

Article

Task-Based Needs Analysis as a Foundation for TBLT Course Design: Evidence from Thai University EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study presents a task-based needs analysis (TBNA) for English for International Communication (EIC) majors at a university in Thailand, with the aim of providing an empirical foundation for task-based language teaching (TBLT) course design in the Thai EFL context. Using a six-cycle Delphi methodology, data were triangulated from multiple sources and methods: document analysis of job placement records; semi-structured and structured interviews with graduates and workplace managers; a means analysis of institutional constraints; a confirmatory survey administered to 70 in-service graduates; and an analysis of target discourse (ATD) based on authentic workplace interactions. Results revealed that EIC graduates are predominantly placed in customer service positions across the hospitality, retail, and recreation sectors, and that eight task types are critical across these workplace domains, with giving directions, responding to emails, and providing reception services rated most highly. Successful task performance was conceptualized primarily in terms of effective communication and pragmatic competence rather than grammatical accuracy or syntactic complexity. An ATD of the task 'Giving Directions' identified the discourse structure and linguistic strategies characterizing prototypical task performance in Thai workplaces. The findings provide a principled approach for developing needs-based instruction, criterion-based assessments, and pedagogic tasks for additional language learners with specific needs.

Keywords

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), needs analysis, analysis of target tasks (ATT), analysis of target discourse (ATD), customer service industry in Thailand

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1 Introduction

English proficiency serves as both an economic imperative and a pivotal determinant of career success in Thailand. As a primary engine of the national economy, English is indispensable for the tourism sector—which welcomed over 11 million foreign tourists in 2022 and projected 20 million in 2023 (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2023)—as well as for the broader service industry, including hotels, fitness centers, spas, restaurants, and shopping malls. English is, in short, vital if Thailand is to remain competitive with neighbouring economies (Chamnankit, 2015). Beyond the tourism sector, employers in both the public and private sectors consistently prioritize English proficiency in hiring decisions (Bangkok Post, 2017; Raksaphet, 1991), and Thai university graduates widely recognize English as key to securing employment and earning a higher salary (Khamkhien, 2010; Ulla & Winitkun, 2017). Yet despite this recognized importance, the English communicative competence of many Thai graduates remains insufficient to fully meet the demands of the workplace.

When it comes to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, however, grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods remain the norm in the Thai educational system (Kongkerd, 2013; Kong-In & Damnet, 2018; Saengboon, 2019; Soongpankhao, 2016). These approaches place a strong emphasis on grammatical accuracy as a criterion of success in language learning and may be a contributing factor in Thai learners' persistent lack of communicative competence over the last three decades (Kong-In & Damnet, 2018; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Saengboon, 2004; Ulla, 2021). English instruction in Thai universities might be argued to suffer from three specific problems: (1) lack of connection between what happens in the classroom and learners' lives outside of the classroom (Phaisarnsitthikarn, 2020), (2) lack of motivation on the part of Thai students to engage in English classes (Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014), and (3) overemphasis on linguistic accuracy rather than communicative competence (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Saengboon, 2004).

Despite growing international advocacy for Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an effective communicative methodology (Ellis, 2024; Long, 2015), its systematic implementation in Thai EFL settings remains limited. While Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum (BECC) and the Thailand 4.0 national development policy framework have encouraged communicative and learner-centered pedagogies, neither has explicitly mandated TBLT in higher education, nor have teacher education programs in Thailand systematically prepared instructors in its theoretical principles and classroom practices. As Sato (2026) demonstrates in the comparable EFL context of Japan, TBLT implementation faces substantial challenges in contexts characterized by exam-oriented curricula, limited authentic input, and deeply entrenched teacher-centered instructional norms—conditions that similarly characterize the Thai EFL landscape (Kongkerd, 2013; Kong-In & Damnet, 2018). The gap between what TBLT requires—authentic task performance, criterion-based assessment, and learner-centered pedagogy—and prevailing instructional practices in Thailand creates both the rationale and the challenge for the kind of curriculum development initiative described in the present study.

Using tasks as a unit of analysis in designing courses for Thai students entering the service industry might provide a means of ameliorating these problems. Long (2015: 110), for example, argues that in addition to aligning with research and educational principles, analysis of language use surrounding target tasks captures the dynamics of target discourse and helps circumvent course designers' lack of knowledge of the fields for which they are preparing learners by allowing them to draw on insider descriptions of job requirements.

Long (2015: 108) defines tasks broadly as the events that learners participate in 'in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between.' As a unit of analysis in language course design, however, Long distinguishes three levels at which tasks can be conceptualized (2015: 223–227). The first is *target tasks* or the things that learners need to do in everyday life (e.g., taking plane reservations, taking hotel reservations). The second is *task types* or superordinate categories created by classifying target tasks based on common features (e.g., taking reservations). The third is *pedagogic tasks* which are activities

that learners complete in the classroom (e.g., filling out a reservation form while listening to a recording of a booking, role-playing customers and receptionists making reservations).

The present study aims to illuminate the nature of Thai EFL learners' needs as a basis for task-based instruction and assessment. To this end, a task-based needs analysis (TBNA), consisting of an analysis of target tasks (ATT) and an analysis of target discourse (ATD) (Long, 2005, 2015, 2022), was conducted for English for International Communication (EIC) majors at a university in a major city in Thailand. The TBNA combined multiple sources and methods of data collection and involved multiple cycles of data collection from graduates and experts in key areas of job placement. The outcomes of the TBNA provide an empirical basis for designing task-based instructional modules and assessment procedures to better address the future occupational needs of EIC majors for customer service skills within service industries in Thailand. The study also provides a heuristic for TBNAs in other contexts.

The study makes three original contributions to the TBNA literature. First, it is among the first TBNAs conducted in the Thai EFL context specifically targeting the customer service and hospitality sector, addressing a gap in a literature that has concentrated primarily on East Asian business settings (So-Mui & Mead, 2000; Cowling, 2007) and European hospitality contexts (Malicka et al., 2019). Second, it extends Lambert's (2010) multi-cycle Delphi methodology by integrating an ATD as a sixth cycle of data collection within a unified research programme—demonstrating how the full empirical pipeline from workplace document analysis to discourse modelling can be compressed into a single coherent study. Third, by producing empirically derived criterion-referenced assessment instruments alongside prototypical discourse models for each task type, the study operationalizes the ATD findings in a form directly usable by EFL teachers without specialist linguistic training, bridging the gap between TBNA research and everyday classroom practice.

2 Literature Review

Needs analysis plays an important role in L2 course design (Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015), particularly in contexts where learners have specific occupational needs for a foreign language such as Thailand. Brown (2009) and Long (2015) both suggest that language programs should be designed based on a needs analysis to improve transparency, relevance, accountability, and learner motivation. Needs-based language programs can help to avoid situations in which instruction is unfocused, resulting in motivation being lower than it could be, or graduates leaving the program without a clear idea of what they have learned or the ability to apply it for any functional purpose (Lambert, 2010).

Research on TBNA methodology has evolved considerably over the past two decades, and three broad themes emerge from the literature: (1) methodological standards for data collection and validation, (2) the contexts and domains in which TBNAs have been conducted, and (3) an expansion in the scope of what TBNAs seek to discover. On methodological standards, Serafini et al. (2015) provide the most systematic treatment, surveying TBNA designs and procedures over three preceding decades and recommending a checklist to improve reliability and validity. Their central recommendation—triangulation of multiple data sources and methods—has become a defining feature of high-quality TBNA research. Studies across different cultural and professional contexts have consistently employed this principle. So-Mui and Mead (2000) triangulated survey, interview, workplace observation, and language sample data to investigate occupational needs in Hong Kong's textile and clothing industry; Chew (2005) combined interview and questionnaire data for bank employees in the same city; and Cowling (2007) drew on multiple informant perspectives in a Japanese corporate setting. More recently, Baralt et al. (2022) and Malicka et al. (2019) extended this tradition into new contexts while continuing to validate findings across multiple cycles of data collection.

In terms of the geographic and domain contexts in which TBNAs have been conducted, existing research has been concentrated primarily in East Asian business and finance settings (So-Mui & Mead,

2000; Chew, 2005; Cowling, 2007; Baralt et al., 2022) and in European hospitality contexts (Malicka et al., 2019), with comparatively little attention to the travel and tourism industry in Southeast Asia. Of particular relevance to the present study is Lambert (2010), who conducted a TBNA at a Japanese university employing a multi-cycle Delphi approach to identify the task types needed by English majors across diverse workplace domains. The study began with document analysis to identify key workplace domains, used open-ended interviews with expert informants to build initial task inventories, and progressively narrowed to a closed-item confirmatory survey reaching graduates over a 20-year period. Critically, Lambert (2010) found that the most important criterion of success across workplace domains was being able to communicate effectively and politely, a finding with direct implications for curriculum design in communicative EFL contexts such as Thailand (Lambert, 2022).

A third trend in TBNA research is an expansion beyond identifying target tasks toward investigating criteria of task success, sub-task steps, and the target discourse associated with task performance. While early TBNA focused primarily on cataloguing what learners needed to do (e.g., So-Mui & Mead, 2000; Chew, 2005; Cowling, 2007), more recent work has examined how tasks are accomplished. Malicka et al. (2019), for instance, identified not only 50 target tasks for hotel receptionists in Barcelona—organized into eight task types—but also the factors shaping task complexity and the linguistic strategies workers employed. Crucially, their findings, like those of Lambert (2010), revealed that face-to-face oral interaction dominates customer-facing work, while higher-level staff engage more heavily in written communication. At the same time, the analysis of target discourse (ATD) has emerged as an important complement to the analysis of target tasks (ATT) (Long, 2022). Hillman and Long (2020) demonstrated this for U.S. Foreign Service Officers preparing to deliver Japanese celebration speeches, identifying the discourse structure and prototypical language models associated with the task. Subsequent ATDs have followed similar procedures in analyzing weather forecast discourse (Maie & Bradford, 2022) and office-hour interactions in U.S. universities (Sağdıç & Reagan, 2022). Together, these studies show that TBNA now encompasses a comprehensive empirical foundation—from identifying task types to mapping discourse structure—as a basis for TBLT course design.

Notwithstanding these advances, important gaps remain. TBNA of customer service needs in the Southeast Asian hospitality and service industry are currently lacking, and few studies have traced the full pipeline from task identification through ATD to course design within a single research program. The present study addresses both gaps by conducting a comprehensive TBNA for English for International Communication (EIC) majors entering customer service positions in Thailand. It integrates an ATT and an ATD within a multi-cycle design (Lambert, 2010), demonstrating how the results can provide a basis for all aspects of course design from learner needs to program evaluation.

3 The Present Study

The study aimed to provide an empirical basis for needs-driven curriculum renewal at a university in Bangkok, Thailand. Six rounds of data collection were employed to build a consensus on the customer service needs of English for International Communication (EIC) majors: (1) an analysis of existing documents, (2) semi-structured interviews with graduates and managers, (3) a means analysis, (4) follow-up structured interviews with managers, (5) a confirmatory survey of all graduates over the ten-year period preceding the study, and (6) an analysis of target discourse (ATD).

3.1 Research questions

The following five research questions are addressed:

1. What are the key workplace domains into which EIC majors are placed?
2. What task types are common to these workplace domains?

3. What is important in the successful completion of these task types?
4. What are the sub-task steps in completing these task types?
5. What language is typically used to complete these sub-task steps?

3.2 The context

The study was conducted for learners in the Bachelor of Arts in English for International Communication (EIC) program at a university in a major city in Thailand. The program aims to develop English communication skills for the 21st-century Thai workplace. The curriculum consists of integrated English classes in the first two years, followed by specialized classes in the second two years (literature, linguistics, translation, interpretation, and communication). Students also have opportunities to participate in internships with potential employers. Most classes are taught by Thai English teachers and Thai is typically the language of communication in the classroom. However, one American teacher works in the program and teaches courses in English.

Approximately 75 students enrol in the four-year program each year. Their English proficiency ranges from CEFR A2 (Pre-intermediate) to CEFR B1 (Intermediate), with a small group of exceptions at the CEFR B2 (Upper-intermediate) level (Council of Europe, 2001). Most students have graduated from high schools or vocational colleges where English classes focus on accuracy rather than communicative competence, and they have had little experience completing oral communication tasks in English classes. They also have few opportunities to use English outside of their classes.

4 Methods

A six-cycle Delphi study was conducted following Lambert (2010; see also Brown, 2016) to build a consensus regarding the English-language needs of EIC majors. A Delphi study consists of a sequence of interrogations of informants from populations who manifest a target construct. Information is collected, summarized, and re-distributed, inviting respondents to revise as they feel necessary until a consensus is reached. The researcher reduces irrelevancies in the data and retains central control through data selection (Landeta, 2006).

4.1 Cycle 1: Document analysis

Brown (2016) stresses the importance of examining existing records before collecting new data to avoid redundancy or misdirected effort. The document analysis in the present study consisted of recent news reports and government/industry publications on the importance of English in Thai society, and job placement records over the five-year period preceding the study (2020–2024) published annually on the university website. The results of the document analysis were used to justify the choice of task as a unit of analysis for English language curriculum renewal and to identify key workplace domains for sampling informants.

4.2 Cycle 2: Initial semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with employees and managers from each of the primary workplace domains identified in Cycle 1 to establish initial lists of target tasks. Invitations were sent by email. All informants provided informed consent to participate. Only employees with at least three years' work experience in a target domain were interviewed to ensure informed opinions. The managers interviewed oversaw hiring and evaluation of employees. Interviews were conducted with 13 informants from key workplace domains.

The interviews were conducted in the informants' first language (Thai) and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews consisted of a four-phase protocol following Spradley (1979): (1) orientation (greeting, establishing an explicit purpose and interview process, activating background knowledge concerning the informants' work); (2) grand and mini-tour questions (encouraging informants to rethink events or work situations then narrow the questions to specific tasks, encouraging the interviewer to identify key conditions, sub-tasks, and criteria of success on these tasks); (3) confirmation (summarizing key information in native terms and having them restate to confirm the researcher's understanding); and (4) leave-taking (commenting on additional topics of interest, establishing interviewee expertise, determining willingness for follow-up interviews).

The interview data was used to create initial lists of target tasks for each workplace domain. These were then categorized into task types common across workplace domains based on the procedures outlined by Long (2015: 223–227). Two criteria were used: (1) each target task mentioned fit into only one category, and (2) the final typology accommodated all target tasks mentioned. To establish interrater agreement, the first author transcribed the 13 interviews and worked with a Thai English teacher from the program to identify the target tasks, sub-task steps, and criteria of success mentioned in one interview. They then separately and independently coded two additional interviews. Following this, they met to discuss any discrepancies until agreement was reached. The first author then coded the ten remaining interviews.

4.3 Cycle 3: Means analysis

The means analysis investigated the constraints under which the program would be implemented to decide how many task types could realistically be treated, what the instructional modules would look like, and to anticipate any problems. According to Purpura and Graziano-King (2004, cited in Brown, 2009: 276), a means analysis explores factors affecting curriculum implementation and change. In the present study, this consisted of information about the amount of instructional time available, established norms of attendance and punctuality, and obtaining support from the school in adjusting workloads, encouraging staff cooperation, and providing administrative support. These data were obtained through document analysis, informal interviews, and the first author's experience teaching in the program. The data collected were used to outline a preliminary TBLT course in terms of the length and number of task sequences to be included, the extent to which one lesson could be dependent on work in previous lessons, and the training and support that teachers in the program would need.

4.4 Cycle 4: Follow-up structured interviews

Follow-up structured interviews were conducted with managers from each of the workplace domains in Cycles 1 and 2. These follow-up interviews served to fill in missing information regarding the task types, sub-task steps, and criteria of success. They also served to obtain initial insight into language typically used to complete sub-task steps.

Each informant's ongoing willingness to participate was confirmed. The interviews were conducted in Thai and lasted approximately 35 minutes. The structured interviews targeted specific details regarding tasks and criteria of success that informants had mentioned in Cycle 2, based on questions such as: 'You said that you... could you describe what that would involve?' 'Employees and managers often mentioned..., what do you think this means?' 'When an employee completes..., what exactly do they have to do to do it well?' 'What would you typically say when doing... in English?' (Spradley, 1979). Transcription and interrater agreement procedures were the same as in Cycle 2.

4.5 Cycle 5: Confirmatory survey

A primarily closed-item confirmatory survey was created based on the results of Cycles 1–4 and circulated to a much larger sample of graduates employed in key workplace domains. The aim was to verify the emerging picture of tasks and criteria of success and to establish their criticality for inclusion in a task-based syllabus (Long, 2015: 223–227). Permission was granted by the Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at the university at which the study was conducted to send the online survey. Survey participants provided informed consent on a preliminary page of the survey.

The Google Form online survey consisted of closed response items in which participants rated tasks and criteria of success on a Likert scale. The survey was in Thai and consisted of three parts: (1) background and experience (current job, work experience, years of experience); (2) the criticality of target tasks for their work; and (3) criteria of success. Both sections 2 and 3 provided participants with the opportunity to add open-ended responses to make the tasks and criteria more representative of their work. Before going live, the survey was piloted with eight volunteer students to identify and remove ambiguous, complicated, or abstract terms (Hillman & Long, 2020).

4.6 Cycle 6: Analysis of target discourse (ATD)

The ATD for the task ‘Giving Directions’, which will be used as an example in the present paper, was based on recorded telephone conversations with hotel receptionists made by three English-speaking research assistants (American, Malaysian, Filipino). Each assistant called multiple hotels in two major cities in Thailand where graduates were typically placed to ask for directions from different locations. The managers of these hotels gave informed consent to participate in the project and authorized the research team to make and record the calls to their hotels. The receptionists knew that calls to the hotel were recorded.

A total of 10 conversations were recorded, ranging from 3–5 minutes for shorter distances to 9–16 minutes for longer distances. The directions involved a full range of transportation modes, including walking, city trains, and private cars. The steps used in analyzing the ATD data included: (1) identifying the sub-task steps in each conversation, (2) tallying the frequency with which each step occurred, (3) comparing the language used to achieve each step, (4) identifying the most common forms used for each step, (5) creating concise, grammatically accurate conversations which retained the original discourse structure, functions, and linguistic strategies, and (6) elaborating any difficult language to make it comprehensible to EIC majors (see Long, 2015: 250–259). To establish interrater agreement, all conversations were coded by the first author and a Thai English teacher separately. They then met to discuss any discrepancies until agreement was reached.

5 Results

5.1 Cycle 1: Document analysis

The document analysis generated information on expressed societal needs for English in Thailand and on the specific positions in which EIC graduates are placed after graduation.

5.1.1 Government and industry publications

Recent announcements by business, industry, and government in the national and local news helped to better understand expressed social needs for English in Thailand. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank, Thailand faces a severe shortage of skilled labour (The Nation, 2016). With 83.5% of

its workforce unskilled, Thailand has the lowest proportion of skilled labour among ASEAN nations. A solution, suggested by the committee on educational reform, is to expand area-based education in which learning outcomes are designed in conjunction with communities and local industries. Three significant areas of emphasis are: (1) technology, (2) foreign languages (particularly English), and (3) research and development. The present study is in line with these government, industry, and educational directives in considering the needs of employers in business and industry as a basis for educational design.

5.1.2 Job placement records

Through the analysis of job placement records, it was possible to identify key domains for the subsequent ATT (Long, 2022). Although the workplace domains of graduate placements in the five-year period preceding the study (2020–2024) varied from private companies to various public services, positions typically involved routine customer service, whether connected with work in hotels, fitness centres, spas, restaurants, shopping malls, or recreation centres. The most common jobs across the domains were customer affairs officer, receptionist, guest services staff, and sales (Table 1).

Table 1

Job Placements of EIC Graduates (2020–2024) (n = 184)

Position	Placements	Percentage
Customer affairs officer	56	30.43%
Receptionist	28	15.22%
Guest services staff	20	10.87%
Sales	20	10.87%
Marketing	15	8.15%
Telephone Operator	8	4.34%
Other	37	20.10%

5.2 Cycle 2: Initial semi-structured interviews

The twenty-nine target tasks identified as being important by informants in the initial round of interviews could be categorized into eight task types common across workplace domains (e.g., hotels, spas, fitness centers, restaurants, recreation centers, etc.) (Table 2).

The emergence of eight superordinate task types from twenty-nine individual target tasks requires explanation from both theoretical and practical perspectives, as it constitutes the central empirical finding of the study.

From a theoretical perspective, the convergence on eight types reflects the application of Long's (2015: 223–227) categorization criteria: each task type must be (1) broad enough to serve as a practical unit of syllabus organization, (2) specific enough to retain the situational authenticity of the original target tasks, and (3) internally coherent in terms of shared sub-task steps, linguistic demands, and success criteria. The eight types identified here satisfy all three conditions. Each type encapsulates a functionally distinct set of communicative actions that share an underlying discourse structure, yet each differs sufficiently from the others to constitute a genuinely separate pedagogic unit requiring dedicated instruction and criterion-based assessment.

Table 2

Target Tasks and Task Types

Task Types	Target Tasks
1. Answering queries	Regarding rates and availability (rooms/memberships/services/leases) Regarding items forgotten or lost at facilities
2. Messaging clients	Welcoming new customers Welcoming returning customers Warning customers (for smoking/forbidden activities) Sending confirmations (for a booking/order/service) Thanking patrons (for positive reviews)
3. Handling complaints	Regarding facilities or services Regarding broken equipment (e.g., air-conditioners) Regarding noise (e.g., other rooms, construction) Regarding food or menu
4. Giving directions	To nearby locations To distant locations (changes/modes of transport) To the company over the telephone Figuring out directions using online maps Locating local schedules (trains, buses, events) Locating local fares (trains, buses, events)
5. Explaining procedures	For collecting I.D./passport from guest and visitors For using facilities For joining leisure activities
6. Providing reception services	Checking guests in and out Booking reservations (face-to-face/telephone) Logging requests to clean rooms Informing guests about luggage services Instructing guests on using amenities
7. Responding to emails	Regarding reservations Regarding online reviews
8. Making sales	Over the counter (amenities, souvenirs) Over the telephone (orders, packages, promotions)

From a practical perspective, the eight task types collectively map onto the full communicative cycle of service work—from initial customer contact and information provision (answering queries, providing reception services), through the core service transaction (giving directions, explaining procedures), to relationship management and service recovery (handling complaints, messaging clients, responding to emails) and commercial exchange (making sales). This coverage is not coincidental: it reflects the full range of situations in which EIC graduates are required to use English on a daily basis, as confirmed by the diverse informant pool spanning hotels, fitness centres, spas, and retail environments. The fact that the same eight task types emerged consistently across all of these workplace domains—rather

than a different typology for each domain—is a key finding, as it justifies the design of a single, shared TBLT curriculum for EIC majors entering the Thai service sector, rather than separate curricula for each occupational setting.

The eight task types also capture two distinct communicative modalities. Five task types (giving directions, handling complaints, answering queries, providing reception services, and explaining procedures) are primarily oral and face-to-face, demanding real-time negotiation of meaning, online processing of interlocutor needs, and the deployment of interactional strategies including clarification, confirmation, and repair. Three task types (responding to emails, messaging clients, and making sales) involve written or technologically mediated communication—requiring formal register control, extended written discourse, and, increasingly, the use of digital platforms such as LINE, email, and social media. The dual-modality structure of the typology is theoretically significant: it confirms that English communicative competence for Thai service workers cannot be reduced to oral interaction alone, and that a fully adequate TBLT curriculum must incorporate both spoken and written task types within its syllabus architecture.

Each of the five oral task types addresses a distinct interactional demand and makes different linguistic calls on the learner. Giving directions requires spatial language, sequencing, and repeated comprehension checking under the time pressure of a live telephone call. Handling complaints requires pragmatic sophistication—specifically, the management of face-threat through apology, empathy, and negotiated resolution—in a context where the customer is emotionally engaged and the employee must act within institutional constraints. Answering queries demands quick retrieval and clear articulation of factual information (prices, availability, policies) in a form that is both accurate and reassuring. Providing reception services involves executing a multi-step procedural sequence (check-in, check-out, reservation, room request) that combines transactional precision with interactional warmth. Explaining procedures requires the ability to sequence complex institutional processes (passport collection, facility rules, activity registration) in plain language accessible to international visitors.

The three written or mediated task types are equally distinct. Responding to emails is the most linguistically complex of the written tasks, requiring learners to manage potentially face-threatening communicative acts—declining requests, addressing negative reviews, confirming problematic reservations—in an extended written register without the interactional scaffolding available in face-to-face communication. Messaging clients encompasses a range of shorter written tasks (welcome messages, warnings, confirmations, thank-you notes) that require appropriate register calibration and cultural sensitivity. Making sales, the least critical of the eight task types according to the survey data, involves persuasive language and the promotion of services and products—a communicative demand that is more relevant to some occupational roles (sales and marketing staff) than others (receptionists and guest services staff), as reflected in the occupational distribution in Table 1.

The rank ordering of task types by criticality in the confirmatory survey (Table 5, reported below) reveals a theoretically interesting pattern. The three most critical tasks—giving directions (68% extremely or very important), responding to emails (66%), and providing reception services (63%)—represent three fundamentally different communicative demands: real-time oral spatial communication, extended written professional communication, and multi-step procedural transaction. The fact that such diverse task types are rated equally critical confirms that a balanced TBLT curriculum covering multiple task types and both oral and written modes is warranted—rather than a program focused narrowly on a single skill area such as speaking or writing.

At the other end of the scale, making sales (25% extremely or very important; 32% not at all important) was rated substantially less critical than the other seven task types. This result is consistent with the occupational distribution in Table 1: only 10.87% of EIC graduates enter sales roles specifically. The contextual sensitivity of the ranking—reflecting the actual distribution of graduates across job roles rather than an idealized view of the service sector—illustrates one of the distinctive methodological

advantages of the Delphi approach: the ability to identify which task types are universally critical across all service roles and which are domain-specific, providing a principled basis for sequencing tasks in the syllabus (most critical first) and potentially making some task types optional for students on particular occupational tracks.

5.3 Cycle 3: Means analysis

Learners in the EIC course enrolled in six classes each semester. Each class met once per week for 2.5 hours over a 15-week semester. However, actual class time was two hours as the norm was to arrive at classes 15 minutes late, and there was typically a 15-minute break after the first hour. It was thus decided that one-hour task-based lessons would be planned so that one lesson could be completed before the break and one after. Furthermore, later lessons would not be dependent on the outcomes of earlier lessons so that absent learners could rejoin.

Teachers in the program were confident in speaking English and typically designed their own teaching materials and tests. The teachers were also enthusiastic about TBLT but lacked knowledge of the principles and practices involved. Initial training was thus needed. As administrative support had been secured for the project, teachers’ workloads could be adjusted to allow them to attend the training sessions as part of their regular work.

5.4 Cycle 4: Follow-up structured interviews

The follow-up structured interviews with managers in each workplace domain filled in specific details regarding what each task type involved as a basis for planning the modules. An example for the task of ‘Giving Directions’ is provided in Table 3.

Table 3
Sub-Task Steps in Giving Directions

	Sub-Task Steps	Description
1	Greet customer	Employee greets customer with a standard company greeting.
2	Acknowledge problem	Employee acknowledges customer’s need for directions.
3	Identify mode of transportation	Employee identifies whether the customer will be walking, driving, take a public bus or train, etc.
4	Explain route using visible landmarks	Employee gives directions to destination, mentioning salient buildings, streets, intersections, etc. along the route.
5	Clarify distances	Employee gives estimates of distance for each stage of the route in minutes, meters, stops, streets, etc.
6	Offer additional support	Employee offers to arrange transport, send directions through social media, provide follow-up support by phone (if required).
7	Confirm understanding	Employee checks customer’s understanding of key information.
8	Close the conversation	Employee closes the conversation with a standard company closing, thanking the customer.

The descriptions of sub-task steps were a critical dimension of the TBNA as they directly informed both the ATD and the development of criterion-based assessment tests. The information regarding sub-task steps in Table 3, for example, could be directly translated into the criterion-based test in Table 4.

Table 4
Criterion-Based Assessment Test for Giving Directions

1	Greets customer with a standard greeting	P – F
2	Acknowledges customer's problem	P – F
3	Clarifies the customer's mode of transportation	P – F
4	Explains route using visible landmarks	P – F
5	Clarifies distances in minutes, metres, stops, streets, etc.	P – F
6	Offers additional support	P – F
7	Confirms the customer has understood key information	P – F
8	Closes the conversation with a standard closing, thanking the customer	P – F

The criteria in Table 4 are scored Pass/Fail and are relatively objective. They do not include judgements on fluency, accuracy, complexity, lexis, or appropriateness, which involve subjective rating and constitute what Long refers to as a 'linguistic caboose' (Long, 2015: 331–334). It was decided that learners would be assessed based on objective task-specific criteria for each task type, and that critical changes in language use would be allowed to develop incidentally through performing sequences of pedagogic tasks alternating input-based versions (reading, listening) and interactive versions. Problems with the quality of the language used to complete tasks would be dealt with through communicative focus on form (Long, 2015).

5.5 Cycle 5: Confirmatory survey

The 389 graduates who completed the university's job placement survey between 2020–2024 were sent the online survey. Of these 389, 70 (18%) responded, and these were representative of the customer service positions in Table 1. In terms of experience, 17.5% had more than five years of experience, 17.5% had 3–5 years, 51.47% had 1–3 years, and 13.23% had less than 12 months. They were asked to rank the tasks identified in Cycles 2 and 4 in terms of their criticality. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Criticality of Tasks for In-Service Graduates (n=70)

Rank	Task Types	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not at all Important
1.	Giving directions	41%	27%	17%	5%	10%
2.	Responding to emails	40%	26%	13%	5%	16%
3.	Providing reception services	37%	26%	12%	4%	21%
4.	Handling complaints	35%	28%	11%	5%	21%
5.	Answering queries	33%	30%	9%	7%	21%
6.	Messaging clients	35%	25%	14%	4%	22%
7.	Explaining procedures	28%	28%	19%	7%	18%
8.	Making sales	12%	13%	25%	18%	32%

The data in Table 5 provided a basis for prioritizing task types and initially ordering them with respect to one another (Long, 2015: 223–227). The second part of the survey related to the criticality of general performance criteria mentioned by the informants during the interview process (see Table 6).

Table 6
Criticality of Criteria of Success for In-Service Graduates (n=70)

Criteria	Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not at all Important
1 Effectiveness	49%	38%	10%	3%	0%
2 Clarity	45%	36%	17%	1%	0%
3 Politeness	43%	35%	19%	3%	0%
4 Responding naturally while listening	39%	29%	26%	6%	0%
5 Speaking fluently	32%	41%	22%	6%	0%
6 Demonstrating cultural awareness	26%	41%	25%	7%	1%
7 Grammatical accuracy	14%	43%	29%	10%	3%
8 Sophisticated vocabulary	6%	33%	48%	10%	3%
9 Sophisticated grammar	7%	22%	48%	19%	4%

The results in Table 6 suggest that the primary focus in the Thai workplace is on successful task performance and pragmatics (Criteria 1–4) rather than grammatical accuracy, lexis, or syntactic complexity (Criteria 7–9). Fluency (Criterion 5) was rated higher, but still considered less critical than task completion and pragmatics (Criteria 1–4).

5.6 Cycle 6: Analysis of target discourse (ATD)

The task of Giving Directions will be used to illustrate the results of the ATD. Based on the recorded conversations of Thai employees giving directions in English in the workplace, a common discourse structure for each task type could be identified (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Discourse Structure of ‘Giving Directions’

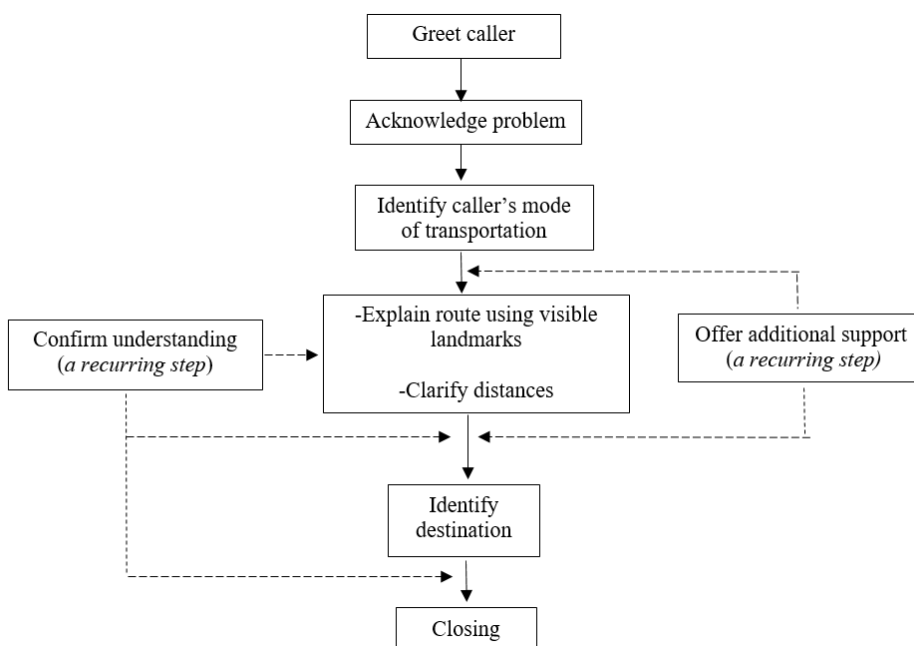


Table 7
Language Used in Giving Directions

Sub-Task Steps	Commonly Occurring Forms	Frequency
1. Greet the customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · (Hotel's name), Sawasdee Kha/Krap, how may I assist you? · Good morning. Thank you for calling (Hotel's name), How may I assist you? · Sawasdee Kha/Krap, reservations, (Staff's name)'s speaking, how may I help you? 	10/10
2. Acknowledge problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Yes, sir. · Alright. · So, you want to know how to get to the hotel, right? 	10/10
3. Identify mode of transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How will you get here? · Will you walk or go by car? · How will you come to the hotel? Your car? BTS? Public transportation? Or how? 	9/10
4. Explaining route using visible landmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · From SIAM station, you can take the green line direct to SILOM or BANG WAH station, but you get off at SAPAN TAKSIN station. · Our hotel is opposite of the AUDI showroom. · You just go straight on the expressway and then there's a fee of 25 Thai baht, so after you pay for a fee, then you just go straight until you see the victory monument, then you can get off at RAMA 9 exit. · Turn to the second right, you will see the temple on your left, walk past that. 	10/10
5. Clarify distances in minutes, meters, stops, streets, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I think it's approximately 15 minutes. · Turn left, keep going about one kilometre. · You walk a little bit, one minute from the station to the hotel. · It's not far. It's not over 10 minutes. · You get off after the third stop. 	10/10
6. Offer additional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Do you have the LINE application? I could share the hotel's location for you. · You can visit our website or Facebook. We have a map on the website. · We can send a car to pick you up at the station. · If you're not quite sure just call to us again. 	6/10
7. Confirm Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Are you ok? · Do you get it? · You want me to repeat? · Ok? 	6/10
8. Close the conversation, thanking the customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · You're welcome, Kha/Krap. Sawasdee Kha/Krap. · My pleasure Kha/Krap. · Have a good/nice day. Bye. · Thank you, Kha/Krap. 	10/10

Note: Polite particles were found in all conversations ('Kha', used by females and 'Krap', used by males).

Table 8

Prototypical Conversation for 'Giving Directions'

Speaker	Language used	Sub-task step(s) completed
Bank Employee	Good afternoon, UOB Bank, Sawanna Speaking. How may I help you?	<i>Greet customer with a standard company greeting.</i>
Customer	Good afternoon, I'd like to go to your bank, but I'm not sure how to get there.	
Bank Employee	Yes, certainly. I can tell me how to get to UOB bank. Where are you now, sir?	<i>Acknowledge problem.</i>
Customer	I'm at the MRT Yak Tiwanon Station.	
Bank Employee	Okay, will you come by the underground train then?	<i>Identify mode of transportation.</i>
Customer	Yes, the MRT?	
Bank Employee	Yes. Our bank is near the MRT Wat Mangkon Station. Just by the Wat Mangkon Temple. You should first take a train from Yak Tiwanon Station to Tao Poon Station. It's an interchange station. You change from the purple line to the blue line at Tao Poon Station. Okay?	<i>Explain route using landmarks.</i> <i>Confirm customer has understood key information</i>
Customer	Yes, I think so.	
Bank Employee	Okay, you take the second train from Tao Poon Station to Tha Phra Station. It's another interchange station.	<i>Explain route using landmarks.</i>
Customer	How far is it from Tao Poon Station?	
Bank Employee	Tha Phra is nine stations from Tao Poon. Get off the blue line at the ninth stop from Tao Poon Station, sir. Then take a third train from Tha Phra to Wat Mangkon Station. Wat Mangkon is four stations from Tha Phra. Is that clear so far? You take three MRT trains.	<i>Clarify distances.</i> <i>Explain route using landmarks.</i> <i>Clarify distances.</i> <i>Confirm understanding</i>
Customer	Yes.	
Bank Employee	Okay, when you get off at Wat Mangkon Station, take the first exit and walk down the steps. Then, walk along Prang Nam Road. You will see the Nam Sae Thai traditional medical clinic on your left. Walk past that. Cross Yaowarat Road. The bank will be on the other side of the road right in front of you. Do you need me to repeat?	<i>Explain route using landmarks.</i> <i>Confirm understanding</i>
Customer	How far is it from the MRT station to the bank?	
Bank Employee	It's about 200 meters.	<i>Clarify distances.</i>
	Our website also has directions to the bank, but if you have any problems, you can call me back. My name is Sawanna.	<i>Offer additional support</i>
Customer	Okay, it's not too far. Thank you.	
Bank Employee	You're welcome. Thank you for calling UOB bank.	<i>Close conversation with a standard closing, thanking the customer</i>

After identifying the discourse structure common to all 10 performances of the task in Figure 1, the language forms commonly used to complete each sub-task step were identified as a basis for creating prototypical language samples for input-based tasks. Table 7 provides a summary of these forms with the number of conversations in which each step occurred.

Finally, Table 8 provides a model conversation based on the discourse structure and language forms common to the task type (Figure 1 & Table 7). In creating these language models, grammatical errors in the original recordings were corrected but unfamiliar and challenging language was retained and made comprehensible through elaboration and repetition (see Long, 2015: 251–259).

6 Discussion

This study investigated the English needs of EIC majors at a university in Thailand as a basis for TBLT course design. Through the triangulation of data from multiple sources and methods over several cycles of data collection, a consensus on key dimensions of learners' needs was developed. The approach builds on Lambert (2010), who employed a comparable multi-cycle Delphi methodology for English majors in Japan, and expands it in two important respects: the integration of an ATD as a sixth data collection cycle, and its application to a learner population with specific—rather than general—occupational needs. The present section discusses the eight task types from both theoretical and practical perspectives, examines why these tasks most suitably address the needs of Thailand's service sector, and considers the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts.

6.1 The eight task types: Theoretical justification

From a theoretical standpoint, each of the eight task types identified in this study satisfies Long's (2015) criteria for target tasks appropriate for TBLT: each is (1) performed in the real world by real workers in target occupational settings; (2) identifiable and bounded as a coherent unit of interaction with a recognizable opening, core sequence, and closure; (3) characterizable by success criteria that are communicative rather than grammatical in nature; and (4) scalable for pedagogic purposes through principled modification of input, interaction, and outcome demands (Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2015).

The most critical task type—giving directions—exemplifies these properties clearly and serves as the detailed illustration in the present paper. The eight sub-task steps identified in Cycle 4 (Table 3) reveal a discourse structure that goes considerably beyond simple information transfer: it requires real-time spatial reasoning, adaptive reformulation based on interlocutor signals, and the ongoing management of comprehension through confirmation checks. The ATD results (Cycle 6) demonstrate that Thai workers perform these steps consistently and employ identifiable lexicogrammatical patterns at each step (Table 7). This provides a principled basis for both input-based task design (using the prototypical conversation in Table 8 as a listening/reading model) and criterion-referenced performance assessment (Table 4)—the two cardinal outputs of TBLT course design. Crucially, the criteria in Table 4 assess communicative task completion rather than linguistic form, consistent with the workplace priority data in Table 6, where effectiveness, clarity, and politeness were rated far more important than grammatical accuracy, sophisticated vocabulary, or syntactic complexity.

Handling complaints, the fourth most critical task type, makes theoretically distinct demands. Complaint handling involves managing face-threat in real time—deploying apology, empathy, and offers of remediation while operating within institutional constraints and maintaining the interactional relationship with a potentially distressed customer. This pragmatic complexity sets it apart from information-transfer tasks like giving directions and explaining procedures: it requires not just communicative accuracy but sociolinguistic sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness. Malicka et al. (2019) identified comparable complaint-handling tasks among the most linguistically demanding in their study

of hotel receptionists in Barcelona, and the present data corroborate this assessment. The prominence of this task type in the Thai service sector context reflects Thailand's specific tourism profile, where international visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds bring varied expectations of service quality, making the ability to handle dissatisfaction gracefully and cross-culturally a high-stakes communicative skill.

Responding to emails, the second most critical task type, occupies a distinct theoretical niche as the primary written task in the typology. Unlike oral tasks, email requires the ability to produce extended written discourse in a formal register, manage face-threatening acts (declining requests, addressing negative online reviews) without the interactional resources available in face-to-face communication, and do so under less time pressure but with a more permanent, public record of the interaction. The inclusion of this written task type as the second most critical confirms that communicative competence for Thai service workers is not reducible to oral fluency alone: professional written communication is a core component of target competence, consistent with the finding by Malicka et al. (2019) that higher-level service staff in their study relied heavily on written communication modes.

Providing reception services, the third most critical task type, is the most procedurally complex. Check-in, check-out, and reservation management require workers to execute a multi-step procedural sequence while simultaneously maintaining warmth and interactional fluency—combining transactional precision with relational engagement. This task type is unique in that it involves the integration of institutional knowledge (room availability, policies, billing procedures) with real-time oral interaction. Its high criticality rating (63% extremely or very important) reflects the centrality of reception work to the occupational profile of EIC graduates, 56% of whom hold customer affairs officer or receptionist positions (Table 1).

The remaining four task types—answering queries, messaging clients, explaining procedures, and making sales—address progressively more specialized communicative demands. Answering queries and explaining procedures are information-provision tasks that require factual accuracy and clear sequencing but are generally less interactionally complex than handling complaints or giving directions. Messaging clients encompasses shorter written communication tasks (welcome messages, confirmations, warnings) that require appropriate register calibration. Making sales is the most commercially oriented task type and the least critical for the majority of graduates, most of whom occupy service-delivery rather than commercial roles. Its inclusion in the curriculum nonetheless provides exposure to persuasive language registers that may become relevant as graduates advance in their careers.

6.2 The eight task types: Practical justification for Thailand

The eight task types are not only theoretically sound but also practically grounded in the specific socioeconomic context of Thailand's service industry. Thailand's tourism and hospitality sector is the country's largest single employer, contributing approximately 20% of GDP before the COVID-19 pandemic and recovering strongly since 2022 (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2023). The communicative demands on frontline service workers in this sector are considerable: they must interact daily with international visitors in English, handle inquiries, complaints, and logistical challenges in real time, and do so in ways that reflect positively on their employers' service standards. The eight task types identified in this study map directly onto the full range of these daily communicative demands—from the most common (giving directions, answering queries) to the most demanding (handling complaints, responding to emails with negative reviews).

The practical suitability of the eight task types for Thailand is further supported by the criteria of success data in Table 6. The workplace priority ordering—effectiveness > clarity > politeness > natural interaction > fluency > cultural awareness >> grammatical accuracy—is strikingly consistent with the nature of Thailand's international service economy. Effectiveness and clarity are paramount because miscommunication in a service encounter has immediate practical consequences (a guest cannot find

the hotel; a reservation is incorrectly recorded). Politeness and natural interaction are critical because Thailand's service culture places high value on harmonious, relationship-oriented communication (a phenomenon deeply connected to the cultural concept of *kreng jai*, or considerate restraint). Cultural awareness ranks sixth—above grammatical accuracy—because EIC graduates routinely serve customers from diverse national and linguistic backgrounds for whom a polite, comprehensible, and adaptable communication partner is more valued than a grammatically precise but interpersonally stilted one. These findings confirm that the eight task types were correctly identified and that the criterion framework underlying their assessment is well-calibrated to what Thai employers actually require from their English-speaking workforce.

An important practical contribution of this study is the demonstration that a single typology of eight task types can serve as a viable syllabus framework across diverse customer service domains—hotels, spas, fitness centres, restaurants, shopping malls, and recreation centres. This cross-domain validity is particularly significant for curriculum design at the institutional level: rather than designing separate TBLT modules for each occupational pathway, the EIC program can organize its curriculum around the eight shared task types, with the specific target tasks and language samples for each type (as in Tables 2 and 7) customized to reflect the range of workplace contexts graduates are likely to enter. This approach combines the theoretical rigour of needs-based syllabus design with the practical efficiency required in real educational programmes with finite time and resources.

6.3 Generalizability of the findings

A key question prompted by these findings is the extent to which the eight task types identified here have applicability beyond the Thai EIC context. This question can be addressed at two levels: contextual and methodological.

At the contextual level, the eight task types are likely to have direct relevance to English-medium customer service education in other ASEAN economies with comparable service sector profiles, including Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. All of these countries have rapidly expanding tourism and hospitality industries, growing urban service economies, and university language programs serving graduates who enter customer-facing roles. The task types identified here—particularly giving directions, handling complaints, responding to emails, and providing reception services—are structural features of international service communication that appear across geographies and cultures (Malicka et al., 2019; So-Mui & Mead, 2000), suggesting that program designers in comparable contexts could adopt the eight task types as a principled starting point for their own TBNAs, validating them against local data before implementation. It is not our intention to suggest that the specific target tasks, sub-task steps, or language samples identified here will transfer unchanged to other contexts; rather, the eight superordinate task types represent a transferable organizational framework whose specific content would be reshaped by each local context.

The study also has broader relevance beyond the Asian context. The customer service domains studied here—hospitality, retail, recreation—are among the most universally distributed service sectors globally, and the communicative demands they place on English-speaking workers in EFL contexts share important structural similarities regardless of national setting. Studies such as Malicka et al. (2019) in Spain and So-Mui and Mead (2000) in Hong Kong show comparable task typologies emerging from ostensibly different professional and cultural contexts, suggesting that the eight task types identified here are not idiosyncratic but reflect a deeper structure of service communication that transcends specific national or cultural contexts.

At the methodological level, the study's contribution extends beyond the eight task types themselves. The six-cycle Delphi methodology—progressing from document analysis through expert interviews, means analysis, and ATD—constitutes a replicable heuristic for any EFL program serving learners with specific occupational needs. The same methodology could be applied to identify task types for nursing

students in Indonesia, business students in Vietnam, aviation students in the Philippines, or IT support staff in Malaysia. In each case, the specific task types will differ from those identified here; but the methodological procedures for identifying, validating, and pedagogizing them—the progression from document analysis to ATD, the use of interrater agreement procedures, the Delphi approach to building consensus, and the translation of ATD findings into criterion-based assessment instruments—are directly transferable. This methodological generalizability constitutes, in our view, the study's most enduring scholarly contribution.

6.4 The analysis of target discourse

In terms of the ATD, commonalities in the steps completed in customer service tasks allowed a discourse structure to be established for each task type (see Figure 1 for an example). Commonly occurring language associated with these steps could be identified (Table 7), providing an empirical basis for constructing realistic language models for input-based pedagogic tasks (see Table 8 for an example). This is consistent with previous research by Maie and Bradford (2022) who identified common sub-tasks and associated linguistic features in weather forecasts as a basis for designing task-based input materials. Similarly, Hillman and Long (2020) identified common steps and associated language forms for developing models of Japanese celebration speeches for training of U.S. Foreign Service Officers.

However, it should be noted that the tasks investigated in previous ATD research have been relatively formulaic in nature with a primary focus on information transfer. The present study also focused on the transfer of specific information. In tasks that involve personal involvement, discourse structure might be less predictable. The task of Giving Directions, for example, lacks the social and emotional dimensions of engagement that characterize tasks such as relating personal anecdotes, making personal recommendations, and explaining how to do or make things of personal interest (Lambert, 2023; Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Future ATD research is needed on tasks that involve more personal involvement between interactants.

6.5 TBLT implementation

Furthermore, the study exemplified one means of developing needs-based instruction that might address key pedagogic problems identified in English instruction in Thai universities and other regions of the world, including lack of connection between classroom work and learners' lives (Phaisarnsithikarn, 2020) and an emphasis on linguistic accuracy over communicative competence (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Saengboon, 2004). It is also worth noting, however, that the implementation of TBLT in exam-driven EFL environments is not without challenge. As Sato (2026) argues with respect to Japan, deeply embedded instructional norms and assessment cultures may require TBLT to be introduced incrementally and adapted to local constraints. The findings of the present study—particularly the means analysis (Cycle 3)—speak directly to this concern by mapping the practical conditions under which TBLT can be realistically implemented at the target institution. Equally, Ellis (2024) draws a distinction between TBLT where tasks constitute the primary unit of instruction and task-supported language teaching (TSLT) in which tasks complement form-focused instruction. For contexts in which TBLT is not feasible, TSLT programs in contexts where learners have specific occupational needs might draw on some aspects of a needs analysis to add transparency and accountability to instruction.

The study demonstrates how TBNA provided essential information for designing foreign language instruction at a university in Thailand. It supports Long's (2005, 2015, 2022) claim that triangulation of multiple sources and methods is essential for TBNA, and that multiple cycles of data collection are beneficial (Lambert, 2010). The means analysis (Cycle 3) offers an important practical contribution by mapping the institutional constraints—class schedules, teacher preparedness, and administrative support—that shape what is feasible in the target context. It is hoped that the study will provide a

heuristic for bringing together recent theoretical and methodological directives in the design of needs-based occupational language courses.

One limitation of the study is limited generalizability of its specific outcomes. Needs-based instruction is bespoke instruction. While the general principles of task-based needs analysis and the methodological heuristic employed here may be applicable in other educational contexts, the specific task types, sub-task steps, and discourse samples that are outcomes of the study were developed for and validated against one specific programme. Teachers and course designers should not adopt these outcomes uncritically in planning instructional materials for different contexts.

A second point worth noting is that the survey response rate in Cycle 5 was 18% ($n = 70$). This raises the possibility of non-response bias. Those who responded may represent one or more specific sub-populations of the broader population of graduates who had the time and motivation to respond to the survey.

Finally, the ATD (Cycle 6) reported in the study focused on only the most critical of the eight task types identified in the NA (Giving Directions). The intention was to provide an example within limitations of space. Future research is needed which focuses on the ATD stage of needs analysis specifically and provides comparable discourse analyses for all tasks identified in the ATD such as handling complaints, messaging clients, and responding to emails.

Overall, the study extends the methodological tradition established by Serafini et al. (2015) and Lambert (2010) to a new geographic and sectoral context, contributing to a growing body of research on EFL needs in the Asian region. Researchers in comparable Southeast Asian contexts—such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines—are encouraged to adapt this framework to investigate the occupational needs of their own learners. The ATD component of the study provides a model for how discourse analysis can be systematically integrated into TBNA methodology to produce linguistically grounded, realistic input materials for TBLT courses.

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