

ความสำคัญของภาษาอังกฤษและการเรียนรู้ความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมสำหรับชาวไทย เพื่อเตรียมพร้อมสู่การเป็นลูกเรือในสายการบินต่างชาติ

The Importance of English Language and Learning Cultural Differences in Readiness for Thais Working as Cabin Crews in International Airlines

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บทคัดย่อ

สายงานด้านธุรกิจการบินมีความสำคัญอย่างมากในโลกปัจจุบัน ซึ่งเชื่อมโยงระหว่างภาคประชาชนและภาคธุรกิจเข้าด้วยกัน ภาษาอังกฤษจึงได้นำมาใช้เป็นสื่อกลางหลักในการติดต่อสื่อสารของประชากรทั่วทุกมุมโลก โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในอุตสาหกรรมการบิน ดังนั้นผู้ที่มีความรอบรู้ในทักษะด้านภาษาอังกฤษจึงมีความได้เปรียบในการทำงานด้านธุรกิจการบิน แต่อย่างไรก็ตามความรู้ด้านทักษะภาษาอังกฤษเพียงอย่างเดียวนั้นยังคงไม่เพียงพอ การทำความเข้าใจในเรื่องของความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมเป็นสิ่งสำคัญอีกอย่างหนึ่ง ที่จะทำให้นักเรือสามารถสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษกับผู้โดยสารและผู้ร่วมงานได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพมากยิ่งขึ้น ในขณะเดียวกันลูกเรือที่ไม่ได้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่โดยเฉพาะชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศควรมีทักษะด้านภาษาอังกฤษที่สูงเช่นกัน บทความนี้มุ่งเน้นให้ตระหนักถึงความสำคัญของภาษาอังกฤษและปัญหาของการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษของชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ อีกทั้งปัจจัยที่สำคัญของทักษะภาษาอังกฤษในการทำงานในฐานะลูกเรือ รวมไปถึงข้อแนะนำในเรื่องของความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมของผู้โดยสารและผู้ร่วมงานเพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมในการทำงานในสายการบินต่างชาติ

Abstract

Aviation Business is vital in modern world; it connects people and business together. In order to communicate, people accept English as a means of communication; especially, in aviation industry. Consequently, competence in English language would be an advantage; however, knowing language only is not sufficient and satisfactory. Understanding cultural diversity is also essential as a part of cabin crews duty since they have to communicate clearly in English to people who are non-native speakers. Meanwhile, cabin crews, themselves, should have high proficiency language skill, though, they are non-native speakers as Thais who use English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This paper will focus on the importance of English language and difficulties using by Thai people who use EFL to communicate as well as the key determinants of using job-related language skill for cabin crews. Moreover, it will touch on the suggestions about cultural differences to be ready working as cabin crews in international airlines.

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ; ความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม; ลูกเรือ; สายการบินต่างชาติ

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL); cultural differences, cabin crews; International airlines

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Aviation business has been increasing over decades. Travelling by plane is the fastest way to get to anywhere around the world, and the flight cost becomes more affordable. Nowadays, people travel by plane for many reasons such as business, travel, and visiting family (IATA, 2018). In order to support the increasing demand of aviation business, there is a long list of jobs supported by aviation business such as airport, airlines, air traffic management, and aircraft manufacture. “Close to 63 million people are employed worldwide in aviation and related tourism. Of this, about 10 million people work directly in the aviation industry. Aviation is a critical factor in global economy” (ATAG, n.d.).

Being a cabin crew becomes a trend and popular job for fresh graduates in Thailand, as we can see from a large number of cabin crew candidates, especially working in international airlines. Well-groomed personality, high salary, and travelling around the world are the perception perceived by Thai people comparing other jobs. Thus, the cabin crew job is very competitive; the recruitment process is stressful as well. EF English Proficiency Index ranked the English proficiency level of Thai people as low, ranking 15 out of 20, comparing with many other countries only in Asia; although, English subject has been put in the curriculum since from kindergarten level to higher education level according to Thai curriculum. If teaching and learning of English is not developed, Thailand will be behind in the competitive world of business (Arune Wiriyaichitra, pp. 1). Cabin crew candidates’ English proficiency is one of the significant qualifications which has been the major problem of Thai people.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 To examine the importance of English language skills for Thai people using EFL.

1.2.2 To identify the key determinants of using job-related language skill for cabin crews.

1.2.3 To examine the cultural differences working in international airlines.

1.3 Scope of this paper

This paper attempted to examine the importance of English language as well as English problem used by Thai people, particularly vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, the paper aimed to identify some the cultural differences of people around the world which is useful for Thai people who would like to work as cabin crews in international airlines.

2. Content

Cabin crews play an important role to take care of passengers, and conduct safety and security. To meet passengers' demand with diversity of nationalities, languages, and culture; a lot of international airlines recruit foreign cabin crews not only to decrease the cost of hiring local crews, which is higher, but to help in language and cultural understanding. There are many international airlines that employ Thai cabin crews (Yossinee Tontanavetchakul, 2011):

- Asiana Airlines (OZ, Republic of Korea)
- Cathay Pacific Airways (CX, Hong Kong)
- China Airlines (CI, Taiwan)
- Egypt Air (MS, Egypt)
- Emirates Airlines (EK, United Arab Emirates)
- Etihad Airways (EY, United Arab Emirates)
- EVA Air (BR, Taiwan)
- Japan Airlines (JO, Japan)
- Gulf Air (GF, Kingdom of Bahrain)
- Jetstar Airways (KU, Kuwait)
- Korean Air (KE, Republic of Korea)
- Oman Air (WY, Oman)
- Qatar Airways (QR, Qatar)

- Royal Brunei Airlines (BI, the State of Brunei Darussalam)
- Royal Jordanian Airlines (RJ, Jordan)
- Singapore Airlines (SQ, Singapore)

Hence, English is recognized as an international and official language for aviation business. As an entry qualification, English language proficiency is required for non-native speakers like Thai people.

2.1 TOEIC

According to Educational Testing Services (2018), The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is an English language test that have broadly used in non-English speaking countries around the world since 1979 to hire and promote their employees. The test was designed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) located in Princeton, New Jersey, United States of America. There are two types of TOEIC test; listening and reading test, and speaking and writing test. In Thailand, Center for Professional Assessment (CPA), where is the sole authorized representative, provides the testing service for both types but listening and reading is the most used and favor. Listening test is a multiple choice in order to test their English proficiency in international business workplace such as face-to-face communication, telephone, or business meeting. For reading test is also a multiple choice in order to test their reading skills in email, poster, brochure, newspaper, annual report, or advertisement.

In order to be qualified as a cabin crew, they must held TOEIC score, or they must take an in-house English language proficiency test created by the airlines themselves. Entry requirements vary between airlines, for Thai candidates, they should have a minimum score of 550 out of 990. EVA Air requires a minimum score of 550. Singapore Airlines requires a minimum score of 600. Japan Airlines requires a minimum score of 650. Jetstar Airways requires a minimum score of 700.

However, Cunningham (2002) conducted a research study to a group of Japanese students. The researcher created his own test called Test of Interactive Communication (TIC) which included the assessment of listening, reading and writing skill; and the TOEIC test. The aim was to measure the EFL students' reading skill, and their communication skills if there is correlation between their TOEIC score and

the communicative competence. The research shows that there is no correlation between TOEIC score and the communicative competence.

The successful Thai candidates are migrated to the airline headquarters where to begin the training process approximately 2-4 months. The training session are divided into two session which are service and safety; English language is used as a means of instruction. In everyday language use, there isn't much time to think the "best word" to describe things and deliver the context, but cabin crews are different. Using informal verbal communication is prohibited; in consequence, effective communication skill course, provided by the airlines, is conducted during the service training for new cabin crews. The course has been designed to equip new cabin crews to communicate with passengers in a confident, professional, positive, and natural manner. Moreover, cabin crews' choices of words have to make passengers feel comfortable and to be respected. Speech training, grammar revision, effective listening skill, and cultural diversity are covered in this course as well.

2.2 Vocabulary

Generally, people use language to communicate in social activities; the more vocabulary language users know, the more likely they will participate successfully. Therefore, it is essential to have knowledge of a large vocabulary, if you wish to accomplish native-like language skills (Hedge, 2003). Not only having a wide range of vocabulary, it is important for cabin crews to be able to select words in a variety of different situations which is a necessary courtesy toward passengers and colleagues. Moreover, choosing the words to express the message is concerned with politeness also. Thai people as a non-native speakers still have limited of vocabulary which affects not only speaking problem but also listening problem. In service language, cabin crews should not use imperative sentence to communicate with passengers, except in case of emergency or medical issues; it can cause unpleasant and offensive. Formal language is common used for service language. For instance, if you desire to say "yes", there are others ways to express such as certainly, absolutely, definitely, and of course. Furthermore, using modal verb like can, could, would, may, shall is a good example used in sentences that can make it more courteous and desirable. Moreover, Cabin

crews should be aware of using “must” or “have to”; however, if they desire to sound more authoritative, it is applicable.

An example, in the situation of requesting assistance or giving instruction to passengers.

Would you please....	switch off	your mobile phone?
Could you please....		
I’m afraid you have to....	switch off	your mobile phone.
I’m afraid you must...		
Would you mind.....	switching off	your mobile phone?
Do you mind.....		

2.3 Grammar

Grammar or form relates to how structure of something is constructed. Aarts (2015) mentioned that “Form refers to the category labels we use for the building blocks of grammar, i.e. word classes, phrases, and clauses”. For that reason, lack of grammar can cause miscommunication, not only speaking skill but also listening skill, when they convey the desired messages. Selecting the wrong tense, misusing wrong subject-verb agreement, or misusing adverb and adjectives are the most common mistakes. Selecting correct tenses and using it variously in conversation can refer to high-proficiency level of English language of users. For example, If we want to express the past meaning, we have to use the past tenses of verbs. There are some choices of sentences using past form.

The flight PM989 from London **arrived** on time yesterday.

After, the flight PM989 **had arrived** at the terminal, there **was** a severe storm.

The aircraft **was taking off** when the passengers **went** to the restroom.

There are some choices of sentences using future meaning, if we want to talk about the future. For example,

The flight **arrives** tomorrow.

The flight **is arriving** tomorrow.

The flight **will arrive** tomorrow morning.

The flight **is going to arrive** tomorrow morning.

2.4 Cultural differences

Culture can be referred to values, practices, beliefs, and perception. In aviation business with different of ethnics and cultural backgrounds, the communication style between people are distinct. Allington & Mayor (2012) mentioned that “Misunderstanding can be caused by cultural differences, rather than linguistic difficulties” (pp. 156). Consequently, cultural difference topic is a part of communication skill course for new cabin crews in many airlines in order to make them understand the culture and background of their passengers thoroughly. Moreover, meeting passengers’ demand and avoiding misunderstanding can cause strong impact on passengers’ satisfaction and perception. On the other hands, working with international airlines, indeed, it is a cross-cultural environment between crews themselves. “Culture has strong influences on every single department in domestic and foreign airlines, but the flight crews face cultural challenges more than other departments because of their close working conditions and the critical safety issues” (Metscher, Smith, & Alghamdi, 2009). There are some instances of behaviors and cultures.

Thai culture, most of Thai people tend to always say “yes” in order to avoid conflict and argument; while, Western people are different. This Thai culture can cause a lot of unpleasant results such as the delay of work among colleagues. In addition, the word “no” is very impolite for Chinese culture. Chinese crews always say yes to the passengers; especially to an authorities such as pilot, although, they are aware that the right answer is “no” (Pyne & Koester, 2005).

Western culture tends to greet each other by shaking hands and having direct eye contact; while, Asian culture, such as Thai, Korea, or Japan is different. Furthermore, Asian culture consider direct eye contact as impoliteness.

The head bobble or head shake is the common gestures which can be seen among South Asia countries, like India, Nepal, and Bangladesh; it is mostly considered as an affirmative like “yes” or “I understand”. In western culture, there is common and accepted purpose that head shake means “no”.

3. Conclusion

Being a cabin crew, boarding is the time for them to contact face-to-face with passengers, they have to express the words clearly and effectively. Moreover, effective communication can help to repurchase and contribute good relationship between passengers and airlines. With good basic English language skills may be not sufficient for cabin crews, they must have greater communication skills. Having high proficiency of English language skill in vocabulary and grammar, as well as having a high TOEIC score are the key determinant to get the job. This paper was carried out in order to examine the importance of English language; especially, job-related language skill used by cabin crews such as service language. Moreover, this paper was emphasized on the cultural diversity in workplace for cabin crews to be ready for working in international airlines which is the way to overcome the limitations in communication among people with different backgrounds.

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