

## **Relationship between The ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Scores of Flight Attendants in Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has established English Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) for all flight crews operating on international routes, all air traffic controllers who communicate with foreign pilots, and air professionals. The ICAO requires those who operate on international routes to be qualified at least in Operational Level 4 in the Requirements. However, in Thailand, the only English test that all flight attendants are necessitated to take is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Apparently, there is a mismatch between the TOEIC test scores and the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) as the foci of these two differ. The current study thus explored the relationship between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and TOEIC scores of flight attendants in Thailand and their attitudes in order to better determine if the TOEIC is the most effective means to recruit flight attendants in Thailand. The data were collected from 100 Thai Airways International flight attendants using a four-point Likert scale self-assessment survey to measure the participants' self-assessed abilities on all the ICAO rating scale descriptors focusing on Operational Level 4. The data were quantitatively analyzed with inferential statistics of Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient. Moreover, to elicit in-depth information regarding the attitudes of Thai airways flight attendants, the semi-structured interview protocols were also used and subsequently analyzed by means of content analysis. The findings of the current study revealed that there is a positive correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the TOEIC scores of Thai Airways International flight attendants, which was equal to 0.384, but this correlation was a weak uphill (positive) linear relationship. As a result, the present study suggests that Thai aviation companies should be aware of using the TOEIC as a recruitment requirement. To ensure a more accurate determination of language proficiency of applicants, it is recommended that the Thai aviation industry develop their own English language proficiency test for staff recruitment processes.

**Keywords:** ICAO Language Proficiency Requirement, TOEIC, Flight Attendants

### **Background of the Study**

Talking about the medium of communication in the aviation industry, the language of international aviation communication is definitely English (Alderson, 2009). Correct and concise pronunciation receives more serious attention from the aviation professionals since countless incidents and accidents in the aviation industry have involved miscommunications between staff in the aviation industry who are not native speakers of the English language. Moreover, the English language of the international aviation industry is not English for

general purposes. Rather, it can be categorized as English for specific purposes or ESP. However, Douglas (2000) has pointed out that ESP for the aviation industry is even more restricted than that. Much of the aviation English can be classified as a code that is used in a very restricted context known as standard phraseology. As the safety in the aviation industry relies on clear and accurate communication between interlocutors, ambiguous or incorrect use of English in the aviation industry can result in catastrophic outcomes that need to be avoided at all costs.

According to Martin (2016), aviation English includes the ability to speak, write, and understand—in English—aviation meteorology, physics, navigation, maps and charts, electronics and avionics, instrumentation, hydraulics, rules of the air, air traffic control regulations, and much more. Precisely speaking, unambiguous and accurate communications in English, both in the air and on the ground, are very important to the international aviation workers to do their job effectively for the safety of everyone involved. Alderson (2009) has pointed out that many serious miscommunications can occur in unpredictable situations, particularly in emergencies, and especially where urgent corrective action or essential information is involved, and where one of the interlocutors may be under severe emotional stress. This supports the idea that speaking skills in oral communication is the most important skill in aviation English. However, it is noteworthy that English in the aviation industry not only encompasses speaking with correct pronunciation, but, according to Ketchum (2007), it also demands communication skills that go hand in hand with reading and writing skills. Simply put, the more one reads and writes, the more one can broaden his or her vocabulary and articulate concepts accurately and more effectively to others. Apart from reading, in the aviation industry, writing skills are found important as they are compulsory in operational systems and maintenance which are considered safety-critical (Sarmiento, 2005). However, the significance of writing in the aviation industry may be overlooked due to the fact that the written language used in maintenance documents is often considered “simplified English,” so people involved in the industry tend to pay more attention to speaking.

The ICAO, a specialized agency of the United Nations, has developed and proposed airline safety standards and practices which require flight crew members, air traffic controllers, and air professionals (including flight attendants) to be able to communicate proficiently using both ICAO phraseology and plain English called the ICAO language proficiency requirements (LPRs). It has identified six areas of language competency in which aviation personnel must be proficient including the following: pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interactions (ICAO, 2004). Each skill is divided into six levels of proficiency, namely Level 1 (pre-elementary), Level 2 (elementary), Level 3 (pre-operational), Level 4 (operational), Level 5 (extended), and Level 6 (expert). In order to be qualified to work in the aviation industry, it is compulsory for flight crews including flight attendants to pass the Operational level 4 of the requirements. Even though the ICAO language proficiency test is designed for and administered specifically with only pilots, with parts of the test concerning the radio communications, flight attendants are still required to meet the specification. This is because it is believed that they still need to be able to use the language to fulfill their duties including providing food and beverages to passengers and ensuring safety and taking care of passengers in an emergency, in addition to having the overall knowledge about the aircraft they fly (ICAO, 2008). In addition to this, the English language proficiency of flight attendants is what ICAO takes into serious consideration, particularly when there is an emergency in which flight attendants have to be the communicators between pilots and passengers with different language backgrounds. More importantly, in case of medical emergencies, flight attendants' ability to use English to communicate with different parties to assist passengers is even more crucial. For these

reasons, it is deemed vital that airline companies make sure that their flight attendants meet the standards set by ICAO.

However, in reality, for many international flight attendants, English is not their first language. They understand, however, that if they want to fly internationally as a career, their English must be fluent to a great extent. Nevertheless, the English proficiency of flight attendants in Thailand in general has been found to be lower than the standards (Permtanjit, 2003). It has been documented that the two largest areas of difficulty in the English language of flight attendants are unfamiliarity with passengers' accents and their own accents and pronunciation. Without effective English communication skills, a flight attendant may find it difficult to fulfill their job descriptions effectively and impossible to climb up the corporate ladder. Apart from this, good English skills help the aviation professionals develop and maintain the relationships with colleagues and ensure that arguments and disagreements are kept to a minimum.

At present, however, the only English test that all flight attendants recruited in Thailand are required to take is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which needs to be taken before they apply for the job. This is a rather common practice among most of the airlines in the world. Since the score range for those who can apply for the position is quite wide (from 600 to 990 points), the English language proficiency of flight attendants varies. Thus, it can be seen that the ICAO language proficiency standard and true proficiency of flight attendants may not be congruent in every case. The ICAO sets the standards of language proficiency of those who work in the aviation industry called the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs). Those who work in this industry must be qualified at least in Operational Level 4 in the requirements. In reality, however, flight attendants whose TOEIC score is higher than 600 points (the cut-off score for eligibility to work in the aviation industry) may or may not have to reach this Operational Level. Consequently, it can be stated that currently there is a mismatch between the TOEIC test scores and the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs). One plausible explanation is that the TOEIC test is designed for business purposes, while aviation English is considered a language of specific purposes. Simply put, whether the TOEIC scores are appropriate for recruiting workers in the aviation industry may need to be reconsidered due to its construct underrepresentation.

For these reasons, in order to elevate the English language proficiency standard of flight attendants in Thailand's aviation industry, the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) needs to be explored to more empirically determine whether those who have the TOEIC scores ranging from 600 to 990 points are truly qualified at the Operational Level in the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs). If not, a new English test (English for specific purposes) specifically designed for recruitment of staff in the aviation industry may need to be developed so as to help the aviation industry in Thailand find the most reliable and effective means to recruit personnel into the industry. Also, flight attendants in Thailand's aviation industry who do not meet the English proficiency standard of the ICAO may need to further improve themselves to acquire it, or risk being removed from international flight routes.

Based on the necessity of aviation professionals to achieve the standard proficiency of English, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between the ICAO language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the TOEIC scores of flight attendants in Thailand in order to reconfirm the effectiveness of TOEIC-based recruitment of flight attendants in Thailand. Moreover, the attitudes of flight attendants in Thailand toward the ICAO language Proficiency Requirements and the TOEIC test were also explored.

### **ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements**

ICAO stands for The International Civil Aviation Organization, which is a United Nations specialized organization. It was established by the United States in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention). This agency is also responsible for producing global plans to assist multinational airlines about safety and navigation, monitoring and reporting air transport performance metrics, in particular, and auditing airlines organizations to maximize safety and security. Moreover, ICAO also sets language standards in order to control the use of English as an international language of the air by making the language requirements called the “ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements” (Estival, Farris, & Molesworth, 2016).

In this study, the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements refer to a set of language rules that all flight crews have to follow. They consist of a set of holistic descriptors such as “Proficient speakers shall communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations,” “Proficient speakers shall use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community,” and “Operational Level 4 of the ICAO Rating Scale is the requirement for flight crews and air traffic controllers.” These new standards instruct flight crews and air traffic controllers to be able to communicate proficiently using both ICAO phraseology and general English. The core content of the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements is that all aviation professionals engaged in or being in contact with international flights must be proficient in the English language as a general spoken medium, not simply having a proficiency in standard ICAO Radiotelephony Phraseology.

The ICAO language proficiency requirements are significantly crucial for aviation professionals because they necessitated all aviation professionals to acquire at least Operational Level 4 in order to be accepted into the industry. The requirements in all levels are divided into six domains: pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction.

Alderson (2009) has pointed out that while there is some argument over the quality of these scales, they are still used in the assessment of proficiency of applicants of aviation licenses. Parohinog and Meesri (2015) have investigated the proficiency of aviation students based on the six domains of the aforementioned ICAO language proficiency requirements and found that the difficulties that students in Thailand have encountered in the six domains of the ICAO language Proficiency Requirements were particularly grammar or structure, followed by interaction.

### **TOEIC Test**

The TOEIC test refers to the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) that is specifically designed to measure the ability of test-takers who are non-native English speakers to use English in everyday life, especially work-related activities. The TOEIC has been developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS), the world’s biggest private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization, based in the USA, following a request from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry (MITI). ETS is also the developer of the TOEFL, one of the most well-known standardized language proficiency tests primarily used in the USA and all over the world for admission into educational institutions (Runnels, 2014).

The purpose of the TOEIC test is to measure language proficiency in terms of everyday English skills of people working in an international environment (Powers, Kim, & Weng, 2008). In other words, the TOEIC test measures a person’s ability to communicate in English in the context of daily life and the global workplace environment using key expressions and common, everyday vocabulary. The scores indicate how well test takers can communicate in English with others in the workplace. These TOEIC scores

are widely used to determine the proficiency levels of employees or potential employees, for human resources planning and development in the contexts of business, industry, and commerce (Powers et al., 2008).

The TOEIC test has been used for the recruitment of staff at Thai Airways International for years. The importance of the TOEIC exam is that Thai Airways International, the biggest airline company operating in Thailand, recruits an average of 100-150 new flight attendants every one to two years partly based on their TOEIC scores. The recruitment process takes over two weeks for screening, and more than 10,000 walk-in candidates undergo basic academic, skill, and physical fitness assessments, a very labor-intensive process. Unfortunately, a large number of applicants are not selected as each year only 30-35% meet Thai Airways International's minimum TOEIC score of 500, which qualifies them for additional interviews and tests (ETS, 2007; Powers et al., 2008).

Since English is an important skill for the career as a flight attendant, and in fact a minimally acceptable level of English has already been determined by Thai Airways International (as represented by the TOEIC score of 500 since 1988), ETS has proposed that Thai airways adjust the process to move the English testing from the end of the process of screening to the beginning of the process (before screening). In other words, Thai Airways International should first pay attention to English skills of the applicants apart from their education, attitude, personality, and general appearance. This change should help Thai Airways International to refine the recruitment process to end up with a more homogenous group of eligible applicants. Moreover, the refinement cuts down many recruitment expenses and reduces staff working in the recruitment process.

### **Self-Assessment**

The ability to self-assess is often seen as a key characteristic of an autonomous language learner (Gardner, 2000) where autonomy refers to a learner's ability to take care of and be responsible for their own learning (Holec, 1981). Moreover, Holec (1981) posits that self-assessment is a tool which supports those with that ability. An assessment may serve many purposes, such as measuring progress, proficiency, motivation, or confidence (Gardner & Miller, 1999). According to Race (2001), self-assessment is a method that allows students to judge their own work such as reports, essays, presentations, and even exam papers.

Gardner (2000) describes the benefits of self-assessment that can extend beyond learners to teachers and also to the institution. Learners benefit the most from self-assessment and in very diverse ways. Oscarson (1997) explains that it is not only the teacher who gets the benefits from self-assessment to improve and expand their teaching techniques, but it is also beneficial for students to raise more goal-oriented motivation in language learning. Moreover, student self-assessment also encourages them to participate more as well as helps the teacher to relieve their burden. As Naeini (2011) has pointed out, despite the fact that criticisms against self-assessment in terms of validity and reliability still remain, many scholars have successfully used self-assessment as a teaching method in the classroom to improve classroom instruction.

According to Popper (1959) and Ackroyd and Hughes (1981), there are a number of advantages of using a questionnaire as a tool to collect data. First, a questionnaire is a tool that helps gather a large amount of information in a short period of time from any number of participants with limited effect on its validity and reliability. Secondly, a questionnaire is a scientific data collection tool that yields quantitative data that can be used not only to compare and contrast data, but to formulate a new theory or hypothesis.

Coombe and Canning (2002) point out that in spite of the criticisms against self-assessment in terms of its validity and reliability, it is generally believed that if a self-

assessment instrument is utilized with sufficient care, it can still be both a valid and reliable supplement to traditional assessment in some ways.

It is generally said that successful companies put the right man on the right job. The findings of the present study can be a starting point for Thai Airways International to reconsider whether their existing recruitment process enables them to choose flight attendants with sufficient levels of English proficiency to ensure their professional performance. If the company finds that the TOEIC is not the most suitable proficiency test in accordance with the standard of ICAO language proficiency, they can use the study findings as evidence of the necessity to come up with a new English proficiency test, whether another commercially available test or a newly designed in-house test, so as to more effectively recruit flight attendants to ensure quality service provision and the safety of their passengers.

## Method

To explore the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) reading and listening scores of flight attendants in Thailand, this study collected the data from Thai Airways International flight attendants who use English as a medium of communication with the passengers. There are approximately 3,000 flight attendants of Thai Airways who are responsible for taking care of passengers' safety and providing food and beverage service to passengers. The flight attendants of Thai Airways International consist of both males and females whose age range is between 22 and 60 years old. All of them are Thai nationals and their first language is also Thai. The participants of this study were 100 flight attendants working in the economy class of Thai Airways International, all of whom were recruited by means of purposive sampling. There were two inclusion criteria. First, they had been working with the company for more than 12 months to ensure that they had gained some experience using the English language in their line of work. Second, they had to have the updated TOEIC scores taken no more than two years ago to reflect their ability to use English as a medium of communication with the passengers while working. Yamane's (1967) formula was used in order to find the proper sample size, which was 100, with the margin of error being approximately 10%.

The instruments used in this study was the self-assessment survey developed by the researcher based on the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) descriptors (see Appendix) such as item 1.2) You can demonstrate a marked accent. (คุณสามารถใช้สำเนียงเสียงหนักเบาได้ชัดเจน) and item 2.2) You can make a good command of basic grammatical structure. (คุณสามารถใช้โครงสร้างไวยากรณ์พื้นฐานได้เป็นอย่างดี). The participants responded to the following stem-completion item: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements (where 1 was 'strongly disagree' and 4 meant 'strongly agree')?" The four-point Likert scale was employed to measure the participants' self-assessed abilities on all of the ICAO rating scale descriptors focusing on Operational Level 4 consisting of six domains: pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction. The four-point scale was selected to reduce the participants' tendency of selecting a neutral response (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). The survey was validated by a panel of three experts in English for specific purposes and assessment before use. The ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) self-assessment survey was written in both Thai and English and it was available for free download at [www.doc.google.com](http://www.doc.google.com). Oscarson (1997) has suggested that a self-assessment has generally been found to be more accurate when administered in the native language of the respondents. In this study, however, the participants were requested to complete the survey in English as they were supposed to be qualified to do so.

To complete the investigation of the correlation process, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) listening and reading tests were also taken into consideration. As a rule, all participants had to have the TOEIC score of 600 to 990 points in order to qualify for job requirements of Thai Airways. In this study, they were expected to specify the TOEIC scores they had when they applied for the job with the airline.

Moreover, to elicit in-depth information regarding the attitudes of Thai Airways International flight attendants towards the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the TOEIC test, the semi-structured interview protocols were designed and administered by the researcher. After undergoing a validation process, ten interview participants were purposively selected after completing the self-assessment survey, and the interviews of the ten selected participants were conducted by the researcher in English. This was because the interview participants were those with a higher level of proficiency and the researcher wanted to avoid misinterpreting the interviewees' original messages when translating the interview data from Thai to English. The interview took place at Thai Airways Operations Center, each of which took 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

The data from the self-assessment surveys and interviews were analyzed by means of statistical analysis using the SPSS Program for Windows. First, quantitative data gathered with the self-assessment surveys were analyzed with descriptive statistics of percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was also utilized to determine the correlation between the self-assessment surveys and the TOEIC scores. On the other hand, qualitative data collected using the interview protocols were analyzed by means of content analysis.

## Findings and Discussions

### English Proficiency of Flight Attendants

The population of this study is 3,000 Thai Airways International flight attendants who use English as a medium of communication while taking care of passengers' safety and providing food and beverage service to passengers. The flight attendants of Thai Airways International consist of both males and females whose age range is between 22 and 60 years old.

Of the 100 Thai Airways International flight attendants who completed the self-assessment surveys, the minimum TOEIC score was 680 and the maximum score was 990, with the mean TOEIC score of 830.30 which falls into the B2 level of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). According to ETS (2008, 2013), a TOEIC examinee whose TOEIC score falls into the level B1 and B2 of CEFR is an independent user who can understand the main points of standard input, interact with most situations, and produce simple connected texts, which is considered sufficient to work effectively as a flight attendant.

**Table 1. TOEIC Scores and the ICAO LPRs Scores (n = 100)**

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
TOEIC Scores	680	990	830.30	81.17
ICAO LPRs	91	153	120.34	10.95

### **Relationship between the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores and the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) self-assessments of Thai Airways International flight attendants**

To address the first research question, i.e., What is the relationship between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) of Thai Airways International flight attendants?, the summary scores of the self-assessment survey and TOEIC score of each participant were correlated using inferential statistics of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. When considering the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency requirements (LPRs) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) of Thai Airways International flight attendants, it could be seen that there was a positive correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements scores (LPRs) ( $M = 120.3400$ ,  $SD = 10.94551$ ) and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores of Thai Airways International flight attendants ( $M = 830.300$ ,  $SD = 81.17141$ ), which was equal to 0.384, but this correlation was a weak uphill (positive) linear relationship. It was also found that the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) of Thai Airways International flight attendants was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Table 2*

*Relationship between the TOEIC test scores and the ICAO LPRs scores*

		<b>TOEIC</b>	<b>ICAO LPRs</b>
<b>TOEIC Scores</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.38**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100

\*\*Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

One plausible explanation for the weak correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) score and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) score of Thai Airways International flight attendants is probably the mismatch in the contents of the TOEIC test and the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) self-assessment survey. According to Ross (1998), the self-assessment accuracy will be found low if the contents of the test and the self-assessment materials do not match. The TOEIC test focuses on the everyday English use of people who work in an international environment; on the other hand, the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) involve the use of English for specific purposes, namely aviation English, that includes the ability to speak, write, and understand (listen and read) aviation meteorology, physics, navigation, maps and charts, electronics and avionics, instrumentation, hydraulics, rules of the air, and air traffic control regulations in English. To explain further, the TOEIC can be used to determine the level of English proficiency of people in different careers, as evidenced by the fact that TOEIC scores are used in the fields of business, logistics, etc. In contrast, the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements were not originally designed to be a language proficiency test, and they are not even used in the aviation industry in some countries. For example, in Canada, the language proficiency test of flight crew license holders is called The Aviation-Language Proficiency Test, written in either English or French and focusing on the context of aviation (Estival et al., 2016). In addition, according to Alderson (2009), there is an argument over the quality of the ICAO language proficiency scales, but these scales are still widely used in the assessment of proficiency in the use of



English for acquiring aviation licenses as it is considered a valid and reliable standardized assessment tool to measure specific language use in the aviation industry.

In addition, it may be explained that the low correlation between the self-assessment survey and the TOEIC score may have resulted from the participants' lack of thorough understanding of the statements contained in the survey. The language used in the self-assessment survey were extracted from the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements descriptors, which may be beyond the proficiency levels of those whose English proficiency is at B2 level of CEFR. According to Runnels (2014), the discrepancy between the actual level of proficiency of study participants and the level of proficiency required to complete a research instrument may lead to a low correlation. For instance, Negishi (2011) conducted a study with Japanese university students and reported that a lack of clear understanding or misunderstanding due to limited language proficiency could lead to a weak correlation between a set of scores.

Moreover, the low correlation found in this study may have been because the participants were not familiar with completing a self-assessment instrument. In fact, responding to a self-assessment data collection tool relies on a complex set of skills in addition to language skills such as cognitive skills (Little, 2005). Thus, Thai Airways International flight attendants who had different educational backgrounds and different previous experiences with a self-assessment survey may have had trouble understanding the survey statements, hence a low correlation found in the present study.

### **Flight Attendants' Attitudes toward the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the TOEIC**

#### **Flight Attendants' Attitudes toward the TOEIC**

The participants of this study had both positive and negative attitudes toward the TOEIC test. In general, they felt that the TOEIC test is useful and directly related to their job. The participants of this study were all very familiar with the TOEIC test and they all agreed that the TOEIC test actually measured their everyday English skills that they needed in their line of work. On the other hand, there were some flight attendants who felt that the TOEIC test was in fact more suitable for workers in the field of business, not particularly for airline crews like them. Furthermore, they felt that while they were working, the English language skill they had to use most was the speaking skill, which was not included in the TOEIC test, thus indicating the mismatch between the language assessed by the TOEIC and the language flight attendants actually needed to fulfill their work requirements. Also, some participants shared their opinion that the cut-off score of 600 required by Thai Airways International may be too low, making flight attendants who got the score around the cut-off point unable to work efficiently and effectively as flight attendants on international routes. As such, the aviation industry in Thailand may need to reconsider the minimum English requirements of their personnel as well as look for another standardized English assessment alternative that includes all language skills in English, including speaking. The significance of the TOEIC as perceived by flight attendants is exemplified below:

How important is TOEIC to you as a flight attendant? Why?

*It is quite important. Firstly, one of the requirements for cabin crew application is to have TOEIC scores. If the scores meet the airline standard, there is a chance to get a job. Secondly, practice tests are the foundation of this job. We can get used to the conversations, the accents, and the ways to communicate even grammatical structures for some paperwork. Finally, TOEIC plays a role in career path. It is more or less a factor for job promotion. However, in my view, 600 is inadequate. [Participant #3]*

### **Flight Attendants' Attitudes toward the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs)**

According to the findings from the interviews, the participants raised many concerns about quite familiar with the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs), or, at least, they were able to guess what it was supposed to be, even though they did not take this test when they applied for the job. Apparently, the participants had positive attitudes toward the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and realized its significance for them to work as flight attendants who flew international routes. Secondly, most of the participants agreed that the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) were quite practical for them in order to work in real life. This may have been because the survey covered all six domains that were directly related to their work. Some of the participants also added that to achieve level 4 of the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) was not easy since they were English as foreign language users and some of the language used in the requirements were difficult to understand. Many participants agreed that they were unable to deal with the requirements the first time they encountered them since some technical terms were too specific. Finally, a number of participants explained that even though the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) were a good requirement for airline professionals, they should not be used as an English proficiency test for them as they also focused on knowledge of the aviation industry in addition to the language proficiency, as can be seen from the following excerpts:

Do those six ICAO skills cover all language uses in your working routine? Why or Why not? What else should be added?

*Those six skills cover all. In my view, basic skills for communication are divided into listening, speaking, reading and writing. My working routine mostly concerns listening and speaking. According to the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs), comprehension seems to result from listening. Pronunciation, structure, and vocabulary are components of speaking. The combination of these four skills definitely leads to interaction and fluency. This results in effective communication which, in my view, is one of the main responsibilities of cabin crew. [Participant #4]*

However, although the participants perceived that the ICAO LPRs were practical, some of them felt that achieving Level 4 was not that easy since they used English as a foreign language, as they explained:

What do you think about Operational Level 4 of ICAO LPRs? Is it practical that all air professionals have to be at least this level? And why?

*It is a suitable standard. However, it is somehow impractical that all flight crews have to be at Level 4. It might not be a problem for native English speakers. Meanwhile, other crews whose English is a second language or a foreign language might find it difficult to achieve that operational level 4. Even though they have tried to practice English, they have to struggle to increase their proficiency. The results might not be as good as that of native English speakers'. [Participant #3]*

Such findings have implications for how the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements can be used as international language requirements for every English user involved in the aviation industry throughout the world. According to Estival et al. (2016), the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) are originally designed for native speakers of English, and this means that it may not be clearly understandable by those whose native language is not English. If there is more evidence that non-native speakers of English

generally have problems with the language used in the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) descriptors, they should be revised to make them clearer, probably by using simpler terms, for example. This may make the requirements become the policy for non-native speakers of English in addition to that of native English flight crews and air-traffic controllers such as British, Canadian, and New Zealand aviation professionals.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

With regard to limitations of the present study, first and foremost, the self-assessment survey was used to collect data, and it has been accepted that a self-administered data collection instrument may not completely reflect accurate information as it is supposed to (Gardner, 2000). For example, Blue (1994) explains that self-assessment should be used with caution as some learners may not have experience making judgments of this sort. Thus, it is teachers' responsibility to make sure that learners are able to complete self-assessment before they are given a chance to do so to ensure validity and reliability of the self-assessment results.

Further research may also use other data collection instruments such as field observations to triangulate the findings of the study. Additionally, as the participants in the present study were Thai Airways International crew members, the findings might not be generalizable to other flight attendants working for other airline companies in Thailand as well as those based in other countries. In the future, research may be undertaken with flight attendants who work for other companies to better confirm the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the TOEIC scores.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed that the correlation between the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) of Thai Airways International flight attendants was weak. As a consequence, the present study suggests that aviation companies, particularly those in the Thai aviation industry, reconsider the English language requirements of their applicants to ensure that they are equipped with both the English language proficiency and the knowledge of the aviation industry required in their line of work. Alternatively, they may simply demand the airline applicants to take the TOEIC speaking test separately to ensure that they are truly qualified to use English speaking skills to efficiently and effectively fulfill their job requirements. Finally, the Thai aviation industry should develop its own English language proficiency test to better suit the contexts of Thai flight attendants and to raise the standard of aviation English proficiency of those who work in airline industry in Thailand as airline professionals so as to help Thailand achieve global recognition as one qualified provider of aviation services.

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## Appendix

This questionnaire aims to investigate the needs and the problems of English language use in aviation industry. Please complete this questionnaire and send it to the interviewer when you finish. (There are some terms that need to be clarify depending on the context of use).

### Part I: Personal information

Directions: Please answer the following questions.

Sex:  Male  Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of working experiences in aviation industry: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

English proficiency:

Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor

TOEIC scores: \_\_\_\_\_

### Part II: English language skills

Directions: Please mark ✓ in the table each number means.

4 = strongly agree    3 = agree    2 = disagree    1 = strongly disagree

#### 1.) Pronunciation

##### Level 3

In this Level 3, “accent” refers to mother-tongue accent or first-language accent.

Pronunciation	4	3	2	1
1.1 Your accent is so strong as to render comprehension by an international community of aeronautical radiotelephony users very difficult or impossible. คุณมีสำเนียงชัดเจนมากจนทำให้ความเข้าใจของผู้ใช้โทรศัพท์ทางไกลระบบไร้สายในประชาคมระหว่างประเทศเป็นเรื่องยากหรือ เป็นไปไม่ได้				

##### Level 4

In this Level 4, “accent” refers to standardized English language accent.

Pronunciation	4	3	2	1
1.2 You can demonstrate a marked accent. คุณสามารถใช้สำเนียงเสียงหนักเบาได้ชัดเจน				
1.3 You can demonstrate a localized regional variety of English. คุณสามารถใช้สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษของท้องถิ่นได้				

Pronunciation	4	3	2	1
<p>1.4 You may have to pay close attention to understand or may have to clarify something from time to time.</p> <p>คุณอาจจะต้องตั้งใจอย่างมากที่จะทำความเข้าใจ หรืออาจจะต้องอธิบายบางอย่างเพิ่มเติมเพื่อความชัดเจนในบางครั้ง</p>				

### Level 5

In this Level 5, “accent” refers to standardized English language accent.

Pronunciation	4	3	2	1
<p>1.5 You demonstrate a marked accent, or localized regional variety of English, but one which rarely interferes with how easily understood your speech is.</p> <p>คุณสามารถใช้สำเนียงเสียงหนักเบาได้ชัดเจน หรือ สามารถใช้สำเนียงภาษาอังกฤษของท้องถิ่นได้ โดยไม่ค่อยมีผลต่อการเข้าใจคำพูดของคุณ</p>				
<p>1.6 Your accents are always clear and understandable, although, only occasionally, a proficient listener may have to pay close attention.</p> <p>สำเนียงของคุณมีความชัดเจนและเข้าใจได้ง่ายเสมอแม้ว่าบางครั้งผู้ฟังที่มีความเชี่ยวชาญอาจต้องตั้งใจฟังเป็นพิเศษ</p>				

## 2.) Structure

### Level 3

Structure	4	3	2	1
<p>2.1 Your weak command of basic grammatical structures will limit available range of expression or result in errors which could lead to misunderstandings.</p> <p>โครงสร้างทางไวยากรณ์ขั้นพื้นฐานที่อ่อนของคุณ จะจำกัดขอบเขตของการแสดงความคิดหรือทำให้เกิดข้อผิดพลาดซึ่งอาจนำไปสู่ความเข้าใจผิดได้</p>				

Level 4

In this Level 4, 1.) Global error refers to an error in sentence structure, 2.) Local error refers to an error in words level.

Structure	4	3	2	1
2.2 You can make a good command of basic grammatical structure. คุณสามารถใช้โครงสร้างไวยากรณ์พื้นฐานได้เป็นอย่างดี				
2.3 You do not merely have a memorized set of words or phrases on which you rely but have sufficient command of basic grammar to create new meaning as appropriate. คุณไม่เพียงแต่มีชุดคำศัพท์หรือวลีที่นำมาใช้ได้เท่านั้น แต่คุณยังมีไวยากรณ์พื้นฐานมากพอที่จะนำมาสร้างความหมายใหม่ได้ตามความเหมาะสม				
2.4 You can demonstrate local errors and infrequent global errors and communication is effective overall. คุณมีการใช้คำผิดๆอยู่บ้าง และนานๆครั้งจะพูดประโยคผิดๆ แต่โดยรวมแล้วคุณยังสามารถสื่อสารได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ				
2.5 You do not usually attempt complex structures, and when you do, quite a lot of errors would be expected resulting in less effective communication. คุณมักจะ ไม่พยายามใช้โครงสร้างประโยคที่ซับซ้อน และในเวลาที่ คุณพยายามก็จะมีข้อผิดพลาดมาก ซึ่งส่งผลให้การสื่อสารมีประสิทธิภาพน้อยลง				

Level 5

In this Level 5, global error refers to an error in sentence structure.

Structure	4	3	2	1
2.6 You demonstrate greater control of complex grammatical structures and may commit global errors from time to time when using complex structures. คุณมีการใช้การควบคุมโครงสร้างไวยากรณ์ที่ซับซ้อนที่คืบขึ้นและมี				



ข้อผิดพลาดในประโยคได้บางครั้งเมื่อใช้โครงสร้างที่ซับซ้อน				
2.7 You could consistently control basic structure, with errors possibly occurring when complex structures and language are used. คุณสามารถควบคุมโครงสร้างพื้นฐานได้เสมอโดยมีข้อผิดพลาดเกิดขึ้นได้บ้างเมื่อใช้โครงสร้างและภาษาที่ซับซ้อน				
2.8 You have a more sophisticated use of English overall, but will exhibit some errors in their use of complex language structures, but not in your basic structure patterns. โดยรวมๆ คุณมีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษที่ซับซ้อนมากขึ้น แต่ยังมีข้อผิดพลาดบางอย่างในการใช้โครงสร้างภาษาที่ซับซ้อน แต่ไม่ได้อยู่ในรูปแบบโครงสร้างพื้นฐานของคุณ				

### 3.) Vocabulary

#### Level 3

Vocabulary	4	3	2	1
3.1 Your Gaps in vocabulary knowledge and/or choice of wrong or non-existent words are apparent which has a negative impact on fluency or results in errors which could lead to misunderstandings. การขาดความรู้ด้านคำศัพท์และ/หรือการเลือกใช้คำที่ผิดหรือไม่มีอยู่จริงของคุณนั้นชัดเจนมาก ทำให้มีผลกระทบเชิงลบต่อความคล่องแคล่วหรือทำให้เกิดข้อผิดพลาดซึ่งอาจนำไปสู่ความเข้าใจผิดได้				
3.2 Your frequent inability to paraphrase unknown words or in the process of clarification makes accurate communication impossible. บ่อยครั้ง การขาดความสามารถในการถอดความคำที่คุณไม่รู้จักหรือในขั้นตอนการอธิบายของคุณทำให้การสื่อสารที่ถูกต้องเป็นไปได้ไม่ได้				

## Level 4

Vocabulary	4	3	2	1
3.3 You do not likely to have a well-developed sensitivity to register คุณมีแนวโน้มที่จะไม่สามารถรับรู้ระดับของภาษาได้ดีนัก				
3.4 You are usually able to manage communication on work-related topics, but may sometimes need clarification. คุณมักจะสามารถจัดการการสื่อสารในหัวข้อที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการทำงานได้ แต่บางครั้งอาจต้องการการอธิบายเพิ่มเติมบ้าง				
3.5 When faced with a communication breakdown, you can paraphrase and negotiate meaning so that the message is understood. เมื่อต้องเผชิญกับความล้มเหลวในการสื่อสาร คุณสามารถถอดความและปรับความหมายใหม่เพื่อให้สารของคุณเป็นที่เข้าใจได้				
3.6 You think your ability to paraphrase includes appropriate choices of simple vocabulary and considerate use of speech rate and pronunciation. คุณคิดว่าความสามารถในการถอดความของคุณนั้นรวมถึงการเลือกใช้คำศัพท์ต่างๆ และการสื่อสารที่มีความเร็วเหมาะสมและมีการออกเสียงอย่างถูกต้อง				

## Level 5

Vocabulary	4	3	2	1
3.7 You may display some sensitivity to register, with a lexical range which may not be sufficient to communicate effectively in as broad a range of topics, but with your proficiency will have no trouble paraphrasing whenever necessary. คุณมีความไวต่อระดับของภาษา แต่ขอบเขตคำศัพท์ที่ใช้อาจไม่เพียงพอที่จะทำให้อ่านหัวข้อที่หลากหลายได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ อย่างไรก็ตามด้วยความสามารถของคุณ มักจะทำให้ไม่มีปัญหาในการถอดความเมื่อจำเป็น				

**4.) Fluency**Level 3

Fluency	4	3	2	1
4.1 Your slowness of speech flow is such that communication lacks concision and efficiency. ความช้าของการพูดของคุณนั้นมักจะทำให้การสื่อสารขาดความกระชับและ ความมีประสิทธิภาพ				
4.2 Your long silent pauses frequently interrupt the speech flow. การหยุดเงียบนานๆของคุณขัดจังหวะการพูดที่ต่อเนื่อง				
4.3 You fail to obtain the professional confidence of your interlocutors. คุณไม่ได้รับความเชื่อมั่นในฐานะที่เป็นมืออาชีพจากคู่สนทนาของคุณ				

Level 4

Fluency	4	3	2	1
4.4 Your speed rate may be slowed by the requirements of language processing, but remains fairly constant and does not negatively affect the speaker's involvement in communication. อัตราความเร็วในการพูดของคุณอาจช้าลงตามความจำเป็นในการประมวล ภาษาแต่ยังคงค่อนข้างต่อเนื่องและไม่ส่งผลเสียต่อการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้พูดใน การสื่อสาร				
4.5 You can speak a little faster than the ICAO recommended rate of 100 words per minute if the situation requires. คุณสามารถพูดได้เร็วกว่า 100 คำต่อนาทีตามที่ ICAO แนะนำ หากตกอยู่ใน สถานการณ์จำเป็น				

Level 5

Fluency	4	3	2	1
4.6 Your rate of speech and organization of discourse approach natural fluency. อัตราความเร็วในการพูดและการเรียบเรียงวาทกรรมของคุณ มีความคล่องแคล่วอย่างเป็นธรรมชาติ				
4.7 Under appropriate circumstances, your rates significantly higher than the ICAO recommended rate of 100 words per minute can be achieved without negatively affecting intelligibility. ในโอกาสที่เหมาะสม อัตราความเร็วในการพูดของคุณจะสูงกว่าอัตราที่แนะนำโดย ICAO ที่ 100 คำต่อนาที และไม่มีผลทางลบต่อการทำความเข้าใจ				

**5.) Comprehension**Level 3

Comprehension	4	3	2	1
5.1 Your comprehension is limited to routine communications in optimum conditions. ความเข้าใจของคุณจะถูกจำกัดอยู่กับการสื่อสารตามปกติในสภาวะที่เหมาะสม				
5.2 You would not be proficient enough to understand the full range of radiotelephony communications, including unexpected events, substandard speech behaviors or inferior radio reception. คุณไม่เชี่ยวชาญพอที่จะทำความเข้าใจกับการสื่อสารทางวิทยุโทรศัพท์ได้อย่างครบถ้วนรวมถึงเหตุการณ์ที่ไม่คาดคิด พฤติกรรมการพูดที่ไม่เป็นไปตามมาตรฐานหรือการรับสัญญาณวิทยุที่ต่ำ				

## Level 4

Comprehension	4	3	2	1
5.3 You have strategies available which allow you to ultimately comprehend the unexpected or unusual communication. คุณมีกลยุทธ์ที่จะช่วยให้คุณเข้าใจการสื่อสารที่ไม่คาดคิดหรือที่ไม่คุ้นเคย				
5.4 Unmarked or complex textual relations are occasionally misunderstood or missed. ความสัมพันธ์ของเนื้อความที่คลุมเครือหรือซับซ้อนจะถูกเข้าใจผิด หรือพลาดไปบ้างเป็นครั้งคราว				

## Level 5

Comprehension	4	3	2	1
5.5 You achieve a high degree of detailed accuracy in their understanding of aeronautical radiotelephony communications. คุณมีความแม่นยำในรายละเอียดสูงในเรื่องความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการสื่อสารทางวิทยุสื่อสารทางอากาศ				
5.6 Your understanding is not hindered by the most frequently encountered non-standard dialects or regional accents, nor by the less well-structured messages that are associated with unexpected or stressful events. ความเข้าใจของคุณจะไม่มีอุปสรรคจากภาษาถิ่นที่ไม่ได้มาตรฐานหรือสำเนียงตามภูมิภาคที่ไม่ได้มาตรฐานที่พบได้บ่อย และด้วยสารที่ไม่ได้เรียบเรียงโครงสร้างอย่างดีที่เกี่ยวข้องกับเหตุการณ์ที่ไม่คาดคิดหรือที่ตึงเครียด				

**6.) Interactions**Level 3

Interactions	4	3	2	1
6.1 Your interactions are such that communication lacks concision and efficiency. ปฏิสัมพันธ์ของคุณทำให้การสื่อสารขาดความกระชับและประสิทธิภาพ				
6.2 Your misunderstandings and non- understandings are frequent leading to possible breakdowns in communication. ความเข้าใจผิดและการขาดความเข้าใจของคุณมักทำให้การสื่อสารหยุดชะงักหรือล้มเหลว				
6.3 You do not gain the confidence of your interlocutors. คุณไม่ได้รับความมั่นใจจากคู่สนทนาของคุณ				

Level 4

Interactions	4	3	2	1
6.4 When you do not understand an unexpected communication, you must be able to communicate that fact. เมื่อคุณไม่เข้าใจการสื่อสารที่ไม่คาดคิดคุณยังต้องสามารถสื่อสารความจริงดังกล่าวให้ได้				
6.5 You query a communication, clarify, or even simply acknowledge that one does not understand rather than to allow silence to mistakenly represent comprehension. คุณมักจะตั้งคำถาม อธิบายเพิ่มเติมหรือยอมรับว่าไม่เข้าใจแทนที่จะปล่อยให้ความเงียบทำให้คนอื่นเข้าใจผิดว่าคุณเข้าใจแล้ว				
6.6 You can check, seek confirmation, or clarify a situation or communication. คุณสามารถตรวจสอบ ยืนยันหรือชี้แจงสถานการณ์หรือการสื่อสารได้				

Level 5

Interactions	4	3	2	1
<p>6.7 Your interactions are based on high levels of comprehension and fluency.</p> <p>ปฏิสัมพันธ์ของคุณขึ้นอยู่กับระดับความเข้าใจและความคล่องแคล่วในระดับสูง</p>				
<p>6.8 Your skills in checking, seeking confirmation and clarification remain important, they are less frequently deployed.</p> <p>ทักษะในการตรวจสอบ การหาการยืนยันและการอธิบายความยังคงมีความสำคัญ ถึงแม้ว่าทักษะนี้เหล่านี้ไม่ได้ถูกนำมาใช้มากนัก</p>				
<p>6.9 You are capable of exercising greater control over the conduct and direction of the conversation.</p> <p>คุณสามารถควบคุมและกำหนดทิศทางของการสนทนาได้</p>				