

English for Homestay Tourism: Barriers and Needs of Entrepreneurs in Rural Community of Thailand

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Abstract—Nowadays English language has become a medium of communication and is used as a lingua franca by native and non-native speakers including in homestay tourism. Therefore, this qualitative research investigates the barriers and needs of English for homestay entrepreneurs in a rural community, in Phetchabun province, Thailand. The samples were 15 key informants selected by purposive sampling. They are homestay entrepreneurs in Baan Saliang Haeng 3, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun province that has obtained the Thai homestay standard evaluation. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were employed for data collection and the data were analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings reveal two main issues: i) the limitations and barriers of using English for communication with international visitors and ii) Needs for English skills development for homestay entrepreneurs. The key limitations of the homestay owners are their educational background. Most of them graduated from primary and secondary school as well as they do not use English in their daily life. As a result, they lack knowledge of English vocabulary and are not able to construct English sentences. In terms of the need for English improvement, most homestay entrepreneurs need English learning materials that are in bilingual version (Thai – English) with Thai language reading and meaning such as a booklet with the contents of greetings, room explanation, room rate, room facilities, amenities explanation, and tour itinerary of the community which they can learn by themselves.

Index Terms—English for homestay, needs analysis, tourism, Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

The English language becomes a medium of communication and is used as a lingua franca by native and non-native speakers including in the tourism context. English is not only a method of international communication but it is also a source of power, through which proficient language users such as tourist guides, interpreters, and translators have become key representations and actors respected by other CBT participants who lack English capital (Nomnian et al., 2020). For all tourism professionals, a strong working command of English is an essential (Astawa et al., 2019). Thus, ESP needs analysis of designing courses to develop English language skills for tourism stakeholders is important, especially, in homestay tourism which is able to link international tourists to the history, culture, nature, wisdom, and the way people live in the community.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to language instruction in which all content and method selections are based on the learners' motivation to learn (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Therefore, designing ESP courses, and doing needs analysis is important, especially, in the tourism context of English for homestay. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), needs were defined as necessities, wants, and lacks. (Brindley, 1989, p. 56) claimed: "it is the gap between what the learners' actual needs are and what should be taught to them."

Similarly, in other provinces in Thailand, Phetchabun is one of the second-tier provinces where the homestay has been promoted by the government sector in order to integrate with creative tourism that has been contained in the provincial development plan (2018 - 2022) (Phetchabun Development Plan, 2018). However, few studies on the extent to which the development of homestay services in Phetchabun province, for instance, Somsak and Promprasert (2018) studied the context of Homestay in Khao Kho, Phetchabun with eight key informants who are leaders and villagers joining in homestay community enterprise. The findings found that the homestays were evaluated as the Thai Homestay Standard and managed with a small group of 5-7 households. Unfortunately, there is no study about English skill development for homestay entrepreneurs in this area.

Consequently, this study aims to investigate the barriers and needs of English for homestay entrepreneurs in the rural community, in Thailand in order to explore the means to improve homestay entrepreneurs' English skill development. Moreover, it also supports the master plan under the tourism nation strategy (2018-2037) (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018) and the Phetchabun provincial development plan (2018-2022) in terms of promoting and developing creative tourism to high values (Phetchabun Development Plan, 2018) as well as it is in accordance with sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4); decent work and economic growth which can assist the homestay entrepreneurs to earn extra income for tourism management if they are able to use the English language to communicate with the foreigners. Findings thus contribute to the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of English for

tourism professionals and are able to apply to other communities in terms of enhancing the potential of tourism entrepreneurs.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Setting and Participants

This qualitative research was taken place at Baan Saliang Haeng 3 homestay in Nong Mae Na, Khao Kho District, Phetchabun province with fifteen homestay entrepreneurs who were the head of Baan Saliang Haeng 3 homestay and the owners of the homestay. The key informants were selected by purposive sampling as they were from the homestays that have obtained the Thai homestay standard evaluation and were ready to service the tourists both Thais and foreigners as well as willing to improve their English language skills.

Baan Saliang Haeng 3 homestay (Lower Northern of Thailand)

Baan Saliang Haeng 3 homestay is located in Khao Kho District, Phetchabun province in Lower Northern Thailand. The homestay is small lodging with a small group of 5-7 households that have met the Thai Homestay Standard, homestay tourism under the streamlined POLC management, to accomplish the specified goals by planning, organizing, leading, controlling, and monitoring these small accommodations (Somsak & Promprasert, 2018).

The community's resources were employed to be tourist attractions such as streams, community forests, mulberry farms including various types of winter vegetables, and fruit such as hydroponics vegetable plots, strawberry plots, passion fruit plots, Hmong pumpkin plots, coffee plantations, organic vineyards, etc. In addition, the community has organized two days trips and activities for tourists. The trip will be started at 2 p.m. and take two hours to travel around the community by local vehicle (Rod E-Tak). The price is 500 baht for 10 people. The main activities are roasting coffee, making salad dressing, learning how to grow vegetables, and farming. Therefore, the tourism management in this community will be focused on agriculture which can be linked to the homestay tourism program since it is one of the people's ways of life in the community and can lead to sustainability in the rural community. Although running homestays has a significant ability to promote SDGs 1 and 11, there are major expenditures that necessitate communal planning and management (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021).

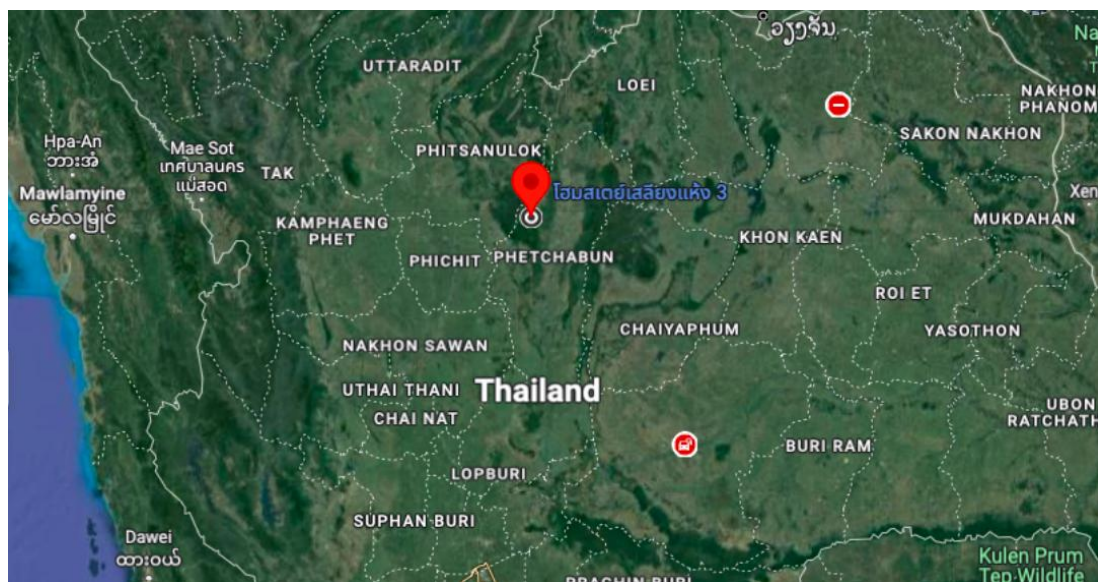


Figure 1 The Map of Baan Saliang Haeng 3 Homestay

Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/โฮมสเตย์สลียงแฮ้ง3/@15.6004675,96.8123169,1198737m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x31201511fd90ab29:0xc357e14dbc78c846!8m2!3d16.5865713!4d100.9519917>

B. Research Instruments

The data collection instruments were semi-structured interviews and participant observation (Creswell, 2009) as follows:

(a). Semi-Structured Interviews

To investigate deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the entrepreneurs who play a significant role in homestay tourism. The examples of the interview questions are as follows:

- What is the general context of homestay tourism management in your community?
- How often do you use English in the homestay tourism context?
- What English skills do you often use to communicate with international visitors?
- In which situation do you use English for communication in the tourism context in your community?

- Do you ever face problems or challenges in using English for homestay tourism? And how do you overcome these problems?

- What English skills do you need to improve?

- What topics and contents do you need to improve for English for homestay tourism?

The length of each interview was approximately 25-30 minutes.

(b). Observation and Field Notes

Participant observation was selected to understand the authentic community context in order to explore the way for research questions to examine the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews about barriers and needs of homestay entrepreneurs in using English for communication. The total observation time was 10 days; it was divided into 3 days, 3 days, and 4 days.

C. Research Ethics

This research project was approved by Phetchabun Rajabhat University Research Committee PCRU-REC No. 003/2021 on November 2, 2021.

D. Data Collection

To study the limitations, barriers, and needs of English for homestay tourism of entrepreneurs in Phetchabun, Thailand, a qualitative research approach was employed as a paradigm to collect the data. Firstly, I visited the community and contacted the homestay leader and homestay entrepreneurs in order to inquire basic information about the tourism context in the community, and then I asked to enter the area to observe the context of tourism management by using participatory observation and finally, requesting an interview with the homestay entrepreneurs in terms of limitations, barriers, and needs of English used for homestay tourism in order to explore the means to improve their English language skill development.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with fifteen key informants; there are one homestay leader and fourteen entrepreneurs. The interview questions covered the following broad topics: general context of homestay management in the community, English functions and barriers to communication with international tourists, and needs for English skills development for homestay tourism.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen key informants in the Thai language at the homestay in the community. The length of each interview was approximately 25-30 minutes and was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into the English version. The confirmed transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, and based on the conceptual framework, themes in this study were identified. Thematic analysis is a useful method for examining themes that have been found and disclosing interpreted cultural meanings, which form the main topics of investigation and debate in tourist research (Walters, 2016).

Participatory observations were conducted by participating in the homestay activities, for instance, coffee roasting activities, making salad dressings, and taking a local vehicle (Rod E-Tak) to see the way of life of people in the community. I observed them conducting a tour when there are tourists who came to visit and stay at the homestay and do activities. I visited and stayed in the community five times to participate in the activities that they provide to the tourists.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Limitations and Barriers of Using English for Communication With International Visitors

From the interviews with the sample group on the issue of problems with using English for homestay tourism, it was found that the homestay entrepreneurs had a limitation in using the English language for communication because of their educational background. Most of them graduated from primary and secondary school as well as they do not use English in their daily life. As a result, they lack knowledge of English vocabulary and are not able to construct English sentences correctly. Most of them do not have the opportunity to use English to communicate with foreign tourists. The villagers involved in local tourism management lack even fundamental English language skills (Nomnian et al., 2020). The homestay owners often face that the guests speak too fast and they do not have enough vocabulary (Erfiani et al., 2021). However, they solve a problem if they cannot communicate with foreigners by using body language. In terms of tourism public relations, the community does not have a definite tour itinerary and lacks a channel, especially, the knowledge of applying social media for promoting tourist attractions in the community which can cause this community still be unseen in Khao Kho District.

Extract 1

“In the COVID-19 situation, there are few international tourists coming to our community but most of them visited here with their Thai wives, therefore, we haven’t a chance to use the English language for communication with them.”

(1st homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Haeng 3)

This extract reveals that the entrepreneur has an opportunity to meet the foreign tourists but there is a limitation to using the English language for communication because they come to the community with Thai wives.

Extract 2

"I can use a simple or short English conversation such as greetings in a short sentence. We cannot use a long conversation to communicate with foreigners. If the foreigners talk to us, we do not know how to say in English"

(2nd homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Haeng 3)

This interview extract demonstrates that the participant has problems using English for communication.

Extract 3

"There are some tourists from China who came to our community. They spoke English to me but I cannot understand, I used body language with them."

(3rd homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Haeng 3)

This interview extract reveals the problem and limitation that has occurred with the homestay entrepreneurs when they communicated with international visitors. However, they solve this problem by employing body language.

Extract 4

"The activities that we provide for the tourists will be started at 2 p.m. When the tourists arrive at the homestay I will take them to travel around the community in order to touch the local way of life by Rod E-Tak. In the evening, the tourists will have dinner with the host as well as watch a local show. The homestay activities depend on the tourists' requests. We do not have a definite program tour."

(4th homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Haeng 3)

This extract shows that the community has interesting tourist attractions, however, the community lack tourism management and does not have a definite tour program both in Thai and English.

Extract 5

"I think English is important for the tourism context and I would like to speak English and use English for communication with foreigners but I cannot speak it because I did not know the English language at all."

(5th homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Haeng 3)

This extract demonstrates the English language plays an important role in the tourism context. The entrepreneurs need to improve their English language skills.

B. Needs for English Skills Development for Homestay Entrepreneurs

According to the interview about the need for English skills development for homestay entrepreneurs, the result reveals that most of them strongly agree that the English language is important because it will make their community known to international tourists and will generate more income from tourism management. In terms of English language skill development, listening and speaking are the most crucial skills that they would like to improve for communication. Additionally, most homestay entrepreneurs need English learning materials that are in bilingual versions (Thai – English) with Thai language reading and meaning in form of a booklet which can practice by themselves. The contents that they would like in the learning material consist of greetings and room explanation, room rate, room facilities and amenities explanation, and a tour itinerary of the community. Moreover, they need the content about the activities that the homestay has offered for the tourists such as making salad dressings, roasting coffee, burning Khao Lam, explaining local food menus and ingredients to tourists, as well as other expressions necessary for homestay tourism. In addition, the entrepreneurs also need signposts for tourist attractions in the community as well as a need for signboards describing interesting places in the community in bilingual versions (Thai-English). Similar to Nomnian et al. (2020), villagers preferred printed materials and CDs for improving their English skills as well as the need for traditional learning materials to modern devices, because of their unpredictable and poor internet speeds. Moreover, the study by Musleha et al. (2021) revealed that the homestay hosts in Tamansari tourism village require English as a means of communication with foreign tourists although the homestay hosts encountered some difficulties, including pronunciation, a lack of time, a lack of a partner to learn with, volatility in the number of international tourists visiting, and a lack of motivation to learn.

Extract 6

"I think, it would be better if we have a learning material such as a booklet because I can learn and practice by myself. I would like simple English learning material with Thai and English including meaning."

(6th homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Heang 3)

This interview extract reveals that the entrepreneurs would like to improve their English language skills through self-directed learning such as a booklet with two languages (Thai – English) with meaning and ease to use for practice.

Extract 7

"We need to know the vocabulary about vegetables that we bring to cook for the tourists such as chayote, Dok Dee Gung, or butternut. When the tourists asked me "what is it". I do not know what to say." Thus, if I know the vocabulary, I think I can answer them."

(7th homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Heang 3)

Extract 8

"For example, when making a salad dressing, we will have a recipe for what we put for the ingredients. We will explain to tourists and let them eat the salad dressing with vegetables that we have grown ourselves. Mostly, we describe it in the Thai language, however, if we can speak English it would be better."

(8th homestay entrepreneur, semi-structured interview, Baan Saliang Heang 3)

The interview extracts above show the need for homestay entrepreneurs about learning English for explaining homestay activities, menus, and ingredients as well as local vegetables such as chayote, Dok Dee Gung, or butternut.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the barriers and needs of homestay entrepreneurs in the second-tier province where CBT has been managed by local people in Phetchabun province, Thailand. The findings demonstrate a limitation in using the English language for communication with foreign tourists of homestay entrepreneurs, because of their different educational backgrounds. Moreover, the entrepreneurs lack knowledge of English vocabulary and are not able to construct English sentences. However, they solve a problem if they cannot communicate with foreigners by using body language. In terms of tourism public relations, the community does not have a definite tour itinerary and lacks a channel, especially, applying technology for promoting tourist attractions in the community to international tourists which can cause this community still be unseen in Khao Kho District.

The findings reveal the need of homestay entrepreneurs is English language skill development in listening and speaking. Additionally, most homestay entrepreneurs need English learning materials that are bilingual versions (Thai – English) with Thai language reading and meaning in form of a booklet which can practice by themselves. The contents that they would like in the learning material consist of greetings and room explanation, room rate, room facilities and amenities explanation, and a tour itinerary of the community. They need the content about the activities that the homestay has offered for the tourists such as making salad dressings, roasting coffee, burning Khao Lam, explaining local food menus and ingredients to tourists, as well as other expressions necessary for homestay tourism. They also need signposts for tourist attractions in the community as well as a need for signboards describing attractions in the community in bilingual versions (Thai-English).

Interestingly, nowadays English has become a global language used by people all over the world including in Thailand where the English language plays a crucial role in the workplace. Particularly in the tourism context, English plays a significant role as a lingua franca. Tourism entrepreneurs have a positive attitude toward the English language and are willing to improve their English language skills in order to prepare themselves to welcome international tourists in the future. Therefore, the government sector as a policymaker should consider exploring the means to support homestay and CBT entrepreneurs in English language development and the way to promote homestay tourism in order to meet the sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4); decent work and economic growth which can assist the homestay entrepreneurs to earn extra income for tourism management if they are able to use the English language to communicate with the foreigners. Furthermore, in the digital disruptive period, supporting CBT entrepreneurs with the knowledge of integrating English with social media and digital platforms for promoting tourism in the community should be also considered.

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