NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES IN USING ENGLISH SKILLS OF SALES SUPPORT STAFF IN A PRIVATE COMPANY IN THAILAND

BY

MISS MANASIKAN PURNANANDA

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN CAREER ENGLISH FOR
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2021
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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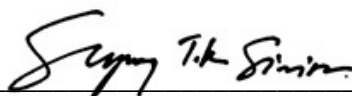

on December 17, 2021

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Independent Study Paper Title	NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES IN USING ENGLISH SKILLS OF SALES SUPPORT STAFF IN A PRIVATE COMPANY IN THAILAND
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the needs and difficulties in using English skills of sales support in a private company in Thailand. The data were collected from 68 sales supports through a close-ended and open-ended questionnaire. The findings revealed that all English language skills were necessary for the sales support, especially the reading skill, which was the most needed skill, as it was used for reading daily emails. The study also showed that the listening and speaking skills were the most difficult for the sales support. Listening to Indian accents and idiomatic English was very difficult for the sales support in this study. Although, in general, the reading and writing skills were rated as moderately difficult, the reading and writing of documents of terms and conditions were very difficult for the participants. This study created understanding about the particular needs and difficulties in each skill. This could be beneficial for the organization's human resource development plan in improving the necessary skills for its sales support.

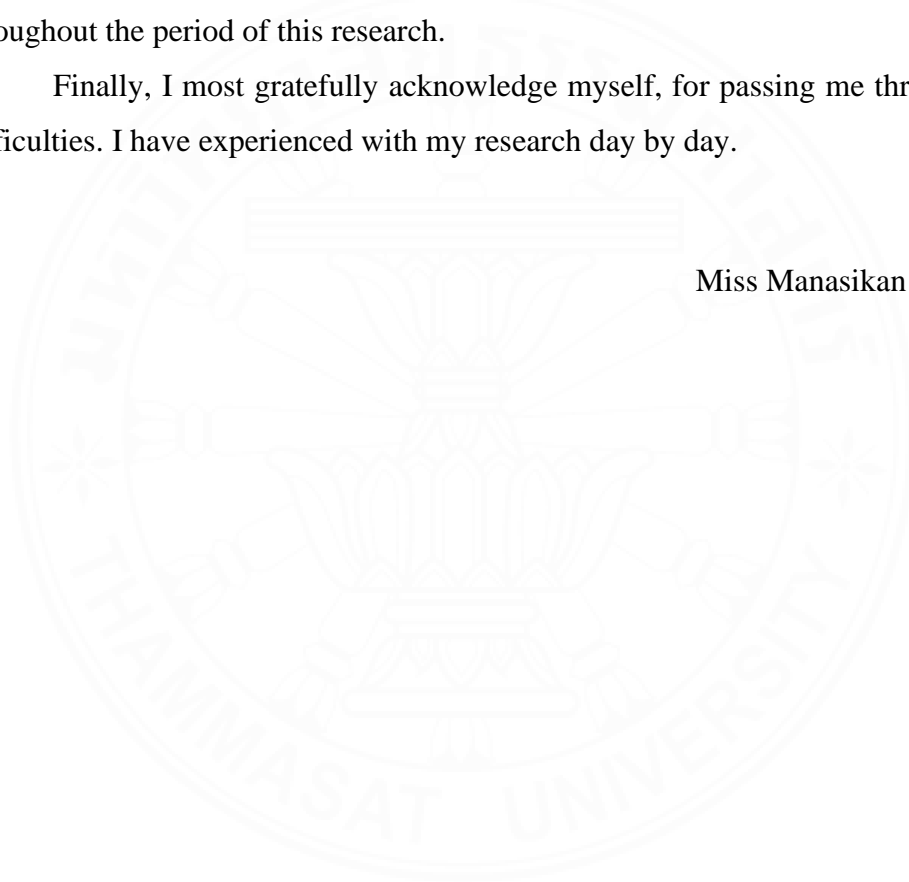**Keywords:** Needs, Difficulties, English Language Skills, Sales supports

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Miss Manasikan Purnananda

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Workplace communication plays a vital role in modern society, and without it, nothing could be accomplished. According to Drucker (2010), the key five functions of management are planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling, which all rely on communication. Instructions could not be given; equipment and supplies could not be ordered; progress would be unmeasurable; and products and services could not be delivered to customers without workplace communication. If staff can communicate effectively, companies will be able to reach their goals.

Customer service is an important part of an organization in which the staff must have superior communication compared to other divisions. The sales support team is a crucial part of the customer service team, enabling a company to achieve customer satisfaction and reach their sales targets. One of the most important elements that members of the sales support team need to have success in customer service is professionalism in customer contact. Professionalism in customer contact, in this case, refers to English communication skills (Katz, 1987).

In order to provide a satisfactory experience to the customers, effective communication skills must be used in all the duties of the sales support team members, which include processing new leads; managing correspondence between customers and the sales team; monitoring customer accounts; providing reports and other data to assist the sales team; answering phone calls; keeping track of sales goals and targets; contacting customers for the delivery of goods; and setting schedules.

In many cases, displaying effective professionalism in customer contact, especially in English communication skills, can lead to a promotion to sales support staff, or eventually to sales itself. Therefore, developing effective communication skills is necessary for sales support staff to be successful in discharging all their duties and working with different groups of people.

However, sales support staff sometimes have difficulty using English to express what they intend in international communication. Some claim that they lack confidence

when communicating in English because they feel awkward regarding their accent, tone, grammar, and vocabulary. The inability to effectively communicate with customers of the sales support staff can lead to complaints or misunderstandings from customers and the team abroad.

Vaughan's study (as cited in Choompon (2009) highlighted that professional skill is useless if an employee does not know how to communicate. In the private company studied in this research, it is crucial to develop effective English communication skills for sales support if they use the four English language skills (listening, writing, reading and speaking) to communicate internally and externally. However, the majority of people still experience a variety of challenges in using English for communication, depending on their backgrounds and abilities.

Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to investigate what communication skills the sales support staff lack and their English communication needs.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1.2.1 To investigate and identify the important English skills needed to be used at the workplace for sales support staff

1.2.2 To investigate and identify the difficulties faced by sales support staff when using the different types of English skills at the workplace

1.3 Significance of the study

It is expected that the results of the present study can be used as guidelines for companies or organizations in effectively developing ways to improve the English skills of their sales support staff.

1.4 Research questions

The following research questions were posed:

1.4.1 What are the English communication skills that sales support staff need at the workplace?

1.4.2 What are the difficulties faced by sales support staff when using the different types of English skills at the workplace?

1.5 Scope of the study

This study explored the needs and difficulties in using English skills of sales support staff in a private company in Thailand. It is, however, limited to the opinions of the participants because of the limitations in the constructed questionnaire. Also, this study focused on only one group of participants at a private company in Thailand. Moreover, the findings from the study may not apply to other groups of sales support staff at different companies in Thailand.

1.6 Definitions of terms

Definitions of the terms of this study are as follows:

1.6.1 Needs refers to the particular English language skills that sales support staff in a private company in Thailand desire to use.

1.6.2 English language skills refer to speaking, reading, writing and listening skills used by sales support staff in a private company in Thailand.

1.6.3 Sales support refers to staff working in an international company located in Thailand who need to communicate with others using the English language at the workplace.

1.6.4 A private company in Thailand refers to an international company located in Thailand, wherein almost all the workers are Thai.

1.7 Organization of the study

This study on the needs and difficulties in regard to using English skills of sales support staff in a private company in Thailand is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 deals with the introduction of the study. It consists of the background, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, scope of the study, and definition of terms.

Chapter 2 contains the review of literature, which provides theoretical perspectives, principles, and previous studies on the use of English language skills in private companies in Thailand.

Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology, including how the information was gathered and the analytical tools that were used to address the research questions in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the data gathered from the questionnaires. The data from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS software.

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the study. Then, the final part provides the conclusion of the study associated with the research questions, the implications of the study, and the recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of academic aspects and related information including a review of the related research and literature regarding the communication needs of sales support staff in private companies in Thailand. This study focuses on five areas below:

2.1 Needs

2.2 English language communication skills

2.3 The difficulties in English communication

2.4 English for sales support staff

2.5 Related research

2.1 Needs

2.1.1 Definitions of needs

The concept of "needs" has been described by various educators in different terms. "Learning needs" were defined by Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) as specific elements in language learners' situations. Rahman (2015) explains that "learning needs" are required for foreign language learners when learning to completely master a language. Widdowson (as cited in Juan, 2014, p. 13) has a different perspective. He defines learning needs as what learners expect to get from a language course when they have completed it or derive from their academic or occupation requirements.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) describe the concept of needs by using three terms: necessities, lacks and wants. **Necessities** are abilities or a set of skills that learners need to have to achieve the target. **Lacks** relate the inabilities of the learners in the present language; similarly, Robinson (1991) considers lacks as skills that learners do not have or need to improve to fulfill the requirements in the target language. **Wants** are individual learners' perceptions and desires to achieve their own needs to meet their target language's requirements, according to Richterich (1983).

2.2 English Language Communication Skills

2.2.1 Definitions of communication

Bygate (1987) defines communication skills as interactions and the maintenance of relationships. It is considered as the process of sharing information between a speaker and listener, according to Scott (1981).

Littlewood (1995) states that a speaker should select a suitable language for the listener and the circumstance. Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995) add that in order to have effective communication, a speaker and a listener should fluently and correctly use the language chosen for communication. Thus, a speaker and a listener should be confident about, and familiar with, using the three important elements of the chosen language which are the sounds, words and structure, according to Luoma (2004).

However, Brown (2007) argues that appropriate communication involves sociocultural elements in addition to grammatical elements. Speakers and learners need to know when and how to use a language to communicate in each situation. Bachman (1990) explains that the basis of English communication is English literacy, consisting of both listening and speaking ability. Bachman (2019) divides communication skills into five elements: knowledge, strategy, psychology, context, and language. Meanwhile, speakers are able to effectively communicate by using accurate language, according to Bartz (1979).

In summary, communication is the method of thinking, making decisions, and interacting by integrating sounds, words, structure, and meaning. Thus, English language learners are required to have knowledge of language elements and be able to use language appropriately in specific situations.

2.2.2 The importance of English language communication skills

According to Males, Weldy, and Icenogle (1997), communication skills are the main priority when employers make decisions on who to hire. Hetherington (1982) found that for students, English language communication skill is essential for their future careers. However, the importance of communication skills in hiring decisions has escalated drastically. Maes, Weldy, and Icenogle (1997) report that language communication skill was ranked as the most critical competency for job

seekers, as well as one of the top three criteria for hiring or promoting staff to general management positions (Kane, 1993). Hetherington (1992) also asserts that English language communication skills are essential for students' future careers. Likewise, Mellinger (1992) stresses that the two important features for successful careers are communication and social interaction.

In the view of Crosling and Ward (2002), students need to be competent in English communication skills, particularly oral communication, which is perceived as a more important skill than writing in the workplace. According to their study, courses in college or university do not prepare students well enough to prosper in oral communication in their future careers.

English language communication has become an essential skill for students. The ability to effectively communicate in English is vital for students to increase their employment opportunities. Teachers, researchers, and educators should utilize appropriate methods to help language students develop their English communication skills.

2.2.2.1 Listening skills

Listening is one of the most critical communication skills needed for exchanging thoughts and ideas among people, according to Khamprated (2012). Listening to conversations in a second language is particularly difficult as it requires great effort from the listeners to structure the meaning from the information they hear. Gross (1982) views that listening comprehension is indispensable for listeners as it enables them to understand the meaning from the listening source. Listening comprehension refers to the ability to perceive a message through the senses and understand the meaning of the details, according to Steinberg (2007). Failing to comprehend the messages from conversations may lead to problems in due course, especially when it relates to performing professional tasks.

In his study, Tangniam (2006) emphasized that listening is one of the most important communication skills for Thai Airways staff because it is considered as one of the key elements necessary for providing exceptional customer service to passengers. The inability to comprehend spoken language may lead to dissatisfaction with services. As it relates to English language learning, Khamprated

(2012) highlights the importance of correct pronunciation of words to facilitate listening comprehension. Hamouda (2013) maintains that listening skill is crucial for obtaining knowledge; learning cannot be accomplished if learners cannot receive information through listening. The difficulties in listening comprehension will be discussed further in the next section.

2.2.2.2 Speaking skills

Speaking skills play a fundamental part in communication in any language, including English. Quershi (n.d.) highlights that speaking skills are used to interact with others, express our opinions, and exchange information. We use spoken communication to exchange information in a variety of situations. Effective communication occurs when speakers correctly deliver spoken messages. Quershi (n.d.) stresses the importance of speaking skills as follows:

(1) To prepare and enable speakers to convey smooth and effective speech when taking part in any conversation.

(2) To help users express thoughts, ideas and emotions in the form of words in a meaningful way.

(3) To draw the attention of the audience or interlocutor, resulting in the achievement of personal goals, such as delivering presentations, sitting for job interviews, and negotiating through effective and proficient speaking skills.

2.2.2.3 Reading skills

We use reading skills in our everyday life as one of the key communication tools to obtain knowledge and information from printed and online materials (Chawwang, 2008). There are more opportunities to read English materials that are available in various forms nowadays than speaking, listening, and writing (as cited in Chawwang, 2008), with Phupradid (2003) sharing the same opinion. Grabe and Stroller (2002) indicate that reading in English is a necessity. English language is not only the medium for international communication but also the language of science, technology, and advanced research. Pangsapa (2012) also states that reading is the primary means to independently learn and achieve academic or professional goals in various areas. Chantawimol's (1998) study on the perception of Thai people towards English language indicated that doctors, engineers, teachers, and hotel businesspeople need reading skills to read academic textbooks and journals. At the same time, students

will need reading skills to read textbooks because most of them are published in English (Chawwang, 2008).

2.2.2.4 Writing skills

Writing skill is the integration of a complicated process involving of various types of fundamental structural elements (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001, Khaldieh, 2000), which are paragraphing, structuring a sentence, and using correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Writers are required to use word choice, appropriate grammar, syntax, mechanics, and the coherent organization of ideas (Clifford, 1991; Gebhard, 2000; Harris, 1969; Tyner, 1985) to produce a piece of writing.

Alfaki (2015) points out that people use written communication to express ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes to others, similar to spoken communication. Thus, writing skills are considered vital for various careers, as well as for students throughout their academic life (Afrin, 2016). Moreover, Park (2015) determined that writing skills are important for Korean naval officers to perform tasks such as sending emails, writing messages, or other correspondence. Nowadays, written communication in military operations has become more necessary because it is used for exchanging information among multiple languages users.

2.3 Difficulties in English Communication in Each Skill

2.3.1 Difficulties in listening in English

Even though listening comprehension is regarded as an essential skill for language learners to acquire, students still confront some challenges when interpreting spoken language. The three main difficulties are as follows:

(1) Difficulty in comprehending idiomatic expressions in English: According to Taki (2013, p. 825), "an idiom is a combination of lexical items and has a meaning which is distinct from the individual lexical items and this idiomatic meaning is usually understood based on the conventional use of speakers in the speech community". To interpret idioms, listeners need to comprehend the culture and the intercultural differences of the speakers.

(2) Variety of accents that inhibit understanding through listening: Hamouda (2013) studied the listening comprehension problems of Saudi students in EFL listening classroom, discovering that differences in accented speech made it difficult for the students to understand phrases, and that they had a lack of opportunities to be exposed to different accents in English-speaking environments. Bingol (2014) asserts that the only place language listeners listen to spoken English is in a language classroom where they are provided with the mother tongue accents, or American and English accents, spoken by their language teachers. However, English is spoken with people from different countries and accents.

(3) The ability to control the speed of a speaker's speech. The speaking rate and tone of speakers affects the ability of listeners to comprehend the meaning of spoken language, according to Khamprated (2012). Flores (2013) adds that background noise, a lack of visual clues and body language, the poor quality of a recorded voice, street gossip, new products, unfamiliar situations, and dialogues from radio and movies are considered as additional uncontrollable communicative factors in real-life settings. They cause distractions to listeners, particularly those who are not proficient enough to correctly understand speech content.

Khamprated (2012) adds that a limited knowledge of vocabulary is a major cause of listening comprehension problems, especially when speakers use words that are unfamiliar to listeners. In this situation, the listeners tend to focus on the meaning of the unfamiliar vocabulary, which becomes a distraction and limits their ability to comprehend the overall content. Bingol et al. (2014) state that listeners encounter less difficulty in listening comprehension when they are familiar with the vocabulary they hear from the content of speech.

2.3.2 Difficulties in speaking in English

Speakers need to use speaking skills to convey meaning when communicating with other speakers in different contexts. According to Leong and

Ahmandi (2017), English language teaching in school does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to practice English spoken communication and speaking skills and evaluation is not effectively implemented. Thus, many learners are unable to speak appropriately and sensibly, even though they have spent many years studying the language (Ahmandi, 2017). The major difficulties that arise when speaking English among Chinese students according to Xiuqin (2006) are as follows:

- A lack of English language users has caused students to avoid English spoken communication and keep silent because they do not understand the language. Hence, the students are unable to provide any response in conversations.

- The speakers' fear of making mistakes and being criticized prevents them from having opportunities to practice speaking skills in spoken situations.

Wiriyachitra (2002) also identified the factors that cause Thai learners to have difficulties speaking English language, which are slightly different from Chinese learners.

- The pronunciation, syntax, and idiomatic usage of English is different from Thai (mother tongue)

- -Lack of opportunities to use English in their daily lives; unchallenging English courses; being passive learners; being afraid of speaking English with foreigners; failing to take responsibility for practice and learning.

2.3.3 Difficulties in reading in English

A successful reader needs to make a significant effort to develop and enhance his/her vocabulary, grammatical understanding, and sentence structure knowledge in English language. The improvement of these skills is a difficult process. Gunning (2002) highlights that reading ability level mainly depends on the vocabulary and sentence structure knowledge level of the readers. Wongwaiyut (2011) emphasizes that in order for readers to effectively comprehend English documents, they must develop the three aforementioned crucial elements. Reading comprehension can be

improved by increasing vocabulary knowledge, according to Anjomshoa and Zamanian (2014)

The process of reading requires a substantial amount of effort by readers to understand what they are reading. Enhancing vocabulary knowledge to attain success in reading comprehension is also very difficult. According to Anjomshoa and Zamanian (2014), vocabulary knowledge improves reading comprehension. Difficulties in reading comprehension are usually caused by a limited understanding of the meaning of words, especially technical terminology and sentence structure. O'Donnell and Wood (2004) claim that the ability of readers to understand the relationships between sentences and how a text is organized determines the chance of success in reading texts. Nuttall (2000) also mentions that complicated grammatical sentences — for example, complex phrases, complex noun groups, and coordinating conjunctions — make it difficult for readers to follow reading passages.

Reading difficulties are also caused by an inability to understand the structure of reading content. Chawwang (2008) states that the general primary complication of an inability to understand a text is the lack of knowledge of sentence structure and vocabulary. These reading issues might also be associated with the teaching methods that the readers experience. Teaching and learning methods of students in some countries do not help students to improve their reading ability, according to Ruangputtanakul and Tongjai (2006). Chawwang (2008) states that many students in Thailand translate each sentence into Thai and do not know the grammatical rules. Some readers are unable to read effectively due to an inability to identify topics and main ideas, make assumptions or predict an author's purpose.

2.3.4 Difficulties in writing in English

Second language learners and learners who speak English as their mother tongue need to dedicate themselves to reach an adequate competency level in English writing skills. This makes writing skill one of the most difficult elements of English language communication. Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) found that a lack of knowledge about writing correct English sentences, eloquently expressing ideas, and selecting the right vocabulary to articulate their opinions are the causes of problems of writing in English, as well as a lack of ideas about writing topics.

Afrin (2016) reveals that the most common mistakes in writing for many English learners are as follows:

- Spelling mistakes
- Misuse of tense, subject-verb agreement, punctuation and fragments, prepositions, number pronoun, words, and word choice
- Misapplication of articles, and capitalization.

The mistakes mentioned above and the failure to construct a topic sentence with supporting details and concluding lines, as well as the inability to put the said writing components together in a comprehensible manner using appropriate transitional phrases, are the main challenges preventing writers from writing paragraphs effectively, according to Afrin (2016).

2.4 English for Sales Support Staff

The sales support staff play a crucial role in selling products or services, which is vital for the survival and growth of business organizations. In Malaysia, English communication skills are acknowledged as one of the most common criteria and a high priority for any sales-related job. Therefore, sales support staff must have proficient English communication skills to be able to perform their job effectively (Yaw Kuen, 2001). There is no room for communication error for sales support staff when it comes to communicating with prospective clients. Continuous improvement is a key — the more proficient salespeople become, the greater the returns to their business.

The importance of the English language skills for sales support staff has been recognized in many research studies, textbooks, and classified advertisements. For example, a research paper entitled *Natural Language Interface for Online Sales System* concluded that sometimes customers prefer to have a direct communication with sales support staff because online procurement may not be able to provide clarification according to the needs of individual customer. Many customers prefer onsite sales, which allow them to enquire about products directly to sales support staff naturally and comfortably. (Jusoh, Al-Fawareh, 2007). Also, in many classified advertisements for sales staff positions, English skills are one of the major qualifications.

This study focused on English language skills and subskills of the above-mentioned research studies, textbooks, and classified advertisement as follows:

Listening skills

1. Understanding the needs of customers/teams including complaints and complements.
2. Understanding personal details and information
3. Understanding conversations on the phone
4. Understanding idiomatic various accents of English
   a. American English accents
   b. Vietnamese English accents
   c. Philippine English accents
   d. Singaporean English accents
   e. Indian English accents

Speaking skills

1. Welcoming and greeting
2. Inquiring about customers/teams' information and needs
3. Making polite requests
4. Offering assistance
5. Giving customers/teams' products information
6. Refusing politely
7. Offering options for customers/team.
8. Providing information about the company (e.g., history, business units, products, salespersons, etc.)
9. Having conversations by phone
10. Apologizing when mistakes occur
11. Explaining the reason for mistakes
12. Expressing gratitude when customers give compliments
13. Clarifying questions or confirming messages
14. Making public address announcements

15. Pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds

16. Using appropriate word stress

17. Using suitable word intonation

18. Using engineering terminology correctly

19. Speaking politely according to grammatical rules and social etiquette

Reading skills

1. Understanding terms and conditions in documents

2. Understanding communication through email correspondences

Writing skills

1. Writing daily emails

2. Writing terms and conditions in documents

2.5 Related Research

Park (2015) conducted a needs analysis for English courses offered at educational institutions of the Korean navy for Korean naval officers whose roles required English communication skills. Background information and perceptions of individual participants emphasized the use and requirements of English communication skills that they wanted to improve. Data were collected via unstructured interviews, a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that the most challenging communication skill for Korean naval officers is speaking, which supported the adoption of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and a learning-centered approach to ESP by the English for military purposes courses.

A needs analysis of Thai government officials and their use of English language at the workplace was conducted by Sriurai (2013). Data were collected from one hundred officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension using questionnaires. The results showed that listening and speaking skills were the most important and problematic skills for effective English communication at the workplace. They were given a high priority when asked what skills these officials wanted to improve.

Kuen (2001) conducted a need assessment of sales personnel in a Malaysian business context focusing on a Malaysian owner-managers group of different

companies. The study mainly focused on the importance of the productive skills of speaking and writing for sales personnel.

Yutdhana (2000) conducted a survey on the English language needs of businesspersons in Chiang Mai for running their businesses. The study investigated the English requirements of businesspersons from seven business types. The intention was to reveal the role and importance of English in business circles in Thailand.

Jiranapakul (1996) investigated the actual usage of English language required for communication by Thai engineers in engineering companies. A total of 21 operational engineers and 21 managerial engineers were interviewed. English communication skills were considered as an additional factor of their career advancement. Listening and speaking skills were prioritized as the most two important English communication skills for operational engineers, whereas writing and speaking skills were the first two essential skills chosen by managerial engineers.

Akkakoson (1994) surveyed the use of English for business communication in 15 top Thai companies represented by 17 human resource management staff. The companies were divided into three groups: high-level companies, middle-level companies, and low-level companies. According to the study, one of the foundations of business communication is the four English communication skills because they are considered very useful for most employees. The human resource management representatives of the three groups had slightly different opinions regarding the prioritization of the need for English communication skills between the supervisory level and junior level. In the view of the human resource management representatives from the high-level company group, all four skills were considered as a crucial communication tool for the supervisory level, while listening speaking were important for junior-level staff. The middle-level group thought that listening and reading were most important for the supervisory level, whereas the low-level company group considered listening, speaking, and writing as the most important element for the supervisory level.

Wongsothon (1982) conducted a survey of the general need to use English communication skills of workers in government agencies, state enterprises, and the business sector using a questionnaire and interviews. The results revealed that reading skill was used the most, followed by writing, listening, speaking, and translating,

respectively. Workers in the business sector used English for communication more than those working in government agencies and state enterprises. English was generally used for working purposes more than social and personal purposes. Academicians were the group using English the most in all of the sectors.

In summary, the related research revealed that the requirements regarding the use of English skills depend on the field. For sales support staff, their needs for English usage must be examined to provide effective language instruction that enables them to apply it in real-life situations.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study and consists of four parts as follows:

1. Participants
2. Research instrument
3. Data collection
4. Data analysis

3.1 Participants

The participants in the research were 68 customer service team members and sales support staff working for a private company in Thailand. The sales support staff were chosen because they mostly use English language in their job duties and also have to interact with customers and suppliers. The participants were all of those above who were willing to collaborate in this study.

3.2 Research Instrument

The current study utilized a quantitative approach in which a survey technique was used to identify the English language skills needed for sales support staff. For this study, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher by adapting questionnaires on similar topics. The researcher used the questionnaire as the instrument to collect the data from all participants, consisting of five parts as follows:

Part I: General information of the participants

This section sought participants' information about age, sex, educational background, function, position, duration of work, the importance of English in their job area, opinions on English skills, and the English skills used most often in their job area. This part was designed in the form of both close-ended statements and open-ended questions.

Part II: General opinions about language skills in using English: listening, speaking, reading and writing

The part was a self-assessment of the participants' English ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. There were five choices using a Likert scale asking the participants to rate their levels in all English skills as follows:

5 - Excellent

4 - Good

3 - Fair

2 - Poor

1 - Very Poor

Part III: The needs and difficulties of the English language functions for the sales support staff

In this part, the questions were categorized into four main sections considering listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In each section, the questions covered different English language functions for sales support staff. A five-point Likert scale was used for the participants to rate the level of need as follows:

5 - Very high need

4 - High need

3 - Moderate need

2 - Low need

1 - Very low need

Moreover, an open-ended question to obtain the participants' suggestions was included at the end of each section.

Part IV: Useful Suggestions

This was an open-ended part, which consisted of two items to obtain the general opinions of the participants on the importance of English in their job scope and general suggestions about English language skills.

3.3 Data Collection

After the questionnaire was approved by the supervisor, it was sent to the participants, who were sales support staff at a private company in Thailand, via email and sent back once the questionnaires were completed.

3.4 Data Analysis

Various data analysis methods were used to analyze the gathered data. The data from the completed and returned questionnaires were entered into the SPSS program. Frequencies and percentages were computed for demographic information, including gender, nationality, age, education, experience with studying English, and the number of years they had worked in the sales support position. Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency such as mean and measures of dispersion such as standard deviation and range, were used to analyze the participants' perceptions of their needs and the difficulties with regard to using English language skills. The data from the open-ended questions were transcribed and investigated using content analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) the results from the quantitative data and (2) the results from the qualitative data from 68 sales support staff in a private organization in Thailand. The first section reports the data from the close-ended statements, and the second section describes the data obtained from the open-ended questions.

4.1 Results from the close-ended statements

The results are divided into four parts as follows:

4.1.1 The results regarding demographic and general information of the participants calculated into frequencies and percentages.

4.1.2 The results regarding the self-assessment of language skills in using English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, calculated into means and standard deviations.

4.1.3 The results regarding the needs in using English skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, calculated into means and standard deviations.

4.1.4 The results regarding the difficulties in using English skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, calculated into means and standard deviations.

4.1.1 Participants' demographic information

A total of 68 questionnaires were collected from sales support staff at a private organization in Thailand to identify their opinions on the English language skills. The findings on the demographic information, including gender, nationality, age, education, experience in English study, and experience working in the sales support position are detailed below.

Table 4.1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	27	39.1
Female	41	60.3
Total	68	100

Table 4.1 shows that 60.3 percent of the participants were female, while 39.1 percent of the total of 68 participants were male.

Table 4.2: Nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Thai	67	98.5
Non-Thai	1	1.5
Total	68	100

Table 4.2 shows that 98.5 percent of the total of 68 participants were Thai, while one participant was non-Thai.

Table 4.3: Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-30 years old	24	35.3
31-40 years old	32	47.1
41-50 years old	10	14.7
51-60 years old	2	2.9
Total	68	100

As shown in Table 4.3, the largest group of participants were 31-40 years old (47.1%), followed by 20-31 years (35.3%), 41-50 years (14.7%) and more than 50 years (2.9%) from the total of 68 participants, respectively.

Table 4.4: Education

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's degree	46	67.7
Master's degree	18	26.5
Ph. D. degree	4.4	4.4
Others	1.5	1.5
Total	68	100

From Table 4.4, the majority of participants had a bachelor's degree (67.7%), followed by a master's degree (26.5%), Ph.D. (4.4%) and others (1.5%).

Table 4.5: Years of Studying English

Study Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 10 years	18	26.5
10-15 years	26	38.2
16-20 years	12	17.6
> 20 years	12	17.6
Total	68	100

As shown in Table 4.5, the largest group of participants had study experience of 10-15 years (38.2%), followed by less than 10 years (26.5%), 16-20 years (17.6%) and more than 20 years (17.6%).

Table 4.6: Working experience in the sales support position

Working experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
< 1 year	11	16.2
1-5 years	20	29.4
5-10 years	19	27.9
>10 years	18	26.5
Total	68	100

Table 4.6 shows that the largest group of participants had working experience in the sales support position of 1-5 years (29.4%), followed by 5-10 years (27.9%), more than 10 years (26.5%) and less than 1 year (16.2%).

Table 4.7: Necessity of English for current position

Necessity of English for current position	Frequency	Percentage
Necessary	66	97.1
Unnecessary	2	2.9
Total	68	100

Table 4.7 shows that 97.1 percent of total 68 participants viewed that English is necessary for their current position, while 2.9 percent said it was unnecessary.

4.1.2 General opinions on using English skills

This part investigated the general opinions on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. In order to understand the role of English in the sales support position, three aspects were investigated as follows:

· Level of each English language skill

· Level of need for each English language skill

· Level of difficulty of each English language skill

The participants were asked to indicate their general opinions using a five-point Likert scale.

The data were analyzed using the SPSS program and the results of each question are presented in Table 4.8 - Table 4.10.

Table 4.8: Self-Assessment of English skills

Skills	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation	Ranking
Listening	68	3.60	0.756	Good	1
Speaking	68	3.51	0.743	Good	2
Reading	68	3.40	0.650	Good	3
Writing	68	3.13	0.862	Fair	4

According to Table 4.8, the English skill that received the highest mean score was listening skill, with the mean of 3.60, which can be interpreted as good listening skill. Similarly, both English speaking skill and English reading skills were also rated as good, with mean scores of 3.51 and 3.4, respectively. Writing skills received the lowest mean score of 3.13, which indicated a fair level of competency.

Table 4.9: Opinions about the need for using English skills

Skills	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of need	Ranking
Listening	68	3.38	1.051	Moderate	4
Speaking	68	3.59	0.717	High	3
Reading	68	4.10	0.775	High	1
Writing	68	3.99	0.723	High	2

Table 4.9 concerns the need for each English language skill. According to table 4.9, sale support position required several English skills. The position required a high level of reading skill, with the mean score of 4.10, followed by writing skill and

speaking skills, with mean scores of 3.99 and 3.59, respectively. English listening skill was moderately needed for the sales support position, with the mean score of 3.38.

Table 4.10: Opinions on the difficulty of using English Skills

Skills	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of need	Ranking
Listening	68	3.04	0.937	Moderate	4
Speaking	68	3.09	0.842	Moderate	3
Reading	68	3.56	1.013	High	1
Writing	68	3.54	0.818	High	2

According to Table 4.10, the English language skill perceived as being the most difficult skill was reading skill, which had the mean score of 3.56. Likewise, English writing skill, with the mean score of 3.54, was also perceived as very difficult. Speaking skill and listening skills were moderately difficult, with mean scores of 3.09 and 3.04, respectively.

4.1.3 Need for using English skills

Table 4.11: Need for English listening skill

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Listening and understanding what customers want	4.53	0.610	Very High	1
Listening to customers' complaints	4.19	0.629	High	2
Listening to customers' expressions of satisfaction	4.07	0.676	High	5

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Listening to personal details and information	4.16	0.660	High	3
Listening while having conversations on the phone	4.09	0.728	High	4
Listening to slang expressions	3.19	0.885	Moderate	10
Listening to idiomatic English	3.04	1.028	Moderate	11
Listening to American English accents	4.03	0.712	High	6
Listening to Vietnamese English accents	3.01	0.819	Moderate	12
Listening to Philippine English accents	3.38	0.847	Moderate	9
Listening to Singaporean English accents	4.03	1.007	High	7
Listening to Indian English accents	3.78	1.118	High	8

According to Table 4.11 regarding the English listening skill required in the different tasks of the sales support position, none of the aspects were found to be below a moderate level in terms of the need in the workplace. One aspect out of twelve aspects, namely listening and understanding what customers want, was rated as an extremely high need, with the mean score of 4.53. A total of seven out of twelve aspects received a high rating. These aspects included listening to customers' complaints (mean score = 4.19), listening to customers' expressions of satisfaction (mean score = 4.07), listening to personal details and information (mean score = 4.16), listening while having conversations on the phone (mean score = 4.09), listening to American English accents (mean score = 4.03), listening to Singaporean English accents (mean score = 4.03), and listening to Indian English accents (mean score = 3.78). Lastly, four out of twelve aspects were rated at a moderate level: listening to slang expressions, listening to

idiomatic English, listening to Vietnamese English accents, and listening to Philippine English accents, with mean scores of 3.19, 3.04, 3.01, and 3.38, respectively.

Table 4.12: Need for English speaking skill

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Welcoming and greeting	3.97	0.456	High	4
Inquiring about customers' information & needs	4.22	0.688	Most	1
Making polite requests	3.79	0.764	High	11
Offering assistance	3.99	0.702	High	2
Giving product information	3.84	0.704	High	9
Refusing politely	3.74	0.683	High	12
Offering options	3.84	0.704	High	10
Providing company data	3.72	0.789	High	13
Having conversations by phone	3.85	0.738	High	8
Apologizing when mistakes occur	3.97	0.753	High	3
Explaining the reason for mistakes	3.90	0.883	High	7
Expressing gratitude when customers make complaints	3.53	0.889	High	17
Clarifying questions or confirming massages	3.53	0.701	High	16

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Making public address announcements	3.37	0.809	Moderate	19
Pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds	3.71	1.066	High	14
Using appropriate word stress	3.94	0.879	High	5
Using appropriate intonation	3.66	0.857	High	15
Using engineering terminology correctly	3.46	0.969	High	19
Speaking according to grammatical rules and social etiquette	3.94	0.689	High	6

According to Table 4.12, none of the aspects were found to be below a moderate level in terms of the need in the workplace. Nearly all of the aspects of speaking skill at the workplace were rated at a high level except two aspects: inquiring about customers' information and needs, which was rated as an extremely high need, with the mean score of 4.22; and making public address enouncements, which was rated as a moderate need, with the mean score of 3.37.

Table 4.13: Need for English reading skill

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Reading terms and conditions in documents	4.03	0.846	High	2
Reading emails	4.66	0.704	Very High	1

According to table 4.13, reading e-mails was rated as an extremely high need, with the mean score of 4.66, while reading the terms and conditions in documents was rated as a high need, with the mean score of 4.03.

Table 4.14: Need for English writing skill

Level of Need	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Writing daily emails	4.38	0.811	Very High	1
Writing terms and conditions in documents	2.87	1.381	Moderate	2

In terms of writing skills at the workplace, table 4.14 shows that the participants needed to write daily emails more than terms and conditions in documents. Writing daily emails was rated as extremely needed by the participants, with the mean score of 4.38. On the other hand, writing terms and conditions in documents was rated as moderately needed, with the mean score of 2.87.

4.1.4 Difficulties in using English skills

The following sub-section describes the difficulties with the four basic skills of English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in a more detail. The criteria for the interpretation of the Likert scale were the same as shown in Table 4.9. Likewise, the data in this sub-section were also analyzed using the SPSS program, and the findings to each question are presented in Table 4.16 to 4.19.

Table 4.16: Difficulties in English listening skill

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Listening and understanding what customers want	3.51	0.801	High	4
Listening to customers' complaints	3.66	0.987	High	3

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Listening to customers' expressions of satisfaction	3.13	0.879	Moderate	9
Listening to personal details and information	3.44	1.042	High	5
Listening while having conversations on the phone	3.13	0.710	Moderate	8
Listening to slang expressions	3.35	1.089	Moderate	6
Listening to idiomatic English	3.74	1.074	High	2
Listening to American accents	3.10	1.236	Moderate	11
Listening to Vietnamese accents	3.34	0.908	Moderate	7
Listening to Philippine accents	3.07	1.055	Moderate	12
Listening to Singaporean accents	3.12	1.127	Moderate	10
Listening to Indian accents	4.34	1.016	Very High	1

According to Table 4.16, listening to Indian accents had an extremely high level of difficulty, with the mean score of 4.34, followed by listening to idiomatic English, with the mean score of 3.74, and listening to customers' complaints, with the mean score of 3.66, respectively.

Table 4.17: Difficulties in English speaking skill

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Welcoming and greeting	3.10	0.694	Moderate	16
Inquiring about customers' information & needs	3.29	0.714	Moderate	12
Making polite requests	3.18	0.732	Moderate	15
Offering assistance	2.97	0.690	Moderate	19
Giving product information	3.18	0.690	Moderate	14
Refusing politely	3.38	0.754	Moderate	10
Offering options	3.41	0.696	High	9
Providing company data	3.34	0.784	Moderate	11
Having conversations by phone	3.21	0.873	Moderate	13
Apologizing when mistakes occur	3.79	0.659	High	3
Explaining the reason for mistakes	3.72	0.808	High	4
Expressing gratitude when customers make complaints	4.07	4.854	High	1
Clarifying questions or confirming massages	3.07	0.676	Moderate	17
Making public address announcements	3.03	0.712	Moderate	18

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds	3.90	0.979	High	2
Using appropriate word stress	3.69	0.935	High	6
Using appropriate intonation	3.46	1.099	High	8
Using engineering terminology correctly	3.57	0.759	High	7
Speaking politely according to grammatical rules and social etiquette	3.71	0.793	High	5

In terms of English-speaking skills, Table 4.17 illustrates that nine out of 19 aspects were rated at a high level of difficulty. These aspects include the difficulties in expressing gratitude when customers make complaints, with the mean of 4.07, pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds, with the mean of 3.90, and apologizing when mistakes occur, with the mean of 3.79, respectively.

Table 4.18: Difficulties in English reading skill

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Reading term and conditions in documents	4.47	0.922	Very High	1
Reading emails	2.43	0.997	Low	2

According to Table 4.18, reading terms and conditions in documents was rated as extremely difficult. On the other hand, the difficulty level of reading email was rated as low.

Table 4.19: Difficulties in English writing skill

Level of Difficulty	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Ranking
Writing daily emails	2.59	0.851	Low	2
Writing terms and conditions in documents	4.56	0.780	Very High	1

Table 4.19 demonstrates that participants perceived writing terms and conditions in documents as extremely difficult (mean score = 4.56). In contrast, participants perceived writing daily email as having a low level of difficulty (mean score = 2.59).

4.2 Results from the open-ended questions

The last section of the questionnaire was devoted to open-ended questions in order to gather additional opinions and information on English language skills that could not be expressed through the five-point Likert scale. The open-ended questions were answered by only two of the participants. The results from the qualitative data are detailed as follows:

4.2.1 Need for using English skills in current job

Based on the responses (50%), the respondents agreed that English listening skill is very important, especially in terms of communicating with external customers and internal workers. This is because the skill is necessary for identifying customers' needs and wants. Being able to listen and interpret the messages received from customers is crucial as it allows them to pass on correct information to process sales, leading to effective communication between sales support staff and customers. This means that English speaking skill is also important. One-half of the respondents agreed that speaking skill allows employees to provide accurate information, as well as engage in negotiations and offer deals to customers more effectively.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) the discussion, (4) the conclusion, and (5) recommendations for further studies.

5.1 Summary of the study

5.1.1 Objectives of the study

This study aimed to investigate the needs and at the same time identify the difficulties of the sales support staff in a private company in Thailand in regard to using English at the workplace.

5.1.2 Participants, instrument, and data collection

A total of 68 sales support staff in a private company in Thailand participated in this study. Their foremost duties included contacting customers, suppliers, teams, and services by email, telephone, conference calls, and face-to-face. A close-ended and open-ended questionnaire was used as the research instrument to collect the data, which was approved by the supervisor.

Due to ethical considerations, the researcher sent a letter seeking permission from the director of the Human Resources Department at a private company in Thailand and an email asking for consent from the participants prior to collecting the data. Once the questionnaire was completed, the findings from the close-ended statements were assessed by descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation. The results from the open-ended questions were transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed.

5.2 Summary of the findings

5.2.1 The demographic data of the participants

As shown in the previous chapter, the vast majority of the participants were Thai (98.5%) and the rest were foreigners (1.5%). The number of female participants (60.3%) was slightly higher than male participants (59.7%). The largest group of participants were 31-40 years of age (47.15%). More than half of the total participants (67.7%) had received a bachelor's degree. The rest of the participants had received a master's degree (26.5%), and a Ph.D. degree (4.4%). The participants' experience studying English was as follows: less than 10 years (26.5%), 10-15 years (38.2%), 16-20 years (17.6%), and more than 20 years (17.6%). Their working experience in the sales support position in a private company was as follows: less than 1 year (16.2%), 1-5 years (29.4%), 5-10 years (27.9%), and more than 10 years (26.5%).

5.2.2 Results from close-ended statements

5.2.2.1 Need for using English skills

Regarding the need for using English skills, the quantitative results revealed that all four skills were needed at a high level, especially reading, which was the most highly rated. Reading was the skill regarded as the most crucial for communication at the workplace, followed by writing, speaking, and listening, respectively.

In regard to reading skills, the most necessary skill was reading documents containing terms and conditions, followed by reading work emails.

For English writing skills, writing daily emails was rated as a very high need by the members, while the need to write terms and conditions in documents was rated as only moderate.

Regarding the English speaking skills required in the different tasks of sales support staff, none of the aspects were below the moderate level in terms of the need in the workplace. Nearly all the aspects of speaking skills at the workplace were rated as high-level needs, except two: inquiring about customers' information and

needs, rated as extremely high; and making public address announcements, rated as moderate.

As for listening skills required in the different tasks of the sales support position, none of the aspects were determined to be below a moderate level in terms of the need in the workplace. One out of twelve aspects, namely listening and understanding what the customer wants, was rated as extremely high. A total of seven out of twelve aspects received a high rating, including listening to customers' complaints and expressions of satisfaction, listening to personal details and information, listening while having conversations on the phone, listening to American English accents, Singaporean English accents, and Indian English accents. Ultimately, four aspects of twelve were rated at a moderate level. These aspects were listening to slang expressions, idiomatic English, Vietnamese English accents, and Philippine English accents, respectively.

5.2.2.2 Difficulties in using English skills

The statistical calculation of the data revealed the most difficult skills were reading skills, which received a mean score of 3.56. Likewise, English writing skills were also perceived as extremely difficult, with the mean score of 3.54. Speaking skills and listening skills were moderately challenging, with mean scores of 3.09 and 3.04, respectively.

Regarding reading skills, reading terms and conditions in documents was rated as extremely difficult. On the other hand, the difficulty level of reading email, which required English reading skills, was assessed as low.

For writing skills, the participant's perceived writing terms and conditions in documents as extremely difficult. In contrast, participants viewed writing daily email as having a low level of difficulty.

For speaking skills, nine out of 19 aspects were evaluated to have a high level of difficulty. These aspects included offering options, apologizing when mistakes occur, explaining the reasons for errors, expressing gratitude when customers make complaints, pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds, speaking with appropriate word stress, speaking with suitable word intonation, speaking using correct engineering terminology, and speaking politely according to grammatical rules and

social etiquette. The remaining ten aspects of English speaking skills, namely welcoming and greeting, inquiring about customers' information and needs, making polite requests, offering assistance, providing product information, refusing politely, providing company data, having conversations, clarifying questions or confirming messages via phone, and making public address announcements were rated as moderately difficult.

In terms of English listening skills, the aspects of listening to customers' expressions of satisfaction, slang expressions, American accents, Vietnamese accents, Philippine accents and Singaporean accents received mean scores ranging between 3.07 and 3.35. Four out of twelve aspects were perceived as having high difficulty: listening and understanding what customers want, listening to customers' complaints, listening to personal details and information, and listening to idiomatic English. Only one aspect, listening to Indian accents, had a very high level of difficulty.

5.2.3 Open-ended results

5.2.3.1 Need for using English skills in current job

The data from the open-ended questions based on participants' responses (34% of 68 participants) showed that they agreed that English listening skill was very important, especially in terms of communicating with external customers and internal workers. This is because the skill is necessary to identify customers' needs and wants. Being able to listen and interpret the message received from customers is crucial as it allows staff to pass on the correct information to the salesperson to process sales. Effective communication is required between sales support staff and customers, meaning that English speaking skill is also important; 10% of the 68 participants agreed that speaking skill enables employees to provide accurate information, as well as engage in negotiations and offer deals to customers more effectively.

5.3 Discussion

Several interesting results from Chapter Four will be examined in detail to answer the research questions of this study in this section.

5.3.1 What are crucial English skills for sales support staff in Thailand?

In answer to the first research question, the results from both the close-ended statements and open-ended questions revealed that reading, writing, and speaking were seen as high-level needs, whereas listening skill was seen as less needed than the other three skills as a moderate need. This is probably because the context of terms and conditions was legal language and technical terms. Therefore, all four English skills were necessary for working in the sales staff position or sales support because of the criteria for any sales-related job. For example, any sales-related job in Malaysia requires superior communication skills in English. Therefore, sales personnel must be equipped with these skills so that they can perform their job effectively. This is related to the findings from Yaw Kuen (2001), who indicated that some salespeople might already have a certain degree of proficiency in speaking, listening, writing, and reading English skills. However, when it comes to communicating with prospective clients, there is no room for error. Continuous improvement is a key — the more proficient salespeople become, the higher the returns to their business.

Referring to reading skill, which was rated as the highest need, most of the aspects at very high need levels were related to work, such as reading daily emails and the terms and conditions of customers' or suppliers' agreements. The results are in line with the results of Chawwang (2008), who determined that reading was the most significant English language skill since it is used as the main tool for obtaining knowledge and data, most of which is available in printed and online materials, almost invariably written in the English language.

Moving on to writing skills, they were found to be one of the most necessary skills used in the sales support position. The most important aspects of writing skills included writing daily emails, writing the terms and conditions of customers' or suppliers' agreements, and sending messages through a group chat regarding the scheduling of meetings or urgent actions. The sales support needs to know how to structure paragraphs and essays, use technical terms, and have knowledge of

grammatical rules and vocabulary usage. Proficient skill in English wiring is considered as a requirement for sales support staff in order for them to achieve their targets. Wongsothon (1982) states that the nature of work in the business sector requires staff to use English writing skills more than government agencies and state enterprises, and English is used more for working purposes than personal and social purposes.

In the context of writing terms and conditions in documents, the tasks are mainly associated with coordination with foreign and non-foreign organizations. Sales support staff are obligated to be able to coordinate with both foreign and non-foreign organizations through written messages or emails. Thus, the sales support staff need to have various writing skills, such as requesting permission when the delivery terms need to change from the supplier paying to the customer paying, written communication offering congratulations or condolences, thank you emails, or preparing speeches for meetings with customers.

However, the findings on the comparison between the needs and difficulties of the sales support staff who work in a private company in Thailand in the writing aspect are similar to Seyabi and Tuzlukova's study (2014), which revealed that participants lacked knowledge about correct English language structures, vocabulary, and how to organize writing ideas and topics.

The third most needed skill required for the sales support position was speaking skill. This is in line with Park (2015), who found that speaking skills were highly important for Korean naval officers because they can help ensure the success of missions. Sales support staff in private companies in Thailand lack adequate opportunities to connect with customers or colleagues using English as a spoken language, similar to English listening skills. On the other hand, in a considerable number of private companies in Thailand, sales support staff in fact do have many opportunities to engage in spoken communication in various situations, such as coordinating or meeting with foreign customers, receiving customer delegations, or joining conferences hosted by foreign organizations. Regardless of the frequency of the opportunities to interact with customers, English speaking skill was still assessed to be one of the most required communication skills for the sales support position in an international working environment for face-to-face conversations with the intention of providing information, providing service, or exchanging information. In order for sales

support staff to perform effectively, they need to have an adequate background and basic knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation and word stress.

It is very important for sales support staff, especially those who frequently use spoken communication, to deliver correct messages to customers. In order to ensure the accuracy of spoken messages, the sales support staff need to be evaluated for their knowledge of English, which includes grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation based on consonant and vowel sounds, intonation, and word stress.

The sales support staff need to ensure that the messages are delivered clearly to customers, which requires good fluency in speaking. Speaking skills need to be developed by learning how to speak clearly and pronounce each word with correct tone and stress.

As for listening, the results showed that the need for listening skills was moderate for sales support staff to perform their duties, which differed from Sriurai's (2013) needs analysis. Her study determined that listening and speaking skills were the most difficult communicative skills for Thai government officials at the workplace and need to be improved. The results revealed that sales support staff in private companies have more opportunities to use speaking and listening skills in English to communicate with customers and colleagues than government officials. Thus, these communicative skills are neither prioritized for training nor practiced in the daily working life of government officials.

The most important aspect when working in an international context for sales support staff was listening to and understanding customers' wants. The sales support staff are under significant pressure to correctly receive and convey messages, and they are also required to naturally and appropriately respond in different situations.

To recapitulate, sales support staff have few chances to use the English language. However, listening skill is still essential for the success of sales support in multinational working environments, especially in situations in which they need to communicate face-to-face and respond naturally. Therefore, the nature of their working environment probably motivates the sales support staff to try to refine their English listening skills in order to carry out their duties effectively.

5.3.2 What are the difficulties that sales support staff encounter when using English skills in Thailand?

In terms of the difficulties in using English language skills, the results from the questionnaire revealed that reading was the most challenging skill among the four basic skills, primarily reading terms and conditions and emails. This agrees with the results of the study conducted by Wongwaiyut (2011), which revealed that English reading skills are important for people whose work is related to international affairs because they are required to read English written documents. However, they often face tremendous obstacles when reading documents, mainly due to a lack of familiarity with general vocabulary.

Reading is a process requiring a significant effort on the part of the readers to comprehend what they are reading. Effective reading comprehension mainly depends on the vocabulary knowledge of readers. Anjomshoa and Zamanian (2014) emphasize that reading comprehension and reading ability can be enhanced by increasing vocabulary knowledge, especially technical terminology.

Writing skills were considered to have a high difficulty level. The most challenging working scenarios for the sales support staff who participated in this study were writing terms and conditions and emailing sales agreements. These documents require the writer to use specific and complex legal terminology. The sales support staff who are responsible for these writing duties may have limited knowledge and face difficulties choosing appropriate terminology or vocabulary to accurately express their ideas. Moreover, some may lack background information and knowledge regarding the details of the product or sales contract that they are assigned to write.

The sales support staff may also struggle to assemble ideas coherently and organize the content in the proper format, i.e., the introduction, body, and concluding paragraphs. The reaffirms the work of Tangniam (2006), which showed that Thai Airways ground staff also faced challenges in English writing, specifically aviation documents, because the airline industry uses international standards for structure and communication and the staff have to correspond appropriately.

Although speaking skills were the third most challenging skill for the sales support position, the results indicate that difficulties arose when expressing gratitude when customers make complaints. The aspect which the participants perceived as the most challenging was pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds. This may be because this specific working situation requires a good ability in speaking skills, and the speakers need to have sufficient knowledge of the phonetics of the English language. Xiuqin (2006) also found that speakers who cannot speak English fluently are usually terrified of making mistakes and receiving harsh feedback from others. These worries and anxieties likely prevent them from improving their speaking skills.

Another difficulty encountered in spoken communication was the fact that participants had few opportunities to speak English with foreign customers at their workplaces, especially those who do not have proficient English speaking skills. The opportunities to take part in meetings or conferences that require the sales support staff to interact with foreign officials were limited to those who already had good English competency. As a result, the sales support who were required and willing to improve English language skills were not given the opportunity to practice their skills in the actual settings.

Listening skills were seen as the least difficult skill. The findings demonstrated that the sales support staff felt that listening to Indian accents was the most challenging, followed by various English accents. Khamprated (2012) determined that one of the listening challenges for language learners in a private vocational school was understanding speakers with various native English accents, namely American, Australian, and British accents. Sales support staff need to communicate with English native speakers and non-native English speakers. For that reason, different English accents are one of the elements that present listening challenges. Moreover, listening can be more challenging if the speakers are non-English speakers with strong accents, for example, Indian, Philippine, Singaporean, and Vietnamese speakers. In such situations, a lack of experiences listening to various accents could prevent listeners from understanding the content, possibly leading them to misinterpret the messages they hear.

Another problem regarding listening among the participants was when they have a conversation with customers via telephone.

To summarize, listening is an essential skill in the English language. Many language users, including sales support staff, are not able to comprehend what they hear. Most of the listening difficulties are related to unfamiliar accents, a lack of knowledge of idiomatic expressions, and inadequate vocabulary knowledge. It can be concluded that these issues are less likely to be found among sales support staff who frequently use English listening skills to communicate with speakers with various English accents to perform their job duties than for those who have few opportunities to use listening skills. It can be inferred that the lack of opportunities to use English in real-life situations prevents sales support staff from developing proficient English language skills.

5.4 Conclusion

This study attempted to assess and identify the needs and difficulties regarding English language skills used among sales support staff in a private company in Thailand. Out of the four communicative English skills, reading was the most required skill in the workplace, chiefly reading the terms and conditions in customers' or suppliers' agreements and sending out emails that involve using technical terms. According to the participants, reading and writing were identified as the most two difficult English communication skills. The participants felt that reading and writing in the context of negotiating terms and conditions in customers' or suppliers' agreements were the most challenging. The responses to the open-ended questions revealed that they agreed that English listening skill is crucial, especially in terms of communicating with external customers and internal workers. This is because the skill is necessary for identifying customers' needs and wants. Furthermore, being able to listen and interpret the messages received from customers is also critical, as it enables them to pass on correct information to the salespersons to process sales. To foster effective communication between sales support employees and customers, sufficient English proficiency is required, particularly in speaking, as this enables employees to provide accurate information, engage in negotiations and offer deals to customers more effectively.

English reading skills are also necessary for the sales support staff when it comes to understanding the details of purchase orders. Moreover, reading skill is required to understand the terms and conditions related to each sale. However, some participants mentioned that this skill is less necessary in comparison to other English language skills. In addition, participants also perceived that there are my supporting tools and applications in the present day that can enhance reading skills, e.g., translation applications. Among the four English language skills, the participants agreed that English writing was the most essential skill required by the sales support position since the position involves often dealing with email correspondence with customers. This implies that good writing skill is necessary to perform their daily work effectively.

The findings from this study may be used as guidelines for improving the English language skills of staff in organizations where they are required to communicate within or between organizations. These organizations will be able to adjust or redesign their working environments to provide more opportunities for staff to improve their English communication. This should enable them to make a more effective contribution, benefitting the organization as a whole.

5.5 Recommendations for further studies

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research.

5.5.1 The number of participants in this study was limited to all the sales support positions in a private company in Thailand, which was sixty-eight people. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to those who work in other private companies in Thailand. Further study could explore more target situations, and the participants could provide additional information regarding the potential working situations that require the use of English in open-ended questions.

5.5.2 Since this study only focused on the sales support division, future research could be conducted with other divisions to discover the similarities and differences.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONIARES OF A SURVEY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS FOR SALES SUPPORT IN PRIVATE COMPANY IN THAILAND

Verification of Participants

Are you a sales support who is working in Bangkok?

(   ) Yes (start the questionnaire)

(   ) No (end)

Part I: Demographic and General information

Instruction: Please provide your personal information.

1. Gender

    (   ) Male (   ) Female

2. Nationality

    (   ) Thai (   ) Other, specify………….

3. Age (Years)

    (   ) < 20   (   ) 20 - 30

    (   ) 31 – 40   (   ) 41 - 50

    (   ) 51 – 60   (   ) > 60

4. Education

    (   ) Bachelor's Degree   (   ) Master's Degree

    (   ) Ph. D.   (   ) Other, specify………….

5. Years of English Studying (years)

    (   ) < 10   (   ) 10-15

    (   ) 16-20   (   ) > 20

6. Years of working in the Sales Support position for …………….years

7. Type of your organization (   ) Thai   (   ) International

8. Is English necessary for your current position? (   ) Yes (   ) No

Part 2: General Opinions about language skills in using English: listening,
    speaking, reading and writing

Instruction: Please put X into the appropriate (   ).

1. How do you rate your <u>listening</u> skills in English?

    (   )Excellent   (   )Good   (   )Fair   (   )Poor   (   )Very poor

2. How do you rate your <u>speaking</u> skills in English?

    (   )Excellent   (   )Good   (   )Fair   (   )Poor   (   )Very poor

3. How do you rate your <u>reading</u> skills in English?

    (   )Excellent   (   )Good   (   )Fair   (   )Poor   (   )Very poor

    4. How do you rate your <u>writing</u> skills in English?

    (   )Excellent   (   )Good   (   )Fair   (   )Poor   (   )Very poor

5. In your job, how often do you need to use the following language skills?

Skills	Most	A Lot	Somewhat	A Little	Least
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					

6. In your job, what level of difficulty do you encounter for the
    following language skills?

Skills	Most	A Lot	Somewhat	A Little	Least
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					

Part 3: The needs and difficulties in using English skills: listening, speaking,

reading and writing.

Instruction: Please put X into the appropriate box.

1. To what extent do you need and what extent do you encounter difficulties the following <u>Listening Skills</u> in your job?

Level of Needs					Listening Skill	Level of Difficulties				
5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
					1. Listening to and understanding what customers/team want.					
					2. Listening to customers/teams' complaints					
					3. Listening to customers/teams' satisfaction					
					4. Listening to personal details and information					
					5. Listening to conversations by phone					
					6. Listening to slang expressions					
					7. Listening to idiomatic English					
					8. Listening to American English accent					
					9. Listening to Vietnamese English accent					
					10. Listening to Philippine English accent					
					11. Listening to Singaporean English accent					
					12. Listening to Indian English accent					

2. To what extent do you need and what extent do you encounter difficulties the following <u>Speaking Skills</u> in your job?

Level of Needs					Speaking Skill	Level of Difficulties				
5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
					1. Welcoming and greeting					
					2. Inquiring about customers/teams' information and needs.					
					3. Making polite requests					
					4. Offering assistance					
					5. Giving customers/teams' products information.					
					6. Refusing politely					
					7. Offering options for customers/team.					
					8. Suggesting company information (e.g. history, business units, products, sales person, etc.).					
					9. Conducting conversations by phone					
					10. Apologizing when mistakes occur					
					11. Explaining the reason for mistakes					
					12. Expressing gratitude when customers give compliments					

Level of Needs					Speaking Skill	Level of Difficulties				
5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
					13. Clarifying questions or confirming messages					
					14. Making public address announcements					
					15. Pronouncing English consonant and vowel sounds					
					16. Speaking with appropriate word stress					
					17. Speaking with appropriate word intonation					
					18. Speaking using Engineer terminology correctly					
					19. Speaking politely according to grammatical rules and social etiquette					

3. To what extent do you need and what extent do you encounter difficulties the following <u>Reading Skills</u> in your job?

Level of Needs					Reading Skill	Level of Difficulties				
5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
					1. Reading term and conditions' documents.					
					2. Reading emails					

4. To what extent do you need and what extent do you encounter difficulties the following <u>Writing Skills</u> in your job?

Level of Needs					Writing Skill	Level of Difficulties				
5	4	3	2	1		5	4	3	2	1
					1. Writing daily emails					
					2. Issuing term and conditions documents					

Part 4: Suggestions.

1. How does English skills important roles in your current job?

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2. How do you want the company to arrange English courses or the process for improving to meet your needs and the difficulties that you found ?

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3. How does English skills important roles in your current job?

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4. How do you want the company to arrange English courses or the process for improving to meet your needs and the difficulties that you found ?
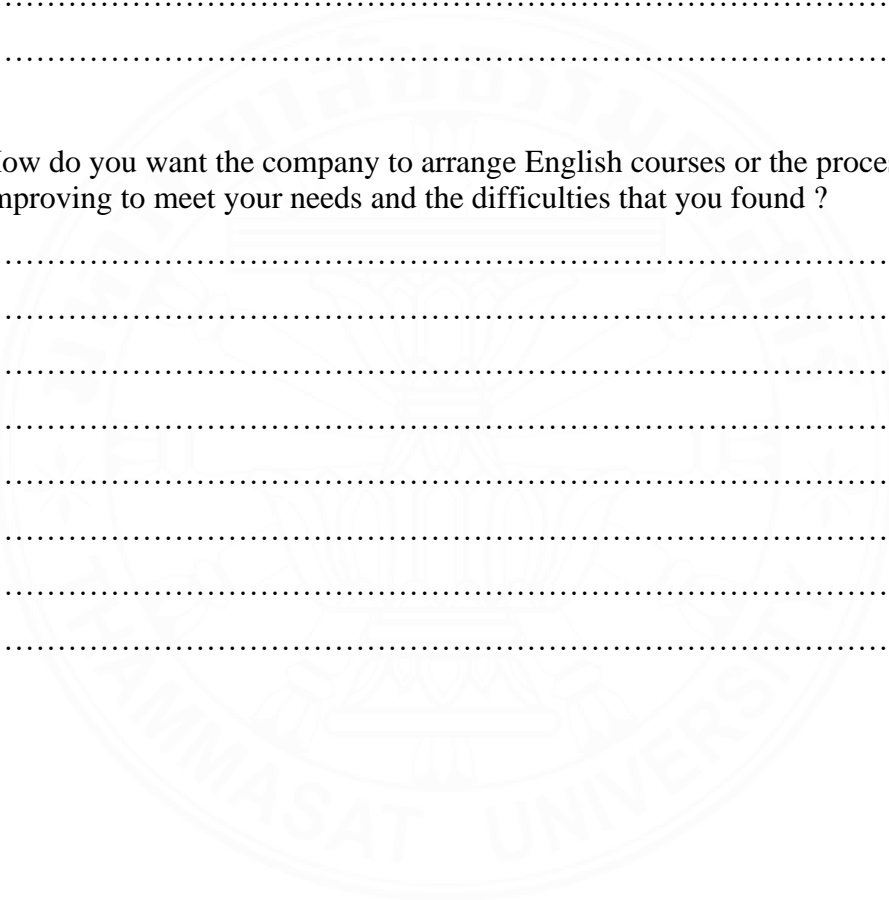
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BIOGRAPHY

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Date of Birth	September 9, 1988
Educational Attainment	2014: Bachelor's Degree of Arts, Major English
Work Position	Order Management Administrator
	Emerson (Thailand) Limited
Scholarship	-
Publications	
Work Experiences	Order Management Administrator and chevron
	key account
	Emerson (Thailand) limited
	12 Nov 2018 – present
	Shipment and material coordinator
	wholesale Electric Asia (Thailand) limited
	Jun 2016 – 30 Sep 2018
	Export sales and customer service
	L.Y. Industries co., ltd.
	May 2014 – Jun 2016
	Oversea coordinator and secretary
	Vet inter-business co., ltd.
	Nov 2012 – May 2014