Needs Analysis of English Skills for Logistics Business Among Thai University Students

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Abstract—**Logistics plays a vital role in driving the global economy forward. Within this profession, English serves as the primary means of communication. However, not all logistics personnel, especially those for whom English is a second language, find it easy to use. The aim of this research is to conduct a needs analysis for English skills in the logistics industry. A questionnaire was distributed to 156 Thai logistics management students and employed Google Forms together with Microsoft Excel for quantitative analysis. The findings revealed the following: 1) The four core skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and vocabulary were reported extremely important, while grammar was rated as important. 2) The most frequently utilized English skill was reading, the skill most desired to improve was speaking, the skill that lacked the most was grammar, and the skill requiring the greatest development in their future were reading, listening, speaking, and writing, respectively. The implications of this study are significant for the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses.**

Index Terms—**English for logistics business, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), course development**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

English, as one of the most widely spoken languages worldwide, is utilized by individuals for various purposes. Firstly, it serves as a means for academic communication, known as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP is particularly valuable for students and educators in higher education institutions located in non-English-speaking countries, as it helps them address challenges and obstacles encountered during the learning and teaching processes. Secondly, English is employed for specific purposes, commonly referred to as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is a needs-based approach that determines the specific language skills that should be emphasized or focused on to facilitate children's success. By providing learners with opportunities to engage with English in contexts that they comprehend and find intriguing, ESP enables them to naturally acquire the language. In this manner, ESP opens doors for learners to develop their English proficiency in a meaningful and captivating manner.

In Thailand, where English is taught as a foreign language to some extent, having a strong command of the English language is crucial for achieving optimal job performance. Furthermore, English proficiency serves as a crucial tool for Thai employees to accomplish their objectives in the global labor market. As highlighted in the comprehensive report on English language usage in professional settings (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2016), English is the primary language for international business transactions, irrespective of whether countries have English as their native or non-native language. This holds true for Thailand, which stands as a prominent player among the top-performing upper-middle-income economies (Logistics Performance Index, 2018). However, the significance of English extends beyond individual employees to encompass companies as well. The report reveals that English proficiency is considered important by over 95% of employers in countries where English is not the official language. In the logistics sector, a crucial component of transportation and distribution, 77% of employees whose first language is not English acknowledge the importance of English for their respective businesses (Logistics Performance Index, 2018).

Attaining proficiency in English is a significant milestone in achieving effective communication in the language. However, numerous studies have highlighted the challenges and difficulties faced by Thai employees across all four language skills. For instance, research has shown that listening skills pose challenges (Sanjit, 2016; Tamtani, 2019; Jeharsae, 2014; Jampa & Denis, 2016), speaking skills encounter obstacles (Srisuwan & Kardkarnklai, 2014; Pratoomrat & Rajprasit, 2014), reading skills present difficulties (Boonruk, 2019), and writing skills raise concerns

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(Rajprasit et al., 2015; Youngyusensin, 2015). These findings shed light on the areas where Thai employees encounter specific language-related challenges and highlight the need for further attention and support in developing these skills.

Despite the widespread use of English as a medium of communication across various domains, including the logistics industry, there is a noticeable absence of an English for logistics course that is built upon a comprehensive needs analysis derived from learner data. This is an urgent matter that needs attention. The demands and requirements of learners, gathered through direct engagement with actual users, serve as the authentic resources for developing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course that aligns with their expectations. While previous studies have conducted needs analyses in the logistics field with logistics professionals (Youngyusensin, 2015; Phuyathip, 2019), the investigation into the specific needs of learners in the field seems to have been overlooked. Consequently, there is a need for data collection directly from learners, ensuring the extraction of authentic insights from real users. Subsequently, the development of a well-tailored ESP course becomes imperative to address these identified needs effectively.

B. Limitation

1. The participants in this study are students who are currently pursuing a degree in logistics management at a public university in Thailand.

2. The information collected in this study exclusively originated from individuals who actively participated in an English for logistics course at the tertiary level.

C. Significance of the Study

The findings from the present study could prove valuable when designing an English course tailored specifically for students in higher education with a focus on English for logistics business.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Needs Analysis

(a). Definition of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis encompasses the essential items that humans require for their survival and well-being. It can be classified into two categories: target needs, which are the goals individuals strive to achieve, and learning needs, which are the necessary task learners must undertake to acquire knowledge (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). To put it simply, the distinction between these two types of demands lies in the former relation to what the learner must do in the desired environment, while the latter pertains to what the learners must do to facilitate learning. According to Brown (1995), needs analysis involves a systematic process of gathering and evaluating both subjective and objective information, aiming to define and validate a curriculum that effectively meets students' language learning requirements within the specific institutional context that influences the learning and teaching environment.

(b). The Purpose of Needs Analysis

In 1970, Gagne emphasized the aims of needs analysis, which included enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of current courses, providing support for both content and instructional techniques in existing courses, as well as designing new courses. Needs analysis is considered a vital component in the systematic development of a curriculum as it collects information to determine the course objectives (Brown, 1995). Additionally, Richards (2001) proposed several practical applications of needs analysis in language instruction. These applications include assessing the specific language skills required for various positions such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student; evaluating the effectiveness of an existing course in meeting the needs of prospective students; identifying students within a group who would benefit the most from training in particular language skills; recognizing important shifts in direction as perceived by a reference group; identifying gaps between students' current abilities and what they need to be able to do; and gathering information about specific challenges experienced by learners.

(c). Theories of Needs Analysis

Many researchers have classified needs analysis into different categories (Berwick & Johnson, 1989; Brindley, 1989; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Richards, 1990; Robinson, 1991; Nunan, 1999). Firstly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguished between target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to what the learner must accomplish in the target environment and encompass necessities, deficiencies, and desires. Learning needs, on the other hand, pertain to the actions the learner must undertake to facilitate learning. Secondly, Berwick and Johnson (1989) distinguished between perceived and felt needs in their needs analysis. Perceived needs are objective sets based on others' learning experiences, and they include normative, actual, and objective demands. The other type of need is felt needs, which are the learner's own needs, such as feelings, ideas, and assumptions. Then, Brindley (1989) and Robinson (1991) categorized needs analysis into objective and subjective needs. Objective needs revolve around factual information about learners, such as language proficiency while attending courses, perceived language difficulties, and the demand for language in real-world communication situations. Subjective needs, on the other hand, are identified through concrete and observable data collected about the learner or the situation, including the language learners need

to acquire and their current proficiency and skill level. Richards (1990) further classified needs analysis into situational requirements and communicative requirements. Situational needs encompass the general parameters of a language program, such as teacher expectations, teaching styles, and teaching techniques. Communicative needs, on the other hand, focus on the specific context in which learners will use the target language, including their role in the target situation, necessary language skills, future interactions and language tasks, and the required level of language proficiency in the target situation. Furthermore, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) differentiated between outsiders and insiders in their analysis of requirements. Outsiders' requirements pertain to objective/perceived needs based on known and verifiable information, while insiders' requirements relate to subjective/felt needs, which encompass cognitive and emotional aspects. Nunan (1999) divided requirements analysis into content needs and process needs. Content needs involve the selection and organization of themes, language, functions, ideas, and vocabulary while process needs encompass the selection and sequencing of learning activities and experiences.

(d). Needs Analysis in ESP Course

In order for an ESP course to succeed or be effective, it is needed to conduct a needs analysis. According to Robinson (1991), needs analysis plays a vital role in ESP courses. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further emphasized that each language training should be grounded in a needs assessment. The work of Carter and Nunan (2001) showed that needs analysis was a critical component of an ESP strategy particularly in terms of course design. Needs analysis encompassed various aspects of ESP course development, including course design, material selection, pedagogical techniques, assessment, and evaluation, as highlighted by Chatsungnoen (2015). Although it originated in the 1920s, needs analysis gained significant importance in the field of ESP during the 1960s (West, 1994).

(e). Definition of Needs Analysis in the Present Study

In the current study, the initial perspective on needs analysis is that it serves as a crucial phase within the development cycle of an ESP course. It has been included in this study with the aim of using the results to guide the identification of English language skills necessary in the logistics industry, while also contributing to the creation of an English for logistics course. The needs analysis conducted in this study intends to explore the participants' thoughts on the need for improved knowledge and application of English in logistics-related contexts. To summarize, the present study defines needs analysis as the process of assessing the requirements for a more comprehensive understanding of an English for logistics course.

(f). The Model of Needs Analysis Used in the Present Study

The methodology for conducting the needs analysis in this study draws upon the framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The objective is to evaluate the English language requirements of Thai university students who are specializing in logistics management. The focus is on identifying the specific needs of the learners within the target setting, encompassing their needs, uses, lacks, and wants. Furthermore, the analysis takes into consideration the content of English for logistics textbooks, as well as insights and recommendations from previous studies conducted in similar fields.

B. Previous Studies

Youngyuensin (2015) and Phuyathip (2019) conducted studies focusing on needs analysis within the field of logistics. Youngyuensin's (2015) study revealed that participants ranked writing as the most challenging skill, closely followed by speaking. The participants expressed a need to enhance their English proficiency, particularly in business writing, grammar, and vocabulary, to order to perform their job responsibilities effectively. It emphasized the importance of considering learners' needs when designing training courses to ensure successful and efficient performance among staff members. On the other hand, Phuyathip (2019) investigated the English language needs and challenges faced by logistics professionals working at a multinational logistics firm in Thailand. The study concluded that respondents sought improvement in all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Additionally, they identified the need to acquire logistics-specific technical terms, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to excel in their work. Moreover, they encountered difficulties in applying these core English abilities in their professional contexts. Previous research studies highlighted the necessity of conducting an English needs analysis specifically tailored to the logistics sector, focusing on the demands of professionals rather than students. Consequently, the present study aims to bridge this gap by examining the needs of students majoring in logistics.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

For the current study, a total of 156 Thai junior students who are pursuing a major in logistics management were included. These students are enrolled in the English for Logistics Business course, which is offered at a public university in Thailand. Prior to joining this special electing course, the students have successfully completed and passed the fundamental English courses provided by the university. They are actively participating in the study to enhance their

understanding of the language requirements associated with various logistical situations or tasks, encompassing the four language skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

B. Research Instrument

Drawing inspiration from Hutchinson and Water (1987), the questionnaire was carefully developed to examine the English language skills needed in the field of logistics. The questionnaire consisted of four categories – needs, uses, wants, and lacks – and employed a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to gather data. To minimize misinterpretation, the questionnaire was presented in Thai language and divided into five sections. The first section aimed to explore the English language skills needed by Thai university students majoring in logistics management. Participants were asked to express their specific requirements in areas such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, English grammar, and English vocabulary. The items in this section were closed-ended, and participants were instructed to select their preferred rating (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) to indicate their needs.

The second section focused on the utilization of English language skills in the classrooms. Participants were asked to reflect on how they employ English in various capacities, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, English grammar, and English vocabulary. The items in this section were also closed-ended, and participants were required to indicate their preferred ranking to illustrate their usage.

Moving on to the third section, the questionnaire aimed to uncover the desired English language skills expressed by the participants. This section allowed participants to articulate their preferences for skills such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, English grammar, English vocabulary, and intercultural communication. Similar to the previous sections, the items were closed-ended, and participants were instructed to indicate their preferred ranking to denote their desires.

The fourth section investigated the lack of English language abilities among the participants. They were given the opportunity to voice their views on the areas in which they felt deficient, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, English grammar, English vocabulary, and intercultural communication. The items in this section were closed-ended, and participants were requested to indicate their preferred ranking to convey their deficiencies.

Lastly, section five explored the English language skills that participants anticipated needing in the future. This section allowed them to express their future skill requirements, covering speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The items in this section were closed-ended, and participants were asked to indicate their preferred ranking to signify their future needs.

C. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection took place in the classroom. Once the lecture finished, the participants were requested to share their perspectives on each statement by filling out questionnaires using the Google Form application. To ensure complete understanding, the researcher reads out all the survey items aloud for the participants and clarifies some points that the participants do not understand clearly.

D. Data Analysis Procedure

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively using Google Forms, a versatile platform designed for creating online forms and surveys with various question types. This tool allows for real-time evaluation of results to determine the frequency usage. Subsequently, the data was converted into mean scores and standard deviations.

IV. RESULTS

TABLE 1
ENGLISH SKILLS NEEDED AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT (N=156)

No.	The needed skills informed by participants	Mean	SD
1	Listening is necessary skill	4.83	0.51
2	Speaking is necessary skill	4.81	0.57
3	English vocabulary is necessary skill	4.74	0.61
4	Reading is necessary skill	4.70	0.54
5	Writing is necessary skill	4.56	0.74
6	English grammar is necessary skill	4.08	0.93

In Table 1, the English skills required by the participants were displayed. It was observed that listening was identified as the most crucial skill, followed by speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing, and grammar. Moreover, English grammar was regarded as a highly necessary, whereas the rest were considered extremely important.

TABLE 2
THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT (N=156)

No.	Used skills among participants	Mean	SD
1	Reading skill	3.87	0.89
2	English vocabulary skill	3.78	1.05
3	Listening skill	3.69	1.05
4	Writing skill	3.34	1.15
5	Speaking skill	3.30	1.20
6	English grammar skill	3.16	1.16

Table 2 provided insights into the utilization of English language skills among the participants. It indicated that reading was the most frequently employed skill, followed by vocabulary, listening, writing, speaking, and grammar. Additionally, reading, vocabulary, and listening were rated as highly used, while writing, speaking, and grammar were rated moderately used.

TABLE 3
ENGLISH LANGUAGE WANTED BY THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT (N=156)

No.	Wanted skills reported by the participants	Mean	SD
1	Speaking skill	4.74	0.53
2	Listening skill	4.72	0.51
3	Vocabularies in logistics industry	4.65	0.66
4	Reading skill	4.5	0.83
5	Writing skill	4.48	0.78
6	Intercultural skills	4.42	0.77
7	English grammar	4.30	0.84

Table 3 illustrated the desired English language skills expressed by the participants. The results revealed that speaking was identified as the most deficient skill, followed by listening, vocabulary, reading, writing, intercultural, and grammar. Furthermore, speaking, listening, and vocabulary were rated as having a very high need, while writing, intercultural competence, and grammar were considered to have a high level of need.

TABLE 4
LACK OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT (N=156)

No.	Lack skills reported by participants	Mean	SD
1	English grammar skills	4.16	0.95
2	Speaking is skills	4.09	0.98
3	Writing skills	4.02	1.00
4	Intercultural skills	3.87	1.01
5	Listening skills	3.82	1.05
6	English vocabularies in logistics business	3.64	1.03
7	Reading skills	3.44	1.09

Table 4 highlighted the lack of English language skills. The findings indicated that grammar was identified as the most lacking ability, followed by speaking, writing, intercultural, listening, vocabulary, and reading. Furthermore, grammar, speaking, writing, intercultural competence, listening, and vocabulary were rated as having a significant shortage, while only reading was considered to have a moderate level of need.

TABLE 5
ENGLISH SKILLS NEEDED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE FUTURE (N=156)

No.	Task	Mean	SD
1	Understanding minutes of meeting (R)	4.75	0.57
2	Understanding presentation by reading (R)	4.73	0.59
3	Understanding ordering via email (R)	4.72	0.59
4	Understanding the detail or information in the meeting (L)	4.72	0.61
5	Understanding the discussion of report by listening (L)	4.71	0.60
6	Understanding presentation by listening (L)	4.71	0.60
7	Giving a comment/an opinion at meeting (S)	4.71	0.64
8	Giving presentation (S)	4.71	0.68
9	Understanding the advice or instruction via phone (L)	4.70	0.63
10	Understanding the written report by reading (R)	4.69	0.63

According to Table 5, the learners expressed their priority to understand meeting minutes, followed by comprehending presentations through reading, understanding ordering via email, grasping the information during meetings, comprehending the discussion of the report by listening, understanding presentation through listening, providing comments or opinions in meetings, giving presentations, and comprehending advice or instructions over the phone. Moreover, students were required to engage in passive learning by reading and listening to the relevant matters outlined in items 1-6 and 9-10. Additionally, as illustrated in items 7-8, they were expected to actively participate in discussion through speaking.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Skills Needed for Logistics Management Students

Based on the finding of this study, the most needed skill was listening which aligns with previous research conducted by Niamsuwan (2017) on the English language needs of aircraft heavy maintenance mechanics. Notably, Chatsungnoen (2015) also highlighted the significance of listening skills in an occupational context, specifically in the ESP program for food science technology. This underscores the importance of incorporating listening-focused exercises and activities in English language training programs for logistics management majors. By allocating resources to enhance listening skills, universities can better prepare their students to navigate the challenges and needs of the logistics industry.

Furthermore, students ranked listening skills higher than other abilities across various aspects. Listening plays a vital role in facilitating learning as it enables students to comprehend and respond to information provided by lecturers, classmates, and others. The research findings of Sanjit (2016), Tamtani (2019), Jeharsae (2014), Jampa and Denis (2016) also support the significance of listening skills in the ESP environment. Developing listening skills not only strengthens communication skills, but also fosters emotional intelligence and promotes critical thinking.

Hence, students recognized the need to improve their listening skills as it directly impacts their academic success, communication proficiency, and future careers. However, it is worth noting that was no significant difference in the average importance rating between speaking (4.81) and listening (4.83), suggesting that both skills should be concurrently emphasized. On the other hand, grammatical structure was ranked as the least needed skill with an average of 4.08, but it was still represented at a high level. It suggests that listening, speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing, and grammar must all be prioritized in the language classroom because they were ranked from "high" to "very high".

B. Frequently Skills Used by Logistics Management Students

In general, the students perceived reading to be the most valuable English language skill. The high average score suggests that the majority of logistics students prioritize reading as a crucial skill for their studies and professional growth. By being proficient readers, these students can effectively access and comprehend a wide range of written materials related to logistics, including industry journals, research papers, technical documents, and business reports. Logistics management programs may include a variety of tactics and exercises into their curriculum to help students improve their reading abilities. Assigning relevant reading materials, participating in group discussions or debates on logistical themes, and offering help on good reading approaches and comprehension tactics are some examples.

Based on classroom activities and learning experiences, it is probable that reading abilities were discovered most frequently in all environments where English was used. This statement implies that pupils who have a high degree of English language competency gain the most from their reading abilities, which can also improve their analytical and critical thinking capabilities. According to the findings, the top three most utilized abilities are reading, vocabulary understanding, and hearing, with levels ranging from "low" to "high". As a result, frequent usage and required abilities are crucial, and these skills should be prioritized in classroom activities. Additionally, grammar is the least used skill, which reflects the current teaching strategies for L2 teachers that grammar should not be taught explicitly in order to pass an exam but should be able to be used in everyday situations.

C. Wanted Skills for Logistics Management Students

Regarding the findings of this study, it was found that most of the respondents need to improve their speaking. Students think that speaking skills will enable them to express themselves more courageously, participate in social activities, encounter new people, and even succeed in their careers. In this part, the result from the aspect of wanted skills is different from the top three needed and used skills in the earlier parts. It's interesting that the skills that are most wanted are not the ones that are most necessary. This suggests that students' attitudes toward studying English should consider both their wants and needs for their future professions and personal requirements. In addition, this finding indicates that students place a significant emphasis on improving their oral communication abilities in English within the context of logistics management. The relatively high mean score for speaking suggests that most logistics students recognize the importance of this skill and desire to improve their spoken English proficiency. This highlights their understanding that strong speaking skills can enhance their productivity and career prospects in the logistics industry.

D. Lack of English Language Skills for Logistics Management Students

The result has shown that grammar was the area where the most English language proficiency was lacking, followed by speaking, writing, intercultural communication, listening, and vocabulary. And the least lack of English language skills was in reading skills, which were represented by "medium". Even though grammatical focus was listed as the least needed skill in Part 1, it became the aspect that students really concerned themselves with, and they evaluated themselves with a low level of grammatical proficiency. However, it is not the point that they would like to improve the most based on the result from Part 3.

E. The English Language Skills Needed to Improve in the Future

The top-five needs that the participants prefer to develop in the future are 1) to understand the minutes of the meeting the most, followed by 2) to understand the presentation by reading, 3) to understand ordering via email, 4) to understand

the detail or information in the meeting, and 5) to understand the discussion of the report by listening. These top-five needs fall under reading and listening skills, which are related to passive learning. The result clearly shows that students see the clear picture about the scenarios of using English and "meeting" becomes the situation that they face quite often, and it requires all of four main skills for effective meeting.

F. Suggestion

The most and least skills in terms of need, usage, want, lack, and scenario of using English were presented differently for each of the researched skills concerning learning the English language. However, the average of each scope was presented from medium to high. So, all skills should be practiced, and it is linked to the design of the curriculum in Thailand for L2 students who need to learn various skills in the language classroom, but the focused practice of each skill can be managed by the mean score or range. In addition, the top three English usage scenarios include meeting, presenting, and emailing, which could be included in the classroom activities to boost those mentioned English language skills.

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