

NEEDS AND PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH FOR HOSPITALITY INDUSTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE HOTEL EMPLOYEES AT MEOTEL HOTEL KEBUMEN

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Abstract: Hospitality industry is one of the important sectors to play roles in the economic and tourism growth in Kebumen. Therefore, keeping this industry to be competitive in the future seems to be urgent. Hotel owners need to improve the quality of human resources, mainly the English communication skills. This research describes and analyzes needs and problems of English for hospitality industry at Meotel Hotel Kebumen. It involved 20 experienced hotel employees at the research site as the participants. Questionnaires were used in the data collection. The data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings proved that the skills needed from the most required to the least one are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The three most dominant language uses are to give services, to give information, and to give help. Problems in using English encountered included guessing unknown words due to limited vocabulary, lacking of grammar knowledge, inability to follow the speed, and lacking of confidence.

Key words: *needs, English, skills, hospitality industry*

INTRODUCTION

One of the important sectors to play roles in the development of tourism industry in Kebumen is the hospitality industry. Hospitality is identified as the act of giving genuine care and kindness to a stranger, friend, or whoever is in need. It involves friendly treatment of guests or tourists from hospitality industries like: travel, accommodation, foodservice, conferences, leisure and recreation. Meotel Hotel Kebumen is one of the examples of the hospitality industries operated in Kebumen.

As a hospitality industry, Meotel Hotel Kebumen needs to be professional to serve their guests. Therefore, demand on having highly qualified employees with well-developed communication skills of English is significant. It is due to the fact that many employees have to meet and communicate in English with foreign guests in their jobs; for examples, in guests booking, briefing for hotel facilities, negotiating, and so on. Communication, according to Wardaugh (1992:5), is defined as a process of transmitting information from the source to the receiver. It is a two way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas, and feelings, but also create and share meaning. In the case of hotel services, participants in the communication involve the hotel employees and guests.

Since best services is basic to all hotel activities, effective communication shown by the hotel employees when giving services must become an absolute need. In line with this, English as one of the tool for communication at work should not be a problem for the hotel employees. Defects on this matter affect the quality of services.

Meotel Hotel Kebumen is a three star hotel which is located in Kebumen city center and being developed to help Kebumen popularize its tourism sector. The hotel is demanded to prepare its employees with excellent English in order to be more competitive in the future. However, based on preliminary observation done it seems that there are a number of employees who are still in lack of English communication skills. For example in term of fluency, the employees seem to have difficulty when required to practice their English. Some of them even can speak only few words. Another cannot pronounce the words acceptably. This atmosphere must be contradictory with effective communication principles and it needs solution soon. Dealing with this issue, it is significant to do a research on needs and problems on English use for the employees at Meotel Hotel, Kebumen.

This study is to investigate needs and problems on English for hospitality industry from the perspective of the hotel employees. The findings can be used as a baseline for any related parties to conduct an English training program for the hotel employees based on needs and problems they encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language is crucial for hotel employees. This language is part of their job since it is one of the tools for communication in their work place. Especially in the hospitality industry, English language should not be taken for granted since it makes communication effective. Hamzah (2006) in his study described that the service quality in Malaysia falls behind countries like Thailand and Singapore. Service, in this case, involved communication between hosts and guests which is significant business in hospitality industries. To communicate effectively, it is undeniable that hotel employees are demanded to have excellent competency of English.

Currently, teaching and language learning has evolved tremendously. It leads course designers and practitioners to improve their teaching methodology and approaches to suit the learners' needs. In the case of ESP (English for specific purposes), because of the current demand from industrialization and globalization, the teaching of ESP has also evolved. Historically, English for Specific Purposes has become vital and innovative activity within the teaching of English as a foreign or second language movement (Howatt, 1984). ESP must be seen as an "approach to language learning (not as a product) which is based on learners need and directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning". (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). They have also pointed out the three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP: the demands of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner.

Harun and Blue (2003) provides a good example of a study on the language needs of Hotel and catering on the use of hospitality language at front office of four hotels in Britain. The study focused on the need of specific language for first speakers of English. The research concluded that the hospitality industry entail a specific type of language that is hospitality language. This study had initiates the issues of the language use in the hospitality industry. The finding also tells that hospitality language can be regarded to be in the area of English for Occupational Purposes with a substantial overlap with General Purpose English (GPE). Nevertheless, the study was done in the native speaker setting and this research is contradictory with the research being done by the researcher proposing for this research.

Similarly, Kardijan (2017) also studied the gap between learning needs and its implementation in English for hospitality specific purposes program at the Hospitality Department of State Vocational High School 1 of Tasikmalaya. The study found that there was inconsistency between learning needs for the student communicative competence and the learning process. The research suggested a re-instructional design of English learning for the hospitality specific purposes program. Although this research was conducted for vocational

high school students, it strengthens the urgency of link and match between learning needs and learning materials for hotel employees that the writer is seeking through this research.

Another example is done by Suzana Ab. Rahim, (2011). She exposed the need of learners to hospitality real-place requirements in terms of communication skills. It is pertinent that employees (existing and potential), employers and educators have a consensus of what are the competencies that are required to be instilled in learners to prepare them for the hospitality industry. She found that students who are likely to pursue a career in Tourism and Hospitality work force must realize that communication skills are seen vital to the work force. "Soft" skills, particularly communication skills in English will make students more employable. She concluded that a mismatch exists between the required skills as against the ability. It is imperative to identify and bridge the gap. The research done by Suzana seemed to be addressed for tourism students whereas the study being done in this research is addressed to those who have worked with some experience.

Keyoonwong (1998) conducted a survey of needs and wants of English in tourism career. The results showed that the tourism personnel in Chiang Mai considered listening and speaking skills the most important and necessary. The employers, as well as the staff themselves, were not satisfied with the English language proficiency. They needed to practice the skills including listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Similarly, Boonyawattana (1999) studied needs analysis of English in tourism business. The results found that listening and speaking skills were greatly important in tourism business careers more than reading and writing skills. Speaking was needed the most, followed by listening, reading and writing. People who worked in tourism business also encountered the most problems of using English in listening skills, followed by speaking, writing and reading skills. This research is clearly considered to be different from those exemplified in term of place and focus.

METHOD

This research was done at Meotel Hotel, Kebumen which is located at the city center of Kebumen. It involved 20 hotel employees who worked at Meotel Hotel. The research instrument was in the form of set of questionnaires dealing with needs and problems of English for hospitality industry. The questionnaires consisted of three parts, namely: a check list, a five rating scale, and an open ended form. All questionnaires are written in Indonesia language in order to avoid misinterpretation. The validity of the instruments is reviewed by experts, namely an English lecturer and statistics lecturer. For the reliability of the questionnaires, the Cronbach alpha coefficient is used. In collecting the data, the researcher writes an official letter to ask for permission and cooperation to the hotel manager. After getting permission, the questionnaires are distributed to the research subjects to collect the data needed in the research. Data collection is done by the researcher with the help of selected employees at the research site. The data collection is done within one month in May 2019. After the questionnaires completed, the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) is used to analyze the data. The devices which are used are as follow:

- a. Cronbach alpha coefficient is used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaires
- b. A five rating scale is used to score the level of English for hospitality industry needs

Scale	Mean range	Level of needs
1	1.00 – 1.49	Very low
2	1.50 – 2.49	Low
3	2.50 – 3.49	Moderate

4	3.50 – 4.49	High
5	4.50 – 5.00	Very high

- c. Mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation are used to calculate the level of English for hospitality industry needs in average. The higher the mean score means the more needs of English for hospitality industry. In reverse, the lower the score means the lower needs of the English for hospitality industry.
- d. Frequency (f) and percentage (%) are used to calculate the problems of English for hospitality industry usage at Meotel hotel Kebumen.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the questionnaires distributed questioning about the four language skills needed by the hotel employees in order to work well in their post, the results can be seen as in table 1 below:

Table 1. Language skills needed by the hotel employees

Language skills	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
Listening	3.95	0.75	High	2
Speaking	4.40	0.59	High	1
Reading	2.55	0.51	Moderate	3
Writing	1.65	0.58	Low	4
Total	3.13	0.60	Moderate	-

From the table 1, it is observable that the employees, needs of using English in the hotel is moderate as shown by $\bar{x} = 3.13$ with the standard deviation (S.D.) = 0.60. It was also found that speaking is the most required skill of the four language skills needed with $\bar{x} = 4.40$ and S.D.= 0.59, followed by listening with $\bar{x} = 3.95$ and S.D.= 0.75), reading with $\bar{x} = 2.55$ and S.D.= 0.51); and finally, writing with $\bar{x} = 1.65$, S.D.= 0.58. The fact that the needs of English language is still moderate may explain the fact that although tourism industry in Kebumen has been promoted for years, there are only few foreigners who visit the city. Consequently, the hotel employees has only few chance to practice their English. The fact that speaking is most needed by the employees is because of the demand in their routine work. The hotel employees were often to be asked needed information by tourists. What more, tourists may also sometimes want the hotel employees to give them some help or services. This finding is supportive to Reinsch's study (1997) claiming that the respondents perceived face to face oral events were mostly often required them to function in their routine works.

When the hotel employees were required to select given functions of English language that are highly used at work, the results revealed as shown in table 2.

Table 2 Language functions by hotel employees

Language functions	Frequency	Percentage
Giving information	8	40%
Giving services	3	15%
Offering help	5	25%

Describing places, people, or things	1	5%
Solving problems	2	10%
Persuading	0	0%
Complementing	1	5%
Expressing opinions	0	0%
Total	20	100 %

Based on table 2, it can be seen that the three most frequently used language functions of English by the employees in Meotel Hotel Kebumen were giving information (40%), offering help (25%), and giving services (15%). This could explain that the three language functions are significant in hospitality industry. It also supports for the needs of specific language functions in the hospitality industry. Based Blue and Harun's notion (2003), these language functions are seen as hospitality language which are frequently used in hospitality industries. In addition, this is also in line with Boonyawattana's study (1999) that functions like providing services, giving information and offering for help are frequently used by the personnel in the tourism business.

In the case of problems encountered by the hotel employees, the following problems were the ones which were frequently found in the four language skills:

Table 3. Listening problems

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Guessing meaning of unknown words or phrases	6	30%
Understanding intonation patterns and stress	7	35%
Having difficulty to follow the communication speed	4	20%
Understanding instructions	3	15%

Table 3 shows that there were four dominant listening problems faced by the hotel employees, namely guessing meaning of unknown words or phrases, understanding intonation patterns and stress, having difficulty to follow the communication speed, and understanding instructions. From the four dominant problems, it can be seen that the three most frequent problems were understanding intonation patterns and stress (35%), guessing unknown words or phrases (30%), and having difficulty to follow the communication speed (20%).

Table 4. Speaking problems

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Being not confident	7	35%
Being not able to pronounce words	5	25%
Not knowing how to say something in English	6	30%
Having difficulty to enter discussion	2	10%

As table 4 shows, it was found that the dominant speaking problems faced by the hotel employees in Meotel Hotel Kebumen were being not confident, being not able to pronounce words, not knowing how to say something in English, and having difficulty to enter discussion. It was found that the three most frequent problems to arise in speaking skills were

respectively, not being confident (35%), not knowing how to say something in English (30%), and last being not able to pronounce words correctly (25%).

Table 5. Reading problems

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Understanding main points	5	25%
Guessing unknown words in the text due to limited vocabulary	8	40%
Looking for details	4	20%
Understanding text organizations	3	15%

Based on table 5, it is seen that there are four dominant problems in reading. Those problems include understanding main points, guessing unknown words in the text due to limited vocabulary, looking for details, and understanding text organization. It was found that the three most commonly found problems in reading faced by the hotel employees were guessing unknown words in a text (40%), understanding main points (25%), and finally looking for detail information (20%).

Table 6. Writing problems

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Using correct spelling and punctuations	6	30%
Structuring sentences (lacking of grammar knowledge)	7	35%
Developing ideas	5	25%
Organizing paragraph	2	10%

As seen in table 6, there are 4 important problems to arise in writing skills. They are using correct spelling and punctuations, structuring sentences (lacking of grammar knowledge), developing ideas, and organizing paragraphs. From the four important problems, it was found that the three most frequent problems in writing faced by the hotel employees in Meotel Hotel Kebumen were structuring sentences (lacking of grammar knowledge (35%), using correct spelling and punctuations (30%), and developing ideas (25%).

From table 3-6, it can be assured that the common problems in the four language skills faced by the hotel employees in Meotel Hotel Kebumen were to understand intonation patterns and stress, not knowing how to say something in English, guessing unknown words due to limited vocabulary, and structuring sentences (lacking of grammar knowledge). The difficulty of understanding the intonation patterns and the English stress was caused by the fact that the employees rarely get involved in the real communication with foreign tourists. Therefore, they are not accustomed to listening to English. This is of course supportive to the idea that learning a language is a matter of habit how frequent the learners get involved with the target language. Besides, having limited vocabulary and lacking of grammar knowledge also block the hotel employees to be confident in practicing their English. As a consequent, there might be defects in hotel services which may put the hospitality industry at risk to continue its survival. Hamzah (2006) in his study described that the service quality involved communication between hosts and guests which is significant business in hospitality industries. To communicate effectively, it is undeniable that hotel employees are demanded to have excellent competency of English. Otherwise, service may be done unsatisfactorily.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions, the study can be concluded that the four language skills needed from the most required to the least one for the hotel employees in Meotel Hotel Kebumen are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. There are three most dominant language uses that the employees are demanded to practice, namely to give services, to give information, and to give for help. Dealing with problems in using English encountered, they include guessing unknown words due to limited vocabulary, lacking of grammar knowledge, inability to follow the speed, and lacking of confidence. Although the current investigation does not represent all hospitality employees in a wide scope, it is believed that the sampling might give representation of hospitality employees working around Kebumen. Needs analysis is one of the parts in a curriculum development and basically required before a syllabus development for English language teaching. This study is expected to be able to provide guidelines for developing an English for specific purposes syllabus. As a result, there will be a link and matched between teaching-learning and demands in the related job of the learners.

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