

Thai Business Organization Employee English Language Communication Competency

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The study intended to evaluate English language communications competency within Thai business organizations. Therefore, from the use of simple random sampling techniques, 400 questionnaires were obtained from individuals employed in a company listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) in 2016. The research instrument was a questionnaire whose items were judged to have a reliability of 0.72. Data were analysed by use of mean statistics, standard deviation (S.D.), and use of a rank order of deference scores, which prioritized the study's aspects' importance by using the adjusted Priority Need Index (PNI) (modified). Results determined that employee English language communications competency was at a moderate level. This contrasted sharply with expectations for listening skills to be at a high level and the requirement for speaking skills to also be at a very high level. Therefore, the authors concluded that there is a need to develop English language communication competencies. Speaking needs special attention and requires more effort than listening. Moreover, when considering each aspect, it was determined that attitude had the highest level of need for improving English communication ability, over knowledge, and skills, respectively.

Key words: *Business Organization Workers, Communication Competency, English Language Needs for Communication, Listening Skills.*

Introduction

Language pervades every aspect of organizational life as it touches everything. However, global organization leaders, whose staff members speak a multitude of languages, often times pay little attention to it in their approach to talent management (Neeley & Kaplan, 2014). English is the global language for business (Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Neeley, 2012), which has become the lingua franca for the modern world (Wilson, 2005). Therefore, corporations of all sizes, nationalities, and industries find it increasingly advantageous to be able to communicate effectively in English. English proficiency has become a genuinely strategic requirement, which is essential to take competitive advantage of business opportunities, promote internal collaboration, and help foster innovation. Furthermore, with business globalization, the shifting from production-based economies to knowledge-based economies, the explosive growth of information communications technology (ICT), the struggle to become learning organizations and the critical need for knowledge workers (Phillips et al., 2017), have made knowledge management practices a must today across all types and levels of organizations (Thampradit & Fongsuwan, 2014). Education, therefore, plays an essential role in shaping a nation's competitive advantage, which is the result of technological advancement (OECD, 2012).

However, companies are struggling to keep pace with the growing importance of English. The same is true for Thai institutions in producing teachers who can both communicate and teach in the English language effectively (Figure 1) as only 6% of Thai teachers can pass a basic English examination (Boonruang, 2018).

What is the solution? Numerous methods have been proposed in recent years that make use of ICT and Internet infrastructure to offset the limitations of a classroom environment and teaching resources. Well received and respected concepts include flipped and blended learning, online learning, e-learning, open and distance learning, and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) (Deechai et al., 2019; Klemke et al., 2018; Zhang, 2017; Banyen et al., 2016; Pulker & Vialleton, 2015; Toto & Nguyen, 2009). Some of the methods are also combined and become hybrid concepts. Social media platforms, along with smartphones, have also entered into an educator's tool kit, along with mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). These devices and platforms easily allow students remote access to content and class assignments from learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle, Edmodo, and Schoology. Thus, the Thai education system is under tremendous pressure to keep pace with technological changes and be competitive with Thailand's regional trading partners.

According to Klemke et al. (2018), the *flipped classroom* is a model within the *blended learning* delivery process where instruction happens directly online. Classroom flipping is also a mechanism that supports the first two phases in Bloom's taxonomy (remembering and

understanding) as reinforcement happens online through interaction with the content and direct instruction through video and multi-media formats.

Moreover, blended learning combines aspects of classroom flipping with traditional classroom environments (Banyen et al., 2016), which is a combination of traditional face-to-face (F2F) lessons and computer-based education (Pérez-Marín et al., 2012). Carman (2005) also identified five key elements as essential in blended learning. These included live events, online content, collaboration, assessment, and reference material. Blended learning also ensures the largest impact possible of a learning experience, which ensures that organizations can optimize their productivity and deliver customer value (Julian & Boone, 2001).

Online learning, e-learning, and distance learning are very similar in concept and describe platform connection methods rather than the techniques used after the connection between the teacher and student is made. Finally, although MOOCs have come up short in their ability in student completion success, it has been argued nonetheless that in China a MOOC embedded flipped classroom promotes student activity, autonomous work, and collaborative learning skills (Zhang, 2017). MOOCs also contribute to a better understanding of technology-enhanced, student-centered learning environments.

Although all these educational innovations initially sound wonderful, there are some dark corners to their implementation success (deNoyelles & Seilhamer, 2015). One area which can be very limiting is access to reliable bandwidth. Connectivity cost can also be another limiting factor in student use. Learning management systems can also be difficult to implement and customize, and require constant technical support. There is also administrator hesitancy in the implementation of concepts that are poorly understood or require the learning of new and 'complex' ideas, software, and devices. Varis (2007) also suggested that governments and schools need to focus on removing these barriers to access and connectivity, professional support development, quicken e-learning innovation, promote digital literacy, and implement lifelong learning processes. How these issues are overcome are probably the most significant obstacles an educator has before them in their excitement in implementing new technology-based education processes.

Furthermore, numerous studies have stated the importance of English language communication competency as being a pre-requisite for a 21st Century knowledge worker and an organization's competitive advantage and success (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). Technology, social media platforms, ICT, and LMSs are also essential elements to achieve these goals (Thaiposri & Wannapiroon, 2015). English language communication skills also help with life-long learning skills and give them motivation and confidence to learn (Böhm & Constantine, 2016). Stepping into a society of lifelong education thus requires learners to be highly self-motivated, while having the ability and motivation to learn independently.

Ruchiwit et al. (2019) have suggested that higher education (HE) management needs to realize the importance of student role development in achieving a skilled labor force that is ready to serve the needs of all sectors (Harry, 2015). Additionally, labor resource analysis and education management planning are needed to produce skilled workers for the labor market. According to Yodwisitsak (2004), the creation of competitive advantage requires knowledge that requires quality human resources. These knowledge workers then become the most valuable asset with the staff's ability to create, use, and share knowledge representing a higher ability at achieving strategic advantage.

However, knowledge management (K.M.) does not come easy. This is consistent with Ho (2004), in which 85% of the cross-industry studies which attempted K.M. implementation failed because management did not realize the importance of K.M. elements. This is consistent with Levinson (2000), who indicated the importance of personnel by stating that education of human capital is a necessary ingredient for success in a knowledge-based economy.

Although organizational culture (O.C.) has been listed in numerous studies as a key to successful K.M. (Chase, 1997), in Thailand, entrenched O.C. oftentimes hinders K.M. This includes O.C. elements such as 'face,' strict hierarchical level management structures, the unwillingness to challenge 'authority,' *Kreng Jai*, and a very strong seniority culture, where a junior staff member does not dare to speak out in front of a senior manager, are still considered as standard practices in Thai society (Yodwisitsak, 2004; Komin, 1990). Thus, learning, which embraces the acquisition of existing and the development of new knowledge in order to improve organizational performance, is obstructed (Yodwisitsak, 2004).

However, these obstacles must not stand in the way within business organizations. Knowledge has to be correctly managed to assist evolving organizations in getting the most value out of employees, operations, and processes (Ho, 2004). Online spaces can serve as a repository of on-demand resources and dissemination of information, with work-sharing critical to incentivizing members to produce, while building professional networks (deNoyelles & Seilhamer, 2015).

As already outlined, the importance and necessity for English language communications development in human resource knowledge management (HRKM) are critical, as English language competencies are vital elements in a firm's knowledge management success within highly competitive international markets.

Research Objectives

1. To study the actual and expected conditions for the development of English language worker competency in Thai business organizations.
2. To study and prioritize the development of English language worker competency based on the opinions of practitioners in Thai business organizations.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The population for the study consisted of executives, managers, and staff in business organizations listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand in 2016. The sample group size of 400 was selected by use of simple random sampling, with size determination coming from concepts articulated by Yamane (1973) in which a level of confidence of 95% was assured with an error rate not more than 5%.

Research Tools

The research instrument used was a questionnaire with five rating levels/points based on a Likert type agreement scale for querying each respondent's opinions concerning their expected and actual conditions of English competency within their business organization. The survey consisted of 33 item statements from two competencies (listening and speaking) and in three aspects (knowledge, skills, and attitude). The questionnaire passed a direct check by five experts who were experts in ESL competency development. The questionnaire's *Index of Item-Objective Congruence* (IOC) ranged from 0.60-1.00 with the average item reliability assessment value or Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient being 0.72.

Data Collection

In this research, the researcher collected data from executives and staff of business organizations registered on the Stock Exchange of Thailand in 2016. Data collection commenced in March 2016 and continued through June 2016. The collection was accomplished by personal interviews with the study's research teams.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data utilized both the mean and standard deviation with data strength judged through the use of a five-level Likert type agreement scale. Interpretation criteria for *very high* agreement to the item statement was 4.50-5.00, *high* = 3.50-4.49, *moderate* agreement = 2.50-3.49, *low* agreement = 1.50-2.49, and finally, a *very low* agreement = 1.00-1.49.

Study and prioritize the need for English language competency development of Thai business organization employees was classified according to competency, by use, and analysis of the Priority Needs Index Modified (PNI_(Modified)). The basis for this comes from Wongwanich (2007) who conducted a dual-response format in which a questionnaire was used as a form of estimated value, in which items are judged by their importance (I) and by each item's ability using their degree of success (D), which are constructed within the definition of prioritization, the discrepancy model, and the needs prioritization process model by conducting the principle of difference assessment. The needs are calculated by Mean Deference Method (MDF), which finds out the means of I and D (rank order of deference scores) and prioritizes the importance by using the adjusted Priority Need Index (PNI), which Wiratchai and Wongwanich (2005) adjusted in their research. It is a process to find out the difference rate of I – D and divide it with D in order to control the scope of the needs. The equation is $PNI_{(Modified)} = (I-D)/D$.

Research Results

Employee Characteristics

From the survey's 400 SET-listed company staff respondents, 52.50% were women, and 47.50% were men. It was also discovered from the survey sample that 67.50% were 41 years of age or older. Respondents also indicated that 60.75% had obtained a bachelor's degree; another 33% had finished a master's degree, while 3.25% had completed their Ph.D. Work experience results showed that 22.25% had more than 20 years of work experience. In comparison, another significant segment of 21.25% had 11-15 years of work experience. As might be expected, given a large number of senior employees, monthly income responses indicated that the largest group of 40.75% was over 30,000 Thai baht (THB). This was followed by 28% who were 15,001 – 20, 000 THB a month, and 25.75% who were between 20,001 – 30,000 THB a month. At the time of the study in 2016, the Thai baht to the U.S. dollar exchange rate was approximately 35.8 THB to 1 USD.

Furthermore, Table 1 shows the English language communication competency development actual and expected conditions, while Table 2 shows the prioritization of the needs. Additionally, the PNI_(modified) was used to arrange the teachers' needs on the use of student portfolio assessment in priority order. Table 3 shows the English language communication competency development overall assessment results.

Table 1: English Language Communication Competency Development Actual and Expected Conditions

Aspect/Item	Actual			Expectation		
	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level
Listening						
Knowledge	3.44	0.86	moderate	4.36	0.60	high
Skills	3.49	0.62	moderate	4.41	0.56	high
Attitude	3.43	0.75	moderate	4.42	0.55	high
Average	3.45	0.74	moderate	4.40	0.57	high
Speaking						
Knowledge	3.46	0.84	moderate	4.63	0.50	Very high
Skills	3.44	0.69	moderate	4.37	0.68	Very high
Attitude	3.28	0.70	moderate	4.43	0.60	Very high
Average	3.39	0.74	moderate	4.48	0.59	Very high

Table 2: English Language Communication Competency Development Needs Prioritization

Aspect/Item	I	D	PNI _(Modified)	Level
Listening				
Knowledge	3.44	4.36	0.21	2
Skills	3.49	4.41	0.21	2
Attitude	3.43	4.42	0.22	1
Average	3.45	4.40	0.21	-
Speaking				
Knowledge	3.46	4.63	0.25	2
Skills	3.44	4.37	0.21	3
Attitude	3.28	4.43	0.26	1
Average	3.39	4.48	0.24	-

Table 3: English Language Communication Competency Development Assessment Results

Aspect/Item	English Language Communication Competency							
	Listening				Speaking			
	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level
Knowledge								
1. Knowledge of grammar or structure	3.47	4.35	0.20	4	3.60	4.64	0.22	5
2. Social English knowledge	3.43	4.38	0.21	3	3.33	4.53	0.26	2
3. Communications ability	3.36	4.29	0.21	2	3.35	4.63	0.27	1
4. Interpretation teaching ability.	3.42	4.39	0.22	1	3.50	4.67	0.24	4

Aspect/Item	English Language Communication Competency							
	Listening				Speaking			
	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level
5. Vocabulary comprehension, pronunciation and listening skills.	3.52	4.40	0.20	5	3.54	4.70	0.25	3
Skills								
1. Interpretation skills.	3.53	4.53	0.23	5	3.34	4.38	0.22	5
2. English vocabulary usage.	3.47	4.50	0.24	4	3.30	4.46	0.26	1
3. Simplification of English language use?	3.23	4.43	0.27	2	3.33	4.40	0.24	3
4. Vocabulary simplicity.	3.52	4.49	0.22	6	3.31	4.37	0.23	4
5. Employees are encouraged to make use of English language synonyms and substitute whenever possible.	3.20	4.54	0.30	1	3.38	4.48	0.25	2
6. Social English skills.	3.37	4.48	0.25	3	3.29	4.20	0.21	6
7. Responsiveness.	3.61	4.46	0.20	7	3.39	4.26	0.20	7
8. Having the ability to teach staff the reasons for learning and using English.	3.65	4.35	0.17	10	3.55	4.35	0.18	9
9. Having the ability to conduct staff English language teaching activities that mirror everyday life as much as possible.	3.59	4.28	0.16	11	3.62	4.37	0.17	10
10. Staff English language training focuses on providing numerous interactive opportunities and activities as much as possible.	3.54	4.37	0.19	8	3.67	4.41	0.15	12
11. Staff English language training focuses on real-world phonics use including pronunciation, fluency, stress, and intonation.	3.62	4.32	0.15	12	3.59	4.33	0.16	11
12. Staff English language training focuses on social English skills whenever possible.	3.58	4.33	0.18	9	3.52	4.36	0.19	8
Attitude								
1. Learning and teaching activity sequence development.	3.23	4.58	0.29	2	3.50	4.60	0.22	10

Aspect/Item	English Language Communication Competency							
	Listening				Speaking			
	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level	I	D	PNI _(Mod.)	Level
2. Staff role and English teaching development.	3.35	4.57	0.28	3	3.44	4.57	0.23	9
3. Teacher support system development.	3.30	4.54	0.27	4	3.43	4.59	0.24	8
4. English language coaching staff members are expert developers.	3.20	4.60	0.30	1	3.48	4.50	0.21	11
5. Real English language is suggested to be used.	3.39	4.42	0.23	6	3.38	4.21	0.19	13
6. Stimulate and promote each person's opportunity for activity participation.	3.41	4.31	0.20	9	3.49	4.27	0.18	14
7. Innovative new concepts are introduced and used in the teaching process.	3.44	4.56	0.24	5	3.21	4.54	0.30	2
8. Listening practice activities are designed to be new and interesting.	3.46	4.29	0.19	10	3.04	4.28	0.29	3
9. Learning Management and Planning	3.45	4.38	0.22	7	3.00	4.35	0.31	1
10. Evaluation	3.43	4.36	0.21	8	3.30	4.46	0.26	6
11. Training reinforces English language use with other staff members.	3.57	4.42	0.18	11	3.38	4.48	0.25	7
12. English language training uses established theory and knowledge.	3.62	4.44	0.17	12	3.03	4.20	0.27	5
13. Responsive teaching methods.	3.61	4.13	0.13	14	3.04	4.24	0.28	4
14. Teaches make staff personnel motivated to study.	3.51	4.23	0.16	13	3.31	4.12	0.20	12

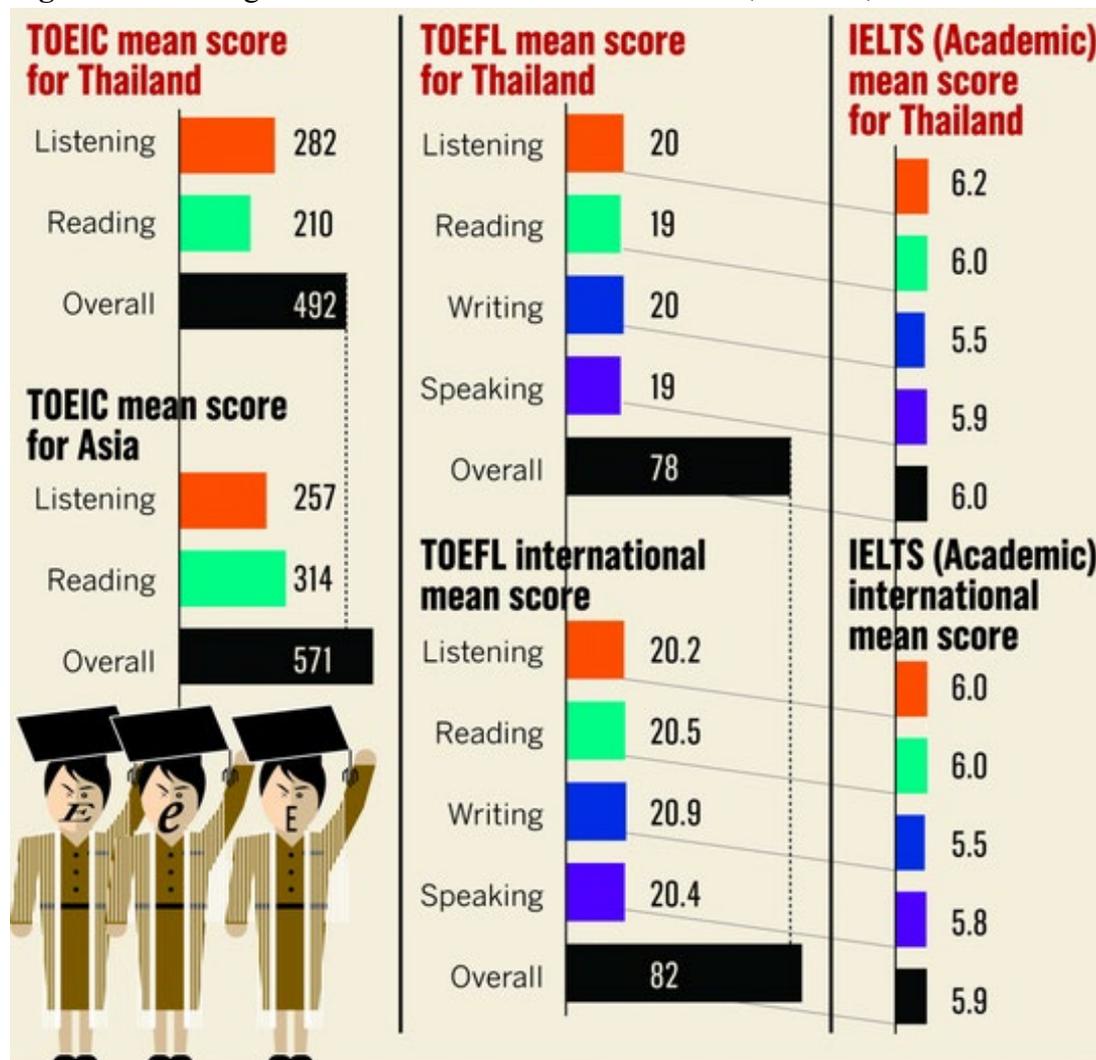
Discussion

As might be expected, the research determined that within companies listed on Thailand's stock exchange, staff perception of the needs for English language communication skills, and the reality of what exists is quite different. Research results also determined that the listening aspects of the study (*knowledge, skills, and attitude*) were at a *moderate* level (mean = 3.45, S. D. = 0.74) (Table 1). However, expectations of the needs for these skills were *high* (mean = 4.40, S.D. = 0.57). Furthermore, an analysis of the speaking aspects (*knowledge, skills, and*

attitude) was also determined to be at a *moderate* level (mean = 3.39, S. D. = 0.74) (Table 1), but staff expectations for employee English speaking skills were *very high* (mean = 4.48, 0.59).

Unfortunately, these results are consistent with numerous other studies regarding the English language communications skills of Thais. Globally, the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) English language evaluation test is recognized as a standard for use in employee English testing; however, the average Thai TOEIC test score is 492 (Figure 1) (Boonruang, 2018). This compares to requirements from Korean conglomerates such as Hyundai Group (minimum TOEIC score of 720), and Renault Samsung Motors minimum score of 750 (Lee, 2014).

Figure 1. Thai English Skills Test Results for the TOEIC, TOFEL, and IELTS



Source: The Nation- <https://www.nationthailand.com/national/30320094>

Additional analysis also showed in Table 2 that from the use of the $PNI_{(Modified)}$ formula, there was also a large magnitude in the difference between the impotence (I), and the degree of success (D), as listening aspects, averaged $I = 3.45$, while $D = 4.40$. Moreover, the importance level of each aspect for listening showed that attitude (1) was most important, followed by skills (2) and knowledge (2). Scores for all aspects of speaking were very similar to listening as well as the differences between I and D. This is consistent with Hymes (1974), in which English language speaking competency was stated to be knowing when to speak, when not, and as what to talk, with whom, when, where and in what manners. Kaur and Clarke (2009) also added that in Malaysian multinationals firms, communications events such as chairing and speaking in meetings, report writing, and editing, were deemed essential by members of the surveyed human resource departments. Finally, the *attitude* was once again judged most essential for overcoming speaking limitations in business organizations in Thailand.

Even though Thai is the official language of Thailand, early learners are exposed to English in their first year of elementary school (Noom-ura, 2013). For some, English is a second language; for many others, it is a third (Chinese being second). Outside these classroom environments, however, exposure to English in Thailand is frequently difficult to obtain and sporadic at best (Dhanasobhon, 2006) unless the Internet and social media resources are utilized at home or in the classroom (Leesa-nguansuk, 2018). If these paths are followed, there is a rich abundance of resources available for all levels of English learners in all areas of topical interest. Chansamrong et al. (2014) have also suggested that when students use blended-cooperative learning strategies for English language grammar, the students' scores improved significantly. For the vocabulary, most students want teachers to employ learning strategies for memorizing.

However, without access and use of these resources, English language person-to-person communications opportunities are very scant, and frequently expensive to acquire. Thai students' motivation to learn English is also low (Ning, 2015; Dhanasobhon, 2006).

However, to compete internationally, business organizations must have both H.R. staff and managers who have the ability to communicate well in English (Neeley, 2012; Kaur & Clarke, 2009). Adopting a standard mode of speech is not just a good idea; it is a must. Also, according to Neeley (2012), three main reasons are driving the move toward English as a corporate standard. These are competitive pressure, globalization of tasks and resources, and M&A integration across national boundaries. However, change is never easy, and there are significant obstacles in successful English-language policy implementations.

Furthermore, across Asia, numerous nations have seen a growing need for appropriate English communication programs within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment

(Kusumoto, 2012). This EFL need has led to the lowering of the compulsory English instruction student age in many Asian countries as well (Butler, 2004).

In Japan, Kusumoto (2012) conducted a needs analysis of Japanese homeroom teachers in response to Japan's drastic change in English education at the elementary school level. The author contended that requirements were handed down from a central authority with no input allowed from the teachers whom the policies affected. Additionally, numerous other studies have reported the importance of a needs analysis for English communication, academic, health care, and business use. Examples of these global studies include a needs analysis for a health-care training institution and their subsequent success story from it in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Bosher & Smalkowski, 2002), as well as a needs analysis and syllabus design for an intensive EFL course for Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industry (Cowling, 2007).

Finally, in Table 3, we find the study's English language communication competency development assessment results. From this, several observations can be made. From PNI(modified) scores under listening, we can see a crucial need for English language skill development in the area of synonym use and word substitution ability (Aspect 5). We can also see that under attitudes, there is a perception by business organization staffs that English language coaching staff members are expert developers (Aspect 4). Under speaking, we can conclude that the survey respondents felt that innovative new concepts are introduced and used in the teaching process (Aspect 7), with a positive attitude towards learning management and planning also being critical (Aspect 9). These results are consistent with Clement and Murugavel (2018), who also discovered that among all ESL skills, speaking was considered the most critical skill in the workplace, and the majority surveyed accepted that they need to improve their speaking skills. It was also noted that online training was the preferred vehicle by the participants in learning to speak.

Conclusion

This research paper set up with an important goal: to study the need for English language competency development for workers in Thai business organizations. From the 400 participants in the study, it was determined that employee English language communications competency was at a *moderate* level. This contrasted sharply with expectations for listening skills to be at a *high* level and the requirement for speaking skills to also be at a *very high* level. Therefore, the authors concluded that there is a need to develop English language communication competencies, with speaking needing a higher level of attention, which requires more effort than listening. Furthermore, when considering each aspect, it was determined that attitude had the highest level of need for improving English communication ability, over knowledge, and skills, respectively. Therefore, in developing and promoting English language communications competencies of business organization employees,



speaking should be given the greatest emphasis. However, when considering each aspect, the focus should be given to their attitude first. The results obtained from this research should be useful in developing and enhancing the English language communication competencies of Thai business organization employees.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors would also like to declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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