

The Elders' Voices Regarding Their Role as a Catalytic Agent for Local Tourism

Singkhram Rakpa¹, Khomkrit Tachom¹, Budsaba Kanoksilapatham², Albert Lisec¹

¹ School of Liberal Arts, University of Phayao, Phayao, Thailand

² Faculty of Management Science, Silapakorn University, Thailand

Correspondence: Khomkrit Tachom, School of Liberal Arts, University of Phayao, Phayao, Thailand.

Received: February 16, 2023

Accepted: March 20, 2023

Online Published: April 7, 2023

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n5p310

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n5p310>

Abstract

Elderly populations play important roles in society as providers of historical accounts, wisdom, culture, traditions, and social customs. As elderly people generally remain physically, mentally, and intellectually healthy, encouraging them to preserve and share their local identity through English language communication is one strategy that can support Thailand's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for older people. This study investigates the elderly's need to learn communicative English for tourism to maintain local cultural identities. The participants included 170 retired elders from one district in a province in northern Thailand. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that 65.88 % of elders expressed a need for English language training for tourism communication. The elders' overall needs for training content were also at a high level (\bar{x} = 3.69). Finally, the elders' needs for situations for practicing English communication skills were at a high level (\bar{x} = 3.74). The results of this study suggest that it is vital to survey and prioritize the elders' needs for English language communication training courses for local community sustainability. The results of the present study have been used as guidelines for training elders to strengthen their role as a catalytic agent for local tourism.

Keywords: elders, voices, local identity, maintenance, catalytic agent, local tourism

1. Introduction

The issue of the elderly is gaining attention worldwide as the elderly population is steadily increasing in every country. According to World Population Prospects 2019 (United Nations, 2019), by 2050, 1 in 6 people in the world will be over the age of 65, up from 1 in 11 in 2019. Older people account for more than one-fifth of the population in 17 countries. The elderly population is expected to increase at rates greater than 3% per year between 2022 and 2050 in Northern Africa and Western Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and Central and Southern Asia (United Nations, 2022). Many countries continue to face this issue of rapidly increasing elderly populations. Therefore, there should be more policies to deal with increasing elderly populations.

Community elders can play important roles in driving a country's economy. In Thailand, the elderly population is increasing to the point where Thailand will be a predominantly ageing society within the next decade (Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute, 2014). This presents a challenge for the country's government and related agencies to find measures to support the increasing rate of the elderly population. The government has established a policy and various strategies to prepare and develop the ageing communities to live inclusively in Thai society with honour and dignity, and to participate more fully in the country's development. The key strategies are promoting lifelong learning and creating employment opportunities for the elderly. For example, the Amazing Thai Host project is one of these strategies that is intended to encourage the elderly to work in their community or use their knowledge and skills to provide services to tourists at important tourist attractions (KomChadLuek, 2016).

Promoting lifelong learning or creating employment opportunities for seniors is the key factor that seniors need in order to contribute more to their communities and to improve their quality of life. One study by Chantaneer (2019) has demonstrated the need for elderly learning and career development. Improving quality of life for the elderly is an important social opportunity that the government should encourage because statistics have shown that the majority of Thailand's elderly population is highly dependent on and closely connected to their communities (National Statistical Office, 2014). This means that seniors are physically and mentally primed for contributing to their communities by developing lifelong learning and finding employment that is appropriate to their potential. In addition, suitable occupations or activities should be available for voluntary participation and for the purpose of assisting foreign tourists visiting local attractions. These kinds of opportunities are well suited for elders who typically have lived in an area for many years and have extensive knowledge of local history, customs, traditions, culture, rituals, and beliefs. Therefore, the elderly population is ideal for providing valuable knowledge and advice to tourists who visit local attractions. Many of the elderly population are retired government officials who possess extensive knowledge and experience in their communities. These elders tend to be the best sources of cultural knowledge who can share local wisdom and leave positive impressions on both domestic and foreign visitors. While the elderly population of a community naturally

possesses these attributes, it is also important to recognize the need for training elders to improve their competence in intercultural communication in order to facilitate understanding and improve relationships with international tourists.

While there are many benefits of developing the elderly population's ability to interact with tourists and their local communities, it must be recognized that a major hindrance to developing tourism in Thailand is that the country's tourism personnel have difficulties communicating in English with foreign tourists (Nawarat, 2016; Atibaedy, 2011; Sriyawong et al., 2017). Among the problems that tourism personnel encounter when communicating in English are misunderstanding different English accents, use of offensive words, insufficient vocabulary, and inadequate grammatical knowledge (Nawarat, 2016; Atibaedy, 2011; Sriyawong et al., 2016). Such problems have resulted in foreign tourists sometimes having bad attitudes toward Thai tourism personnel, and these problems may affect the development of the tourism potential of the country (Piriyasilpa, 2014; Kalasin & Charumane, 2015). For this reason, it is imperative to develop English communicative ability so that tourism personnel can properly communicate with foreign tourists.

2. Literature Review

Several studies on the development of tourism personnel (Purnomo, 2016; Nuemaihom, 2014; Aimsupa, 2015; Chanyoo et al., 2016; NikonKittiKoson, 2016; Poolket et al., 2015; Sriyawong et al., 2016; Simasathiensophon & Keuasuwon, 2015), as mentioned above, focus on the development of tourism and service business employees, Buddhist monks, novice monks, students, tourism business operators, drivers, or tourist police. However, Thailand has an increasing number of elderly people who are dependent on society for their wellbeing and livelihood. As such, the Thai Government has formulated strategies for the development of the elderly. Most research studies in the past addressed elderly health (Rattanaubon et al., 2012) in various respects such as psychology (Wichitsiri & Sawangsopakul, 2012), social participation (Meier, 2009) and lifelong education (Japa et al., 2013). However, there exists little research on elders learning foreign languages in order to improve quality of life by increasing social engagement and promoting brain health and cognitive ability, thereby slowing dementia and preventing depression. The lack of research in this area creates a need to explore the benefits of language learning in the Thai elderly population so that they can maintain local identities and participate in local tourism. Language learning will enable elderly populations to make use of their free time serving the community as a catalytic agent for local tourism. For the present study, the elders were members of a district association of retired teachers. The association has an annual mission to improve the quality of life of its members. Therefore, this study explores the needs of the association members and utilizes their needs in designing training courses for elders in the future.

3. Method

3.1 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate the elderly population's needs for English communication training in order to promote their local identity. To fulfil this objective, a mixed-method research design was adopted, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze data.

3.2 Context of Study

The present study was carried out in a small rural community in a northern province of Thailand. The province is included in the northern province group 2 according to the administrative policy of the Ministry of Interior with goals for upgrading the quality of life of residents in these provinces. This province is considered one of the most desirable locations in the country for resident quality of life. In addition, this area has an abundance of natural resources and cultural tourism, which are particularly attractive to tourists wanting to experience authentic rural culture and traditional lifestyle. Importantly, the creative economy framework, which encourages residents to develop and promote unique features of their community in order to boost their local economy, is also promoted in the province to improve the residents' quality of life and to attract tourists. With these missions and resources in the province, it is necessary to educate and train local tour guides in local communities so that they can welcome future tourists.

3.3 Participants

The participants in this study included 170 retired government teachers in the Mueang District of a northern province in Thailand. The research subjects were selected through the purposive sampling technique. All research subjects were members of a district association of retired teachers who belonged to the provincial teacher savings cooperatives. There are a total of 800 members of the association and the association's objectives include: 1) creating unity among club members; 2) strengthening potential and ability as an elderly person with life experiences to be valuable to society; 3) supporting and promoting the development of club members' physical health, mental health, and quality of life; and 4) promoting welfare creation by assisting and caring for club members who are elderly and sick.

Collecting data about English communication needs from retired government teachers was crucial because the participants had extensive background and experiences in education, as well as some basic knowledge of English. These qualities facilitated organizing English training in this study. The participants' age range was as follows: 60-65 accounted for 32.40%, and 66-69 accounted for 29.40%. The education background of the participants consisted of mostly bachelor's degree (71.80%) while some possessed higher degrees (17.60%). Most of the participants have worked in primary schools and with local provincial communities for several years. These experiences provided the participants with significant knowledge about the province's culture, traditions, ways of life, beliefs, tales, rites, local cuisine, and tourist attractions. Importantly, the participants also showed a willingness to dedicate themselves to serve their local communities as tour guides and to help promote local communities' identities to international tourists. Annually, the provincial teacher savings cooperative

arranges a training course for its members. During the collection of data at the meeting in 2022, the researchers informed the participants who attended that meeting of the purpose of the English for tourism project for the elderly population and asked them to answer a survey questionnaire regarding their interest in developing their English communication for tourism purposes.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study were 39-item questionnaires and interview questions. The questionnaire was used to collect the participants’ demographic information and needs analyses for developing their knowledge of English communication for tourism purposes, while the interview questions were designed to collect the participants’ in-depth opinions regarding English for tourism communication and the province identity.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part consisted of 12 items dealing with demographic information where the participants were asked to choose items that applied specifically to their situation. The second part adopted a five-point Likert scale and consisted of 27 items about the participants’ needs to improve their English communication skills for tourism. Finally, the third part consisted of open-ended questions where the participants gave recommendations and suggestions.

There were three interview questions pertaining to the importance of English for local tourism, English skills needed for improvement, and the promotion of the province’s identity.

Both questionnaire items and interview questions were verified by five experts in the field of English for specific purposes, English language teaching, and education. The items in the questionnaire and interview questions with the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) between 0.50-1.00 were selected for data collection. The questionnaire IOC of the present study was between 0.67-1.00.

3.5 Data Collection

The researchers asked for and received permission from the participants who attended the annual meeting of the teachers’ savings cooperative of a province in the north of Thailand. A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed to the participants to complete after the meeting, and a total of 170 questionnaires were returned for analysis. The participants took approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Individual interviews with five participants were conducted by telephone because of the Covid-19 pandemic. There were five semi-structured interviews administered by the researcher in charge of the project and each interview took between 15 and 20 minutes. Before the interview, the researcher asked for the permission from the interviewees to record the interview data. After the interview, the researcher stored the interview recordings in the researcher’s notebook computer with security protection system.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using frequency, percent, mean scores, and standard deviation using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the interview data, the content analysis method was adopted. The themes were identified and grouped for interpretation. Once the data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed completely, the analyzed data were verified by the researchers to confirm the accuracy of the analysis.

4. Findings

The researchers divided the results of the present study into three sections. Section 1 presents the elders’ needs/desire to participate in English communication training courses. Section 2 deals with the elders’ needs for training contents and situations. Section 3 illustrates the interview results regarding the elders’ need to use English for communication in tourism.

4.1 The Elders’ Needs/Desire to Participate in English Communication Training

This section presents the elders’ needs/desire to participate in the English communication training course, their interest in working in the local community using English to provide services to international tourists, and the need to practice English skills. The details of each need are presented below.

Table 1. Percentage of the elders’ needs to participate in the English communication training course

Needs to participate in the English communication training course	N (170)	Percentage
Need/desire	112	65.88
No need/no desire	47	27.65
Not specified /no response	11	6.47
Total	170	100

As shown in Table 1, 65.88% of the elders expressed a need to participate in the English communication training course, while 27.65% of the elders expressed no need to participate in the English communication training course.

Table 2. Percentage of the elders interested in working in the local community using English to provide services to international tourists

The elders' interests in working in the local community using English to provide services to international tourists	N (170)	Percentage
Most interested	31	18.60
Very interested	61	36.50
Moderately interested	59	35.30
Little interested	9	5.40
Least interested	2	1.20
Not interested	4	2.40
Not specified	4	0.60
Total	170	100

As can be seen in Table 2, 36.50% of the elders indicated "very interested" in working in the local community using English to provide services to international tourists, followed by 35.30% who were "moderately interested," and 18.60% who indicated "most interested."

Table 3. Percentage of the elders'needs to practice English skills

The elders' needs to practice English skills (can choose more than one item)	N (343)	Percentage
Listening	62	18.08
Speaking	69	20.12
Reading	26	7.58
Writing	24	7.00
Listening and speaking	102	29.74
Listening and writing	14	4.08
Reading and speaking	25	7.29
Reading and writing	21	6.12
Total	343	100

As Table 3 shows, 29.74% of the elders expressed a need to practice both listening and speaking, followed by the need to practice speaking only (20.12%), and listening only (18.08%). Reading and writing together was the least preferred skill for which the elders expressed a need.

4.2 The elders Needs for Training Contents and Situations

Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviation of the elders'needs for training contents

Needs for training contents	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1. Local history or legend	3.54	1.04	high
2. Local attractions	3.69	1.00	high
3. Local occupations	3.64	1.00	high
4. Local culture and traditions	3.73	0.98	high
5. Local foods	3.76	0.99	high
6. Local products	3.70	1.04	high
7. Local accommodations	3.69	1.03	high
Total	3.69	1.02	high

From Table 4, the participants' overall needs for training contents were at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.69$). When considering the descending mean scores, it was found that the needs for training content on local foods were at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 3.76$), followed by needs for training content on local culture and traditions ($\bar{x} = 3.73$), followed by local products ($\bar{x} = 3.70$). The needs for training content on local history and legend were at the lowest level ($\bar{x} = 3.54$).

Table 5. Mean scores and standard deviation of the elders'needs for situations for practicing English skills

Needs for situations for practicing English skills	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
1. Greeting and conversations in daily life	3.95	1.07	high
2. Listening and giving information on local history and legends	3.66	1.00	high
3. Listening and giving information on local attractions	3.66	1.05	high
4. Listening and giving information on local occupations	3.65	1.02	high
5. Listening and giving information on local culture and traditions	3.72	1.01	high
6. Listening and giving information on local foods	3.75	1.03	high
7. Listening and giving information on local products	3.74	1.05	high
8. Listening and giving information on local accommodations	3.73	1.04	high
Total	3.74	1.04	high

As shown in Table 5, the participants' overall needs for situations for practicing English communication skills were at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.74$). When considering the descending mean scores, the need for situations about greeting and daily life conversation were at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 3.95$), followed by the need for situations regarding listening and giving information on local foods ($\bar{x} = 3.75$), and listening and giving information on local products ($\bar{x} = 3.74$), respectively. The need for situations involving listening and giving information on local occupations was at the lowest level ($\bar{x} = 3.65$).

4.3 The Elders Need to Use English for Communication in Tourism

This section presents the results of the interview conducted with five elderly informants using three interview questions: 1) How important is English for tourism in the province, 2) What English skills should be developed to communicate effectively with tourists, and 3) What important identities should foreigners know about the province? Once the qualitative data analysis was completed, these three themes emerged from the analysis. The details of each are presented below.

1. Importance of English communication skills

The participants expressed in interviews that they believe that English is an international language, and it is necessary for people in the province to have knowledge of and understand English for communication in tourism. Some specific comments given by the interviewees are as follows, and have been edited for brevity:

“I think that English is important for tourism in our province because there are many tourist attractions here. Increasing numbers of international tourists visit our province. English is considered an international language used for communication. Therefore, it is beneficial for elders and people in our province to communicate using English.”

(An elderly male informant)

“English is important because, at the moment, international tourists are visiting our province. It is beneficial for our province if our people can communicate in English with those tourists.”

(An elderly female informant)

“English is necessary, but our province is not a major tourist destination. Foreign tourists just drop by for one day and then leave for their destinations in other provinces. Therefore, English is necessary mainly for hotel staff and vendors.”

(An elderly female informant)

“English is very important for elders, and the elders must always practice listening and speaking English. If there will be training, it will be highly beneficial for us elderly people.”

(An elderly female informant)

2. Needs/Importance for English communication skill practices

The participants considered listening and speaking to be the most important skills for improvement because these skills are used for communication in tourism. In addition, the participants claimed that grammatical correction, sentence patterns, and tenses should not be focused on. Short expressions, phrases, or groups of words were considered more important for communication. Some interviewees commented:

“For communication skills, especially for tourism, it is not necessary to focus on grammar. We should focus on intelligible verbal communication, and the use of simple and clear expressions is important for communication as well. It is not necessary to speak in complete sentences.”

(An elderly male informant)

“I think an important skill is listening and speaking. It is similar to Thai children learning a language. When they were born, they knew nothing about listening and speaking. Their first skill was listening, followed by speaking. These first skills are important because we can use them for communication. When it comes to communication in English, listening and speaking skills are more important than other skills [reading and writing].”

(An elderly male informant)

“I want listening skills the most. We listen and speak. Before we speak, we have to listen. If you don't understand what you have listened to, you might not know how to speak about it and cannot answer some questions. Therefore, listening and speaking are twins. I must choose listening first.”

(An elderly female informant)

“Speaking, [followed by] speaking and reading are the most important skills. How can we speak? Sometimes, schoolteachers focus on teaching grammar rules for examinations. The teachers do not emphasize the application of English skills learned in classrooms. I will suggest the application of English skills for all sectors. For example, vendors might not have practiced skills. Thus, learning by heart or practicing speaking in words might be the best way for them.”

(An elderly female informant)

“I think that the sentence is not needed and that we do not talk about grammar when we communicate in English. We can use simple expressions that help us get our meaning across. Do not speak by following the time order using past tenses, present tenses, or future tenses. We do not need those tenses. Just speak using phrases or groups of words that can help us understand one another.”

(An elderly female informant)

3. Promoting specific local identity

The informants expressed their views regarding the various features of local identity which are most attractive to international English-speaking tourists. These features include culture and traditions, local attractions, temples, historical sites, local cuisine, street food, and local products. Regarding this issue, several interviewees said:

“The lake is our main tourist attraction. If you visit our province but do not visit the lake, it is like you do not visit our province.”

(Male elderly informant)

“Apart from the culture and tradition, there are temples and historical sites where we can take foreign tourists for sightseeing. For those who are interested in culture or antiques, we can show them temples such as Wat Lee Temple, Giant Buddha image temple, and Wat Sri Umongkham temple.”

(Male elderly informants)

“Backpackers like street food, so we should take them to try street food at the stalls along the main road. In addition, foreign tourists like street food such as spicy fresh shrimp salad. The tourists like to take photos when the cooks are preparing food.”

(Female elderly informant)

“Foreigners always like handmade souvenirs such as water hyacinth products made by women’s groups in the village by the lake. If we have group tours, we should take foreign tourists to visit the village. I think the tourists are interested in how villagers produce the products.”

(Female elderly informant)

5. Discussion

According to the research objective, which was to investigate the elderly population’s needs for English communication training in order to promote their local identity, five main findings emerged in the present study. Each finding is discussed below with supporting evidence.

The first finding shows that the majority of elders had a clear need for English language training for tourism communication. There was a high demand for English language training contents and situations for practicing English generally, perhaps because the elders involved in this study were retirees with ample free time. Therefore, their desire to spend time learning new things was likely motivated by their recognition of the importance of learning English for intercultural communication with foreigners. Also, the elders wanted to reduce stress and depression caused by living alone and coping with loneliness. Having no grandchildren or relatives with which to interact regularly motivated them to reach out to become more involved in their communities. Providing them with the opportunity for English tourism training allowed them meet other elders, make new friends, and establish new purposes in life. In addition, the majority of the elders in this study were between the ages of 60 and 65, and still possessed a strong desire and ability to learn new things and improve their communication in English. They also had a deep understanding of local culture, which facilitated productive interactions with foreign visitors. By having the opportunity to participate in organized training, the elders could fulfil their desire to improve, help, and become actively involved in their community. Further, the findings of this study are in accordance with the research of Yingrattanasuk et al. (2016) who found that elders in the 60 to 64 years old age group have a greater need to participate in learning activities for self-development than other age groups. This finding is consistent with that of Klimova and Pikhart (2020), who found that studying a foreign language benefits cognitive capacities regardless of age. Additionally, foreign language classes appear to offer healthy seniors new chances for socializing and social integration, which likely have a positive impact on their general well-being. In addition, this finding accords with the results of the study by Puebla et al. (2022), who discovered that by engaging in enjoyable activities of their choice, elder participants aspired to keep themselves physically, cognitively, culturally, and socially engaged without feeling pressure from others.

The second result of the present study indicates that most of the elders were highly interested in working in a local community that provides services using English to international tourists. Their interest suggests that some elders value the opportunity to volunteer their services in order to help others and promote their home province. They genuinely want to better inform foreign visitors about renowned local tourist attractions, meaningful legends, interesting history, sustainable cultural traditions, local cuisine, and local products. The group of elders involved in this study were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in English language training and strove to become highly competent intercultural communicators with foreign tourists. Further, the participants in this study were accustomed to involvement with the government retired teacher association, which holds annual activities to develop its members’ wellbeing. The elder members frequently participated in activities arranged by this association, and frequently sought new opportunities for contributing to local communities. In a similar vein, Puebla et al. (2022) discovered that interest groups that facilitated regular meetings were attended by more than half of the elders of a community, who showed their desire for social interaction by active participation as volunteer workers in their communities, partly as a means of avoiding isolation and feeling valuable through social participation. The participants also expressed a need to apply newly learned skills. In language contexts, this became a desire to utilize the target language in authentic contexts.

The third finding of this study reveals that nearly all of the elders expressed a need to practice listening and speaking skills more than reading and/or writing skills. A possible explanation for this might be that listening and speaking skills are the most useful skills for communication between Thais and foreigners. Opportunities to practice listening and speaking English are scarce in rural areas of Thailand, so the elders in this study needed more opportunities to use and develop these skills for future work as service providers in their

communities. Furthermore, these skills are easily acquired through interactive activities offered in training courses tailored to elders' needs. Regarding the elders' work experience, most of the participants had worked for many years in primary schools and with local provincial communities. These experiences gave the participants extensive knowledge of the province's culture, traditions, ways of life, beliefs, tales, rites, cuisine, and tourist attractions. The combination of their educational background, work experiences and significant local knowledge of the community provided the ideal context for the participants to develop their knowledge through this training project. Importantly, the participants showed an eagerness to dedicate themselves to serving and helping to promote their local communities as tour guides for international tourists. This finding supports the work of other studies, which have demonstrated that older persons prefer language-learning aids that encourage face-to-face social engagement, an active lifestyle, and opportunities to practice in order to meet a variety of language-learning objectives (Puebla et al., 2022). According to Bustamante (2020), depending on the effect of diverse socio-culturally based contextual elements, elders in a community develop and change their identities as English language learners. It was also discovered that the elders' commitment to studying English was intricately linked to their envisioned identities as future proficient English speakers.

The fourth finding shows that the elders' most preferred training contents were local cuisine, followed by local culture and traditions, and lastly local products. The most probable explanation for these results is that the elders recognize these contents as necessary for their study because of their usefulness and application in their future work as service providers for international tourists in their local communities, since these are the most common topics about which tourists request information. In addition, these topics are closely related to the elderly guides' daily lives, so it is likely they were interested in learning more vocabulary and expressions to discuss these topics in greater detail with foreigners and thereby further promote their local communities. Additionally, the elders in this research were all retirees from government schools and possessed comparable education levels. Their similar backgrounds and experiences allowed for excellent cooperation during training. The elders responded to the course content and successfully cooperated in the intercultural communication English activities. This finding accords with previous studies such as that by Savina and Авина (2015), who suggested that the grammar and vocabulary in language training should fully meet the linguistic needs of a senior learner, whose language demands are limited to traveling and daily conversation. Although vocabulary content varies depending on the language requirements of each study group, it generally concentrates on activities pertaining to family, travel, holidays, shopping, and personal interests because older people best remember details, they are interested in by drawing on their own experiences. The findings are also in accordance with the research of Yingrattanasuk et al. (2016), who state that elders want to develop both their work skills as well as their knowledge and skills in foreign languages, especially English or ASEAN languages for the purposes of improving their competence and earning more income.

The final finding indicates that the situations in which elders need to practice their English skills the most are those involving greetings and daily conversation, followed by listening and providing information about local cuisine and products. These situations are closely related to the elders' daily lives in their local communities, and as such they are ideal situations for elders to practice listening and speaking skills in order to prepare themselves as service providers and local community promoters. Thus, they need more of these kinds of situations to practice these particular English communication skills. Furthermore, the elders in this research were both physically and mentally healthy and were eager to participate and learn as demonstrated by their cooperative social behaviour during training, their active participation inside and outside the classroom, their ability to remember and apply important vocabulary, and their use of learning technology. Despite their moderate knowledge of English and infrequent opportunities to study English, they proved to be diligent and appreciative while expanding their English education. All of these observations support the need for further intercultural English language training both in and outside the classroom. These findings accord with research conducted by Chanpradit et al. (2021) that finds elders have strong ambitions to join English training courses that teach the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing that can then be used for earning additional income as tourist guides within the scope of intercultural communication with foreigners. This shows that there exist proactive elders in communities who seek opportunities to practice in various English listening and speaking situations, including greetings, introducing goods and services, describing places, and negotiating questions and answers with foreign tourists. According to Slowik (2019), the two most crucial elements for learning a language later in life are teachers and teaching materials. When creating language courses, it is important to consider these elements in light of the needs, skills, and learning preferences of older adults.

6. Conclusion

The elderly population is increasing in nearly every country globally, and some strategies and measures are being prepared to support ageing societies and assist elders in living happily and with dignity. Most elders remain mentally and physically healthy, and society in general can benefit from this group of people. The present study aims to explore elderly populations' needs for developing their English communication to provide services to international tourists and to promote local communities in northern Thailand. Based on the preceding discussion of the results of this study, several conclusions were drawn. This study found that most elders have a need for English language training for tourism communication and are highly interested in working in an area where they can use English to provide services to foreign tourists in the local community. The elders also need to develop primarily listening and speaking skills, particularly regarding their preferred training contents about local cuisine, local culture and traditions, and local products. Finally, the elders have a need for various situations to practice their English skills, including greetings, daily conversations, and providing information about local cuisine and products. To serve the elderly population's real needs in foreign language learning, to develop their preferred teaching and learning methods, and to foster their motivation and satisfaction in learning foreign languages, further study should

be conducted with larger populations of elderly learners, and mixed-method research approaches should be adopted.

Acknowledgements

This study was fully funded by a research grant (Fundamental Fund) from the University of Phayao, Phayao, Thailand. The authors would like to thank the University of Phayao for providing this research grant. The authors would also like to thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References

- Aimsupa, M. (2015). *Developing Training Program on Cultural Tourism for ASEAN Preparation for Young Tour Guides in Singburi Province*. Master's thesis, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Pathum Thani Province.
- Atibaedya, A. (2011). A Self-directed Learning Model for Communicative English Using for Eco-tourism in Thaka, Amphawa, Samutsongkram. *Research and Development Journal*, 3(1), 34-43. Retrieved from <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/irdssru/article/view/212729>
- Bustamante, B. E. B. (2020). *Elderly English learners' stories: A study of Santiago community center student's English learning experiences and identity construction* [Master's thesis, Universidad Andres Bello]. Universidad Andres Bello.
- Chanpradit, T. H., Sriruk, C. H., & Srinon, U. (2021). Needs of English for elderly people in Doem Bang Nang Buat, Suphanburi. *Journal of graduate studies Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University*, 15(3), 61-74. Retrieved from <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JournalGradVRU/issue/view/16833/4247>
- Chantane, M. (2019). The occupational development needs of the elderly in the Tambon SamBanDit Uthai District of Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. *ARU Research Journal Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 1-6. Retrieved from <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/rdi-arua/article/view/144919>
- Chanyoo, H., Watthanaboon, S., & Kittisunthonphisarn, N. (2016). Effects of the Experiential Learning Model through the Local-Based Training Package to Enhance English Speaking Abilities for Young Tourist Guide. *Social Sciences Research and Academic Journal*, 11, 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.14456/jssra.2016.37>
- Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute. (2014). *SITUATION OF THE THAI ELDERLY 2014*. Retrieved from <http://thaitgri.org/?p=36746>
- Japa, S., Ruangsuan, C., & Pollaharn, C. (2013). A study of guidelines for life-long education of senior citizens in Nong He Community, Nong He District, Roi-et Province. *RMU. J. (Humanities and Science)*, 7(1), 85-95. Retrieved from <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/rmuj/article/view/19304/16974>
- Kalasin, S., & Charumane, N. (2015). English needs of Thai hotel front desk staff in tourist attractions of Southern Thailand in the move towards ASEAN Economic Community 2015. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus*, 7(2), 1-22.
- Klimova, B., & Pikhart, M. (2020). Current Research on the Impact of Foreign Language Learning Among Healthy Seniors on Their Cognitive Functions from a Positive Psychology Perspective—A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00765>
- KomChadLuek. (2016). *Pulling "retirement groups" as local tourism volunteers*. Retrieved from <http://www.komchadluek.net/news/politic/252423>
- Meier, C. (2009). Participation of the Elderly in Social Activities in Phatumtani Province. *Pathumthani University Academic Journal*, 1(1), 92-109.
- National Statistical Office. (2014). *The 2014 survey of the older persons in Thailand*. Text and Journal Publication. Retrieved from [http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/elderly workFullReport57-1.pdf](http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/elderly%20workFullReport57-1.pdf)
- Nawarat, K. (2016). The study of communicative English in the cultural tourism of Phra Buddha Maha Dhummaraja at the Buddhist Park, Phetchabun Province. *3rd National and International Conference on Global Mobility through Ethnicity, Culture and Research* (pp. 1-5). Phetchaburi: Phetchaburi Rajabhat University.
- NikonKittiKoson, P. (2016). Development of English communicative innovation for local vendors at Koh Kret, Nonthaburi Province. *Journal of the Association of Researchers*, 21(2), 110-122.
- Nuemaihom, A. (2014). The Development of an English Innovation Based on Needs Analysis for Young Tour Guides at Muang Tam Sanctuary in Thailand. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 3, 54-61. Retrieved from https://www.sibresearch.org/uploads/3/4/0/9/34097180/riber_h14-081_54-61.pdf
- Piriyasilpa, Y. (2014). English Language Needs of Tourism Industries in Khon Kaen Province. *Journal of Thai Hospitality & Tourism*, 9(2), 16-30.
- Poolket, W., Supakavanich, W., & Wimoktanon, T. (2015). Development of English Communicative Skills of Homestay Village to Increase Potentials Tourism: A Case Study of Kok Kong Village Kudwa Sub-district Khuchinarai District, Kalasin Campus. *Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok Social Science Journal*, 4(2), 86-91.

- Puebla, C., Fievet, T., Garc á, J., Tsopanidi, M., & Clahsen, H. (2022). Promoting social and collaborative language learning among older adults in the digital era: Development and evaluation of a smartphone app prototype using a design-thinking approach. *Gerontechnology*, 21(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2022.21.1.483.06>
- Purnomo, B. (2016). Model of Teaching English for Tourism Service Providers Through Role-Playing Method at Vocational School. In *UNNES International Conference on ELTLT (English Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation)* (pp. 114-120).
- Rattanaubon, A., Supawan, S., Charoen, P., Kowittaya, M., Pathumcharoenwattana, W., Kimpi, P., ... Satjasopon, R., (2012). The Development of the Supportive Guidelines in Education/Learning Management for Enhancing the Competencies of Older Adults in Thailand. *Journal of Education Studies*, 40(1), 14-28. Retrieved from <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/EDUCU/article/view/20873>
- Savina, T. V., & Савина, Т. (2015). Specificity of English-Language Teaching for Senior Learners within the Lifelong Learning Concept. *Žurnal Sibirskogo Federal'nogo Universiteta*, 8(11), 2606-2613. <https://doi.org/10.17516/1997-1370-2015-8-11-2606-2613>
- Simasathiensofphon, N., and Keuasuan, B. (2015). Development of an English skill training package for hospitality and tourism officers. *Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Buriram Rajabhat University*, 7(2), 57-58.
- Słowik, A. (2019). Developing efficient foreign language classroom environment for older adult learners. *The Journal of Education, Culture, and Society*, 10(2), 189-200. <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs.20192.189.200>
- Sriyawong, J., Saiduang, P., & Pitikornpuangpeth, C. (2016). A development of activity package promoting communicative English skill for traditional Thai masseurs in Ubon Ratchathani Province. *Humanities and Social Sciences Journal, Ubon Ratchathani University*, 7(2), 227-242.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019*. Retrieved from https://population.un.org/wpp/publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*. UN DESA/POP/2022/TR/NO.
- Wichitsiri, P., & Sawangsopakul. (2012). Wisdom, Social Support and Psychological Well-being of Elderly in the Elderly Club at WatSarod Rat Burana District, Bangkok. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 38(2), 139-151.
- Yingratanasuk, T., Cherdchookiat, P., & Wannapiroon, P. (2015). *The Development of Learning and Occupation for the Elderly: Learning to Enhance Active Aging*. Retrieved from <http://dspace.lib.buu.ac.th/xmlui/handle/1234567890/1541>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).