

# The Effects of Using a Case-Based Teaching Strategy in English Language Teaching to Develop Hotel Management Students' Critical Thinking Skills at a Private University in Thailand

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## Abstract

While critical thinking skills are crucial for hotel personnel to effectively handle unexpected challenges, traditional Thai instructional methods often fall short of fostering these skills within the context of hotel education. This study aims to explore whether critical thinking skills among hotel management students can be enhanced through the implementation of a case-based teaching strategy in an Advanced Communication in Hotel Business course. Using a mixed-method approach involving questionnaires and focus group interviews as research instruments, some of the third and fourth-year students majoring in Hotel and Restaurant Management at a private university in Thailand were the participants. The findings from the questionnaire indicate positive outcomes. Further, the focus interview results reveal that the students' critical thinking skills are developed through the utilization of a case-based teaching strategy in this course. In addition, the student's critical thinking skills improve as well as their proficiency at the highest levels of Bloom's 2001 revised taxonomy, including evaluation and creation. Consequently, several recommendations are proposed, including the integration of a case-based teaching strategy and teacher training into English instruction. These factors are essential in fostering the development of students' critical thinking skills and preparing them for future success.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, case studies, English language teaching, hospitality industry

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# ผลการจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษด้วยกรณีศึกษาเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ ของนักศึกษาสาขาวิชาการจัดการโรงแรม มหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนในไทย

วีรภา พงษ์พานิช, ณธกร เสถียรชยากร, ศุภชัย แซ่เอี้ยว<sup>2</sup>

## บทคัดย่อ

ทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์นับเป็นทักษะที่สำคัญสำหรับบุคลากรด้านการโรงแรม ในการรับมือกับความท้าทายต่างๆ ที่อาจเกิดขึ้นในสถานประกอบการ อย่างไรก็ตาม การจัดการเรียนการสอนรูปแบบเดิมที่เกิดขึ้นในประเทศไทยในระยะที่ผ่านมา ยังค่อนข้างขาดการส่งเสริมการพัฒนาทักษะดังกล่าวให้กับผู้เรียนในสาขาวิชาชีพการโรงแรม ดังนั้นงานวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาประสิทธิผลในการจัดการเรียนการสอนด้วยกรณีศึกษาเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ของผู้เรียนในรายวิชาการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษขั้นสูงในธุรกิจโรงแรม โดยมีกลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนระดับชั้นปีที่ 3 และ 4 สาขาวิชาการโรงแรมและภัตตาคาร ผลการศึกษาจากแบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์แสดงให้เห็นว่าการจัดการเรียนการสอนด้วยกรณีศึกษามีส่วนช่วยพัฒนาทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ให้กับนักศึกษาในเชิงบวก นอกจากนี้รูปแบบการเรียนการสอนดังกล่าว ยังมีส่วนช่วยพัฒนาทักษะการประเมิน (evaluating) และการสร้างสรรค์องค์ความรู้ใหม่ (creating) ซึ่งเป็นระดับขั้นสูงสุดของการเรียนรู้ตามทฤษฎี Bloom's 2001 ดังนั้นการบูรณาการการสอนโดยใช้กรณีศึกษา และการฝึกอบรมครูผู้สอนในการจัดการเรียนการสอนด้วยวิธีดังกล่าว จึงนับเป็นสิ่งสำคัญที่จะช่วยส่งเสริมการพัฒนากระบวนการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์และเตรียมความพร้อมสู่สายอาชีพในอนาคตให้กับผู้เรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** การคิดเชิงวิพากษ์, กรณีศึกษา, การเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ, ธุรกิจการโรงแรม

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## Introduction

The Mutual Recognition Arrangements on Tourism Professionals (MRA on TP) facilitates labor mobility and information exchange among ASEAN members. It establishes the ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals (ACCSTP), ensuring that certified professionals are qualified to work in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) without further examinations (ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System, n.d.). To meet ASEAN specifications, competency-based training (CBT) and competency-based assessment (CBA) methods have been adopted in English subjects to train individuals in the tourism and hospitality industry across ASEAN member states (ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System, n.d.). One of these English subjects is English for Hotel Personnel, considered English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which focuses on teaching English as a second or foreign language for specific purposes (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). ESP aims to address the specific needs of trainees by designing activities that help them achieve their learning goals and objectives, such as subject-specific language use and the development of target performance competencies.

In Thailand, the tourism industry contributes significantly to the economy, with hotel staff playing a crucial role in interacting with guests. They encounter unexpected situations daily; for example, after checking in guests, rooms may not have been cleaned, or damaged items in guest rooms may not have been reported by housekeepers, so developing critical thinking skills is essential for hotel staff to solve problems effectively (Ploysangwal, 2018).

Critical thinking is a topic of widespread discussion in the education area. Halpern (2001) defines it as the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply information to real-life situations. Developing critical thinking skills benefits both individuals and society by enabling systematic and logical problem-solving. Consequently, there have been several attempts (Auttawutikul et al., 2014; Boa et al., 2018; Changwong et al., 2018) to increase the critical thinking skills of Thai students. Furthermore, since 2015, the Ministry of Education has made efforts to reform education to foster critical thinking (Kanokpermpoon, 2019).

Overall, it appears that enhancing Thai students' critical thinking is challenging, resulting in a lack of improvement in their critical thinking skills (Charoensuthipan, 2023). Importantly, English for hotel personnel in Thailand focuses more on competency-based training (CBT) and competency-based assessment (CBA) to meet ASEAN specifications (ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System, n.d.), leaving little room for fostering students' critical thinking skills. Additionally, while case studies (Barnes et al., 1994; Herreid, 2011) have

been proven effective in various fields, including business and medicine, engaging students in decision-making processes and problem-solving, it is worth exploring whether they would help foster the critical thinking skills of hotel students.

Therefore, this presents an opportunity to investigate whether using case studies in English for hotel personnel will be able to develop students' critical thinking skills by exposing students to this method. Our research questions are: *1) To what extent does the use of case studies in English for hotel personnel develop students' critical thinking skills? and 2) What are students' perspectives on this teaching method?*

## Literature Review

### *Definitions of Case Studies*

There have been several definitions of case studies over time. For instance, Leenders et al. (2001) defined a case study as a description of an actual situation, often involving a decision, challenge, opportunity, problem, or organizational issue. While cases do not provide explicit answers, they encourage students' critical thinking. Tourism and hospitality students, described as active learners who prefer learning from experiences rather than theories, have been found to benefit from case studies as a pedagogical approach (Lashley & Barron, 2006; Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Falkenberg & Woiceshyn, 2008). Case studies allow for the presentation of scenarios that align with the learning preferences of the students.

Using a case-based teaching strategy was initially found in Kokebayeva and Kartabayeva's (2015) study at Harvard University's Business School around the 1920s. Originally conceived to instruct business major students, this method involved evaluating real-life situations and rotating decision-making roles (Barnes et al., 1994; Herreid, 2011). A case-based strategy also presents problems that students are expected to solve using provided data, information, and theories (Richardson, 1993; Roy & Banerjee, 2012). The primary objective of the case study method is to enhance student participation and satisfaction in the classroom (Roy & Banerjee, 2012).

Described as experiential learning, a case study allows students to actively participate in a situation, placing them at the center and fostering cooperation and problem-solving skills (Thomas, 2009). In the nursing field, the case study method offers students a chance to experience real-life patient situations and practice their critical thinking abilities to determine appropriate treatment strategies (Popil, 2011). Case studies in nursing education not only

assess students' thinking skills but also provide instructors with insights into their ability to think critically and identify optimal patient treatment approaches.

### ***Critical Thinking***

Critical thinking is a process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information and beliefs. It is a skill that needs continuous practice and is particularly important in education. Critical thinking skills enable students to better evaluate and analyze information carefully before making judgments or offering alternative options, thus fostering meaningful discussions (Byram, 2008).

Several methods and strategies have been employed to develop students' critical thinking, ranging from dialogic strategies to qualitative approaches. For instance, the dialogue multimodal paired presentation strategy involves students working in pairs, taking turns to evaluate each other's writing work with visuals and arguments, thereby engaging students in voicing their opinions and developing their communicative skills (Dredger & Lehman, 2020). Writing critical reflectivity is another strategy that fosters students' critical thinking skills. In this approach, students are assigned to write their life stories and evaluate how their stories were impacted by their settings and relationships. This strategy helps increase their and others' understanding of different views and perspectives (Norton & Sliep, 2018). Similarly, Kinnear and Ruggunan (2019) argued that utilizing qualitative research approaches such as a dialogical approach and critical reflectivity can challenge social ideologies and enhance critical thinking abilities.

These methods and strategies are crucial for creating learning environments that support students in enhancing their critical thinking skills to conceptualize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and beliefs.

### ***Application of a Case-Based Teaching Strategy in Developing Students' Critical Thinking***

Case studies seem to be an important teaching tool that can develop students' critical thinking skills, as indicated by several studies. For instance, in a nursing education setting, Kosawanon et al. (2015) argued that case studies allowed their nursing student participants to systematically think through the case; as a result, they were able to develop their systematic thinking. In a similar study, the results of critical thinking assessments also indicated an increase in the critical thinking abilities of the nursing students. Baumberger-Henry (2003) and Campbell

(2004) summarized that case studies are a method that allows nursing students to think critically about the situations they might face.

Further, Clark and Hott's (2001) study also showed positive results, indicating that case studies offered nursing student participants opportunities to practice problem-solving skills alongside theoretical practices. Certain studies also agreed with Clark and Hott (2001) that having opportunities to practice based on real-life experience will help foster learners' professional language abilities (Duan, 2020) and evaluative and creative skills (Feinstein, 2001). Not only do case studies enhance students' systematic thinking and critical thinking abilities, but they also engage students in meaningful discussions. This is apparent in Agwu's (2020) study, which showed that engaging in discussions within case studies required business student participants to think deeply and meaningfully. Similarly, Malthouse et al. (2015) and Mustika et al. (2020) also concluded that providing question strategies and techniques in discussions helped enhance individuals' critical thinking skills.

As a result, not only do students become better learners, but it also introduces a new teaching method in this business school. This is in line with Dowd and Davidhizar's (1999) study, which argued that case studies allow students to discuss and exchange their points of view with other students and lecturers. Students learn how to apply theoretical concepts to solve possible problems. Similarly, case studies can provide scenarios and food for thought that enable students to think, express their questions, and apply all theories to find the best answer to solve the problem. Importantly, Bettencourt (2004) and Raub and Liao (2012) revealed that case studies can demonstrate the development of students' proactive and innovative traits, as they require students to find ways to prevent or handle guests' issues or complaints. Overall, a case-based teaching strategy is a unique strategy that can enhance students' critical thinking and decision-making skills. They added that the case method yields outstanding outcomes in teaching and learning critical thinking. In conclusion, the case study approach effectively facilitates students' critical thinking skills (Mahdi et al., 2020).

## Methods

This research aimed to explore the critical thinking processes of students through various critical case studies and investigate the students' perspectives on the use of cases to enhance critical thinking. It consisted of the case study approach and two methods, namely qualitative and quantitative, more specifically the questionnaire and focus group interview.

The approach and methods were utilized to assess the students' critical thinking abilities using case studies as a tool. This section provides information about the research participants, data collection procedures, instruments, and data analysis.

### ***Research Design***

Recognizing the significance of understanding the critical thinking processes of students through a variety of critical case studies and investigating their perspectives on using cases to facilitate critical thinking, we chose to employ a mixed methods approach: the questionnaire and focus group interview (Maxwell, 2012). This approach enabled us to gain insights into how students perceived the use of cases to enhance their critical thinking skills.

### ***Research Context***

At a macro level, there are 154 universities in Thailand (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI), n.d.), and this research was conducted in Bangkok using Zoom for interview communication. Participants are from a private university which offers a range of programs in Thai and English. It is among the top private universities in Thailand. It had approximately 19,359 current students, about 2,500 personnel, 15 colleges, 13 faculties, and 4 institutions.

### ***Participants***

In the second semester of the academic year 2021, 22 participants enrolled in HOS 345, Advanced Communication in Hotel Business, employing a case-based teaching strategy, including case study discussions and classroom simulation. Precisely, several different cases related to daily and unexpected issues were presented and discussed among the students. Then, prompting language was provided to the students so they could practice role plays during the classroom simulation. The participants consisted of juniors and seniors majoring in Hotel and Restaurant Management from the College of Tourism, Hospitality, and Sports at a private university. Their ages ranged from 19 to 25 years old, with five being male and 17 being female. Their English abilities were equivalent to B1 as they had all passed at least two English courses before registering for this course.

Exclusion criteria were applied to the participants. Those who attended classes less than 80% of the time were not included in the study's data. Class attendance of at least 80% was required, and the purposive sampling strategy was employed to include 22 participants in the research. Finally, the questionnaire with validity and reliability was sent to the entire group of students, and five of them (Table 1) voluntarily expressed their interest in participating in interviews, using pseudonyms A, B, C, D and E.

**Table 1** Students' demographics of nationality and gender.

Name	Year	Nationality	Birth Gender
A	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Thai	Female
B	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Thai	Male
C	4 <sup>th</sup>	Thai	Male
D	4 <sup>th</sup>	Thai	Female
E	4 <sup>th</sup>	Thai	Male

### *Data Collections and Ethical Considerations*

In this research, data collection occurred in two phases: questionnaire distribution and focus group interview.

**Phase 1: Questionnaire Distribution.** The questionnaire, using the Linkert Scale indicating the level of agreement from 5 to 1, from the most to the least, was constructed based on the competency requirements of the ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System (ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System, n.d.). Then, it was tested for validity and reliability with a sample group of students. Subsequently, the researchers administered the questionnaires to all 22 participants at the end of the semester.

**Phase 2: Focus Group Interview.** In the final class, five participants were invited for interviews via Zoom, conducted in Thai, to ensure that the students felt comfortable and familiar with the interviewers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterward. Then, member check and peer review strategies (Saldana, 2014) were employed to ensure trustworthiness. The interview transcriptions were sent to the students to verify the accuracy of the content. After each coding, categorizing, and theming process, two lecturers who were



hotel experts double-checked the codes, categories, and themes to ensure they were relevant and connected.

Before the interviews took place, the questions were validated by three experts and focused on the effects of using case studies to develop critical thinking skills in hotel management students. Consent forms and study information sheets were provided to the participants beforehand, ensuring they were well-informed about the research objectives, significance, their roles, and their right to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable.

After the semi-structured group interviews, the transcripts were saved and shared within a Google Docs folder. Subsequently, three researchers independently conducted a thematic analysis (Appendix 1) using a shared method, following the approach outlined by Cho and Lee (2014) and Saldana (2014). The interviews were conducted in Thai, and selected excerpts which were related to the research questions were translated into English.

### ***Data Analysis***

Upon receiving the completed questionnaires, Cronbach's coefficient alpha results indicated a range between 0.865 and 0.923. This is greater than 0.70, indicating suitability for data collection and gathering. Additionally, the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) for each question was tested by three content experts, resulting in an overall content congruence index of 0.887. After that, we conducted data analysis on Thai interview descriptions. Our analytical procedures for qualitative data were divided into four distinct stages:

1. In the initial stage, we conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions to explore the general perceptions of students towards the use of case studies, enhancing their critical thinking and how they handled challenges and issues encountered in case studies.
2. Then, we performed process coding on the interview transcriptions to show linguistic evidence to support the use of case studies, enhancing students' critical thinking and how they handled challenges and issues encountered in case studies. This method exclusively employed gerunds ("-ing" words) to represent actions suggested by the data, as outlined by Saldana (2014, p.585). Subsequently, all finalized codings in UPPERCASE were collectively debriefed, following the guidance of Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

3. Moving on to the second stage, we utilized process coding once more, this time to categorize similar or related codes into groups, facilitating pattern construction and analysis, as described by Saldana (2014, p.587). This process allowed for the emergence of linguistic themes related to the challenging experiences of the students. Subsequently, all categories underwent a comprehensive review.
4. In the third stage, we proceeded to create themes based on patterns of categories. The themes identified in UPPERCASE were subject to debriefing. In the findings, all UPPERCASE themes were transformed into italicized phrases within the text and were immediately supported with excerpts from certain participants. Then, the linguistic evidence was revealed to measure the different levels of critical thinking skills development, as outlined in Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The outline levels include remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

## Results

This research aimed to explore the critical thinking processes of students through various critical case studies and investigate the students' perspectives on the use of cases to enhance critical thinking. This section presented the results obtained from the questionnaire and interview excerpts, serving the research objectives and addressing the two research questions: 1) To what extent does the use of case studies in English for hotel personnel develop students' critical thinking skills? and 2) What are students' perspectives on this teaching method?

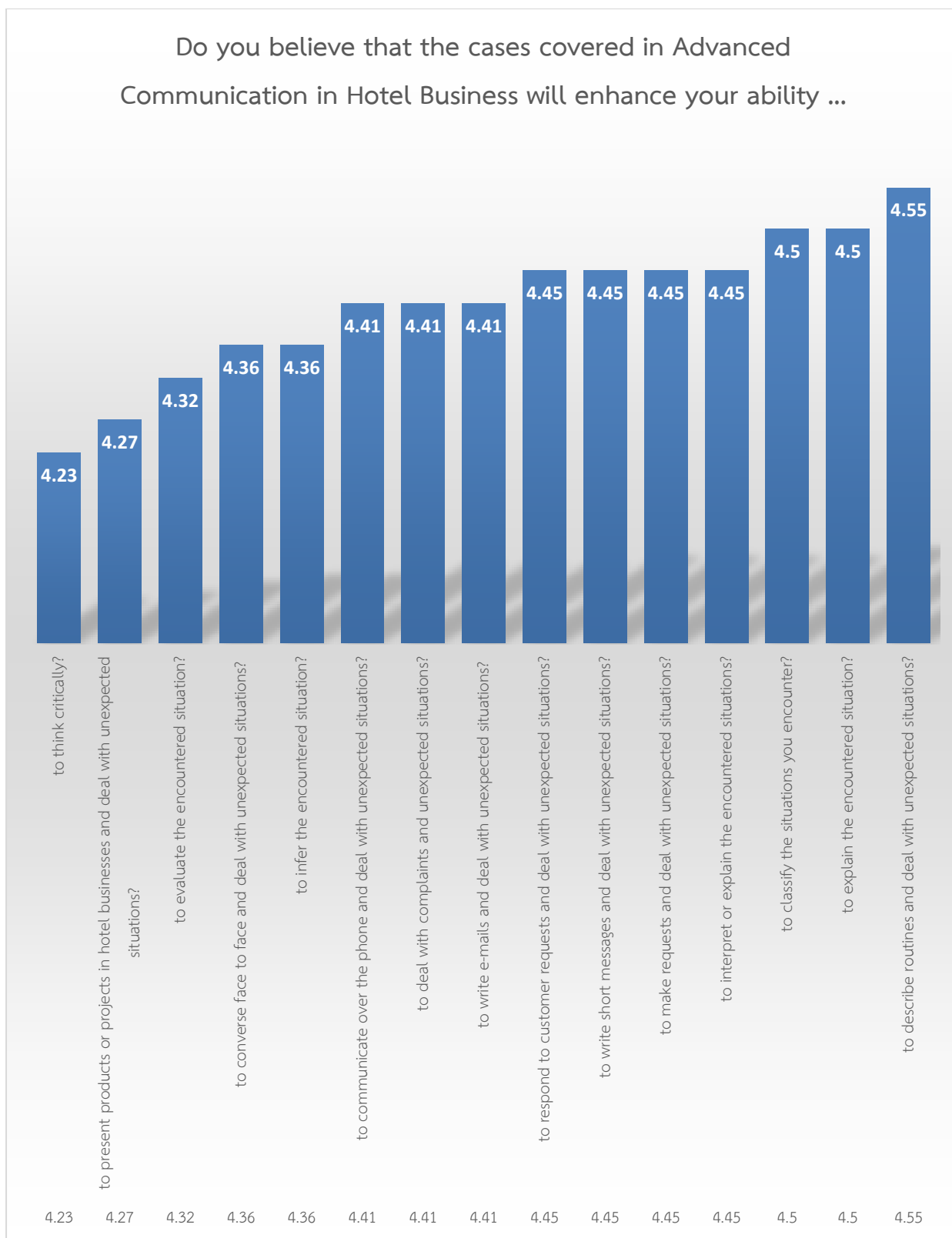
### *Research Question 1: To what extent does the use of case studies in English for hotel personnel develop students' critical thinking skills?*

The findings from the questionnaire indicated several positive outcomes. To be more specific, Figure 1 suggested the participants' positive perceptions towards the influence of the case study method employed in the Advanced Communication in the Hotel Business course.

For instance, scores ranging from 4.23 to 4.55 indicate that various communication and problem-solving skills of course participants have been enhanced. Skills related to dealing with unexpected situations, such as describing routines, classifying situations, and explaining encountered scenarios, received high scores of 4.45 and above. In other words, participants

believed that these skills improved during the course. Written communication skills, such as composing short messages and emails and making requests, also showed positive results, ranging from 4.41 to 4.45. Additionally, abilities to handle customers' requests and complaints, as well as dealing with unexpected events, were highly rated at 4.45. However, critical thinking and evaluating skills when encountering certain situations were rated slightly lower at 4.23 and 4.32.

Nevertheless, these scores still provided generally positive perspectives on the course's potential to enhance these skills. Consequently, this answered research question 1: *To what extent does the use of case studies in English for hotel personnel develop students' critical thinking skills?* In summary, the findings indicated that participants had a strong belief in the course's ability to develop their communication and problem-solving skills in the context of the hotel business, particularly in dealing with unexpected situations and various forms of written and interpersonal communication. These results underscored the course's potential value in improving the skill set of participants in the hotel industry.



**Figure 1** Level of Agreement to Enhance Students' Communication and Problem-Solving Skills in the Context of Hotel Business

## ***Research Question 2: What Are Students' Perspectives on This Teaching Method?***

The interview questions involved the participants' perceptions regarding whether the use of case studies could enhance their critical thinking and how they handled challenges and issues encountered in case studies. The results suggested four main themes concerning the participants' perceptions of the case study teaching method: being aware of challenges; handling challenges; understanding and solving problems; and addressing unforeseen challenges.

**Being Aware of Challenges.** The participants shared their views that they were aware of the issues such as no staff found for help and communication barriers that they were not able to overcome as the following excerpts showed:

### ***Excerpt 1.***

*Our hotel is small in size, and there were no staff available after 10 pm. One night, there was a water shortage, and we were not on shift; fortunately, we lived nearby.*

(Student A)

### ***Excerpt 2.***

*Due to COVID-19, the hotel's operating hours have been reduced to 7 am to 10 pm, with no staff available after 10 pm.*

(Student C)

### ***Excerpt 3.***

*There was a customer trying to communicate with us in a language we did not understand at all.*

(Student D)

### ***Excerpt 4.***

*The customers complained that their room wasn't cleaned and requested a room change. However, the manager found out that they had placed a 'DND' (Do Not Disturb) sign on the door. That means the housekeeping staff were not able to enter and clean.*

(Student E)

**Excerpt 5.**

*The bedroom did not look like the one shown on the hotel's website or in the brochure. The wallpaper too was not as bright as shown in the pictures.*

(Student B)

It seems that these quotations indicate that issues of staff shortage during COVID-19 were common. For instance, customers mostly did not speak English, which created communication problems. The room was not clean and the room pictures did not match what was shown in the advertisement.

**Handling Challenges.** The issues mentioned in the previous section could happen anytime at a hotel. However, the participants were able to cope with these situations and offer solutions to customers. The coping strategies mainly included apology and willingness to help as the following excerpts showed.

**Apology Strategy.**

**Excerpt 1.**

*I quickly rushed to the scene, offered a sincere apology to the customer for the inconvenience, and promptly resolved the issue.*

(Student A)

**Excerpt 2.**

*We needed to apologize and explain that the pictures in the hotel brochures or on the website were for marketing purposes only. There might have been some differences.*

(Student B)

**Willingness to Help Strategy.**

**Excerpt 3.**

*If customers cannot communicate effectively in English, we use a translation application, asking them to speak into the app for English translation. This is an effective way to address the issue.*

(Student D)

**Excerpt 4.**

*We needed to ensure that customers were informed of these issues. For instance, signs or notices would be in place to make them aware of situations such as staff unavailability or water shortages.*

(Student C)

**Excerpt 5.**

*We willingly listened to the customers' complaints and tried to explain that there might have been a misunderstanding due to the misplaced 'DND' (Do Not Disturb) sign on the door. If they still insisted on changing the room, we accommodated their request while gently reminding them to place the sign correctly.*

(Student E)

This section provides examples of common problems that participants had to face and manage. The issues or challenges varied, ranging from staff shortages, and language barriers, to room issues, but they were able to cope with them with apology and willingness to help strategies.

**Understanding and Solving Problems.** Participants valued the case studies which helped them understand and find ways to solve the problems as the following excerpts suggested.

**Excerpt 1.**

*I think yes because various events that happen tend to repeat themselves. They may come in different forms, but in the end, you can compare cases with each other.*

(Student B)

**Excerpt 2.**

*Yes, we believe so because case studies help us organize our thoughts into actionable steps for problem-solving, which in turn allows us to gain a better understanding of our customers.*

(Student E)

These two excerpts pointed out that using case studies as models could help the students solve various issues, and they were able to help students understand customers' needs better, allowing them to improve their service. To be more specific, when customers complained, the students needed to focus on solving the problems. They then learned from this mistake and understood that meeting their customers' needs is essential for making positive changes.

**Addressing Unforeseen Challenges.** In addition to the value of case studies in understanding and solving problems, participants felt positive about the case studies, which could be applied to real-life experiences as the following excerpts illustrated.

***Excerpt 1.***

*Making them (case studies) valuable for practical application by others. C also supports this.*

(Student D)

***Excerpt 2.***

*I believe so. When we encounter real issues at the hotel, we can draw upon what we've learned in the classroom and apply it to the problems in front of us.*

(Student C)

***Excerpt 3.***

*Yes, case studies have proven effective in addressing unforeseen issues by providing real-world examples and in-depth analysis.*

(Student A)

The three quotations reveal the significance of using case studies to help participants solve future or unforeseen issues in their real-life experiences.

Overall, the case study method is crucial for enhancing students' problem-solving skills for their future real-life situations. This is evident from the participants' positive feedback, which shows that the method assisted them in handling the issues and addressing unforeseen challenges effectively. Therefore, the use of the case study method is important for fostering students' problem-solving skills, and this answers research question 2: *What are students' perspectives on this teaching method?*



## Discussion

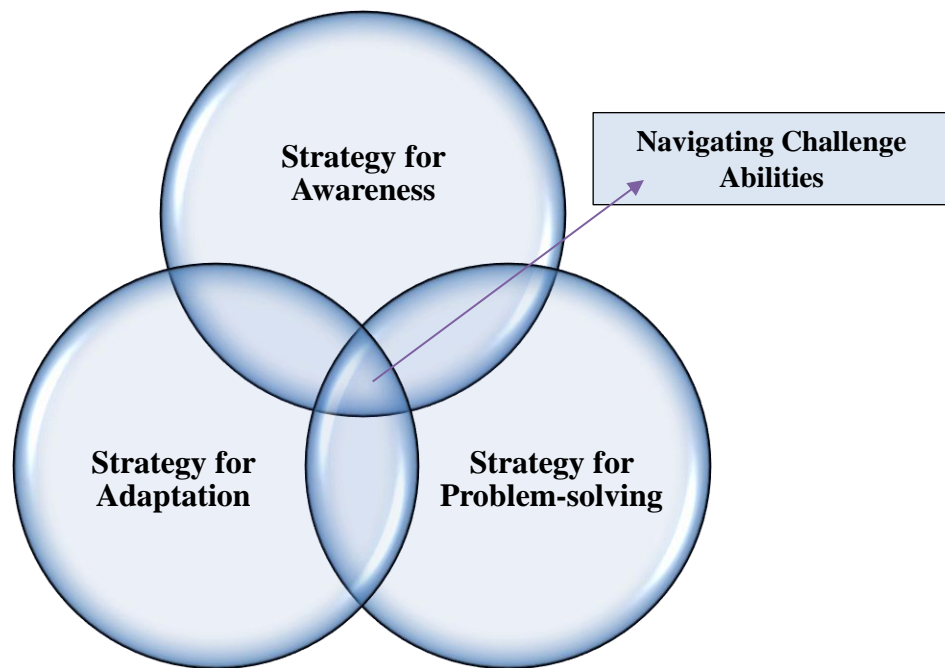
### *Navigating Challenge Abilities*

The excerpts and themes from the interviews indicated positive feedback from the participants regarding the utilization of case studies in teaching critical thinking at this private university. The practical application of case studies and the transfer of skills to real-world problem-solving settings were appreciated and acknowledged by the participants.

The value of case studies was recognized because participants were able to compare different events indicating common problems, understand holistic problem-solving, and locate appropriate strategies. Steiner and Posch (2006) also argued for the importance of students working on real-world problems to sustain their learning development. Furthermore, the importance of case studies in fostering participants' understanding of customer service echoes the results of Goffin and New (2001), indicating that customer satisfaction in new product development increased after the inclusion of case studies.

It seems to us that the four themes of 1) awareness of challenges, 2) handling challenges, 3) understanding and solving problems, and 4) addressing unforeseen challenges can develop participants' capabilities to navigate challenges. Firstly, awareness of challenges demonstrates the *strategy for awareness*. Secondly, handling challenges and understanding and solving problems indicate the *strategy for problem-solving*. Lastly, addressing unforeseen challenges suggests participants' ability to have the *strategy for adaptation* to future challenges.

Therefore, it is apparent from Figure 2 that the application of case studies in the Advanced Communication in Hotel Business course can benefit participants, enhancing their critical thinking skills and equipping them to deal with real-world issues in their future careers in the hospitality field.



**Figure 2.** Navigating Challenge Abilities

### ***Measurement of Students' Critical Thinking Skills***

The use of case studies in a hotel context not only enhances participants' abilities to navigate challenges and prepare them to address real-world challenges in their hospitality careers, but it also significantly increases their critical thinking skills. In this section, the UPPERCASE codings, categories, and UPPERCASE themes (see Appendix 1) are discussed, providing linguistic evidence from interview excerpts that illustrate how case studies were instrumental in developing participants' critical thinking skills.

The linguistic evidence revealed several verbs corresponding to the different level of critical thinking skills development, as outlined in Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). These levels include *remembering*, *understanding*, *applying*, *analyzing*, *evaluating*, and *creating*. These verb categories contribute to the development of critical thinking skills, with some verbs reflecting critical thinking skills in action, such as *applying* and *analyzing*.

#### **Explanation Ability.**

The first two levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy which are *remembering* and *understanding*, are verbs indicating that participants have reached this level. These verbs

include *recall*, *illustrate*, and *explain*, the examples of language in Table 2 suggest that participants generally possess explanatory skills. This could be because the course included task-based language instruction. For example, as shown in Table 2, titled “RECALLING THE CASES WHEN WE STUDIED AND APPLYING TO THE REAL SITUATION”, participants were able to recall what they learned in the classroom. This is because they engaged in relevant task-based drills during class, which helped to enhance their explanatory skills. Duan’s (2020) study also supports this notion, as their hotel participants engaged in numerous oral practices both online and offline until their professional language abilities were effectively enhanced. Consequently, they were able to recall what they learned in class when encountering real issues in a hotel context.

**Table 2** Explanation Ability

Bloom's revised taxonomy	Verbs	Examples
Remembering Level	Recall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>RECALLING</u> THE CASES WHEN WE STUDIED AND APPLYING TO THE REAL SITUATION</li> </ul>
Understanding Level	Illustrate, explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>ILLUSTRATING</u> EXAMPLE OF HOW STAFF’S WORKING TIME WAS REDUCED</li> <li>● <u>EXPLAINING</u> TO GUESTS WHY THE WATER WAS NOT RUNNING</li> <li>● TRYING TO <u>EXPLAIN</u> TO CUSTOMERS THAT THEY MAY BE VISITING THE HOTEL IN NOT THE BEST SEASON.</li> <li>● <u>EXPLAINING</u> THAT CUSTOMERS HANGING ‘DO NOT DISTURB’ TAG EXPLAINS WHY NO HOUSEKEEPING SERVICE WAS PROVIDED THAT DAY</li> </ul>

### Analysis and Application Abilities.

The participants had achieved the next two levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy *apply* and *analyze* which were indicated by the use of verbs such as *apply*, *develop*, *inspect*, and *solve*. These positive results can be attributed to the use of hypothetical questions such as *what would you have done differently?* And *what would you do?* throughout the course.

These questions aimed to elicit evaluative and critical answers from the participants and were routinely asked when case studies were presented. Evidence of this can be observed in Table 3, which provides language examples indicating the development of the participants' critical thinking skills.

Overall, it can be inferred that asking the right questions is important for developing individuals' critical thinking skills. This argument aligns with the findings of Malthouse et al. (2015) and Mustika et al. (2020), who confirmed that question strategies and techniques are crucial in developing individuals' critical thinking skills.

**Table 3** Analysis and Application Abilities

Bloom's revised taxonomy	Verbs	Examples
Applying Level	apply, develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>APPLYING</u> FOR FUTURE REFERENCES</li> <li>● <u>APPLYING</u> SOLUTIONS TO DIFFERENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES</li> <li>● BEING ABLE TO <u>DEVELOP</u> OUR SOLUTION THINKING SKILLS, SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND OUR CUSTOMERS BETTER.</li> <li>● BEING ABLE TO <u>APPLY</u> THINK CRITICALLY</li> </ul>
Analyzing Level	inspect, solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>INSPECTING</u> OUR CURRENT ROOMS WHETHER THEY WERE THE ONES WHICH LOOKED LIKE THOSE IN <i>THE</i> ADVERTISEMENT OR NOT</li> <li>● <u>SOLVING</u> UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS</li> <li>● TRYING TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH FIRST, BUT IF NOT WORKING, <u>SOLVING</u> THE PROBLEMS BY USING TRANSLATION APPLICATIONS.</li> </ul>

#### Assessment and Construction Abilities.

The participants also achieved the last two levels *evaluate* and *create* of Bloom's revised taxonomy, which was demonstrated by their use of verbs such as *evaluate*, *recommend*, *agree*, *plan*, and *compile*. Table 4 provides examples of the language used by participants to showcase their problem-evaluation abilities.

**Table 4** Assessment and Construction Abilities

Bloom's revised taxonomy	Verbs	Examples
Evaluating Level	evaluate, recommend, agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CUSTOMERS COMPLAINING THAT THE PICTURES IN THE HOTEL WERE NOT THE SAME WHEN VISITING THE HOTEL ONSITE AND NOW WE NEEDED TO <u>EVALUATE</u> THIS SITUATION AND COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS FOR THIS ISSUE.</li> <li>● <u>RECOMMENDING</u> ANOTHER HIGHER RATE IF THE CUSTOMERS WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A ROOM WITH BETTER FACILITIES AND AMENITIES.</li> <li>● <u>AGREEING</u> THAT CASE STUDIES ARE IMPORTANT TO HELP SOLVE ISSUES IN THE FUTURE.</li> </ul>
Creating Level	plan, compile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● BEING A MANAGER MEANS TO <u>PLAN</u> FOR EMERGENCY SUCH AS LEAVE A MOBILE NUMBER SO THE CUSTOMERS CAN CALL ANYTIME IN CASE OF EMERGENCY.</li> <li>● <u>COMPILING</u> CUSTOMERS' COMPLAINTS TO IMPROVE THE HOTEL SERVICE IN THE FUTURE.</li> <li>● <u>PLANNING</u> TO ALLOCATE HOTEL STAFF CAREFULLY WHEN THERE IS A STAFF SHORTAGE.</li> <li>● <u>PLANNING</u> TO HAVE AN INTERPRETER STAND BY IF THERE IS THIS ISSUE AGAIN.</li> </ul>

At the *evaluate* level, the ability to thoroughly assess problems, understand their root causes, and propose appropriate solutions is important, as evidenced by language samples concerning customers' complaints about hotel pictures. Similarly, when offering higher room rates with improved facilities and services, participants need to critically evaluate and ensure that the proposed offers align with perceived values and outcomes. Furthermore, case studies can draw on participants' past experiences to inform their future decision-making and problem-solving. Classroom simulations are therefore essential for developing cognitive

abilities such as evaluative and creative skills in Bloom's revised taxonomy. Similarly, Feinstein's (2001) study indicated that providing learners with authentic learning experiences through simulation models helps foster their cognitive abilities and dynamic knowledge.

At the *create* level, the language examples align with the framework of Bloom's revised taxonomy which suggests participants' proactive traits to handle certain problems at the hotel workplace. For instance, the application of emergency response systems, the development of structured comments and feedback models, the innovative design of flexible staff working rosters, and the establishment of language support methods were proposed by the participants. These ideas suggest the importance of being proactive and innovative in creating solutions to issues in the hotel context. These characteristics are crucial for hotel personnel and align with Raub and Liao's (2012) study, which revealed that proactive work behavior is fundamental in customer service to improve organizational performance. Consequently, Bettencourt (2004) suggested that hotel personnel should demonstrate proactive and innovative traits when addressing customer complaints, rather than merely fulfilling regular duties.

Overall, participants have developed their critical thinking and creative skills through the use of case studies in the Advanced Communication in Hotel Business course at this private university. This development begins with their capabilities for explanation and situation understanding, leading to the analysis and application of solutions in case study examples, addressing real-world problems, and ultimately reaching the highest levels of evaluative and creative problem-solving.

## Conclusion

The mobility of labor and information exchange in ASEAN has been promoted by the Mutual Recognition Arrangements on Tourism Professionals (MRA on TP), which sets mutual and common competency standards for tourism professionals and ensures that qualified professionals can travel and work within ASEAN without additional examination. In the tourism industry, ASEAN utilizes competency-based training (CBT) and assessment (CBA) methods. It includes English for hotel professionals, which is used to train hotel staff. However, hotel staff in Thailand need critical thinking skills, which are crucial in handling daily issues, and Thai education has issues teaching critical thinking effectively through English instruction. Consequently, Thai students seem to lack these evaluative and analytical skills, and this study

explores whether critical thinking skills in English for hotel personnel students can be developed through the use of case studies.

The findings reveal the participants' development of critical thinking skills suggesting that the case-based teaching strategy effectively enhanced students' higher-order thinking skills, which are important for handling complex, real-world issues. These findings also highlight the importance of integrating case studies and role-playing into the curriculum to develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

It begins with their abilities to clarify and understand problems. Then, they have reached the levels of analytical and applicable answers in case studies which deal with real-world challenges, and finally rising to the top of assessment and innovative problem-solving skills. The development of various critical thinking and innovative skills among the participants has also been highlighted. The participants' critical thinking abilities have not only been developed but also their educational advancements at the highest level, *create* level, of Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Several limitations have been acknowledged. This study was only conducted with one group of participants enrolling in the Advanced Communication in Hotel Business course, and the number of participants was small, resulting in the questionnaire results and interview data being limited as well, so future research may be cautious of generalizing the results to other contexts. Future research may consider adding teachers' classroom observation journals or students' reflections, so the data are diverse to ensure data trustworthiness. Also, future research may conduct research on another group of students (hotel majors) without the implementation of case studies for comparable outcomes.

Thai curriculum as well as English instruction should be integrated with case studies and supported by teacher training. By this, it means case studies foster learners' independent thinking and real-world application of language skills, which result in their career success in the hospitality industry. Therefore, Thailand's English education system should be strengthened by developing critical thinking with language proficiency to better prepare students for future career journeys.

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## Appendix 1: Categories and Themes of Discussion

### EXPLANATION ABILITY

#### Remembering

- RECALLING THE CASES WHEN WE STUDIED AND APPLYING TO THE REAL SITUATION

#### Understanding

- ILLUSTRATING EXAMPLE OF HOW STAFF'S WORKING TIME WAS REDUCED
- EXPLAINING TO GUESTS WHY THE WATER WAS NOT RUNNING
- TRYING TO EXPLAIN TO CUSTOMERS THAT THEY MAY BE VISITING THE HOTEL IN NOT THE BEST SEASON.
- EXPLAINING THAT CUSTOMERS HANGING 'DO NOT DISTURB' TAG EXPLAINS WHY NO HOUSEKEEPING SERVICE WAS PROVIDED THAT DAY.

### ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION ABILITIES

#### Applying

- APPLYING FOR FUTURE REFERENCES
- APPLYING SOLUTIONS TO DIFFERENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES
- BEING ABLE TO DEVELOP OUR SOLUTION THINKING SKILLS, SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND OUR CUSTOMERS BETTER.
- BEING ABLE TO APPLY THINK CRITICALLY

#### Analyzing

- INSPECTING OUR CURRENT ROOMS WHETHER THEY WERE THE ONES WHICH LOOKED LIKE THOSE IN THE ADVERTISEMENT OR NOT
- SOLVING UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS
- TRYING TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH FIRST, BUT IF NOT WORKING, SOLVING THE PROBLEMS BY USING TRANSLATION APPLICATIONS.

## ASSESSMENT AND CONSTRUCTION ABILITIES

### Evaluating

- CUSTOMERS COMPLAINING THAT THE PICTURES IN THE HOTEL WERE NOT THE SAME WHEN VISITING THE HOTEL ONSITE AND NOW WE NEEDED TO EVALUATE THIS SITUATION AND COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS FOR THIS ISSUE.
- CONCLUDING THAT THIS WAS OUR HOTEL'S FAULT, SO WE NEEDED TO APOLOGIZE TO THE CUSTOMERS FIRST.
- RECOMMENDING ANOTHER HIGHER RATE IF THE CUSTOMERS WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A ROOM WITH BETTER FACILITIES AND AMENITIES.
- AGREEING THAT CASE STUDIES ARE IMPORTANT TO HELP SOLVE ISSUES IN THE FUTURE.

### Creating

- BEING A MANAGER MEANS TO PLAN FOR EMERGENCY SUCH AS LEAVE A MOBILE NUMBER SO THE CUSTOMERS CAN CALL ANYTIME IN CASE OF EMERGENCY.
- COMPILING CUSTOMERS' COMPLAINTS TO IMPROVE THE HOTEL SERVICE IN THE FUTURE.
- PLANNING TO ALLOCATE HOTEL STAFF CAREFULLY WHEN THERE IS A STAFF SHORTAGE.
- PLANNING TO HAVE AN INTERPRETER STAND BY IF THERE IS THIS ISSUE AGAIN.