

Exploring current situations and corporate needs of English language use in workplace:  
Thai professionals' voices to Tertiary Education\*

การศึกษาสภาพและความต้องการของสถานประกอบการในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในที่ทำงาน:  
เสียงสะท้อนของพนักงานต่อการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา

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**Abstract**

In most organizations, at a national or an international level, English language proficiency yields great profits in job achievement and advancement. This study aimed 1) to survey current English language use in the workplace, 2) to investigate English language needs in the workplace, and 3) to examine organizational support for English language skill improvement. The participants were 450 Thai professionals from local and international companies in Asoke, Sukhumvit business area in Bangkok, Thailand. The mixed method approach was employed in this study. The instruments used in this study were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed by using frequency and percentage. The results showed that 1) English was highly required in their workplace, in particular speaking and listening skills, and problems in the language use were found, 2) speaking skills were prioritized and needed in the workplace context 3) the professionals were supported to take English courses in other institutes for English language skill improvement. This study will provide many benefits for English language teachers and course designers in their consideration the revision of English courses at the tertiary level.

**Keywords:** English language use; workplace communication; corporate needs; tertiary education

## บทคัดย่อ

ความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในองค์กรระดับชาติหรือระดับนานาชาติ ถือเป็นประโยชน์อย่างยิ่งต่อความสำเร็จและความก้าวหน้าในการทำงาน การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ตรวจสอบสภาพการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในที่ทำงาน 2) ศึกษาความต้องการภาษาอังกฤษในที่ทำงาน และ 3) ตรวจสอบการสนับสนุนการพัฒนาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษจากองค์กร กลุ่มประชากรที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือ พนักงานคนไทย จำนวน 450 คน ที่ทำงานในบริษัทของไทยและระหว่างประเทศ ย่านธุรกิจจตุจักร สุขุมวิท กรุงเทพมหานคร การศึกษานี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยแบบผสม โดยมีเครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือ แบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้จำนวน ค่าความถี่และค่าร้อยละ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ภาษาอังกฤษมีความจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งในการทำงาน โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง ทักษะการพูดและการฟัง และปัญหาในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษถูกพบในที่ทำงาน 2) ทักษะการพูดจัดเป็นทักษะสำคัญอันดับแรกกับบริบทการทำงาน 3) พนักงานคนไทยได้รับการสนับสนุนในการเรียนหลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษกับสถาบันการศึกษาภายนอกเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะทางภาษาอังกฤษ การศึกษานี้จะเป็นประโยชน์ต่ออาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษ และผู้เขียนหลักสูตรในการพิจารณาการปรับปรุงหลักสูตรภาษาอังกฤษระดับอุดมศึกษา

**คำสำคัญ:** การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ การสื่อสารในที่ทำงาน ความต้องการของสถานประกอบการ การศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา

## Introduction

In an this of globalization, communication and language skills, particularly English, play a vital role in most workplaces in organizations operating at the national or international level. English language provides a mode of communication for people in the international business community. Good English communication skills are also a means of professional development, as these fundamental skills provide the speaker with additional advantages (Mehta & Mehta, 2007). Individuals without efficient communication skills tend to be less successful in professional terms. Apart from language and communication skills, each professional has to deal with communication situations in a variety of contexts. In other words, different situations occur in different types of workplaces, depending on the nature of the profession. For instance, the following communicative situations are apparently common in industry and business: talking about oneself and one's job; travel; social situations (e.g. introductions, small talk); routine telephone calls (e.g. taking messages, answering inquiries); contacting clients, hosting visitors or participating in visits; solving computer problems; explaining a process or a method; discussions concerning deliveries, installations and maintenance; fault analysis and problem solutions; tutoring a new employee; reading manuals, instructions, professional literature; reading company documentation; writing email messages,

faxes, and taking notes in a meeting; writing memos, reports, documents; giving a presentation; meetings and negotiations; and others (e.g. interpretation, translation) (Huhta, 1999).

Based on such situations, it is essential for non-native English speaking professionals, in particular Thai ones, to use the English language to communicate effectively in the workplace. However, certain Thai professionals have faced difficulties in English communication which may affect their work performance and their organization's image (Charunsri, 2011; Haekawee, 2010; Hanyawongse, 2007; Laohachaiboon, 2011; Luankanokrat, 2011; Meggiolaro, 2007; Nimnuch, 2011; Samakkhetgarn, 2008; Yhouyhen, 2008). This fact leads to this study's research objectives: to survey the current situations in the workplace; and to identify corporate requirements for English language use in the Thai workplace. In the following section, contemporary situations, the theory of needs analysis, and the corporate need for language use were reviewed and discussed.

## **Theoretical perspectives**

### **The current situations in the Thai workplace**

The issues of current situations and English communication in the workplace have been studied worldwide at both national and international levels. This is especially true in the case of non-native English speaking countries, which use English as an international language in most professional areas, but experience difficulty in using the language. In Thai organizations operating at a national level, the most serious communication problem in English language is writing skills, because professionals, such as secretaries, are required to deal with documents such as e-mail, and on some occasions, have to personally contact foreigners (Lumchan, 2004), but they experience difficulty in producing correct sentences, and lack sufficient skills and knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (Thaveeprayoon, 2011). Most professionals in organizations operating at the national or international level do not spend a great amount of time using English to personally communicate with other organizations, their language proficiency, and their speaking skill in particular, is perceived to be at the poor level (Talangsri, 2009). In addition, because of the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, interactions between citizens in the region will increase, and by necessity the common language used will be English. Therefore, more communication problems which may arise draw attention to this key issue and need careful concern from individuals and educational institutions (Rajprasit & Pratoomrat, 2012).

Regarding organizations at the national level, the most acute communication problems include speaking and listening skills of second language speakers in various professions, including front office staff at hotels (Charunsri, 2011), staff at a Thai government

savings bank (Meggiolaro, 2007), and at the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) (Luankanokrat, 2011). Many researchers have identified specific problems when the professionals orally communicate with foreigners, which include both native and non-native English speakers. One of the most serious problems is the incomprehensibility of certain foreign accents, such as the Indian or the Australian accent. (Chenaksara, 2005). Additionally, these professionals are unable to produce clear, and correct pronunciation (Bhundhuchareon, 2002; Dejkunjorn, 2005), to speak fluently (Hanyawongse, 2007; Nimnuch, 2011), to use grammar, and vocabulary properly during conversation (Samakkhetgarn, 2008), to catch some words in a conversation (Yhouyhen, 2008), and to make polite requests (Haekawee, 2010). Moreover, a limited range of vocabulary and redundant messages can also cause problems in the workplace (Laohachaiboon, 2011).

As a result of the aforementioned problems, numerous researchers have revealed how English communication problems have arisen. In a linguistic context, overgeneralization and interference from the native language are the main causes of such problems, as well as the complexity of the English language (Riddiboot, 2002), as English is their second language (Chenaksana, 2005) and not something that they routinely use in their private lives. As for the personal context, nationality, work experience and level of education, as well as attitude and environment are also significant (Lumchan, 2004), whereas other theorists claim that language proficiency, personal strategies for English communication and cultural background are equally valid (Sintipong, 2008) and dramatically affect each individual's professional communicative experiences. In addition, language courses both during tertiary education and after graduation are an important aspect of developing language skills. Therefore, professionals tend to experience communication problems in the workplace as a result of their language skills not being developed adequately in courses during their tertiary or post-graduate studies (Tangniam, 2006). Interestingly, the age of the language user influences their ability to use English. For example, younger staff members in the Thai tourism industry are highly competent in terms of speaking and listening skills in comparison to the senior staff (Pasitwilaitum, 2005). For these reasons, English communication problems in the workplace need an urgent solution. Apparently, in the professional context, each organization has to offer an English training course to improve the communication skills of their employees. In the educational context, especially at the tertiary level, institutions have to follow a similar approach, take responsibility for identifying the causes of such problems, and come up with viable solutions. Inevitably, complaints from the organizations to educational institutions specified that recent graduates were not well prepared in domain-specific knowledge and English language proficiency (Bouzidi, 2009), and would therefore not be regarded as potential employees by most

organizations at a national and international level. Therefore, to solve the problem of graduates with dissatisfactory English communication skills, a needs analysis of English language use in workplace should be conducted to identify which specific areas should be used in the English language curriculum development.

### **Needs analysis and corporate need for language use**

The needs analysis, emerged in the 1960s (Koster, 2004) and is a necessary initial step in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. Needs analysis is specifically used for the purpose of analyzing language needs and shaping efficient language courses in accordance with information obtained from both individuals and groups of individuals (Richterich, 1983). This analysis is the systematic collection of all subjective and objective information, and is essential for defining and validating defensible curriculum (Brown, 2006). Various methodologies can be used before, during and after a language course in accordance with the needs analysis (Hyland, 2003). Such analysis provides its implications to language courses at educational institutions, in particular at the tertiary level, and in language training courses held by organizations. It can also be regarded as a part of innovating and improving foreign language curricula in education, demonstrating foreign language teaching objectives with respect to educational or in-company language teaching, developing educational or in-company language teaching programs, drawing up a national policy for foreign languages, and initiating the link between English language skills and trading performance needs (Huhta, 2010). The content of needs analysis clarified by Wu (2010) cited in Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John, (1998) consists of the following: professional information about the learners (e.g. target situation analysis and objective needs); personal information about the learners (e.g. affective factors such as learning experience, cultural information; target language information about the learners (e.g. present situational analysis for the analyst to assess; identifying what the learners lack (e.g. the gap between personal and target language information about the learners); language learning information (e.g. learning needs); professional communication information (e.g. linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, and genre analysis); learner preferences; and information about the environment in which the course will be conducted. Therefore, more efficient course design leads to increased learning achievement, since the design will be relevant and meet the needs of language learners within the context of workplace communication.

In Thailand, research of the needs analysis of language use in the workplace have confirmed that the need for English language skills is at an all-time high, and that Thai professionals still have to improve their English language proficiency, particularly in the

professional context in terms of professional achievement and career advancement. Among the four language skills, listening is the one which Thai professionals need to improve the most. Apparently, professionals in organizations operating at the international level are required to master listening skills because of the need to communicate with colleagues and/or business counterparts, who are either native or non-native English speakers. For instance, Thai engineers in a multinational company have to use their listening skills the most, specifically to listen to instructions from a foreign supervisor (Sopon, 2001). It is the same case for Thai pilots, who identified listening as the most essential English skill required during flights (Dejkunjom, 2005). Furthermore, in a multinational companies, listening skills are prioritized as the most important skill to develop at both the managerial (Pasitwilaithum, 2005), and practitioner levels (Srichomtha, 2010) because this skill is one of the key factors which may lead to their future promotions, greater service satisfaction, and a higher potential for competitiveness and success in their professions (Tangniam, 2006). Therefore, they have to be familiar with the range of different accents and types of pronunciation used by foreigners. Apart from listening, speaking is another vital skill for professionals. This is particularly true in professional fields in which Thais have to communicate with foreigners, such as the hospitality and tourism industry (Haekawee, 2010), international business (Sangsook, 2007), banking and finance (Thaveeprayoon, 2011), and also have to conduct face-to-face conversations in English under different conditions and in varying situations (Choompon, 2009; Nimnuch, 2011). In other words, this skill is used frequently and essential in order to get their jobs done (Lumchan, 2004).

To gain insights into language skills needs, certain studies identify the specific skill needs in accordance with professional tasks. For instance, Thai business professionals need listening skills for oral presentation and making plans for the future, speaking skills for face-to-face conversations with foreign customers and colleagues, oral presentations, talking about the future plans, and writing skills for writing reports (Pingyoad, 2005). However, listening is the highest priority; Thai professionals need be familiar with the varying accents and pronunciation of native and non-native speakers. Likewise, reading skills are also important, as they require skills such as identifying the main idea, analyzing the content, and rapidly searching for information. This skill is necessary because Thai professionals need to access up-to-date information and acquire useful knowledge for their work from textbooks, journals, articles, or news. Another necessary skill is speaking, as Thai professionals must often interact with foreigners, e.g. to have a discussion or a meeting or to make a presentation. The other key skill is writing as it is necessary for Thai professionals to write e-mails, letters, reports, and proposals (Chittavitti, 2005). However, the levels of needs vary and depend on the nature of each

professional area. For instance, listening skills are required most in tourism, agriculture, agro-industry, and trading, while writing skills are required the most for real estate and interior decoration, IT, and finance and banking (Hanyawongse, 2007). In addition, businesspeople in the handicraft industry require speaking skills the most (Yutdhana, 2000).

According to the aforementioned, the English language has become a main medium for workplace communication, and an individual with a sufficient level of English proficiency may succeed in terms of both job recruitment and career advancement. However, problems about workplace communication in English language seem to be unsolvable for many Thai professionals (Charunsri, 2011; Haekawee, 2010; Luankanokrat, 2011; Nimnuch, 2011; Srichomtha, 2010; Thaveeprayoon, 2011). In order to explore whether the problems still exist, and how Thai professionals experience in workplace communication, the present study aimed to survey the current situation of English language use in workplace, to investigate the English language needs of Thai professionals in their workplace, and to examine organizational support for English language skill improvement. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the current situations regarding English language use among Thai professionals in their workplace?
- 2) To what extent of the language do these professionals need to use in their workplace?
- 3) What is the organizational support for the language skill improvement for these professionals?

The outcomes of this study will provide needs analysis for Thai professionals, as well as describe the present situation regarding English language use in workplace in the Thai context. Moreover, educational institutions, in particular at the tertiary level, will have a clearer picture of English language use through feedback from Thai professionals in actual workplaces, in order to more accurately develop and design a curriculum to train and produce a workforce that meets corporate needs. The scope of this study is limited to two primary objectives: the current situation in Thai workplaces and the needs of corporations, such as effective English language use in the workplace, and the organizational support for English language skill improvement for Thai professionals.

## Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted in Asoke, Sukhumvit business area in Bangkok, where comprising of many local and international companies. For unlimited or unidentifiable population, Cochran (1977) has developed a formula to find the sample size with three confidence levels (90%, 95% and 99%). After the calculation of the population, the sample

size is 322 at 95% confidence level. However, the researchers decided to collect data from 500 participants (250 from local, and 250 from international companies) in case that the questionnaire returned to them might be below the expected sample size, and unexpected mistakes such as incomplete responses. The criteria of selecting the participants are that 1) the company size is medium with 500-1,000 employees (Keyton et. al, 2013); 2) the company location is on Asoke road – Sukhumvit 21 (one of the main business areas in Bangkok); and 3) English language is used as part of workplace communication.

The mixed method approach was employed to collect data from both employers and employees. A questionnaire with three parts was developed, based on the literature review, and previous studies: part 1) the current situation regarding English language use among Thai professionals in their workplace, part 2) corporate needs for English language instructional management, and part 3) the organizational support for English language skill improvement for Thai professionals. In parts 1 and 3, a five-point Likert type scales were designed to rate levels of cooperate needs, ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). In part 2, the participants were able to select more than one item.

After distributing the questionnaire, 450 complete ones were returned: 250 (local ones), and 200 (international ones). A number of female and male respondents were 58% and 42% respectively. Additionally, the professional areas were varied, and were categorized based on the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences that they correspond with such as Sales, Customer Services, and Finance. Approximately half of the respondents perceived their English language proficiency at a fair level, while 28 % of them perceived their proficiency at a good level, and only 7 % of them were at a very good level.

Additionally, the semi-structured interview was conducted with both employers and employees to gain insight and to provide information regarding 1) the current situations in the workplace, 2) the corporate needs for English language use in the workplace, and 3) requests about English language instructional improvement. To ascertain the content validity of the instruments, three experts in the field of Business Communication and the Higher Education were also asked to revise the contents of the questionnaire and the interview form before the data was collected. For the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 30 Thai employees, who were not the actual samples of the present study. A few questions were adapted in order to be clearer and easier to understand, based on the suggestions of the subjects of this study. The data collection process was completed within four weeks. For the questionnaires, the data from the respondents were collected within three weeks. After the distribution of the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview was conducted with the 12 respondents (6 employers and 6 employees) who volunteered for it and lasted for one week.

For the analysis of the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the responses from the questionnaire, and to analyze the qualitative data, responses from the interview were carefully coded and studied so as to develop the themes regarding the current situations in the workplace, the corporate needs for English language use in the workplace, and requests about English language instructional improvement.

## Results

In this section, the quantitative data are presented according to the three main research questions, and the qualitative data are reported in order to gain insights into the current situations in the workplace, the corporate needs for English language use in the workplace, and requests about English language instructional improvement.

### *Quantitative Data*

1) What is the current situation regarding English language use among Thai professionals in their workplace?

Table 1: English Language Use in the Workplace

English Language Use in the Workplace	f	%	Ranking
<b>English language used at work</b>			
Very high	80	18	3
High	202	45	1
Medium	136	30	2
Less	28	6	4
The least	4	1	5
<b>English language skills mostly used</b>			
Listening	145	32	2
Speaking	153	34	1
Reading	102	23	3
Writing	50	11	4
<b>Frequency of English language use</b>			
Every working day	149	33	1
Almost every working day	90	20	3
Once a week	104	23	2
Two – three times/month	32	7	5
Once per month	23	5	6
Never use English within one month	52	12	4

Table 1: English Language Use in the Workplace (continued)

English Language Use in the Workplace	f	%	Ranking
<b>English language skills required for the job recruitment</b>			
Listening	115	26	2
Speaking	239	53	1
Reading	62	14	3
Writing	34	7	4
<b>English language proficiency required for the job advancement</b>			
Very high	72	16	3
High	223	50	1
Medium	128	28	2
Less	24	5	4
The least	3	1	5

The results revealed that English was required at a high level in Thai professionals' work. Thirty-three percent of the respondents used English in every working day and 20% used it every working day. In addition, speaking and listening skills were ranked at 34% and 32% respectively. It was considered to be more necessary than the other two skills. In particular, speaking was the first skill required in the job recruitment phase; meanwhile English language proficiency was highly required for promotion and career advancement.

2) To what extent of the language do these professionals need to use in their workplace?

Table 2: Top Three of Corporate needs for English language instructional management

Corporate needs for English language instructional management	f	%	Ranking
<b>The English language skills which require the most attention</b>			
Listening	134	30	2*
Speaking	257	57	1*
Reading	66	15	3*
Writing	47	10	4
<b>The most beneficial English language courses for the workplace</b>			
<i>English for General and Academic Communication</i>			
Intensive Basic English	228	51	1*
Academic Reading in English	144	32	5
Academic Writing in English	174	39	4
Translation (English to Thai / Thai to English)	188	42	3*
Basic Pronunciation	191	43	2*

Corporate needs for English language instructional management	f	%	Ranking
English for Professional Communication			
English for Job Interviews and Work	193	43	3*
English for Professional Writing	172	38	4
English for Professional Presentations	216	48	2*
English for Professional Negotiations	262	58	1*

The findings from the survey in table 2 revealed that most of the respondents prioritized speaking skills and then listening, and reading, respectively. Additionally, the courses that the respondents believed would be the most beneficial for future graduates and members of the workforce included the following: Intensive Basic English, Basic Pronunciation, and Translation (English to Thai / Thai to English), respectively. As for professional communication, they mostly required English for Professional Negotiations, and then English for Professional Presentations and English for Job Interviews and Work, respectively.

Table 2: Top Three of Corporate needs for English language instructional management (continued)

Corporate needs for English language instructional management	f	%	Ranking
<b>The English language communication skills which require the most attention</b>			
Talking with speakers from a different linguistic background	183	41	2*
Giving a speech	85	19	10
Joining a discussion for a specific purpose	132	29	5
Negotiating	262	58	1*
Making a speech without preparation	80	18	11
Debating without preparation	98	22	9
Asking questions for clarification	159	35	3*
Taking part in a conversation	152	34	4
Making presentations	106	24	8
Having conversation on the phone	117	26	6
Expressing an opinion	110	25	7
Expressing an opinions without preparation	77	17	12
Expressing contradictory opinions	40	9	13

Note Participants were able to select more than one item in each category

\*The top three corporate needs for English language instructional management

Apart from such courses, the professionals suggested that educational institutions should take responsibility for preparing students for communication situations which may serve them well in the future labor market. The first communication skill is negotiating, followed by talking with speakers from a different linguistic background and asking questions for clarification during workplace communication, respectively (see Table above).

3) What is the organizational support for English language skill improvement for Thai professionals?

Table 3. Organizational support for English language skill improvement for Thai professionals

Organizational support for English language skill improvement	f	%	Ranking
Inviting guest speaker to provide English courses	130	29	2
Providing English courses within your organization	125	28	3
Supporting employees to take English courses in other institutes	140	31	1
Providing English course in collaboration with universities	55	12	4

Based on the results, the organizations supported the respondents in English language improvement. Apparently, the first three approaches were almost equally employed, that is supporting employees to take English courses in other institutes (31%), inviting guest speakers to provide English classes (29%), and providing English courses within an organization (28%).

### *Qualitative Data*

For the responses of the semi-structured interviews with twelve Thai professionals, the three topics regarding 1) the current situations in the workplace, 2) the corporate needs for English language use in the workplace, and 3) requests about English language instructional improvement are presented as follows:

#### 1) The current situations in the workplace

The results of the interviews showed that Thai English language is needed as a medium to communicate both inside and outside the workplace at the national and international level in Thailand. Therefore, only knowing the first or national language is no longer sufficient in any workplace.

An employee working for a local company mentioned the reason why English language is necessary in the workplace.

*“Staff must respond to e-mails, deal with work-related documents in English and interact with foreign customers. Even though most customers are local, some of them prefer to communicate in English for business purposes.”*

In addition, an employee in an international company emphasized the importance of English use for effective workplace communication.

*“In some organizations, including our own organization, there are both Thai and foreign staff working together, so communicating in English is unavoidable. More importantly, for the international companies, the upper management is not local and as a result, the staff must be fluent in English in order to communicate with their superiors”*

However, regarding the current situations in the workplace, there are some problems about the language use found in workplace, and the causes of such problems are identified by Thai professionals according to their direct experiences.

*“Staff cannot use either formal or informal oral and written English language appropriately, and have some difficulty understanding accents of non-native English speakers. Additionally, the staff in particular the new ones or recent graduates sometimes cannot respond in English immediately during the conversation.”*

The complaint about the tertiary education was made by the two professionals as shown below:

The first one is that *“Causes of the communication problems mainly stem from their language learning experiences in particular at the university level. While at university, some staff were not well prepared and trained for the real workplace.”*

The other complaint is that *“The lessons in the language course heavily focus on grammar, but the more important skills which are oral and written skills are neglected. Therefore, those (staff) are not familiar with properly and fluently using the skills in their workplace. In addition, what they learned and what they realistically need for work are completely different. More importantly, the communication at this era is between non-native English speaking professionals; however, some universities still provides teaching materials or listening practice catered for only native English speakers”*

## 2) Corporate needs for English language use in the workplace

English language proficiency is necessary, as effective communication is an essential part of the success of an organization. From the results of the interviews, those Thai professionals mentioned that employees who have a high level of English language proficiency seem to have greater career opportunities, and advancement compared to those with lower levels of English proficiency. The needs of English language skills are shown as follows:

Regarding speaking skills, a professional in an international company asserted the following fact.

*“Speaking is the most important skill of all because the staff has to communicate in English every working day, with people of many different nationalities and first languages. Additionally, speaking is a key medium for communication within an organization. Without speaking skills, the organization cannot move forward. In a business context, an immediate response is often required, so both existing staff and potential employees need to have good speaking skills.”*

Besides, writing skills are part of effective workplace communication as mentioned by a professional from a local company.

*“Writing is also important skill in workplace, as it is an effective method of communicating ideas. The ability to write effectively in English, using the correct vocabulary and clear language structure is an essential skill for potential employees.”*

Listening skills are also necessary in the workplace where there is communication between Thai professionals and foreign customers or business partners as mentioned below.

*“Listening is an important skill, because staff members need to be able to answer the telephone and discuss work-related topics. If they cannot understand the caller or misunderstand the message, this may lead to either material losses within the organization or even damage the public image of the organization.”*

For reading skills, one professional agreed that it is unavoidable that we read work-related information in English.

*“Reading is a necessary skill in the workplace, as the staff has to understand the content of e-mails, and other work-related documents.”*

### 3) Requests about English language instructional improvement

According to their professional experiences, many issues which may be of relevance to the future workforce have been addressed.

*“English communicative competence needs vary among second language speakers from different cultural backgrounds. New graduates should know how to effectively and appropriately communicate in the workplace. In addition, clear pronunciation is essential for a better understanding of any communicative situation in the workplace.”*

In addition, the professionals request English language teachers and course designers to pay attention to some specific language skills.

*“Confidence and fluency in oral and written English language use should be prioritized in a course, as the more they practice, the more effective their communication will become in the workplace. More significantly, the course content should be related to real world corporate needs.”*

Finally, based on work experience, one professional recommended English courses which may be beneficial for future members of the workforce.

*“English for Business Correspondence, English for Business Negotiations, English for Oral Presentations, and English for Office Work are supposed to be providing the future workforce with the professional skills that they require for their work. In other words, these courses should be specifically designed to meet corporate needs.”*

## Discussion

In this section, the discussion is divided into three parts, based on the research questions, and is as follows:

First, according to the current situation regarding English language use among Thai professionals in their workplace, the Thai professionals examined in this study perceived their English language proficiency to be at a fair level, although some of them worked in internationally operating organizations. To be specific, speaking skills are still problematic for them. This tendency seems unchanged throughout a variety of research and over a number of years, including Charunsri, 2011; Luankanokrat, 2011; Meggiolaro, 2007; Talangsri, 2009. This reveals that some Thai professionals in organizations operating at the national and the international level have some difficulty with English oral communication. The root of the problems is the linguistic characteristics of English language which is completely different to those of their native language. This is specifically caused by interference from their native language, overgeneralization of the native language, and the complexity of the foreign language (Riddiboot, 2000). In addition, aspects of their personal backgrounds, such as their level of education, work experience (Lumchan, 2004), and personal communication strategies (Sintipong, 2008) have a direct impact on their level of language proficiency. The other explanation is that these professionals were not effectively and sufficiently trained at the tertiary level. In other words, there is a significant gap between language education and actual workplaces in the real world (Bouzidi, 2009; Rajprasit & Pratoomrat, 2012). In accordance with the problems that were identified in this study, speaking was identified as being of the highest priority. In other words, it is the most important skill for Thai professionals in their working lives due to increased interactions between Thais and foreigners. English language proficiency is

regarded a great advantage for job seekers and for the purposes of career advancement (Lumchan, 2004; Tangniam, 2006).

Second, regarding Thai professionals' needs to use the English language in their workplace, of all of the skills, speaking is the one which they believe Thai students need to improve before entering the labor market, followed by listening. The specific communication skills which were listed as problems in the previous section (i.e. negotiating, face-to-face and phone conversations, immediate requests for clarification, discussing specific topics, speech delivery, the expression of opinions, professional presentations, and debating skills are required. Additionally, English courses for general and academic communication which focus on basic English skills, basic pronunciation, and translation (English to Thai/Thai to English) are a good foundation for the development of the more advanced language proficiency. In order to cultivate enhanced language knowledge and skills, English courses regarding professional communication are required, and consist of the following: Professional Negotiations, Professional Presentations, Language for Jobs Interviews and Work, and Professional Writing should be included in English language courses or curriculum. The results of previous studies have confirmed that the needs of students vary and depend on the nature of their professional area (Charunsri, 2011; Haekawee, 2010; Luankanokrat, 2011; Nimnuch, 2011; Srichomtha, 2010; Thaveeprayoon, 2011). However, according to the findings of this study, as well as previous studies, Thai professionals require English language communication skills for their careers, but educational institutions, at all levels, have not provided adequate English language instruction.

Third, regarding the organizational support for English language skill improvement for Thai professionals, supporting employees to take English courses in other institutes ranked first. This may mean that the companies in this study do not have the department which has direct responsibility to train their employees' language skills. However, based on the results in this study, the language skills seem to be a key part of workplace communication and organizational success as there are continued organizational supports. As mentioned by Mehta and Mehta (2007), effective communication skills are a means of professional development and provide professionals with additional advantages for job advancement, and company success.

## Conclusion

This study explored the current situations regarding Thai professionals and corporate needs for English language use in the workplace, and the organizational support for English language skill improvement, by distributing a questionnaire and conducting semi-structured

interviews. Thai professionals who work in organizations operating at the national and international level in the Sukhumvit business area in Bangkok, Thailand have provided a picture of their experience of communicating in English in their workplace. They offered recommendations on instructional management to educational institutions, in particular at the tertiary level, which may help prepare their new graduates for the demands of the labor market.

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