Investigating the Needs and Challenges with regard to English Communicative Competencies in the Thai Hospitality Industry

Mongkolchai Tiansoodeenon*, Benjawan Rungruangsuparat, and Sarochrus Tarapond

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Pathum Thani 12110, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: Mongkolchai_t@rmutt.ac.th

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the need for communicative competencies in the hospitality industry, including hotel, tourism, and aviation, in Thailand, and problems with regard to the use of English in the industry. A total of 233 participants took part in the research: 70 from the hotel industry, 72 from the tourism industry, and 91 from the aviation industry. They were recruited using purposive sampling technique, and a mixed-methods research design was employed. To collect data, a Likert-scale questionnaire relating to English communicative competency in hospitality was used. Semi-structured interviews were then piloted and used. A backtranslation technique was employed to ensure the accuracy of the translation from English to Thai. The value of the alpha coefficient's reliability for the questionnaire was 0.85. The quantitative data was analyzed using percentages, means, and standard deviations, while the semi-structured interview transcripts were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that the most significant communicative competencies in the hospitality industry in order of importance are interactional competency, strategic competency, and socio-cultural competency. The problems associated with using English in the hospitality industry included cultural differences and technical vocabulary. Moreover, awareness of the power of non-verbal language is perceived as being equally important for communicative competency.

Keywords: needs analysis; English communicative competency; hospitality industry

1. Introduction

Thailand is one of the world's best-known tourist destinations (Bernstein, & Woosnam, 2019), and the hospitality industry represents one of the most important industries, contributing significantly to the national economy (Jhaiyanuntana, & Nomnian, 2020). It ranks among the largest revenue-generating industries in the Thai economy, as Thailand's inbound tourism attracts a significant number of foreign visitors who are typically and warmly welcomed and pleased by the services provided by the industry (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017). The significance of service quality in the hospitality industry cannot be overstated, as it plays a crucial role in establishing a sustainable competitive advantage and fostering customer trust in a fiercely competitive market (Al-Ababneh, 2017). For this reason, the Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council recently launched the idea of targeting a new set of five S-curve industries in terms of human resources. These industries are biofuels and biochemicals, the digital industry, aviation and logistics, wellness and medical devices, and automation and robotics. These industries are needed to train the people who will drive the future of the country.

Although tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries, Thailand is one of many countries where tourism experts need to improve their English language skills (Alomoush, & Al-Na'imat, 2018). Moreover, the effect of service encounters depends on the manner in which personnel engage in direct and indirect communication with clients, as misunderstandings may arise as a result of divergent religious beliefs and values among tourists (Al-Ababneh, 2017). As a result, it is imperative that, to stay ahead of the competition and to adapt to shifting globalization patterns, technological advances, and consumer preferences, businesses in the service sector need to invest in training and developing their employees (Bas Collins, 2007). Since the

travel and leisure industries rely heavily on the English language (Trang, 2015), the ability to express oneself fluently in English is one of the skills that are currently required in the hospitality industry.

Among other professional competencies, communicative competency is a critical part of the hospitality industry. However, a lack of English proficiency could make it difficult to attract tourists and keep them satisfied (Sermsook, Nakplad, & Jantawong, 2021). In addition, in the current global economic climate of heightened competition and rapid change, it is crucial for hospitality students, managers, and educators to comprehend the competencies necessary for success on the part of the industry leaders of tomorrow (Suh, West, & Shin, 2012). As a result, there has been an increase in efforts all around the world to train those who work in the tourism industry to communicate effectively in English (Ho, 2020).

Hospitality-related research has long been of interest to researchers. Sermsook et al. (2021) study concentrated on examining English language usage issues among tourism workers, as well as identifying areas for improvement. In a broad sense, they found that hotel employees faced a modest level of challenges in effectively communicating in the English language within their work environment. These individuals encountered difficulties when it came to engaging in written correspondence in the English language, specifically with regard to writing letters and emails. The staff members expressed a need to improve their language proficiency in order to effectively communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Namtapi (2022) investigated the lack of the requisite skills and the needs of English-speaking tourist employees. The results revealed that the majority of participants were required to greet, give directions, provide information, and offer and request assistance. They had difficulty coping with foreign English accents, keeping up with tourists' rapid speech, and acquiring sufficient vocabulary and grammar to hold a conversation. They desired intercultural competence. Jeou-Shyan, Hsuan, Chih-Hsing, Lin, and Chang-Yen (2011) studied the requirements of the hotel's top managers in terms of essential competencies. The findings showed that the most significant competencies were leadership, crisis management, and problem solving. However, little research has been carried out to investigate communicative competences in the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries. Therefore, this study attempted not only to identify the communicative competencies required for each industry, but also to extend further the problems that exist with regard to the use of English in the Thai hospitality industry in general.

This study aims to provide answers to the following questions: 1. What is the most significant English-language communicative competency of the hotel industry in Thailand? 2. What is the most significant English-language communicative competency of the tourism industry in Thailand? 3. What is the most significant English-language communicative competency of the aviation industry in Thailand? And 4. What are the main problems with regard to English communicative competencies for the hospitality industry in Thailand?

2. Objectives
1. To identify needs for communicative competencies in the hospitality industry in Thailand, including hotel, tourism, and aviation.
2. To examine problems associated with using English in the hospitality industry in Thailand, including hotels, tourism, and aviation.

3. Literature Review
3.1 Communicative Competence
As emphasized in English learning programs, successful communication relies on linguistic accuracy. This in turn relates to the employee's awareness of using languages for communication purposes, and using different strategies for producing proficient utterances. It is in this way that communicative goals are achieved (Gałajda, 2012). Canale, and Swain (1980) stated that communicative competence involves grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. The first of these - grammatical competence - covers lexical, phonetic, semantic, and other features in both written and oral speech. Sociolinguistic competence involves the contextual use of utterances in relation to the purposes of the speakers and the interpretations of the listener.

However, Bachman (1990) offers another aspect of communicative competence. He suggests that it comprises three aspects: language, strategic, and psychological competences. This model is portrayed as

concerned with language assessment. This emphasizes the mechanisms of linguistic features and contextual elements regarding adaptability and mentality. The language component includes organizational competence, which involves not only grammatical (lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonetic as well as phonological) capabilities, but also discourse-related (cohesive and rhetorical) capabilities. In addition, pragmatic competence is another category of language competence that can be subdivided into illocutionary and sociolinguistic competences.

Finally, Ho (2020) concludes that there are six parts to communicative competence in the tourism professions. First, being linguistically competent means knowing how to use phonology, lexicon, semantics, syntax, and other parts of language. The interconnected meanings between sentences constitute discourse competence. The ability to interpret underlying messages by reading between the lines in texts is referred to as "sociocultural competence". The ability to recognize problems incurred in communication with others and implement treatment for those types of miscommunications are referred to as "strategic competence". Interactional competence is the ability to perform speech tasks in various situations, and make conversation with gestures. Finally, formulaic competence is the ability to match appropriate phrases and dialogues in a systematic manner.

3.2 English for Hospitality

English, as an international language, has been widely used in the hospitality industry by visitors and service providers throughout Asia. Kongtham (2020) conducted a needs analysis among hotel staff working at five-star hotels in Phuket, Thailand. It was found that the importance of apologizing in English was followed by welcoming and greeting, as well as offering help, giving directions, and explaining services and the accommodation provided. Furthermore, listening to customers' needs, clarifying mistakes, and reading industry-specific information were rated as being equally important. Meanwhile, writing in logbooks was rated as more significant than writing requests, suggestions, correspondence via emails, faxes, or telexes, form completion, or other information related to hotel transactions. Similarly, reading business correspondence was found to be more crucial than reading travel information, restaurant menus, all kinds of manuals, hotel advertisements, and news scoops items. At the same time, listening to specific information about guests was rated as being more significant than dealing with varied accents, receiving phone calls, and listening to audio advertisements for the hotels. These findings partially agree with those of Prima, Hartono, and Riyanto (2022), which revealed that Indonesian hotel staff rate listening skills as the most important, followed by speaking skills. Meanwhile, reading and writing skills were perceived as being equally significant for communicating in English at work. In addition, vocabulary was rated more important than grammar in both writing and speaking.

The impact of hotel and tourism services on the world economy was emphasized by the personnel in Mantra, Widiastuit, Handayanai, and Pramawati's mixed-method study (2020), in which describing attractions, offering directions, making suggestions, arranging schedules, and dealing with feelings, as well as particular communicative strategies, were all important to tourism staff in Bali, Indonesia. In addition, they needed cultural as well as historical knowledge along with grammatical structures for developing speaking skills in various genres, such as public speaking and conversation. With regard to the specific tasks relating to the work of a hotel receptionist, it was found that they needed to use English for check-in and check-out purposes. Namtapi (2022) investigated the needs of English-speaking tourism employees and found that the majority of participants were required to greet, give directions, provide information, and offer and request assistance. They had difficulty recognizing foreign English accents, keeping up with tourists' rapid ways of speaking, and acquiring sufficient vocabulary and grammar to hold a conversation. They desired intercultural competence. According to Dhyani, Gairola, and Dimri (2022), the branded chain hotel personnel in Uttarakhand, India ranked English language proficiency as the top need, followed by non-verbal communication and interpersonal skills.

4. Materials and Methods
4.1 Research Design

Concurrent mixed-method designs were used to investigate the English communication competency for hospitality industry personnel. Stakeholders in the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries were asked for

both qualitative and quantitative information. A questionnaire on English communicative competency was distributed in order to obtain quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to obtain qualitative data. Figure 1 illustrates the research methodology.
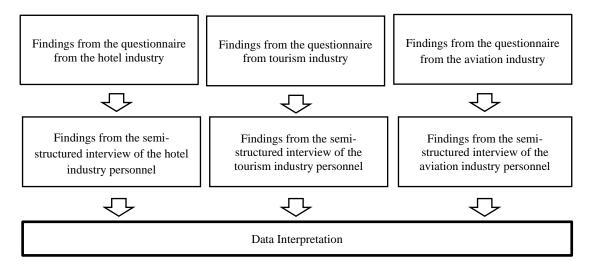

Figure 1 Research design

4.2 Population and Sampling

In this research there was a total of 233 participants, including 70 from the hotel industry (30.04%), 72 from tourism (30.90%), and 91 from the aviation industry (39.06%). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The first group worked in the hotel industry as supervisors and front-line employees at six five-star hotels in the Pattaya and Bangsaen districts of Chonburi Province, where they primarily interacted with foreigners. In addition, the participants in the second group were experienced freelance tour guides and tour operators in the tourism industry in the Bangkok area. Finally, the other group of participants worked in the field of aviation and included passenger service agents, flight attendants, and in-flight service managers from Thailand and Hong Kong-based premium airlines. Overall, the participants volunteered to take part in the study in order to share their perspectives on English communicative competencies in the hospitality sector.

4.3 Research Instruments

The instruments employed in this study consisted of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative research instrument, including the 7-point Likert scale questionnaire of English communicative competency in hospitality, has been adapted from Ho (2020), and contained three main parts: 1) demographic information; 2) communication skills; and 3) recommendations. It has the same question items under three different headings: hotel, tourism, and aviation. There are 27 items in total. The second part was split into seven parts: overall communicative competence, linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, strategic competence, interactional competence, and formulaic competence. The question items were initially written in English before being translated into Thai. Back translation was used to verify the data's validity and reliability. The Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi Human Research Ethics Committee approved the procedure and protocol with regard to conducting this study. The test items were validated by three experts and then piloted with similar group of samples. The value of the alpha coefficient's reliability is 0.85.

The qualitative research instrument involved semi-structured interview questions that were used to triangulate the findings from the questionnaire data from the point of view of stakeholders in the hotel, tourism and aviation industries. The key question list was applied to individual interviewees from these industries. In addition, consecutive queries were asked to clarify their answers.

1. Which English communicative competency in hospitality is the most important?

2. Which English communication skill in hospitality requires improvement?
3. What are the problems that operational personnel encounter when interacting with customers?

The interviews were conducted both on-site and online through voice calls, and were recorded with the interviewees' permission. The process of the interview involved initially addressing a general topic so that the interviewee felt relaxed. The researcher then gradually asked the main interview questions by encouraging the interviewees to utilize their direct experience to answer the questions. The interview ended with the researcher expressing gratitude for the participant's contribution to the study. The duration of the interview was 8–10 minutes. The experts validated the validity of the content of the interview questions following the interview process.

4.4 Data Analysis

The research questions can be answered by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the most important English communication competencies for Thai hospitality. Consequently, both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed. According to Allen and Seaman (2007), the quantitative data of the 7-point Likert rating scales can be calculated and interpreted as follows:

Class interval	=	Upper class limit - Lower class limit/ number of interval
	=	(7-1) / 7
	=	0.86

Mean	Interpretation
6.21 - 7.00	Very important (VI)
5.35 - 6.20	Important (I)
4.48 - 5.34	Slightly important (SI)
3.61 - 4.47	Neutral important (NI)
2.74 - 3.60	Slightly unimportant (SUI)
1.87 - 2.73	Unimportant (UI)
1.00 - 1.86	Very unimportant (VUI)

The questionnaire dealing with English communicative competency in hospitality was analyzed through descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. In addition, content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews.

5. Results and discussion

The overall communicative competencies of the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Overall of communicative competencies

Communicative competencies	Hotel (n=70)			Aviation (n=91)			Tourism (n=72)			Total (n=233)		
	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level
Overall, I think that communicative competence in English is important	6.01	1.20	I	6.73	0.56	VI	5.76	1.48	I	6.21	1.18	VI

The importance of English communicative competence in hotels and tourism was indicated by a mean score of 6.01 and 5.76, respectively, which indicate a high level of satisfaction. In the case of the aviation industry, the mean score is 6.73, indicating a very important level. Next, the specific communicative competencies can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Specific communicative competencies

Communicative competencies	Hotel (n=70)			Aviation (n=91)			Tourism (n=72)			Total (n=233)		
	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level	M	S.D.	Level
Linguistic competence	5.01	1.40	SI	5.93	0.55	I	4.63	1.52	SI	5.27	1.32	SI
Discourse competence	5.03	1.41	SI	5.91	0.66	I	4.60	1.60	SI	5.24	1.36	SI
Sociocultural competence	5.08	1.35	SI	5.97	0.63	I	4.66	1.52	SI	5.28	1.31	SI
Strategic competence	5.04	1.39	SI	6.44	0.64	VI	4.71	1.77	SI	5.48	1.51	I
Interactional competence	5.17	1.33	SI	6.49	0.45	VI	4.72	1.65	SI	5.55	1.43	I
Formulaic competence	4.90	1.42	SI	5.90	0.73	I	4.53	1.75	SI	5.17	1.43	SI
Total	5.07	1.30	SI	6.16	0.41	I	4.66	1.54	SI	5.37	1.32	I

Table 2 shows how hotel, aviation, and tourism personnel perceived the significance of communicative competence in terms of their linguistic, discourse, sociocultural, strategic, interactional, and formulaic skills. For all three industries, the average score for all communicative skills was 5.37, which was at a highly important level. The top three highest mean scores were with regard to interactional, strategic, and sociocultural competences: 5.55 (important), 5.48 (important), and 5.28 (slightly important), respectively.

The mean score for overall competencies in the aviation industry was 6.16, indicating an important level. The mean scores for interactional and strategic competence were 6.49 and 6.44, respectively. However, the mean score for all competences in the tourism industry was 5.37, indicating a slightly important level. The mean scores for interactional and strategic competence were 4.72 and 4.71, respectively. Finally, the average score for overall competence in the hotel was 5.07, indicating a slightly important level. Each communicative competency in the hotel industry was also reported to be of slightly greater importance. Interactional competence had the highest mean score (5.17), followed by sociocultural competence (5.08).

Regarding the findings from the semi-structured interviews, there were 20 key informants, including 8 in the hotel industry from managerial positions and 12 from the guest service departments. In the aviation industry, the key informants included 5 passenger service agents, 5 flight attendants, and 10 senior flight attendants. However, there were only 10 key informants in the form of freelance tour guides involved with the interviews as the epidemic of COVID-19 affected the majority of the country's tour activities. The interview process was discontinued when data saturation was achieved.

In all three industries, the most important communicative skill is the ability to interact with others. Hotels and tourism ranked strategic and socio-cultural competence second and third, respectively. In the aviation industry, socio-cultural competence and strategic competence were ranked second and third, respectively. Table 3 below demonstrates the themes and subthemes regarding the most significant communicative competence for the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries.

Table 3 Subthemes of significant communicative competencies

Themes	Industry	Opinions
Interactional competence	Hotel	Establishing good relationships with customers
		Making customers feel happy and relaxed
		Providing accurate information
		Expressing good intentions and sincerity
	Tourism	Making good introduction
		Making customers feel welcome
		Gaining the trust of customers
	Aviation	Making a good impression
		Applying appropriate verbal and non-verbal language
Strategic competence	Hotel	Dealing with challenges
		Expressing sincerity when solving problems
		Avoiding giving wrong information

Themes	Industry	Opinions
		Using tactful expressions when finding solutions
	Tourism	Using appropriate terms to deal with problems
		Using polite expressions that create a good relationship with customers
		Being knowledgeable when giving specific terms to avoid miscommunication
Socio-cultural competence	Hotel, Tourism and Aviation	Being aware of cultural differences
		Using appropriate words when communicating with customers
		Avoiding sensitive words and topics
		Understanding and speaking with respect to cultural differences

In the hotel industry, it is vital that individuals establish positive relationships with guests. They should endeavor to make guests feel comfortable and welcome. Additionally, any provided information and other important messages must be conveyed precisely to the hotel guest. Therefore, interactional competence was considered a fundamental requirement for hotel staff, including the ability to provide information, negotiate with guests when providing services, and communicating effectively in terms of the basic language functions. Interactional competence also emerged as an important aspect of communicative competence, but it also incorporates strategic competence, which ranks second. Hotel staff must be knowledgeable in order to address problems. They should be able to use expressions to solve problems. The following excerpt provides an example of the supervisors' responses regarding the most essential communicative skill for hotel staff.

Excerpt 1
Pop (hotel manager):"I think that interactional competence is the most important skill that hotel employees should have because giving information, apologizing, and negotiating are all basic skills that we must learn when talking to guests. It is our routine when guests arrive at our hotel. We greet them, give them the necessary information, and most importantly, we make them feel welcome."

Interactional competence is also regarded as very important in tourism. It is essential that tour guides create a good first impression. They must know how to gain the trust and confidence of the tourists. Therefore, they should know how to provide correct information, so dealing with tourists should begin with appropriate greetings and important information to avoid confusing them. Excerpt 2 is an example of an answer from a freelance tour guide regarding the most important form of communicative competence for tourism.

Excerpt 2
Keng (freelance guide): "I am convinced that the most important aspects of tourism are a good introduction and good interaction with customers. If we communicate effectively with them, including by providing accurate information, being friendly, and observing universal manners, we will gain their trust when we ask for their cooperation. It will be less difficult. As a result, none of this will be possible without good customer interaction."

Even though interactional competence is the most important communication skill, insightful information is also important in the field of aviation. Since airline workers often meet passengers from different parts of the world, they should also be able to interact with people from different backgrounds. They should be aware of the level of the language used because there are different classes in the aircraft, and the level of formality in the use of language depends on which class they work in. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of nonverbal language as well as language level. It is meaningless if they speak beautiful English with an inappropriate facial expression. Excerpt 3 and 4 provide examples of the importance of communicative competence in the field of aviation.

Excerpt 3
Jeab (senior flight attendant): "I agree that the most important skill is interactive competence. It is fundamental that we use language to greet, inform, and apologize. However, we must be aware of language and culture because we will be meeting passengers from all over the world and must

interact with them in the appropriate language. Even if we use the wrong words with the passengers, even if we don't mean to, it will cause unnecessary problems. As a result, when communicating with them, we must be mindful of cultural differences."

Excerpt 4
Nui (passenger service agent): "Language use is incomplete without a balance of nonverbal language. In my opinion, nonverbal communication is more important than perfect language. No matter how well you speak the language, good body language is essential."

It is evident that the interactional aspect of communicative competence was the most significant in all three disciplines. To maintain effective communication in English, service personnel in the hospitality industry must be able to inform, inquire, pacify, apologize, negotiate, and clarify effectively, since this is the foundation of the communication that they, as a service provider, should be able to provide at the outset in order to interact effectively with customers. This is in line with Kongtham's (2020) study, which indicates that speaking skills are crucial for tourism employees in terms of providing information, service, and additional assistance. In addition, these results align with the findings of Jiang, and Alexakis (2017) who identified oral communication as the most important skill for hospitality students to possess when interacting with clients. Moreover, Suh et al. (2012), in a study of the communicative competence of hospitality managers revealed that interactional competence in terms of communicating with guests effectively was listed as the top priority.

Strategic competence was found to be the most important strategic skill in the aviation and tourism industries. In the hotel business, it was the third-most important competence after sociocultural competence. This may be due to the fact that staff in the aviation industry are required to be aware of the language proficiency of passengers who are prepared to pay more for a more comfortable cabin. Hence, it is essential for them to equip themselves with adequate game plans for dealing with passengers in different areas of the aircraft and addressing passengers' problems, given the limited resources available onboard. Moreover, with regard to employees in the field of tourism it is necessary to maintain good relationships with customers since they have to spend a good deal of time interacting with one another. They are required to use appropriate strategic plans to communicate, such as making appointments and confirming information. This also highlights the problems of the hotel staff in Firharmawan, and Andika's (2019) study, and tourism staff in Kongtham's (2020) study, which included unfamiliar linguistic features in oral communication with foreign visitors and dealing with unknown vocabulary. In addition, the international clientele of Thai full-service restaurants praised the staff's communication skills (Chewwasung, 2020). The participants emphasized the importance of vocabulary and technical terms as components of linguistic competency for staff in the aviation industry, since they deal with passengers, flight information, and safety regulations.

However, the hotel staff placed the sociocultural aspect in second place behind interactional competence. This might be because such employees encounter a range of customers with cultural differences who may have different requirements. Therefore, they need to identify and resolve miscommunications that may occur when dealing with customers of various cultural backgrounds. For example, some expressions might sound inappropriate when used with certain customers. This is in accordance with the findings of Jeou-Shuyan et al. (2011) who discovered that the ability to solve problems was a crucial element, especially for managerial-level staff in the hotel industry. As the hotel employees expressed concern with regard to the use of correct expressions with multi-cultural guests, personnel in the field of aviation were most likely to encounter multi-cultural passengers, while the tourism employees were more likely to demonstrate sociocultural competence in relation to social status and distance, as they may spend long periods of time with their guests during tour programs and vacations. These are all in line with the findings of Suh et al. (2012) who expressed the view that hospitality personnel in contemporary workplaces use English for international communication with people of various cultural backgrounds.

The findings of the semi-structured interviews also revealed that communication challenges are encountered in the hospitality industry that might hamper effective communication. Table 4 illustrates the problem of communicative competence in the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries. When it comes to communicating with customers, staff in the hotel, tourism, and aviation industries all have similar problems and worries. The main focus is communication issues, and there are three subthemes: cultural differences, technical vocabulary, and the influence of body language on communication.

Table 4 Subthemes of problems in communicative competencies

Subthemes	Areas/opinions in hotel, aviation, and tourism
Cultural differences	Different accents
	Fast speakers
	Misinterpretation due to cultural differences
	Limited English proficiency
Technical vocabulary	Misunderstanding of technical terms
	Restriction on necessary expressions
	Wrong word choice
Impact of body language	Communication enhancement
	Additional methods to convey meaning
	Additional methods to express sincerity

It was observed that hospitality workers faced challenges when it came to communicating with customers when they had to deal with different cultures. It was stated that most people who worked in the hospitality industry didn't understand people who spoke quickly or had different accents. They claimed that they could not understand the meaning of what they were saying and frequently misinterpreted them. In addition, the cultural differences frequently caused issues because staff sometimes responded too quickly to the customers' needs without paying attention to the details. When they listened to customers what they heard was not aways accurate, so they had to be cautious and, if necessary, request clarification to avoid misinterpretation. Last but not least, some non-native English-speaking foreigners did not always speak English well, so it was helpful to learn third languages such as Mandarin and Japanese. As a result, they could better understand the clients' basic needs.

Next, the subtheme of technical terminology affects customer communication. This section provides examples of two hospitality employees describing the challenges they face due to a lack of technical terminology. According to the interview data, developing a strong vocabulary was advantageous for all hospitality personnel because it enabled them to choose and use words to communicate effectively with customers. If they had a larger vocabulary, they should be able to use the language more fluently if they encountered any challenges. Some words could be useful in the field, and it was a good idea to learn them so they felt more confident when dealing with problems.

Excerpt 5
Nong (hotel front desk): "A small vocabulary is also a problem because most of the words are technical, and customers often ask questions we can't answer because we don't know the right words to get the message across."

Excerpt 6
San (flight attendant): "I don't understand the customers because they are from different countries and use different words, such as "blanket." I need to learn what each continent's word for "blanket" is."

Strong verbal language improves communication, but facial expressions, the appropriate tone of voice, and proper posture, also appeared to be helpful communication tools. Frequently, non-verbal language supported staff in resolving issues with customers because it allowed them to express their sincerity more effectively than words. Furthermore, they stated that good body language enabled them to communicate effectively with customers; for example, when customers were upset about receiving incorrect messages, their smile and open body language assisted them in explaining how they wished to express regret rather than repeatedly apologizing. Excerpt 7 and 8 illustrate some of the advantages of using body language to improve communication.

Excerpt 7
Koi (senior flight attendant): "Problems always happen when we misunderstand what passengers say and act in a way they don't expect, so complaints are always caused by these things. Body language is important because it can help us communicate our true intentions to the passenger."

Excerpt 8
Nut (hotel front desk): "Inappropriate body language is always at the root of problems. We say nice things, but our facial expressions don't match. When we communicate with the guests, they may notice that we are not sincere."

Concerning communicative issues, both of these respondents are of the opinion that they emerge as a result of cultural differences, lack or misuse of terminology, and the use of inappropriate body language. A lack of vocabulary, rapid speech, and varying accents made it difficult to comprehend what is being said. The majority of employees thought that exposure to the use of language enhanced their ability to comprehend and respond to the needs of their customers. This agrees with the results of Namtapi (2022), which indicate that foreign English accents are one of the major concerns for tourism personnel, and those of Khuong (2015) which showed that the lack of opportunities to use language in real-world situations led to poor communication outcomes. The amount of time spent learning a language may lead to improved communication skills when it is necessary to talk to people from different cultures.

In addition, the effort to improve communication relies not only on the opportunities to use the language, but also on the comprehension of technical terms pertinent to the respective field. This is due to the fact that it is the predominant mode of communication in working communities. A poor choice of words increases the likelihood of misinterpretation, not only with coworkers but also with customers. This fits with what Prima et al. (2022) found, which was that vocabulary was seen as the most important aspect of good communication. Lastly, nonverbal communication could not be ignored. The open-ended responses associated with nonverbal language support effective communication. In addition to other communicative skills, participants in this study noted that effective communication requires body language such as eye contact and facial expressions. This supports the findings of Dhyani et al. (2022) who found that non-verbal language and interpersonal skills were also important for communication.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the needs for communicative competencies in the Thai hospitality industry, including the hotel, aviation, and tourism sectors. Interactional competency emerged as the top competency for interacting with customers in all fields. Moreover, strategic competence, which refers to the ability to recognize problems incurring in communication with others and to implement treatments for types of miscommunications, was essential for the hotel and aviation industries, while the hotel industry placed second priority on sociocultural competency as they have more need to interact with hotel guests due to the duration of their stay. Regarding the challenges resulting from awareness of cultural differences, knowledge of technical terminology, and the appropriate use of body language, these could be considered the prerequisites for ensuring effective intercultural communication.

The findings of this study indicate that interactional competency is of considerable importance within the hotel, airline, and tourism sectors. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate the fundamental principles of utilizing suitable language patterns to meet the requirements of staff in these sectors. For example, it is of paramount importance that hospitality employees possess adequate problem-solving abilities, as relying solely on basic discourse may be inadequate in order to effectively address concerns. The capacity to resolve difficulties effectively serves as an indicator of staff professionalism, and has a direct impact on the overall reputation of the hospitality companies concerned. In addition, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of non-verbal language and cultural awareness, since they are recognized as influential elements that contribute to the effectiveness of communication. In conclusion, it is advisable to examine the linguistic characteristics of the three prominent communicative competences in order to furnish hospitality professionals with a readily available instrument for enhancing their language proficiency.

7. Acknowledgements

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