis includes target-situation analysis and present-situation analysis. According to Jordan (1997), a thorough needs analysis incorporates various methods such as target-situation analysis, present-situation analysis, deficiency analysis, strategy analysis, and means analysis. Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of systematic needs analysis to identify ESP learners' target needs and present-situation analysis (Moattarian & Tahirian, 2014; Yundayani, 2018; Noor, 2019), which is crucial for developing, modifying, or selecting effective teaching materials.

Present Situation Analysis

Present Situation Analysis (PSA) is a method used to evaluate learners' current language proficiency at the start of a language course. This approach allows instructors to understand the learners' existing language abilities, knowledge, and skills, which is vital for tailoring the course to their specific needs and starting levels. The original concept of PSA is credited to Richterich and Chancerel (1987, as referenced by Ritman, 2016). Gusti (1991, as cited by Yundayani, 2018) explained that PSA aims to assess the current state of both learning and teaching within an educational institution. This assessment should include the learners' skill levels, faculty teaching competencies, course content, ESP syllabus, and the institution's historical performance data. Duddley-Evans and John (2009) also view PSA as a tool to



measure learners' present proficiency in various language skills and usage, emphasizing its importance in determining their ability to effectively use the target language at their current level.

This research aimed to investigate the professional needs for English language usage in the workplace, focusing on identifying the specific language skills and competencies required by researchers in a professional context where English serves as the primary or secondary language of communication. In this study, professional needs referred to the specific demands for language proficiency within the workplace environment.

The study examined the workplace context and identified the professional English language needs of researchers at the Research Institute in Pathum Thani. Guided by Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis framework, the research employed Target Situation Analysis and Present Situation Analysis to systematically address the challenges associated with English language use in the workplace. These approaches provided a structured basis for developing strategies to enhance researchers' English proficiency and effectively meet professional demands.

Challenges in English Language used

Several internal and external factors can complicate the use of the English language. According to Brown (1994), language learners often face challenges due to a limited vocabulary, which makes it difficult to understand many new and unfamiliar words. Moll et al. (1980) added that learners struggle with using English fluently because they lack the comfort and proficiency with the language. In Thailand, English education starts in primary school and continues throughout the educational system. However, because most instruction is provided by Thai teachers whose first language is not English, students have less exposure to authentic English settings. As a result, Thai students typically show weaker listening and speaking skills compared to their reading and writing abilities (Pinsaikeow, 2019).

This study aimed to explore the difficulties researchers faced with academic English in their professional roles. The findings shed light on the challenges researchers experienced and proposed strategies to help them overcome these obstacles effectively.

Conceptual Framework

This research is based on the conceptual framework specified below:



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the process of analyzing the current situation and needs, identifying challenges, and formulating guidelines to enhance researchers' professional English language skills and proficiency.

Limitations of the study

This case study examines the specific situations and identifies the professional English language needs of researchers at a research institute in Pathum Thani. While the results may not be applicable to other contexts or academic fields, they can serve as a valuable resource for academic researchers and scholars conducting similar investigations.

Research Methodology

This study aims to examine workplace-specific situations and identify the English language needs of researchers at the Research Institute in Pathum Thani. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, was used to gather data. The research population focused on researchers within the first group of the Research Institute in Pathum Thani. Purposive sampling technique was used in this study. The target population included all senior researchers, researchers, and research assistants across four centers and one research station within the R&D Group for Bio-Industries, totaling 98 individuals. A questionnaire was distributed to all 98 researchers, with 80 completed questionnaires returned. Interview participants were selected based on their completion of the final section of the questionnaire and their willingness and availability for interviews.

Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining permission from Research Institute to conduct the research and requiring participants to complete a consent form before data



collection. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms were used during semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with 30 researchers from the second group prior to distributing the questionnaires and conducting the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in three phases with different groups of officers. In the first phase, the researcher interviewed officers from the Human Resource Management Division and the International Relations Division to gather essential information on the English language challenges faced by researchers. In the second phase, questionnaires and interview questions, developed based on the initial group's data analysis, were distributed directly to 98 researchers. The results from these questionnaires and interviews were then presented to the third group of participants. In the third phase, six directors were interviewed: four from the research department and two from the International Relations Division and the Human Resource Development Division.

The study's questionnaire was designed based on various frameworks from Hutchinson and Waters' (1987), including Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and Present Situation Analysis (PSA), as well as insights from previous studies. It was provided in both English and Thai to avoid misunderstandings. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to determine frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. For the semi-structured interview data, Litchman's (2013) Three Cs (Coding-Category-Concept) Process was employed, which involves inductively analyzing large sets of unsorted data to identify central concepts that explain the grouping of different elements.

Research Result

The data gathered from the initial group through semi-structured interviews were analyzed to address the first research question. For the second research question, both the questionnaire and semi-structured interview data were examined. After analyzing the findings from the second group, these results were shared with the third group of participants. The semi-structured interviews with this third group were then analyzed to respond to the third research question.

Response to Research Question 1 What are the situations involving the use of English by researchers in the workplace?

The data analysis from the interviews with the officer of the International Relations Division and the officer of Human Resource Management Division the findings found that



researchers utilized all four skills in their work, which were segmented according to each situation: listening in the conference and seminar, presenting for academic work, discussion in the conference, conversation and collaboration, reading for research work, reading for research funding, academic writing, writing for research funding, and writing for promotion. Therefore, the summarized results from the interviews were used to design a questionnaire to inquire about the challenges in using English language and the professional needs of researchers. The situations were categorized into four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

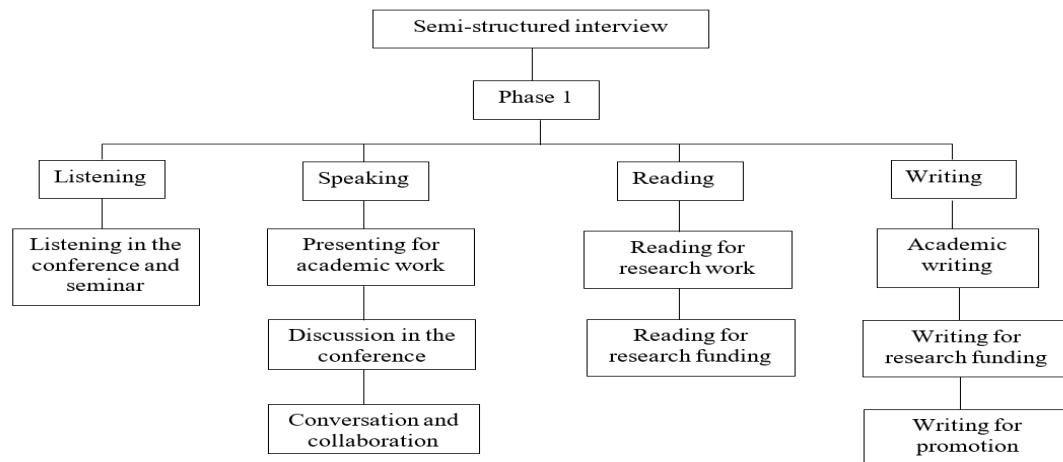


Figure 2 Semi-structured Interview Phase 1

Response to Research Question 2 What are the professional needs for English language use among researchers in the workplace?

The questionnaire data from 80 researchers indicated that reading (Mean = 3.70) and listening skills (Mean = 3.48) are the most crucial for their work. Among the specific sub-skills rated as most important by researchers were: reading English articles, journals, or research papers (Mean = 4.22), writing articles, journals, proposals, or academic reports in English (Mean = 3.81), listening to English presentations at academic or international meetings (Mean = 3.77), and conversing with foreigners (Mean = 3.51).

Table 1 Summary of Professional needs in English Language used in the Workplace across All Four Skills

Skill	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Listening	3.48	1.18	High
Speaking	3.28	1.26	Moderate
Reading	3.70	1.17	High



Writing	3.38	1.27	Moderate
Total	3.46	1.22	Moderate

The professional needs in using the English language among researchers, it was found that respondents indicated a high professional demand for reading skills and listening skills based on questionnaire responses.

Table 2 Professional needs for participants' sub skills in each situation

Situations	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Reading English articles, journals, or research papers	4.22	0.98	Very High
Writing articles, journals, proposals, or academic reports in English	3.81	1.21	High
Listening to English presentations at academic or international meetings	3.77	1.12	High
Conversing with foreigners	3.51	1.15	High

The analysis of data from semi-structured interviews with eleven researchers highlighted the importance of all four language skills. The findings identified key professional English language needs in the workplace:

1. **Listening:** Includes understanding conversations with foreigners, following questions at conferences, listening during meetings, and phone conversations.
2. **Speaking:** Encompasses presenting at conferences, explaining and answering research-related questions, introducing the organization to foreign researchers, and general communication and collaboration.
3. **Reading:** Covers reading academic references, collaborating through written material, and reviewing academic texts.
4. **Writing:** Involves writing research papers, coordinating with foreign researchers, drafting research funding proposals, and preparing conference materials.

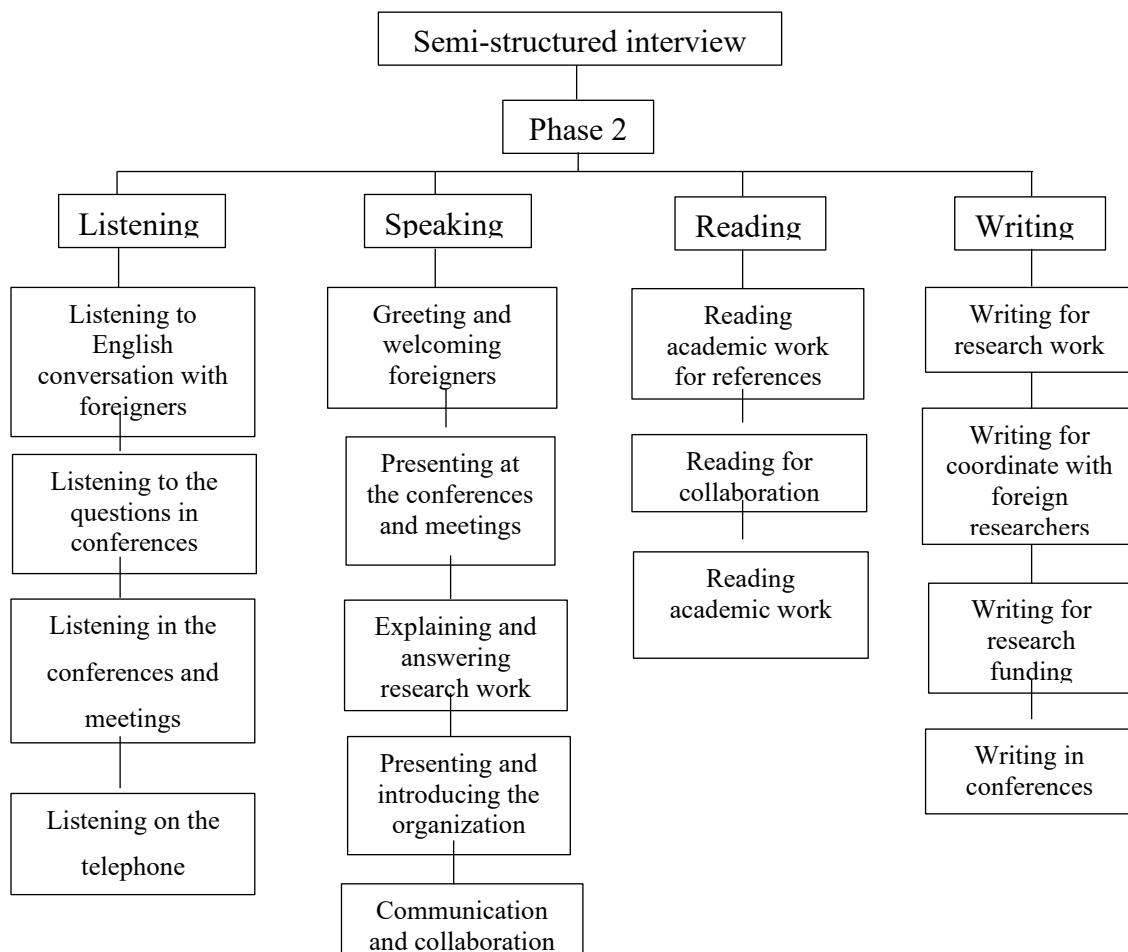


Figure 3 Semi-structured Interview Phrase 2

Response to Research Question 3 What are the guidelines for the professional development of English language use in the workplace for researchers?

The questionnaire responses from 80 participants revealed that 71 of them preferred to enroll in an English language training program. Most participants aimed to enhance their speaking (45.07%) and writing (43.67%) skills. A significant number preferred to have the training during office hours, particularly in the afternoon (64.79%). Regarding session



frequency and duration, about half of the respondents favored weekly classes (52.11%), with a strong preference for 2-hour sessions (60.56%). Additionally, 50 participants (70.42%) preferred instruction from both native English speakers and Thai teachers.

Table 3 Participants' preferences regarding English training courses

Subjects	Choices	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Participants' desire for English training courses.	Yes	71	88.75
	No	9	11.25
	Total	80	100
2. The specific skills they aim to enhance through the training	Listening	7	9.86
	Speaking	32	45.07
	Reading	1	1.40
	Writing	31	43.67
	Total	71	100
3. The preferred duration of the training course	Office hours (in the afternoon)	46	64.79
	After office hour (in the evening)	17	23.94
	Weekend (Sat-Sun)	6	8.45
	Other	2	2.82
	Total	71	100
4. The frequency at which they intend to attend the English training course	Once a week	37	52.11
	Twice a week	23	32.40
	Three times a week	11	15.49
	Other	-	-
	Total	71	100



5. The preferred timing for attending the English training course	1 hour	23	32.40
	2 hours	43	60.56
	3 hours	5	7.04
	Other	-	
		Total	71 100
6. The type of English teacher preferred by the participants	Native English teachers	21	29.58
	Thai teachers	-	-
	Both	50	70.42
		Total	71 100

Analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews revealed that four directors recommended comprehensive training covering all four language skills, with a focus on communication and writing. They proposed a hybrid training approach that combines both online and in-person elements. For duration and scheduling, the consensus was that a one-hour weekly session would be most suitable for researchers. Additionally, there was unanimous agreement that instructors could be either foreign or Thai nationals.

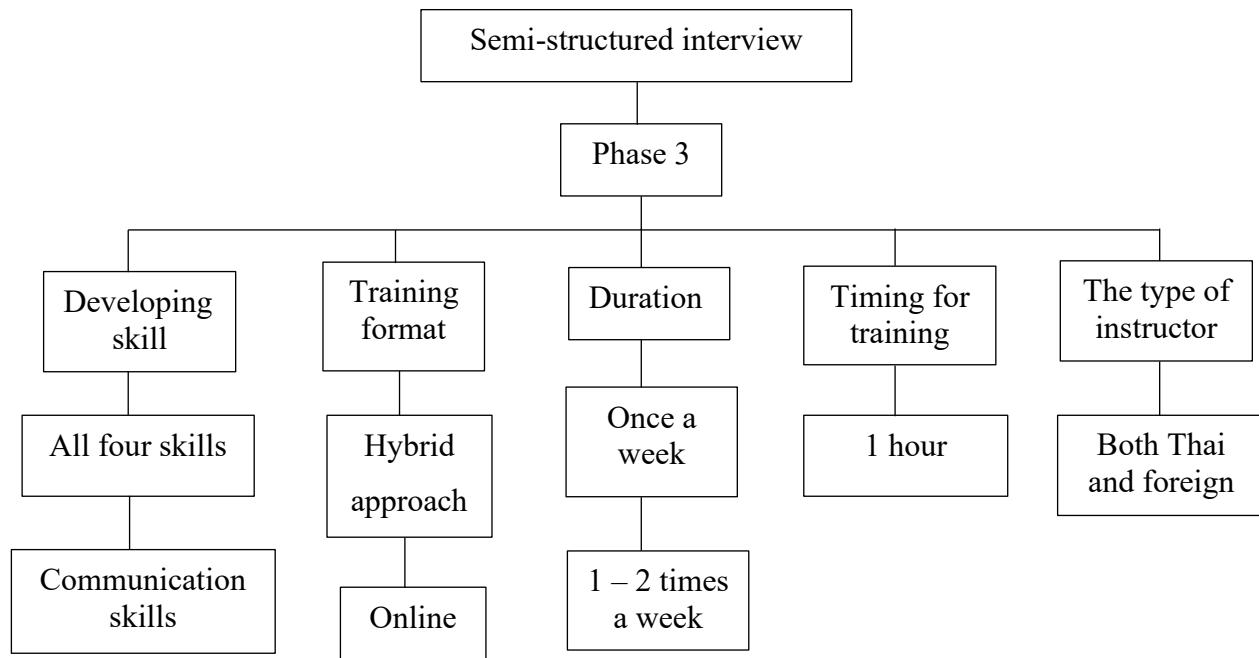


Figure 4 Semi-structured Interview Phrase 3

Research Recommendations



Recommendations for future research should consider broadening the participant base and including various locations to enhance the generalizability of the results. It would also be valuable to examine English language skill needs and challenges across different professions to facilitate comparative analysis. The use of observational methods could provide additional context to subjective reports, offering deeper insights into internal factors, personal learning preferences, and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, conducting a language proficiency test could help reveal any gaps between participants' current language skills and their actual language needs in real-world situations.

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