

The Implementation of Communication Strategies to Improve English Speaking Skills for Eco–Cultural Tourism Staff at Highland Development Area in Thailand

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were: 1) to compare the pre/post-test scores of high, moderate, and low English proficiency eco–cultural tourism staff by using the BSPE model; and 2) to conduct in–depth interviews and observe the types of communication strategies (CSs) employed by high, moderate, and low English proficiency Eco–Cultural Tourism staff. The sample consisted of 70 eco–cultural tourism staff at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province, Thailand. They participated in the English for eco–culture tourism workshop by doing a fifteen–hour course. A mixed–method methodology was used, with quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The research results were found as follows:

1) Before and after the training with the Paired Sample T–Test, the sampling knew more English for eco–cultural tourism during the post–training period than during the pre–training period, with higher average scores of 8.8 ± 3.7 points, or increased knowledge by 29.7% with a statistical significance at the 0.05 level ($t = 18.489$, $P = 0.000$), which was based on assumptions.

2) The in–depth interview and observation found that the high and moderate proficiency groups frequently used the first language–switch and circumlocution strategies. The low proficiency group used the surfing strategy and the word coinage strategy.

However, the study also revealed that the majority of participants believed that English speaking strategies were essential. Implementation of communication strategies will help promote

income for eco-cultural tourism staff. These strategies assume that people in the community can communicate well in English.

Keywords: Communication Strategies; English Speaking Skill; Eco-Cultural Tourism

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the largest industries globally and a fast-growing sector of the economy. Asia attracts many quality-conscious tourists because it is full of biodiversity and cultural heritage (Moli, 2011). In Thailand, the government has the policy to diversify tourism income opportunities into the foundational economy by promoting tourism and enhancing and adding tourism value to the community. There are measures to stimulate tourism in the secondary cities of 55 provinces (less visited area), and eco-cultural tourism is popular with tourists. Tourism promotes learning in terms of culture, community way of life, and conservation of natural resources. Uthai Thani province, one of Thailand's seventy-six provinces, lies in lower northern Thailand. The area represented a long history and great ethnic diversity. Huay Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary was proclaimed a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. This province is characterized by religion, way of life, art, traditions, and culture. It is a unique historical city with a simple, peaceful way of life. Various foods, local performing arts, Thai music, folk music and wisdom, geography, history, woven fabrics, culture passed down from generation to generation, cultural heritage, and national identity. Support the creation, pioneering, inventing, and inventing for a sustainable economy. By maintaining the quality and standards of culture and introducing Thai culture to the world society, when there is an increasing number of foreign tourists, communication between people in the tourism industry and those involved in ecotourism requires effective communication language and communication skills. In addition, the use of language for communication creates a good image for tourists and generates income for jobs. It generates revenue for the village, community, and province. The use of English for tourism is another important thing. Raising the level of tourism to be known to more foreigners is another way to help increase income for the community.

Eco-cultural tourism is a concept that combines both ecological and cultural landscapes to create a tourist paradise. It is a trip to a destination where both cultural and natural are the main attraction. It is a strategy that can support the conservation of natural habitats and economic

sustainability, especially for the indigenous community. (Cajee, 2014) Tourism related to ecological and cultural attributes is becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide (Richards, 2017). One of the definitions of eco-cultural tourism is environmentally responsible travel without destroying natural areas and enjoying and appreciating nature whilst promoting conservation. It has a low negative impact on visitors and benefits the local population's economic and social participation (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). On the other hand, it is proposed as a guideline for communities with disadvantaged cultural or environmental resources for development. Sustainability and engagement are long-term priorities. The future lies in this type of tourism (Gillian & Russell, 2004).

Communication strategies play an essential role in language learning and take many forms. The latest research on teaching and learning communication strategies is designed to improve English reading and writing skills. However, there is little research on English speaking skills, especially among the English for Eco-cultural tourism staff. The researchers expected that communication strategies would be helpful for learners to communicate effectively in English and be close to the actual situation. The advantage of communication strategies is that people learn to develop their oral communication skills. Communication strategies improve learners' ability to speak more fluently and refer to the different methods a speaker can use communication strategies to enhance their ability to communicate in English. It is a speech to convey meaning in different situations by using the concept of academics in teaching English using communication strategies. This study synthesizes the types of researcher communication strategies involved, such as Tarone (1981), Faerch & Kasper (1984), Oxford (1990), Brown (2000), Nakatani (2006), and Chooma & Chattiwat (2020). here are nine essential strategies: 1) First Language-Switch Strategy is when the speaker mixes the mother tongue with the target language. 2) Word Coinage Strategy is a strategy where people think of new words because the correct vocabulary of the target language is not known. They create their terms. 3) Approximation Strategy is a strategy in which a speaker uses words or groups close to the target language. 4) Circumlocution strategy is a strategy in which a speaker describes multiple terms or phrases to convey a single word. 5) Surfing Strategy is a voice or meaningful words or meaning at intervals to tell the listener that the speaker has not finished speaking and is thinking or is having trouble communicating. 6) Repetition Strategy is a strategy that people say or the speaker's familiarity with words may cause repetitive sentence structures. 7) Self-Repair Strategy is the speakers use when they find themselves saying the wrong words or speaking the incorrect grammar or try to correct words or sentences

immediately. 8) Message Abandonment Strategy is a strategy for the speaker to stop talking about what he is talking about directly.

Therefore, researchers have realized the importance of communication strategies of eco-cultural tourism staff learners to improve the communication of English for people in the field of eco-cultural tourism. The community generates and drives sustainable tourism income in eco-cultural tourism at the highland development area.

Research Objectives

1. to compare the pre/post-test score of high, moderate, and low English proficiency eco-cultural tourism staff.

2. to conduct in-depth interviews and observe types of communication strategies (CSs) employed by high, middle, and low English proficiency eco-cultural tourism staff.

Research Methodology

The participants were 70 English eco-cultural tourism staff learners at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province, Thailand, who registered to study English for a fifteen-hour workshop. The activity is a part of the research project of studying and developing innovative communication in English for eco-cultural tourism staff at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province. There were estimated to be 70 people who were personally involved in eco-cultural tourism. They determined the sample size using the ready-made tables of Krejcie & Morgan (1970). The sample group was 59 participants.

The research instruments were the English language proficiency pre/post-test for eco-cultural tourism. It consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions. If the answer was correct, it would get 1 point. If the answer was incorrect, it would be 0 points. The Bloom Concept (Bloom, Madaus & Hastings, 1971) is divided into three levels, as score of 80% or more (24–30 points) means having a high level of knowledge. A score of between 60–79 percent (18–23 points) means having a moderate level of knowledge. A score of less than 60% (0–17 points) means having a low level of knowledge. This pre/post-test has created a new question.

Then the consistency index was calculated between the question and the objective (IOC) (Sinjaru, 2010) by choosing to use the questions with an IOC value of 0.50 or more, where the questions used had an IOC value from 0.67. to 1.00. The questionnaire was tested with ten gift

shop operators and food and beverage vendors in a similar group. Due to the limited number of parallel operators. The results obtained from the questionnaire were used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire using the Kuder–Richardson method. (Kuder–Richardson Formula: KR–20), which was equal to 0.809, then collected the actual data by giving it to the sample before and after the training period. The statistics used to analyze the data were mean, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation. The statistics used to test the hypothesis were Paired Sample T–Test at a significance level of 0.05.

The researchers used in–depth interviews and observations to confirm the data obtained from both questionnaires and gain in–depth information. The research team used an in–depth interview with the building process in four steps. Step 1, studying concepts, theories, documents, and research work related to the English eco–cultural tourism staff learners at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province and analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaire to determine the issue in which the question point is broad, but in the framework of the data used in the questionnaire. Some problems allow participants to express their opinions and suggest other matters. Step 2, taking the questions that have been created to three experts to examine the suitability of the language used and the content validity (Index of Item – Objective Congruence or IOC) obtained an IOC between 0.67–1.00. Step 3, using tools that have been modified according to expert advice. and then try out on a population similar to the sample of five people. Step 4, analyzing and revising the results obtained from the experiment and then used to conduct interviews with 15 members of the eco–cultural tourism staff at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province.

Therefore, to ensure reliability and validity, all items were examined by three experts, at the faculty of liberal arts, Mahidol University and the department of English, Faculty Humanities in Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and Kamphaengphet Rajabhat University, Thailand. All instruments were verified for content validity and were validated by three experts using the Index of Congruence (IOC).

Results and Discussions

The fifteen–hour English learning course for Eco–cultural staff learners at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province consisted of six lessons, including greetings, selling local souvenirs, local fruits and vegetables, food and drinks, negotiating the price, and important eco–

cultural attractions. The course is the BSPE model (Figure 1), which consists of four steps of training: Step 1 B, Building. There are suggestions of topics to study and which communication tactics the instructor will focus on for essential words or phrases. The communication strategies are described both as a whole and for each strategy. The instructor should be ready to give a clear example (25 minutes). Step 2 S, Simulating. This allows learners to use English for simulation in different situations and plan to use the language correctly in any given action to develop speaking skills. (90 minutes). Step 3 P, Performing. Learners report the results of their learning activities and assess the students' task performance. They then identify the cause of the problem and methods of solving problems in communication, including the language used in performing the workload. After that, the teacher chooses the language problem students still use incorrectly while performing tasks and analyzing the speech to correct it. The learner can improve themselves or maybe repeat for more confidence in communication by using the learning log form (25 minutes). Step 4 E, Evaluating. A short time is taken to provide brief feedback on a paper (post-it) to assess how learners feel about the training and indicate a preference of like or dislike in the past practice activity. (10 minutes) Figure 1 shows the development of the BSPE Model, which included four components, namely Building (B), Simulating (S), Performing (P), and Evaluating (E) with the category of communication strategies.

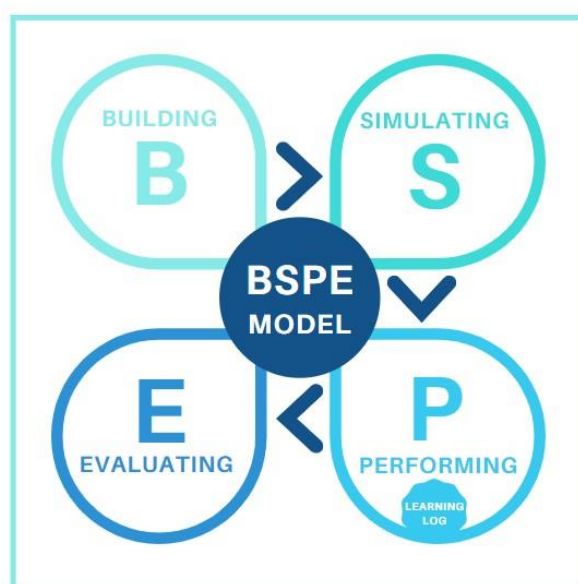


Figure 1. English communication for eco-cultural tourism staff instructional model (BSEP Model)

The results compare the knowledge of the English eco-cultural tourism staff learners at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province before and after the training. Overall, the study results in the pre-training period found that the English language proficiency score for the eco-cultural tourism staff learners at the highland development area were as follows. 59 people from the Pre-Test had the lowest score A score between 6 – 17 points meant a low level of knowledge. Those who scored between 18 – 19 points meant that learning is at a moderate level. When determining the frequency according to the knowledge score, the result found that the highest number of personnel in the sample group received 11 points, 10 people (16.9 percent), followed by 13 points and 15 points, 7 people (11.9%) received 17 points, 6 people (10.2%) got 8 points, 10 points, 14 points and 16 points, 5 people each (8.5%) got 18 points, 3 people (5.1%) gained 9 and 12 points, 2 people (3.4%) got 6 points and 19 points, each person (1.7%), respectively.

Overall study results found that the staff improved the English language proficiency score of eco-cultural tourism in the highland development area during the training period. 59 people from the Post-Test had the lowest score. The highest score was between 12 – 29 points (i.e., the range is 17 points) which was low. Those who received a score of between 18 and 23 meant that they had a moderate level of knowledge and those who scored between 24 and 29 points indicated a high level of knowledge. Determining the frequency according to the knowledge score, it was found that the highest number of personnel in the sample group received 20 points, 18 people (30.5%), received 22 points, eight people (13.6%), got 21 points, seven people (11.9%) got 24 points, five people (8.5%) got 25 and 28 points, four people (6.8%) got 12 points, 23 points, 27 points, and 29 points, two people (3.4%) gain 14 points, 17 points, 18 points, and 19 points and 26 points each person (1.7%), respectively, details are shown in Figure 1. Classified by knowledge level in the pre-training period, the sample group had two levels: Most were low with 55 learners (93.2%), and the rest were moderate with four people (6.8%). The sample group had three levels: 37 were middle level (62.7%), followed by high level, 18 (30.5%), and the rest was at a low level. Four persons (6.8%), respectively, details are shown in Figure 2 and Table 1.

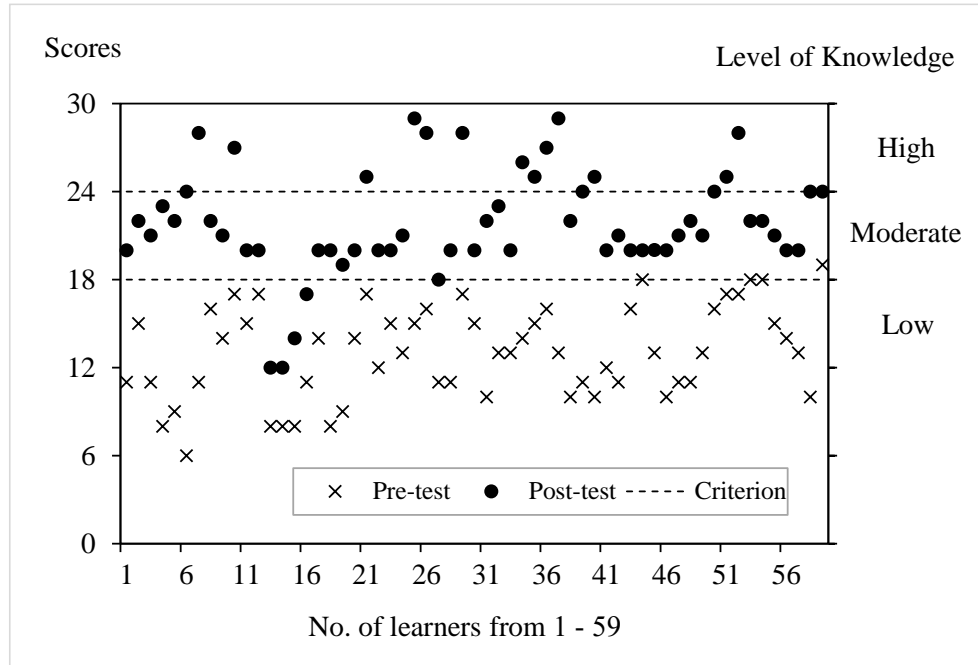


Figure 2. Graph showing the individual knowledge scores of the sampling in personnel in the pre- and post-training test

Table 1 The comparison knowledge of English score during the pre- and post-training test

Knowledge	Criteria	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Low	0 – 17 scores	55	93.2	4	6.8
Moderate	18 – 23 scores	4	6.8	37	62.7
High	24 – 30 scores	–	–	18	30.5
Total		59	100.0	59	100.0

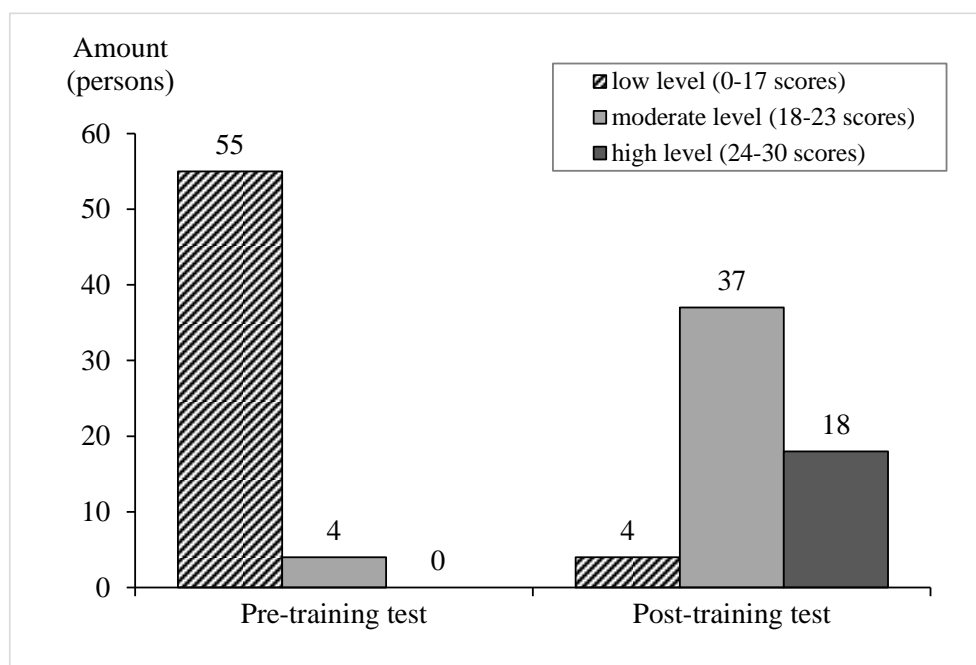


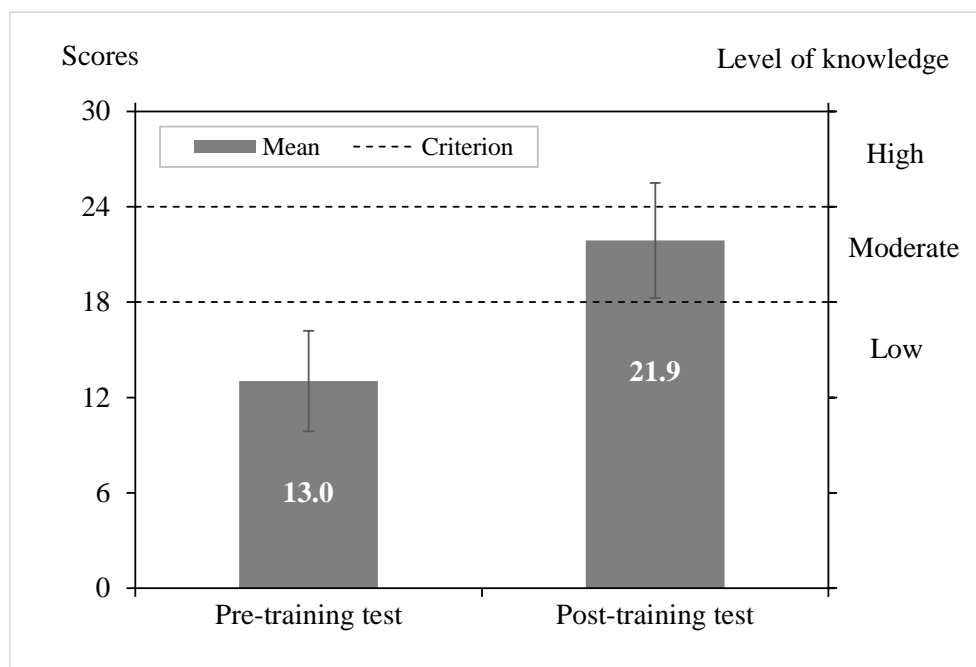
Figure 3. Graph showing the amount of the sampling personnel classified by level of the English language knowledge in the pre- and post-training test

When considering the overall mean of knowledge scores during the pre-test, 59 participants of the sample group had a low level of knowledge. The average score was 13.0 ± 3.2 points (representing 43.3% of the total score of 30 points), while the post-test period found that the knowledge of the sample group was at a moderate level. The average score was 21.9 ± 3.6 points (equivalent to 73.0 percent of the total score of 30 points). It changed from having a low level of knowledge in the pre-training period to having a moderate level after the training (as in Table 4 and Figure 3).

The research hypothesis was tested by comparing the knowledge of 59 members the English eco-cultural tourism staff learners at the highland development area in Uthai Thani province, Thailand, before and after the training, with the Paired Sample T-Test. It found that the sampling personnel knew more English during the post-training period. Then in the pre-training period (i.e., with more average scores of 8.8 ± 3.7 points or 29.7% more knowledge) was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($t = 18.489$, $P = 0.000$), based on the hypothesis (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2 The comparison of knowledge of the English eco-cultural tourism staff learners during the pre- and post-training test

Knowledge	Mean \pm S.D.	Level	Mean difference	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> -value
Pre-test	13.0 \pm 3.2	Low	-8.8 \pm 3.7	-18.489*	0.000
Post-test	21.9 \pm 3.6	Moderate			

*Statistically significant ($P < 0.05$)**Figure 4.** Graph showing the overall mean scores and the level of knowledge among the sampling personnel in the pre- and post-training test

Moreover, the instrument used was a learning workshop handbook and a learning log. The qualitative data was analyzed to implement communication strategies of staff learners. This form is used during activities and notes staff learning from task activities at the end of each topic. For example, From Language-Switch Strategy, one of the eco-cultural tourism staff learners said: Have you ever eaten kanom jeen? From strategy analysis, the learner used the word “khanom jeen” instead of the English words “rice noodles”. The speaker mixes the mother tongue with the English language. Word coinage Strategy. one of the eco-cultural tourism staff learners said: It is beautiful. We call it a big flower pattern. From strategy analysis, the learner used the word “big flower” instead of the English words “blooming flower”. It is a strategy where people think of new words because the correct vocabulary of the English language is not known. They create their own

terms. Approximation Strategy. one of the eco-cultural tourism staff learners said: Having lunch with chicken with the banana tree. From strategy analysis, the learner used the word “banana tree” instead of the English word “banana stem”. It is a strategy in which the speaker uses words they are familiar with, but unknown in English. Circumlocution Strategy. one of the eco-cultural tourism staff learners said: We went to the temple in the morning on the full moon day of the 3rd lunar month to respect the pagoda and do good deeds. From strategy analysis, the learner used all the words in the sentence to describe the phrase “pagoda merit-making”. It is a strategy in which a speaker describes or describes multiple terms or multiple phrases to convey a single word or phrase. Surfing Strategy. one of the eco-cultural tourism staff learners said: Erm... Do you like this pattern? From strategy analysis, the learner used the word “Erm...” to think about what to say next. A voice or meaningful words or meaning at intervals tells the interlocutor that the speaker has not finished speaking and is thinking or is having trouble communicating.

In addition, the nine volunteer learners from three groups were asked questions about strategies they used to deal with speaking problems in general. Finally, they were asked to identify strategies that they thought were essential. A brief version of their answers is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Summary of interview student volunteers from three learner’s groups data.

Learner volunteers	Communication strategies
High group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Try to explain. – Use familiar words and sentences. – Use body language if possible. – Try to speak slow and clear. – Pay attention to words and question words. – Use Thai mixed with English language.
Moderate group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use Thai mixed with English language. – Use familiar words. – Use body language. – Try to speak. – Pay attention to words. – Pay attention to the interrogative sentence.
Low group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use easy word and sentence – Draw a picture – Use body language. – Try to say new words.

Learner volunteers	Communication strategies
	–Ask other people to help
	–Say some words while thinking about what to say

A study reveals that the most frequently reported speaking strategies remained unchanged in various settings. These speaking strategies concern undergraduate students, message reduction and alteration, non-verbal strategies while speaking, social-affective, and negotiation for meaning seems to rank highly in most studies. (Metcalfe & Noom-Ura, 2013). Fillers and hesitation device strategies are the most commonly employed by M.3 (grade 9) English Program students in high, middle, and low English speaking proficiency (Malasit & Sarobol, 2013), and Thai EFL teachers reported employing CSs at a medium frequency level when dealing with English oral communication breakdowns. They are used the most frequently for maintaining the conversation and self-reliance strategies (Boonkongsaen, 2018). The study results revealed that the study group used different strategies. First language switch and circumlocution strategies were the most frequently used among high and moderate proficiency groups. The low proficiency group used the surfing strategy and the word coinage strategy due to different educational backgrounds and education restrictions from the school under the Expansion of Basic Education Opportunity Project under the Office of the National Primary Education Commission. (Nomnian 2014) states that an adult beginner with a limited English language education background led to low self-confidence when communicating with international tourists.

Conclusions

In summary, quantitative and qualitative analyses found that the English proficiency test was a valid strategy for dealing with speech problems. This research improved the English language proficiency measurement tool used to compare the English knowledge skills of learners during the pre-test and post-test after taking the fifteen-hour English language course for eco-cultural staff learners in Uthai Thani Province. It found that the average score after students' knowledge of English skills was significantly higher than the average before the test.

Qualitative data from the interview analyzed the uses of communication strategies and behavior of the strategies used in speaking. The results showed that using the fifteen-hour English learning course for eco-cultural staff learners in Uthai Thani province made learners more confident in using various strategies for communicating in English. The communication strategies

enhanced the English speaking skills of eco-cultural tourism staff at the highland development area in Uthai Thani Province, Thailand. The staff learners used the first language-switch strategy, the circumlocution strategy, the surfing strategy, and the word coinage strategy when they found the problems during speaking with interlocutors.

The research found that the high proficiency score group tried to explain using familiar words and sentences, using body language if possible, speaking slowly and clearly, paying attention to terms and question words, and using Thai mixed with English. The moderate proficiency score group tried to communicate by using familiar words, using body language, speaking as much as possible to understand, paying attention to the terms and the questions. While the low proficiency score group tried hard to keep the communication going by using simple words and sentences, drawing pictures for some time if they could not say the right words, using simple body language, trying to say new words, asking someone else to help, and saying some words while thinking of the correct words.

However, the high, moderate, and low English proficiency score groups believed that English speaking strategies were essential for eco-cultural tourism staff. It enhanced the use of English to generate income in eco-cultural tourism staff if people in the community can communicate well in English. Items such as traditional clothes, bags, or even community foods will generate revenue for the people in the community. Due to the increasing popularity of foreign tourists visiting the community, eco-cultural tourism in Uthai Thani Province is becoming more popular with foreign tourists every day. Planning to develop tourist attractions for people in the community by using the community as a learning center and extending to generate income for the community will lead to a good quality of life and be a role model for other communities.

In recommendations for future study, the limitation of this study was the group-specific case-study approach in the different English backgrounds of the learners. And the focus only on communication strategies. Suggestions for further research may be researching the development of communication skills, including oral, written, and social behavior. In addition, communication skills can be combined and incorporated into the learning process. Learners develop their communication skills through discussions and familiarize themselves with communication situations in the real world.

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