

*Problem Analysis of English Major Undergraduate Students on Internship:  
A Case Study of Burapha University*

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Abstract

Thailand may encounter both opportunities and crises when the ASEAN Economic Community is implemented in 2015 because newly graduated students are likely to face the difficulty in the use of English language in the domestic and international workforce. As language teacher, to prepare university students, especially those whose major were English is the mission of the department. This study, therefore, focuses on identifying the problems in using English language that the undergraduate students encountered while they were on internship with the entrepreneurs. 32 subjects were fourth-year students who enrolled *Practicum* course in the first semester of 2013. These university students were asked to complete the questionnaires to report the problems on their internship. In the first part, it can be reported that the majority of the students used English language at work mostly used their English with non-native speaker customers. They recognized their English ability at the intermediate level. Speaking and listening skills were the Very difficult frequently used skills while they rarely used writing skills at their workplace. However, students reported in Part Two that they perceived that speaking and listening skills were their first and second rank problems in their internship. Also, it was found that writing and reading skills were lesser used than the aforementioned skills in Part One and students rated these skills at the third and fourth place of their problems. The findings, hence, could be used as a basis in developing English courses for English major students in order to enable them to acquire higher English proficiency before internship.

**Keywords:** needs analysis, university students, EFL, AEC

## 1. Introduction

Producing efficient graduates to the workforce is the crucial responsibility of the higher education institute. The implementation of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 awakens universities and education institutes among the ASEAN countries to prepare their students to be able to encounter more competitive marketplace of employment, especially the use of English language (Jarupan 2013, Noom-ura 2013). Thai students are lack of opportunities to use English language apart from their classroom as English is the foreign language in Thailand. They can use English only in their classroom. Even the fact that English language has been a compulsory language subject in the curriculum of Thai primary schools. Before earning bachelor degree, students have studied English for at least sixteen years, six years in their primary school, six years in secondary school and four year in their university. As shown in many research currently about the competency of English users in Thailand, it was still found that the learners have the problems in using English for communication. (Jarupan 2013, Chuanchaisit & Prapphal 2009, Klaichim et al 2000, Noom-ura 2013, Somdee & Suppasetsee 2013).

Comparing with other ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Malaysia or the Philippines which English is their official language or their second language, Thai graduate might face a great barrier for the competitive in employment after the opening to the gate of AEC in 2015 (Noom-ura 2013). Hence, the situation of low English competency in Thai users must be improved. Noom-ura (2013) has classified the English-teaching problems in Thailand into five categories, that is, (1) problems involving teachers, (2) problems involving students, (3) problems involving curricular and textbooks, (4) problems involving assessment and (5) problems involving other factors. It was found in this study that students' lack of opportunities to practice English skills was the crucial problems. This also contribute to the lack of confidence in using language for communication.

Hence, providing appropriate proportion of contents and skills in each course is important for language teachers. To find out what skills students weaken and require to fulfil their language competency is the first task of the teacher. Needs analysis then can be employed as the teacher's instrument to find out what students really need and encounter with. The analysis on language use and skills on the internship is, thus, useful for teacher in order to revise courses for the students. This can help to meet the student's real requirement before students enter to the real workforce.

## **2. Background Information**

Bachelor degree in English (B.A. in English) providing by Department of Western Language, Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences, Burapha University is four-year curriculum. Students require to do an internship when they finish their third year. They are expected to use English language at work be on the work for a period of at least 200 hours.

Students can decide to work with cooperation they are interested in, such as airline industries, hotel, tour agencies or any government and private corporations. The internship will be during the summer semester but will be credited on the first semester of their fourth year.

One of the reason for having internship between year three and year four of the curriculum is for students to have one year for improving their English skills. After internship, students might realize their real English competency reflecting from the counterparts they have worked with during the internship, example, their customers and their supervisors, etc. They hence can spend one last year in the university fulfil their own requirement studying five elective major courses (three-credit courses). They can opt English for Professional courses such as; English for Airline Industry, English for Secretary, English for Hotel and so on when they found out their interest on these professionals. Or their can strengthen their language skill subject as well in English for presentation or things like that.

## **3. Literature Review**

Needs analysis or so-called problem analysis have been conducted for numerous research projects in order to investigate learners' needs and problems. Needs analysis enables the course designer or teachers to achieve two things: (1) to produce a detailed profile of what the learner needs to be able to do in English in an occupation or study for which he or she is being trained; and (2) to produce a specification of the language skills, functions and forms required to carry out the communication described in the needs profile (Hawkey 1980).

To access learners' attitudes, needs and problems, questionnaires, interviews and observations are commonly used. This is to make sure that courses provided to learners were not teacher-centered but truly learner-centered. Hence, a number of research articles, thesis, and books related to needs analysis and problems analysis in EFL and ESL contexts have been reviewed in this study. It can be summarized as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Lists of needs analysis and problems analysis in EFL and ESL contexts**

Author(s)	Settings	Findings/ Implications
Aunruen (2005)	The exploration of the needs and problems in English language of travel agents working in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Questionnaires were administered as the research instrument.	The most important skills was speaking and it was also the most encountered skill. However, the others skills such as listening, writing and reading were required in their jobs as well.
Bocher & Smalkoski (2002)	ESL students had difficulties in speaking and listening in a health-care setting. The use of interview, observations and questionnaires were applied to gather the information about the objective needs of students.	The course had been develop in the area of greatest difficulty: communicating with clients and colleagues
Hamra & Syatriana (2012)	Needs analysis was applied to improve teaching model and teaching materials for reading classes	Students' score improved after learning in the revised teaching model and materials.
Ibrahim & Rahman (2013)	Teachers' attitudes on the use of needs analysis in design writing materials in writing class was administered.	Teachers agreed in the use of needs analysis to find proper ESP/EAP material writings and they convinced that this can help the class succeed.
Klaichim et al (2009)	The questionnaires were employed to obtain the data from teachers and students to find the problems and needs in English teaching and learning at institutes of physical education in Thailand.	It revealed that there were many factors affecting problems in learning English, that is, students' behaviors, students' language skills, English language curriculum and course content, teaching material, teaching methods, teachers' performance and institutes' support.
Pawapatcharandom (2007)	Questionnaire was employed to Thai students to investigate their English language problems and learning strategies in the international problems at Mahidol University in Thailand	The most serious problems of the students was writing skills. They can finish writing task within the limited time whilst intercultural communication was the least problem.
Preechawat (2010)	Questionnaires were employed to explore the English language problems and needs of Thai officers in an international company.	The majority of the subjects agreed that writing skills were the most used skills and were perceived as the most difficult skills. However, they needed the improvement in speaking skills rather than writing skills.

Soruc (2012)	Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with ESL students to reflect the attitudes towards the study program in school in Istanbul	The language programs were revised to meet students' needs.
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There are various ways to access the needs of the subjects depending on the purpose of the analysis. However, as can be seen from Table 1, questionnaires have been the most popular method in need analysis studies whilst some research studies employed the combination of questionnaires and competency test or the combination of questionnaires and interviews. In this studies, the use of questionnaires were administered.

#### 4. Research Questions

This study, therefore, investigates and analyses the problems of English major undergraduate students while working with the entrepreneurs on their internship. So three research questions were addressed in the following:

- 1) *What are the language skills students used most on their internship?*
- 2) *What skills did students encounter the most on their internship?*

#### 5. Methodology

##### 1) *Subjects*

The subjects were 32 fourth-year English major undergraduate students who enrolled Practicum course in the first semester of 2013. They were required to be on the work in field using English language ability and skills in a government departments, government enterprises, or private corporations for a period of at least 200 hours. The period of internship may vary starting from the end of March 2013 to May 2013.

##### 2) *Instrument*

To construct and develop the questionnaires used in this study, a number of research studies related to problems and needs analysis for language teaching and learning were reviewed (Arunruen 2005, Ibrahim & Rahman 2013, Preechawat 2010, Soruc 2012). The questionnaires can be divided into two parts. The personal information and the skills frequently used while internship were asked in the first part. The second part was five-Likert-scale questions asking students to report their problems in four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The responses from students in the first part were calculated and arranged into order from the greatest to the least. The answers from second part were calculated to find the means. Then the most and the least using skills and skills students reported that they had the problems with while internship were analyzed and reported in Discussion section.

##### 3) *Data Collection*

Questionnaire was administered to obtain the data at the last week of students' internship. Teachers who came to visit students at workplace asked the students to complete questionnaires while the teachers had discussed about students' performance with their supervisors in order to get the feedback from the entrepreneurs informally. This consumed about one hour for one office. 32 fourth-year English major undergraduate students were selected with simple cluster sampling technique from 80 students. They can be divided into eight groups by the business type of their entrepreneurs: hotel, tourism, airline, duty free shop, government entrepreneur, private company, and press. At the end of visiting day, students returned the questionnaires to the teachers. The questionnaires then were calculated and analyzed as report in Results and Discussion sections. The students had an opportunities to report their problems while working on that day. The teachers and the students then discussed about the students' performance, progress and problems for about fifteen to thirty minutes.

## 6. Results

### 1) *What are the language skills students used most on their internship?*

According to the finding in Part One, 87.5% of students or 28 students rated themselves as the intermediate users of English language while only 4 persons or 12.5% considered themselves advanced English speakers. During the internship, 46.87% of students used English all the time and 50% of them reported that they sometimes used language. However, only one person rarely used language at work. They also reported that they Very difficultly used their language with customers (81.25% or 26 from 32 students). They rarely used English language with their supervisor and their colleagues (15.62% and 12.5% or 5 and 4 from 32 students, respectively).

Additionally and interestingly, as can be seen in Table 2 below, the findings from Part One showed that among six English skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary, the majority of the students or 29 from 32 student often used speaking skill when they were on the job. The second-ranked skill was speaking, it earned 26 votes from all students. Then the lower ranks were vocabulary, reading, writing and grammar, respectively.

**Table 2: Frequency of Language Skills Used on Students' Internship**

<b>General Information</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<i>Level of English proficiency</i>		
Beginner	0	
Intermediate	28	87.5
Advanced	4	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>People the students contacted using English language</i>		
Foreign customers	26	74.29
Entrepreneur/ supervisor	5	14.29
Colleagues	4	11.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>Rank of language skills and elements which the students used Very difficult</i>		
Speaking	29	29
Listening	26	26
Vocabulary	18	18
Reading	15	15
Writing	8	8
Grammar	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

2) *What skills did students encounter the most on their internship?*

In Part Two of the questionnaire, students were asked to rate their problems in English use that they encountered in four basic skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - on five Likert scales that can be interpreted as follows:

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Problems of English skills</b>	<b>Mean Range</b>
1	Very difficult	1.00-1.80
2	Difficult	1.81-2.60
3	Fairly difficult	2.61-3.40
4	Not very difficult	3.41-4.20
5	Not difficult	4.21-5.00

**Table 3: Students' Problems of Listening Skills on Their Internship**

<b>Problems in Listening</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Listening for details from foreign customers	3.56	.804	Not very difficult
Listening for opinions	3.63	.907	Not very difficult
Listening to telephone conversations	3.66	1.153	Not very difficult
Listening for gist in business	3.69	.965	Not very difficult
Listening business conversations	3.88	.833	Not very difficult
Listening for basic instructions	4.19	.780	Not very difficult
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.77</b>		Not very difficult

It is obviously shown from Table 3 that the students did not have difficulty in listening to foreign customers, as seen from the total means of 3.77. It can be interpreted as 'Not very difficult'. However, the most difficult aspect in listening English for them was *listening for details from foreign customers* (mean = 3.56) whilst the least problem in listening aspect was listing for basic instructions (mean = 4.19).

**Table 4: Students' Problems of Speaking Skills on Their Internship**

<b>Problems in Speaking</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Speaking on the telephone	3.41	1.122	Not very difficult
Speaking for negotiation	3.65	1.066	Not very difficult
Speaking to express opinions	3.69	.821	Not very difficult
Speaking for asking and giving information	3.81	.859	Not very difficult
Speaking at the meeting	3.88	1.157	Not very difficult
Basic conversation with foreigners	3.91	.893	Not very difficult
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.72</b>		Not very difficult



From Table 4, the students encountered some difficulties in speaking English with foreign clients at not very difficult level in overall or at the mean of 3.72. The hardest speaking aspect for them was speaking on the telephone (mean = 3.41) whilst the easiest speaking sitting for students was basic conversation with foreigners (mean = 3.91).

**Table 5: Students' Problems of Reading Skills on Their Internship**

<b>Problems in Reading</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Business reading for gist	3.84	.884	Not very difficult
Reading online information	3.84	.884	Not very difficult
Reading general document	3.93	.871	Not very difficult
<b>Total</b>	3.88		Not very difficult

According to Table 5, the study on students' problems of reading skills revealed that the students dealt with reading on their internship with not very difficult level. They encountered with business reading for gist and reading online information with the similar means of 3.84 while they can read general document more comfortable comparing with the other two reading pieces at the mean of 3.93.

**Table 6: Students' Problems of Writing Skills on Their Internship**

<b>Problems in Writing</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Writing brochure and advertisement	3.72	1.023	Not very difficult
Summarizing a conclusion	3.72	.924	Not very difficult
Writing essays	3.75	1.047	Not very difficult
Writing business letters	3.78	1.157	Not very difficult
Writing business memo	3.91	.928	Not very difficult
Writing emails	3.91	.963	Not very difficult
<b>Total</b>	3.80		Not very difficult

It can also interpret from the findings from Table 6 that students encountered difficulties in writings at not very difficult level in overall with the mean of 3.80. The hardest writing tasks for them were writing brochure and advertisement and, summarizing a conclusion with the same mean of 3.72 whilst the most comfortable tasks of writing were writing business memo and writing emails with the means of 3.91.

All in all, when considered the means of all four basic skills of language (Table 3-6) it was found that speaking skills were the most difficult skills whilst reading skills were the most comfortable skills for students on their internship with the average means of 3.72 and 3.88, respectively.

**Table 7: Comparison of the most used skills and the skills which the students encountered problems Very difficult**

Language Skills	Rank of most used skills	Rank of most problem-encountered skills
Listening	2	1
Speaking	1	1
Reading	3	3
Writing	4	2

Regarding to the findings from Table 2 to 6, it can be summarized as can be seen in Table 7 that the majority of students ranked speaking as the skills they used most in their job while they were on the internship whilst it was speaking skills that the same group of students reported that they had encountered most with together. As listening skills were the skills that students rated that it was their first ranked problems on their job, these skills were at the second rank of the most used skills from the first part of the questionnaire as well. In addition, it can also be indicated that reading skills and writing skills were the skills that students use lesser as well as they were skills that they had problems lesser comparing with the others.

## 7. Conclusions and Discussions

As can be seen from Table 2, the most used skills of the students on their internship gaining from Part One of the questionnaire was speaking. Then the lower ranks were listening, reading and writing, respectively. It was also obviously shown from Table 3 to 6 that students realized that listening and speaking skills were their most difficult skills when they really used them on their jobs.

Regarding to the findings in this study, the implication might be further for three stakeholders; (1) students, (2) English teachers, and (3) curriculum administrators. For (1) English major students who are preparing themselves, they would learn that speaking was the most used skill when entering to the workforce, they then can practice to boost this skill beforehand. As well as the students who finished the

apprenticeship, still they have a time to be fluent in their weak language skills and be keen on their strength. Also, (2) English teachers can adjust their courses in according to the most used skills and the problem skills the students encountered with most. For (3) curriculum administrators, to ensure that they can provide the proper curriculum to suit the workforce. The more the newly graduates are prepared to get ready for their future career and the opening to the gate of AEC in 2015, the more advance they can grow up in the world of employment.

Additionally, for the researcher herself, with the concerning of AEC in 2015, the data earning from this study will be applied for a curriculum development of the subjects she taught in Burapha University. To further this study, the questionnaires employed in this study will be used to develop the major subjects in English business track.

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