

# **The Development of an e-learning Business English Communication Package for Medium and Small Enterprises Staff**

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## **Abstract**

This research aimed at studying the e-Learning of business English communication package for employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The research objectives were to investigate the business English communication needs of medium and small enterprises staff to enable them to work and communicate with foreigners effectively, to develop an effective e-Learning business English communication package for medium and small enterprises staff and compare the English communication between before and after learning through e-Learning business English communication package. The participants of this study were 200 from 10 small and medium enterprises and 30 participants selected from a small and medium enterprise that uses English language for their work. The research instrument used for collecting data were questionnaire survey, in-depth interview, and post-test. The percentage and mean were used to analyze the statistical data. It was found the e-Learning business English communication package which included the conversation class with the teachers who were native speakers, the study of common dialogue used in everyday life and the vocabulary

learning were effective as the post-test scores of 30 participants were improved.

**Keywords:** e-Learning, business English communication package, small and medium enterprises, communication in English

## Introduction

Nowadays, the number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand has been growing significantly due to the support by the governments with the aims to increase the potential of the country after joining the ASEAN community. The language however can become the great barricade for Thai enterprises owners for accomplishing their goals because the working language of ASEAN Community is English.

English is an important language of the world as it currently serves as the common language throughout the world. Many people in different countries use English as the medium language to use primarily for communicating with each other regardless of that which language each person uses as the national language (Canale and Swain, 1980; Crystal, 1997). Therefore, when it comes to the dealing or negotiation of businesses or other matters with other people who have different languages and cultures, most people will use English as a primary language. And for this reason, English has become the second language of many people, followed to their national language (Hamilton and Parker, 1997). In general, English language is placed as the core of the curriculum at all levels of Thai education since the early childhood until lifelong education, especially when the country enters the ASEAN community, of which has determined English to be the working language among citizens of 10 member countries. This means that everyone in ASEAN should be able to make use of English language in order to connect with ASEAN community and society networks, seek opportunities in ASEAN, or even to other countries in ASEAN (Chatsawat and Rimkeeratikul, 2013).

Thailand also has concern about the importance of English in daily life. The government as well as other related agencies and organizations have worked together in providing the study programs and activities that help boost the level of understanding towards English to Thai people for many years. According to the report of Office of the Educational Council (2004), it was found that there was an escalating English programs in study curriculum. For instance, in 1999, 46 international schools which comprised of the elementary and secondary private schools had English in their curricula meanwhile in 2002, the number of schools increased to 67. Additionally, the 2003, it raised to 89 in 2003. Accordingly, the report also found that in the higher education including both private and public

universities, the 521 international programs were provided in 2003, increased from the year 1999 and 2002 with 356 and 465 international programs, respectively. In addition to this, the governmental agencies and private sectors at the moment now require the applicants to submit the results of TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) with score of 550+ as another requirement for them in order to get the job. There was also the scheme of Education Reform from 2009 to 2018 with the aims to promote Thai people to have better use of foreign languages, and improve their proficiency in foreign languages including local Southeast Asian, Chinese, Japanese, and of course English. All these efforts are the vivid proof to claim that Thai government along with the governmental agencies and private sectors do not omit the significance of English language and have always tried to contribute to the better understanding towards foreign languages of Thai people all along (Kaur, Young and Kirkpatrick, 2016).

However, it seems that these efforts were not productive when considering the results expected. Currently, many Thais still do not efficiently use English in daily life. They mostly feel nervous to use English even though they know how relevant it is for their life. It is important to note that though many Thais can better use English, the proportion of those who is incapable of using this language is much greater. According to the results of English proficiency test which includes speaking, writing and reading, it was found that the average Thais and Thai children got low scores ranked 53rd out of 80 countries across the world where English is not the language that is used in daily life, and ranked the 15<sup>th</sup> out of 20 Asian countries (Fredrickson, 2016). Even though the test scores are better compared to neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar but still behind many countries in the same region such as China, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

This reflects that the country needs to put more efforts to promote the efficiency in use of English language among Thai citizens. It turns a worrying trend to Thailand that a considerable number of Thai workforce in the market cannot use English to communicate with foreigners. Many working people in Thailand, assuming to be aged at least 24 years old, are not capable of using English as usual while most of them also have the problems of listening and speaking in English since they rarely have a chance to interact with foreigners in their real life (Panpreuk and Mahapontong, 2007). Therefore, they might find it difficult to listen to the foreigners who communicate with them in English language or accent that they are not familiar with. In some cases, Thai working people also have the problem with their pronunciation that is not accurate and clear enough which results in that the foreigners might not truly understand what they say. These problems also causes them to have less confidence in using English significantly. And thus, Thai enterprises owners are facing challenge in overcoming this language

barrier that could directly affect their business. In fact, a lot of small enterprises owners in Thailand realize the necessity of English language because they need to involve in international operation while in almost every function of business, ability to use English language can make their business gain more potential to compete in international markets.

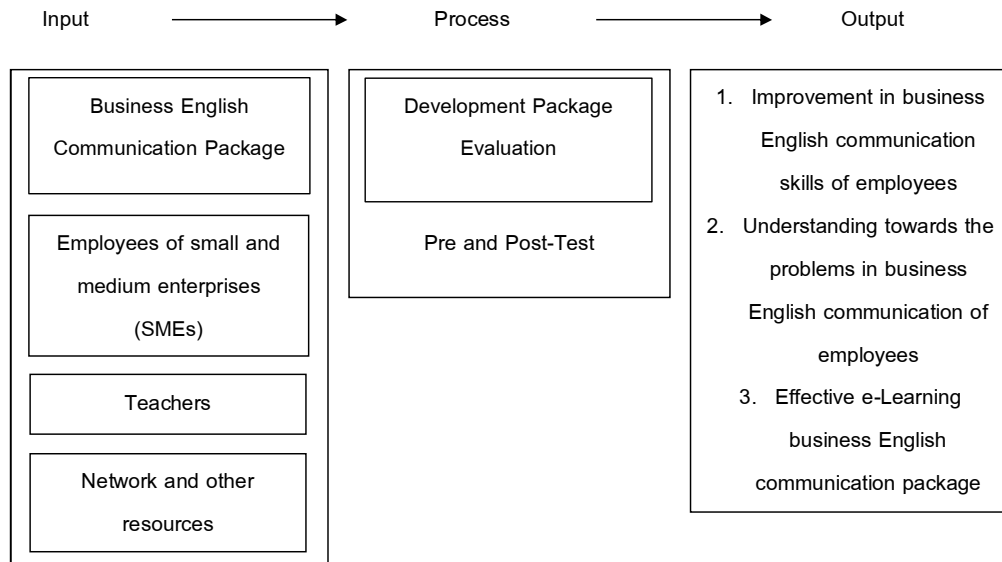
With the development and advancement in technologies today, e-Learning is the recommended option for the study program which supports the progress of students who cannot attend the traditional classroom. In general, various study programs now rely on e-Learning because it can be proceeded anytime and anywhere that the internet connection remains stable and there is no need for the presence of both teachers and students for starting the class. Teaching through the system of e-Learning is also convenient for the teachers to edit or add the content anytime they want as its system only require computers as the main component for accessing and reviewing information. Students can study by using computer at their home so that they do not need to go to school which can save a lot of time. In addition to this, e-Learning is also considered as the cost effective way of learning. To clarify this, compared to other traditional forms of learning, it could significantly reduce the costs due to its ability to learn through online platform which saves the costs of travel, course materials as well as other accommodations.

Therefore, this study would like to focus on the importance of an e-Learning business English communication package that helps eliminate the language barrier issues among Thai enterprises owners and increase their potential in operating business internationally.

## **Objectives**

1. To investigate the business English communication needs of medium and small enterprises staff to enable them to work and communicate with foreigners effectively
2. To examine the opinions of the medium and small enterprises staff toward the English communication
3. To develop an effective e-Learning business English communication package for medium and small enterprises staff
4. To compare the English communication between before and after learning through e-Learning business English communication package

## Research Framework



## Variables

This study comprises of three stages; including input, process and output. The input are business English communication package, employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), teachers and network and other resources. The process is the development package evaluation. The output are improvement in business English communication skills of employees, understanding towards the problems in business English communication of employees and effective e-Learning business English communication package.

## Methodology

The present study is a mixed-method research which is the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. By implementing both research strategies, the data gained from the participants will be the insight data (from the in-depth interview) and able to present the characteristics or common phenomena through the statistical data (from the survey questionnaire).

## Participants

As this research mainly focuses on the small and medium enterprise (SMEs), the target population of this study is the enterprises staff as they are mostly assumed to have the problems with English language. The sample size in

this study includes 200 participants for questionnaire survey and 30 participants for the interviews who represent the total population. All participants in this research will be selected by using the simple random sampling which means that every staff in the selected enterprises will have an equal chance to be selected to be the participants in this research study.

The number of 200 participants of the survey questionnaire is selected from 10 small and medium enterprises that use English language for their work including negotiating and communicating with foreigners in NongKhaem District, Bangkok. Meanwhile, the number of 30 participants of the in-depth interview are selected from an enterprise from a list of 10 enterprises.

### **Instruments**

The study uses the in-depth interview, survey questionnaire, and pre- and post-test as the research instrument, in correspondence with the qualitative and quantitative strategy, respectively. In-depth interview is selected because it enables the researcher to gain the insights of the participants about the problems they experience in using English meanwhile the survey questionnaire has a key advantage that it allows the researcher to collect the data from a great sample size who represents the total population of respondents in the limited time, and it also greatly is often used to present the statistical data of study. The in-depth interview will be arranged for 30 participants after the questionnaire papers are collected from a group of 200 participants. Then, the participants of interviews will be provided with the pre-test before learning through e-Learning business communication package. They will be assigned to do the post-test after learning completely.

### **Procedures/Experiments**

To gain the quantitative data, the questionnaire survey will be conducted on 200 participants to identify the problems in business English communication at the workplace as well as the areas to improve. And then, the participants of the in-depth interview will be questioned about the trends of English language usage in Thailand and e-Learning business English communication package including the problems found and ways to develop the package for better effectiveness. Then, the researcher will develop an e-Learning business communication package based on the data gained from both questionnaire survey and in-depth interview. The participants of the interview will be assigned to do the pre- and post-test in order to compare between before and after learning through e-Learning business communication package developed by the researcher.

## Data analysis

In order to analyze the data gained from both in-depth interview and survey questionnaire, the researcher designs the analysis process for each of them separately. To ensure the validity of the interview, all participants will be asked the same questions in the same order and the researcher will use recording as a technique to interpret the participants' opinion most precisely in order to ensure the correctness of data. The records, of which derives from the participants of the interview will then be analyzed meticulously into the interpretation of their perception towards English language as well as other relevant issues found in the use of English, using content analysis which focuses on the main points and evaluate the texts systematically. The pre-test and post-test will be provided to the 30 participants to see their progress after they attend the e-Learning business English communication package arranged by the researcher based on the results from the study.

## Results

In respond to the research objectives; the business English communication needs of medium and small enterprises staff to and the participants' opinions toward the English communication, the results of the questionnaire survey on 200 participants are statistically presented in percentage as shown in the below tables.

**Table 1.** Attitude towards English communication

Attitude towards English Communication	Agreement Level (number of respondents)	Agreement Level (percentage)
English is a useful language for communication.	165	82.5%
The ability to communicate in English is important for their work.	186	93%
I would like to have their English communication skills in order to communicate with foreigners more effectively.	176	88%
If I am good at communication in English, I will be able to interact the foreigners more.	156	78%

**Table 2.** Problems in English communication

<b>Problems in English Communication</b>	<b>Agreement Level (number of respondents)</b>	<b>Agreement Level (percentage)</b>
I have the problems when they needed to speak or communicate in English.	166	83%
Sometimes, I do not understand what the foreigners talked to me.	164	82%
I am not sure whether the foreigners understood what I say.	124	62%
I am not sure whether I form the dialogue for communication in English correctly.	144	72%
I have the limited number of English vocabularies that I know.	156	78%
The unknown English vocabularies affect my ability to use English for communication	171	85.5%
I do not have the clear understanding towards the English grammar rules.	148	74%

**Table 3.** Improvements in English communication

<b>Improvements in English Communication</b>	<b>Agreement Level (number of respondents)</b>	<b>Agreement Level (percentage)</b>
I would like to practice communication in English more.	191	95.5%
I would like to practice speaking and listening with the native speakers.	156	78%
I would like to learn more about the vocabularies that were often found in daily communication.	166	83%
I would like to improve their pronunciation skills.	144	72%
I have the limited number of English vocabularies that I know.	165	82.5%
I would like to improve their English accent.	135	67.5%

Based on the results shown in Table 1, it was found that most participants believed that English was a useful language for communication and also majority of them had a positive attitude towards English communication. Accordingly, many of them considered as 88 percent would like to have their English



communication skills so that they could communicate with foreigners more effectively. By the way, the results shown in Table 2 demonstrated that their problems regarding the communication. It was found that 83 percent of them had the problems when they needed to speak or communicate in English, reflecting their problems in English communication. Similarly, it was also found that majority of them did not understand what the foreigners talked to them, and were not sure whether the foreigners understood what they said. The related issue was the lack of confidence in forming the English dialogue for communication 72 percent of them were not sure whether they formed the dialogue for communication in English correctly. The other problems regarding English communication were the issues of unknown English vocabularies, and less understanding towards the English grammar rules which were also highly concerned among the participants. As shown in Table 3, the improvement areas in English communication of the participants were the needs for speaking and listening practices with the native speakers as well as the needs to learn more English vocabularies which they could use in daily communication. The participants also need to improve their pronunciation skills and English accent which could be effectively promoting their communication in English.

The participants' opinions toward English communication were further explored through the in-depth interview, of which illustrated that most of the participants believed that English could help them achieve in career because English was an important skills for them to use especially when communicating with the foreigners who became the business partners of their enterprises. And many of them also revealed that they had always tried to improve their English skills all the time through various ways and tried to prepare for English communication skills before going to meet the foreigners. This showed that English was positively viewed by the participants and that they believed English skills was important to their work at first place. Furthermore, there were some ways which they used to practice English e.g. watch movie and listen to the songs in English in order to get acquainted with the English accent so that he could understand what the foreigners said more clearly. It was also found that some participants would like to practice English speaking skills by talking to themselves in English whenever they had a free time. Only a few participants were satisfied with their current English communication skills. The findings from the interview also found that e-Learning business communication package which was needed by the participants might include the practices of communication skills as they revealed that having the good English communication skills could enable them to highly get promoted than those who were not capable of using English for communication with foreigners. Many participants discussed about the problems they had experienced when trying to use English for communication with others. Some of them stated that their main problems circulating their English skills were

caused by their lack of knowledge about the vocabulary including the correct use of grammar which made them stuck when they were trying to form a sentence. Some participants added to this point that with the less vocabularies they knew, they could not understand what the others said and thus made them feel awkward to join in a conversation where they did not completely understand every word.

## Communicative Approach

In respond to the research objectives; to develop an effective e-Learning business English communication package for medium and small enterprises staff and to compare the English communication between before and after learning through e-Learning business English communication package, the researcher developed an e-Learning business English communication package for 30 participants of in-depth interview who represented the total population of medium and small enterprises staff based on the analysis and discussion of the data from the survey questionnaire and in-depth interview. They were assigned to do the pre-test before learning and post-test and after learning through the developed e-Learning business English communication package. Each test had its structure consisting of 50 questions which each question was scored for two marks and were separated into two parts including, 1) dialogue and conversation with 30 questions, and 2) vocabulary with 20 questions. The time allocation for each test was 50 minutes. Hence, the total score for each test was 100 marks.

After all 30 participants did the pre-test, they were scheduled to attend the e-Learning business English communication package which was an English program consisting of the listening and speaking practice with a foreign instructor, and vocabulary learning with a Thai instructor through Skype application. All participants were seated at a room where projector in the room was used for Skype meeting. The program was held for two days consecutively, starting from 16.00 - 18.00 pm. The post-test was held in the next day after the program was completed.

**Table 4.** Pre-test and post-test results

Type of Test	N	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Mean
Pre-Test	30	84	56	64
Post-Test	30	90	58	72

The results from pre- and post-test showed that the average scores of the post-test of the participants were significantly higher than those of the pretest scores. The average score of the pre-test was 64 marks (average score of dialogue

and conversation was 38 and average score of 26). The average score of the post-test was 72 marks (average score of dialogue and conversation was 44 and average score of 28) which was increased from the average score of the pre-test by 8 marks. Furthermore, it was found that the highest score of the pre-test was 84 marks meanwhile the highest one of the post-test was 90 marks, showing an increase by 6 marks.

This showed that the developed e-Learning communication package is effective because the participants could succeed in learning and understanding English communication more than before they learnt the package. In brief, the researcher conclude the e-Learning business English communication package that should be implemented to the English communication study of the employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) includes as follows;

**Table 5.** Lessons in the developed e-learning business English communication package and its benefits

Study Lessons within Package	Benefits
The conversation class with the teachers who are native speakers	Improving listening and speaking skills Getting familiar with the native English accent Practicing the native English accent
The study of common dialogue which is used in everyday life	Clearly understanding and learning the new dialogue Being capable of using the dialogue to fit the real situations and communicate with others
The vocabulary learning	Clearly understanding and learning the new vocabularies Ability to form a dialogue with broader knowledge of vocabularies Understand the vocabularies when communicating with others

## Discussion

According to the results of this study, it is clearly seen that most of the staff of the small and medium enterprises had the positive attitude towards English language. For instance, they agreed that English was not only a useful language but also important to their work because of their scope of work and responsibilities which require them to engage in interaction and communication with the foreigners. With their concerns towards the importance of language, it results in their needs of having English communication skills while they also perceive that they would interact with foreigners more if they were able to communicate in English. The study further explores the problems related to their communication in English. It is found that the main problems of employees who work in small and medium enterprises in NongKhaem District were that they only had the limited vocabularies and inability to form the correct English dialogue

used for communication. Meanwhile, their understanding of English language such when the foreigners speak to them was quite poor. This is supported by the results from the in-depth interview as participants mentioned that their problems are the lack of broad knowledge about the English vocabularies whereas their lack of understanding towards how to correctly form a sentence when they want to speak in English is another English communication issue that is needed to be solved. As a consequence, the researcher develops the e-Learning business communication package by focusing in the problems which they are encountering and their needs for the English communication package. The developed e-Learning business communication package covers the conversation class with the teachers who are native speakers, the study of common dialogue which is used in everyday life, and the vocabulary learning. The results to ensure the effectiveness of this package is measured by the pre- and post-test which shows that the scores of participants significantly increases after learning through this package. Therefore, it can be summarized that this developed e-Learning business communication package is effective and could be applied to the enterprises staff who are looking for a way to improve their English communication. By learning the conversation with the native speakers, the enterprise staff can learn of the native accents as well as getting familiar with the conversation with foreigners. This can help reduce their awkwardness when communication with foreigners at their workplace. In terms of the study of common dialogue, it is important for the enterprises staff to acknowledge the dialogue which they would probably find at their workplace because it allows them to automatically interpret and respond to the other English speakers promptly and precisely. The study of dialogue also provides them a chance to get familiar with the dialogues which are generally used in daily life, supporting their ability to communicate in English professionally. As for the vocabulary learning, in order to tackle the issues of unknown vocabularies, this truly enhances the knowledge of enterprises staff so that they can know the meaning of such words and can interact with others more confidently.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study suggests that English is an important language for most small and medium enterprises in Thailand especially when the country has joined ASEAN community which means that the local enterprises have a great opportunities to meet the significant growth due to the business collaboration or business partnering with businesses overseas. However, one of the top concerns of Thai entrepreneurs and enterprises is that language barrier which could potentially block them from stepping forward. Many Thai people who are regarded as Thai workforce seem to have the problem when they have to use English for communication with foreigners despite the supports for improving English skills by various agencies from both public and private sectors. The study makes

an investigation towards the existing problems of the medium and small enterprises staff related to the use of English for communication and develops an effective e-Learning business communication package which helps the participants in this study achieve in learning English communication. It is suggested that the e-Learning business English communication package which can help the enterprises staff improve their communication in English should include the conversation class with the teachers who are native speakers, the study of common dialogue which is used in everyday life and the vocabulary learning as the study lessons are effective way to improve the communication skills of the staff of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Last but not least, the researcher suggests the future researcher who would like to study in the same topic to conduct the study on staff from the different small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are selected in this study to see whether there are any different results.

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