

The Prospective Flight Attendants' English Language Needs

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Abstract—This study concentrates on having frame of reference from the academicians, stakeholders, practitioners, and students of flight attendant school, as an attempt to understand their needs of specific language skills. The data were acquired through questionnaires for the 103 trainees and interviews for three instructors, two stakeholders, and five practitioners. The analysis of data is based on the interpretation of the results of questionnaire and supported by the interview results. The research revealed the participants' viewpoints of English language, their goals of learning English, language skills, current and target proficiencies, difficulties in learning English, preferred topics or themes, required language functions (expressions), and roles of the students and instructor. The findings of this study can be used as an insightful input to aviation language instructors, material developers, and stakeholder for providing numerous perspectives and resources in assisting the progress of prospective flight attendant's skill development, job qualification, and language acquisition.

Keywords—needs analysis, training program, flight attendant, aviation

I. INTRODUCTION

Upon the rapid growth of job market competition, plenty of institutional training programs that propose the specific tutoring and coaching blossomed throughout these years. The hospitality and tourism industry also experience such excessive demands [1], which push them to go after high competent employees with all the distinctive criteria. Of course, the more the institution is aware of a particular need for occupational skills and languages, the more salient and substantial they are before their rivals. These circumstances also affect institutions that offer professional trainings for prospective flight attendants who have the need of preparation before entering the workforce. Thus, also stated in the regulation released by Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) [2] based on the recommendation from Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (ARAC), one of the prominent requirements for flight attendant is to understand a sufficient English to communicate, coordinate, and perform all required duties. As the consequence, to meet industrial demands, the regulations, the

institutional objectives and the trainees' individual needs, a training program should provide suitable English learning materials.

After a preliminary observation that was held in one of many flight attendant training programs in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, it is clear that English has been taught based on materials without administering a systematical survey of the needs. Therefore, the contents were not really based on the actual and specific needs of prospective flight attendants as they should be. From that primary point mentioned before, it was unavoidable to reach out the joint purposes, a needs analysis had to be conducted. In this study, therefore, the researcher attempted to investigate the theoretical and practical language needs of the trainees through numerous perspectives and elaborate the further discussion about their preferences of the material and the way of learning.

II. NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs analysis has been one of pivotal components and essential parts of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners, such as course developers, material designers, researchers, instructors, and others, especially for occupational preparation purposes. Graves [3] specifies that (needs analysis) is to find out what the learners know and can do, and what they need to learn and do. Instead of teaching English in accordance with the teacher's estimation about the learners' needs, it is substantially important to include the learners' wants and preferences into account. Regarding the importance of the learners' view, Nunan [4] remarked courses should be designed to fit the students. Thus, it is essential to make the learners as the central aspects of language teaching and learning process. For example, before the course designer decides to develop or design materials, it should be known in advance, whether the learners are learning the language to get a job, for daily usage, for academic career, or others. Another aspect that also gives a huge amount of contribution to gain the joint goals is the stakeholder's viewpoint. Hutchinson and Water [5] state that by concentrating on learners, needs analysis model seems to set aside the role of society, since the needs tend to be compromised by the stakeholders. Barber

et al. [6] concurs; the paradigm has been altered to take into account the needs of all involved key parties, including stakeholders, learners, instructors and employers in the industries.

The effectiveness of needs analysis as the substantial component of ESP courses had increased, it generated the trend to use it to measure how effective and achievable is the goal. Nowadays, due the high demand of ESP, a considerable amount of research has been carried out in this area, such as works of Dehnad, Bagherzadeh, Bigdeli, Hatami, and Hosseini [7] from Iran, Prachanant [8] from Thailand, Gözüyeşil [9] from Turkey, and Chostelidou [10] from Greece.

Dehnad et al. [7] analyzed the postgraduate course in the Ministry of Health in Iran, they realized there were discrepancies between the students' perception of needs and the actual material in the syllabus prescribed by the MoH Iran. Therefore, they can conclude that the course was not effective because of the absence of formal research on needs analysis for postgraduate students. Meanwhile, Prachanant [8] conducted the research to survey the needs analysis of tourism employees in Thailand, since there was a high demand for the occupational area, and there were learning materials which are not based on the actual needs of tourism employees. In Turkey, through a different study, Gözüyeşil [9] conducted a needs analysis to determine the highest priority language skills for engineering students of Nigde University and obtain specific and appropriate language tasks and activities. In another study, Chostelidou [10] aimed the study at revealing the learners' expectations to use the target language, which also focused on their highly specific target discipline, accountancy.

III. MATERIAL & METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of this study are 103 trainees (total population sampling) of flight attendant training programs (mostly were freshly graduated from senior high school, and from different regions such Sumatera, Borneo, and Java), three instructors, two stakeholders and five flight attendants (from various public and private airlines).

B. Research Instrument

Data were collected through questionnaire and interviews which were adapted from Graves [3], Hutchinson and Waters [5], and Nunan [11]. They included two major parts: target needs and learning needs. The instruments were constructed in Indonesian Language in order to minimize problems such as misinterpretation and ambiguity. Both of the instruments were reviewed and validated by an academician and an expert.

C. Data Collection

After sending official letters to request for permission and cooperation to gather the data, the researcher began the interviews and questionnaire distribution to the participants. The first interview was conducted on 3rd November 2015 and the second interview (needs analysis) was conducted from 8th to 11th March 2016. The instruments were administered to the participants on 8th March 2016.

D. Data Analysis

The data collected from questionnaire were processed by the Statistical Package for the Social Science (IBM SPSS Statistics) version 21.0 to obtain the frequency and percentage. While, the data form interviews were manually transcribed and coded based on guidance provided by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [12], categorized from its commonalities, and presented in sentences to minimize the extent of this paper.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

The findings will be presented in figures and tables followed by some explanation.

TABLE I. PURPOSES OF LEARNING ENGLISH

Goal	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
to interact with family	1	0.97
to be used in learning process	12	11.65
to continue the studies	0	0.00
to interact with foreigners	5	4.85
to prepare for the future job	82	79.61
others (to read books, to listen to music, and to watch movie)	3	2.91

Moreover, the trainee's main purpose of learning English was to undertake some preparation to acquire the job qualification by significant difference ($f=82$, 79.61 %), while none of the trainees ($f=0$, 0.00%) chose to further their education.

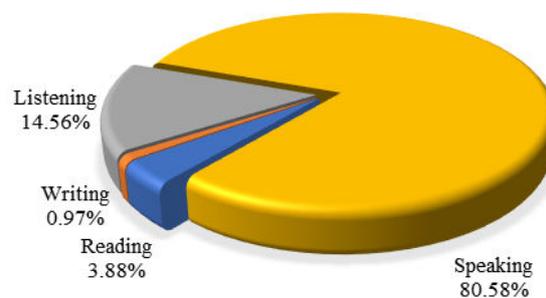


Fig. 1. The required language skills

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews indicated the most important skill for the trainees to acquire regarding to their future's job was speaking as primarily pointed out by 80.58% of the participants. This was ratified by one of the instructors who said, *all of the four skills are very substantial for the jobs. All of them are even included in the national examination. But, speaking is different, it needs a lot of practice. Also, according to people who already work on the field, it is the most required skill.* Another instructor added, *[trainees] must be able to communicate effectively in English language. This [communication skill] is one of the most highly regarded requirement to be a flight attendant. Airlines are looking for people with excellent verbal skill: speaking and listening skills.* Being part of spoken cycle, speaking is mainly integrated with listening. This complemented the results of the questionnaire as in Fig. 1, since the skill that followed as the second most important was listening (14.56%).

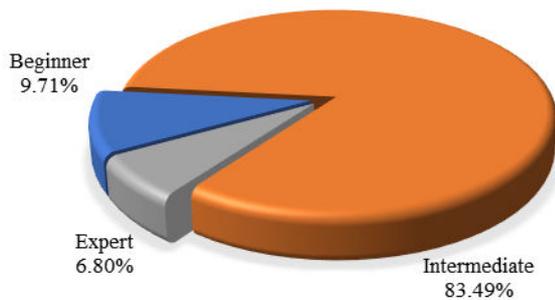


Fig. 2. The trainees' English proficiency

Concerning about the current level of the trainees, most of them (83.49%) claimed as intermediate. This fitted to the fact that most of them were fresh-graduated from senior high school or vocational school. The stakeholder of program confirmed this, since they had a proficiency test as part of the registration examination. However, the instructor revealed different angles of the matter, *if we look into the students' backgrounds, they come from different schools with different qualities. It cannot be denied that some of the schools are better from the others. Thus, this fact automatically made their levels also varied.* She also added some of them were fluent in speaking with considerable vocabularies, as categorized in upper intermediate, while some of them knew only the basics.

TABLE II. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

Problems	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Unable to find suitable vocabularies	52	50.49
Unable use appropriate terminology & expression.	84	81.55
Have difficulty to pronounce the word correctly	59	57.28
Lack knowledge of grammar and structure	66	64.08
Unable to speak fluently	73	70.87

Table 2 depicts the problems encountered by the trainees in their learning progress. It was found that being unable use appropriate terminology and expression was rated as the most common problem (f=84, 81.55%), while followed by being unable to speak fluently (f=73, 70.87%), the lacks in grammar and structure (f=66, 64.08%), the difficulty in pronunciation (f=59, 57.28%), and the limited vocabulary (f=52, 50.49%).

As the aspects of the learning needs, it was also necessary to comprehend what the trainees really want to learn and compared them with the viewpoint of practitioners from the work field. Regarding the theme of the lesson, one of the flight attendants said *[important topics] like the general understandings about what could possibly happen in airplane cabin, such as related to medical and security issues, if something happens to the passengers or crewmembers, and conditions such as emergency, aircraft facilities, its features, etc.* While pertaining to qualities of future workers, the instructor also contributed that *Airlines prefer someone who can relate favourably to passengers, can offer a good service, have a positive and engaging personality.* Hence, it subliminally indulges the essence of a flight attendant must-have qualification in customer (passenger) care subject.

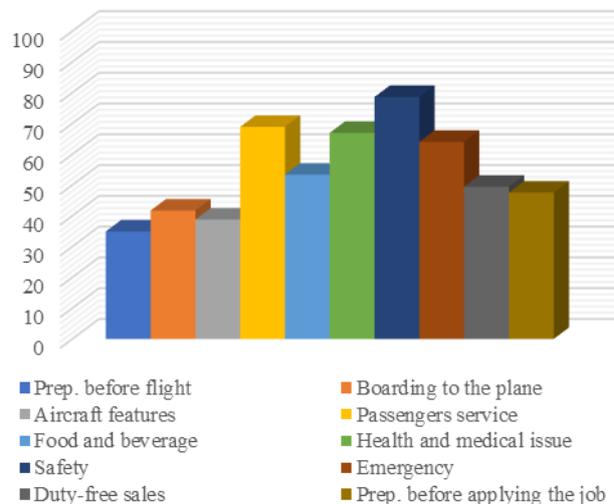


Fig. 3. Job-related expression

Figure 3 is the trainees' viewpoint about essential topics and work-related language function/expression. It indicated important topics were established by a significant percentage (above half) of the participants. They were related to safety (f=81, 78.64%), passenger service (f=71, 68.93%), health and medical issue (f=69, 66.99%), and emergency (f=66, 64.08%).

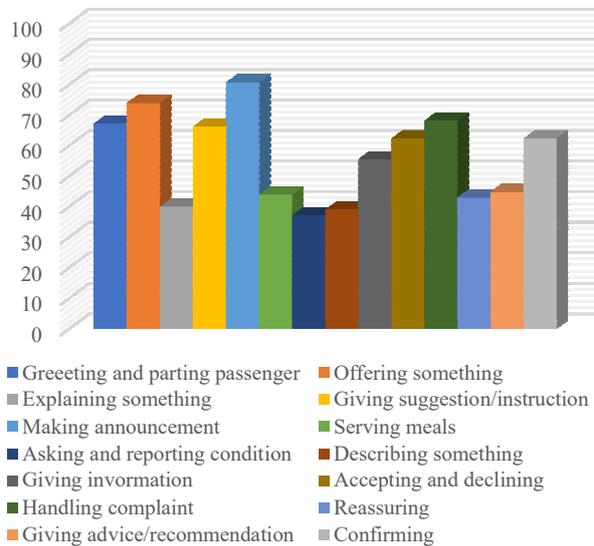


Fig. 4. Preferences about specific expressions

According to the result of the trainees' questionnaires, the Fig. 4 showed their preferences about the specific expressions or language functions needed to aid the occupation-related knowledge. The expression selected as the most important was making announcement (f=83, 80.58%), followed by offering something (f=76, 73.79%), and handling complaint (f=70, 67.96%). Meanwhile, the least chosen expression was reporting condition (f=38, 36.89%).

The results of other interview items were obtained by combining participants' opinions. It was concluded that the roles of instructor are to brainstorm and explain the learning materials in detail, to provide some examples before the exercises, and to give feedback after each lesson. One of the instructors reflected, *[educator] job is to provide materials and examples as the learning sources, and to prepare them to be ready in the work field, also to push them to be more creative and independent learners.*

B. Discussion

The findings have illustrated numerous issues that covered the needs of the prospective flight attendants. The main purpose of learning English according to most interviewees is to prepare the students to be able to achieve the needs of the future job. Therefore, in order to be a professional flight attendant, alongside with other physical skills and knowledge in work

field, the students need to learn English to improve their qualifications, this leads to the usage of English for Specific Purposes as stated by Hutchinson and Waters [5], ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. Then, it is also supported by the following point, based on the high importance of learning English for the students of training programs, they agree that the goal of learning English is to prepare the students to be able to attain the needs of the future job.

The trainees consider language skills that are most likely to use in the work field are Speaking and followed by Listening with a significant range. This suits the statement of the currently working flight attendants in the interviews on the needs. In line with the previous point but with a slight difference in the percentage significance between the mentioned skills, Karimi and Sanavi [13] found in their research, that both speaking and listening are respectively the main concern and target needs of the Aviation students.

The current English proficiencies of the students correspond with the supposed level of ESL high school graduates which is placed between B1-B2 based on The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) description [14], which means they were capable to understand and communicate in a context to give varied and complex information with little mistakes in the language structures, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation.

Moreover, the difficulties experienced by the trainee are being unable to use work-related expressions and being unable to speak fluently. There was a similarity for this case with the result of Prachanant's research [8] about tour guides' needs which reported that using unsuitable words and expressions in speaking was rated as the most serious problem for them. It was due the fact that both professions need the subjects to interact with the consumers or clients directly, and also, they, in the most ways, operated relatively in the same area under the umbrella of the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, the preferences for contents of the teaching and learning process according the students are: (a) topics of materials which are related to safety and passenger service, and (b) job-related expressions that concern to making announcement, offering something, and handling complaints. Based on their research about aviation students' preferences for topics, Parohinog and Meesri [15] mention that it was highly influenced by enrolling in the airlines and undertaking aircrew duties which principally belong to service-oriented industry.

The results also show two important roles for the instructor, which are the provider of information and example to gain students' interest and knowledge, and assessor who gives feedback at the end of lesson and is expected to know and help their students' lack of understanding. When students learned language, they

have chances to know and act with the language in a context that they understand and consider fascinating which can be used in future professional works. Besides, the instructor or material developer could provide the class with specific interests and authentic contexts as the learning tools and could act as the source of information for the students. But of course, this condition should be supported by involving the role of students, hence the instructor could look forward to build the students' English language development as a part of professional development.

V. CONCLUSION

The result was undeviating in pointing out some substantial needs of specific English language in flight attendant professions. This insinuated that an effective and accurate English language instruction is seriously needed to perform the job effectively, and accordingly played an essential role for the flight attendant career path.

As the overall result extrapolated, the research specifically revealed that the importance of English in work field was very high. The trainees' goal to study English was to attain their future job requirement. Speaking skill is regarded as the most essential skill for them. The majority of the trainees rated their English current proficiency in intermediate level. The trainees' main difficulty in learning English is their lack of knowledge about the job-related expressions. Their most preferred topics are about safety and passenger service. In the meantime, the most needed expressions according to the trainee are making announcements, offering things, and handling complaint. The trainee's preferred roles of the instructor are as provider and assessor.

The findings of this study can be insightful to language teachers and material developers. However, the further research is expected in this case, so the result could be processed, developed, examined, and improved into a fixed learning material. As for increasing its competitiveness toward others, the training program has to continue the comprehensive analysis of the needs and to strengthen its professional instructors by providing plentiful instruments and resources in assisting the progress of skills and language acquisition. In a way, perhaps this study may help the ESP learning material designer to understand the students' needs from numerous standpoints.

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