English Oral Communication Skill Improvements and Needs from Foreign Tourists Engagement Perspective as Duty Notion by Thai Airport Passenger-handlers and Flight Attendants of Thai Aviation and Airports

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Abstract

Most aviation and airports industries expect their competent passenger-handlers and flight attendants recruits to meet the following requirement: recruits must have good command of the English language. This study aimed to investigate English oral communication skill improvements and needs by Thai airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants of Thai aviation and airports from foreign tourist engagement perspective as duty notion. Documents and researches involving English communicative English language using in the aviation and airport services were collected as a secondary resource. The documents and researches were analysed to figure out the improvements and needs as the aim. The findings reflected that English oral communication skill improvements and needs through the experiences of the airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants in Thailand regarding with their challenges in performing English oral communication in the workplace were as

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follows: 1) problems regarding English communication of flight were problems concerning language functions, problems concerning English usage, and areas of language difficulties encountered by flight and ground attendants, 2) the English language skills and structural knowledge were listening and speaking, reading, pronunciation, using correct and appropriate grammar, using polite and appropriate language, writing everyday language and conversation, communicative skills, being able to use various sentence patterns and words and problem-solving skills. In addition, foreign tourist perspective reflected by flight and ground attendants were: 1) the attendants could not answer the passengers' question correctly when asked about information that the flight attendants had not studied in the basic training course; the information included ticketing, connecting flight, VAT refunds and ground services, 2) due to their strange accents and pronounce words correctly of the attendants, the passengers and their colleagues did not understand them.

Keywords: English oral communication skill, English for specific purpose in workplace, aviation, needs, Thai airport passenger-handlers, Flight attendants of Thai Aviation

Introduction

Airport and Aviation services need deniably competent ground and air staffs to have proficient English Oral Communication skills to handle smoothly the passengers and flight operation. Aviation industry is the business sector that manufactures, maintains, and operates the aircrafts and the airports. When it comes to aviation, there is a broad range of responsibilities within. It comprises activities at the airport as well as in the aircraft. It involves ground duties that are required to perform before the flight takes off, the activities during the flight and the activities after it lands. Due to the specific of workplace and time, communication between Thai airport passenger-handlers, flight attendants of Thai aviation and passengers must be clear and understandable. English oral communication skill problems were caused from many factors; Permtanjit (2003) stated the main causes of problem for Thai airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants are lack of job-related vocabulary

knowledge, grammar, accents and pronunciations concerning English listening and speaking problems. To enhance English language skills and the effectiveness of their interaction with passengers, they must improve their English communicative competence, especially with regard to English oral communication skill.

Notably the staffs involved in passenger-handling must take English for specific purpose in workplace course which fulfils the target needs. According to annual airport 2019 summary report of Airports of Thailand (Airports of Thailand, 2020) revealed that passenger volume was about 85,825,353 persons through 6 international airports: Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueag, Chaing Mai, Chiang Rai, Hatyai and Phuket.

English for specific purpose in workplace duties notably in airport and aviation industry of Thailand is become presently a prime concern and needs the improvement in English Oral Communication skills for airport and aviation passenger-handlers since Aviation business is one of the areas considered having primary role of development in the program of ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC) which has been established in 2016.

Contents

English for Specific Purposes

According to Rahman (2015), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been identifies as a distinct part of English Language Teaching (ELT) since 1960s. It is different from General English (GE), as it focuses on learners and their needs. Most of the time, ESP learners are adults who want to use English for their professional-related needs. They have their specific goal. ESP is a goal-oriented English teaching and learning approach, and its courses are designed according to learners academic and professional requirements. As a result, ESP contents, teaching and learning methods and environment are different from GE.

Syllabi and materials of ESP courses come up after prior Needs Analysis of ESP learners. There are three characteristics of ESP. First, ESP is created to meet

learners' specific needs. Second, ESP contents are about the "particular disciplines, occupations and activities it serves", Third, ESP puts on emphasis on linguistic descriptions which are grammar, lexis and register. Other than the descriptions, ESP also focuses on skills, discourse and genres analysis which related to the activities. (Aldohon, 2014 ; Dibakanaka & Hiranvurana, 2012)

Needs Analysis is the process of establishing “what and how" of a course. Needs Analysis is also a fundamental part in course designing. The main instruments of Needs Analysis include questionnaire, structured interview, observations, analysis of authentic spoken and written texts, discussions and assessments. Needs Analysis mainly consists of three components, which are Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), and Present Situation Analysis (PSA). (Rahman ,2015) English communication problems of flight attendants.

Three kinds of problems regarding English communication of flight are problems concerning language functions, problems concerning English usage, and areas of language difficulties encountered by flight attendants. Problems concerning languages functions. There are items in this kind of problems, namely: boarding, welcoming passengers and farewells, safety checks before taking off and landing, In-flight services and Unanticipated and emergency situations. (Permtanjit, 2003)

Problems concerning English usage

There are 3 kinds of problems, including: problems regarding the vocabulary use,problems concerning pronunciations and eas of language difficulty that flight attendants came across.

There are also seven main areas of language difficulty, including:

1) flight attendants had to communicate with passengers with unfamiliar accents, 2) flight attendants had to communicate with passengers whose English proficiency was very low, and passengers who cannot speak English at all, 3) flight attendants could not answer passengers' question correctly when asked about information that the flight attendants had not studied in the basic training course. The information included ticketing, connecting flight, VAT refunds and ground services, 4)

flight attendants did not know how to pronounce words correctly. Due to their strange accents, the passengers and their colleagues did not understand them, 5) flight attendants had a limited vocabulary bank.

Ten language skills and structural knowledge that are important for flight attendants and they ranked the skills according to frequency, namely: speaking and listening, pronunciation, using polite and appropriate language, using correct and appropriate grammar, writing everyday language and conversation reading, communicative skills and being able to use various sentence patterns and words and problem-solving skills.

The structural English knowledge and job-related knowledge were divides into three groups, which were vocabulary knowledge, cultural differences and cross cultural communication. The respondents thought that job-related vocabulary (technical terms) was essential.

The problems that the flight attendants encountered included problems concerning language functions or situational English, problems concerning English usage, and other seven areas of language difficulties. Accent and pronunciation were considered essential problems. Pronunciation was considered the hardest part of change (Nunta, 2008).

English Communication for Airline Ground Staff

Communication is absolutely critical to the success of any service encounter. Service, after all, is mostly just the movement and processing of information. Without communication, either excellent or poor service cannot be delivered. An act of communication comes in different forms: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Davidoff (1994) states that the ground staff are customer-contact employees or passenger service agents for an international airline industry. They need to use appropriate English language communication with passengers from all over the world in order to offer services and interact with them properly. Moreover, English language functions used are also derived from job activities in the domain of the airport.

Methodology

This study aimed to investigate English oral communication skill improvements and needs by Thai airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants of Thai aviation and airports from foreign tourist engagement perspective as duty notion. The study achieved through the following procedures.

1. Collected the documents and researches involving English oral communication skill improvements and needs: English for specific purpose, problems and needs of using communicative English in workplace, problems concerning English usage by Thai aviations and airports staff. Generally, the collective researches obtained the primary data by questionnaires and interview, and the data was analysed by using percentage statistic.

2. Classified the documents and researches into 2 categories: English for specific purpose, problems regarding English communications.

3. Systematically analysed the collective documents and researches by mapping out whether they supported the study objective or not.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The collective documents and researches were studied by using various methodology and statistic. For examples: Widodo (2015) analysed the data from the interview were transcribed and analysed through listing, coding, and classifying, relied on the triangulation of sources. Data were presented based on categories from the aspects of social engagement.

The findings of the study were as follows: 1) problems regarding English communication of flight were problems concerning language functions, problems concerning English usage, and areas of language difficulties encountered by flight and ground attendants, 2) the English language skills and structural knowledge were listening and speaking, reading, pronunciation, using correct and appropriate grammar, using polite and appropriate language, writing everyday language and conversation,

communicative skills, being able to use various sentence patterns and words and problem-solving skills. In addition, foreign tourist perspective reflected by by flight and ground attendants were: 1) the attendants could not answer the passengers' question correctly when asked about information that the flight attendants had not studied in the basic training course; the information included ticketing, connecting flight, VAT refunds and ground services, 2) due to their strange accents and pronounce words correctly of the attendants, the passengers and their colleagues did not understand them.

Discussion

The findings generated some discussions on English oral communication skill improvements and needs by Thai airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants of Thai aviation and airports from foreign tourist engagement perspective as duty notion.

Language Problem

There are several challenges faced by the passenger-handlers in English oral communication both passively and actively. The problems in this case include listening, responding, and some psychological problems.

In listening, the staffs are still struggling when they involve in conversation. To be specific, based on the interview, the problems in listening are: failing to catch the uncommon utterance which sounds strange to them, feeling lost in longer talks, missing the spoken words or points. In responding or speaking, although they are quite accustomed to speaking based on procedures or routines, the staffs still feel that they have low speaking ability in some aspects: problem in responding the questions efficiently and comfortably, little skill in accuracy because of poor vocabulary, difficulty in pronouncing words (sometimes causing minor misunderstanding), failing to express idea dealing with the topics outside the routines, trouble in fluency which cannot perform smooth flow of speaking.

Some psychological problems are also noticed, all of the staffs feel lack of confidence when involving in English oral communication. They also have the fear of

making mistakes, nervousness, and anxiety. Then, they also admit and feel that they still have low English proficiency.

Knowledge Needs

Based on the interview with stakeholders and the real experience of passenger-handlers in the job setting, the staffs of passenger handling must own sufficient knowledge about these aspects: aviation vocabulary, general basic English, and job procedures. Vocabulary mastery is very crucial in communication. For them, it is essential to gain vocabulary richness. About: people, things and places in the airport and the duties or functions, basic words about airplane/aircraft and its interior, traveling vocabulary, including flights schedules, travel documents, airport and flight operations, etc. The staffs also need to know comprehensively about airport operation, the flow of boarding and arriving passengers, and the standard procedures of the related position.

Suggestions

The useful suggestions of the study and its findings and discussion above are excellent resources for well preparations and related fields as follows:

1. as the basis of ESP material development, especially for airport passenger-handling occupation. The ESP teachers or practitioners in the related field can develop the details by integrating problems and needs presented.

2. The aviation and airport company can use the study findings as resources to create the English competency and skill criterions for recruitment of Thai airport passenger-handlers and flight attendants of Thai aviation and airports.

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