



A Task-Based Needs Analysis for English Correspondence Course

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Abstract. This paper reports research results on task-based needs analysis for English correspondence course in hotel context for vocational students in university level. A task-based analysis on the needs of the course was conducted to identify the real needs of English correspondence that hotel staffs conduct in performing their jobs, which included the tasks performed, the frequencies and degrees of the difficulty of the tasks. A questionnaire was distributed to the respondents who were hotel staff whose one of the job descriptions in their work places was performing correspondence. Data triangulation was carried out by conducting semi-structured interviews with a few staff. The results indicated that among the sixteen tasks listed, all were performed by the respondents in working. Among them, more than half of the respondents reported that answering inquiry emails, checking detailed information of guests, writing and sending confirmation email, writing memos and logbooks to teammates were done on daily basis. The results also indicated that some respondents reported that sending invoice, contract rate, reservations via WhatsApp or emails, writing memos and logbooks, handling complaints through emails and WhatsApp were difficult. The findings of this research would be able to provide a sound and valuable basis for the development of English Correspondence syllabus and materials, particularly the selection of topic/materials, and topics/materials that need to be given more time allotment, practices, and emphasis in the instructions.

Keywords: Task-based · Needs Analysis · English Correspondence

1 Introduction

English correspondence is one important course provided for students in tertiary level, as in this course the students will learn to achieve the competence of being able to write correspondence in English. The correspondence can be any forms depending on the needs, namely letters, faxes, and emails [1]. This course is also offered as a compulsory course in the vocational English Department in one of the public universities in Bali. This course is given in the fifth semester. Preliminary research on the course has indicated that the present syllabus was not developed based on needs analysis. It was developed based on the materials provided in the main reference that was used. The feedback of the previous students indicated that they felt that some contents of the book were not relevant

to their future needs of working in hotels. Moreover, the contents were too much that they were overwhelmed. Therefore, to renew the syllabus and the materials is urgently needed.

English correspondence is a part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP itself is characterised by needs, that the materials and the teaching should be based on the learners' needs and purposes of learning [2]. As purposes of learning are the basis of the materials and instructions, a needs analysis is a crucial step. Needs analysis refers to the techniques done to collect and assess information that are relevant to the course. This is a continuous process of identifying the how and what of a course [3].

There are many models of needs analysis proposed by experts, namely target situation analysis, present situation analysis, and task-based needs analysis [4]. In this study, task-based needs analysis was applied as it has more advantages than other models. One of which is it provides more valid data about the target tasks as it collects information from the professionals that performs the tasks in the real work field [5]. Task-based needs analysis is also the first step of task-based language teaching, which will be implemented for the instructions of the English Correspondence course.

This task-based needs analysis was administered to 25 respondents who worked in front office section in hotels in Bali. Their experience of working in hotel ranged from 3 until 30 years. Considering the time, they are considered as experienced front office staff. The study used respondents who worked in front office as it is commonly staff in front office who have the job of handling English correspondence. The section that takes this responsibility is usually the reservation section. In several hotels, there are reservation staff who only work in that section, but there are also reservation staff that at the same time work in other sections on Front Office, namely in reception, telephone operator, etc.

This study is a part of needs analysis done as initial procedure for task-based material development for English Correspondence. This study investigates the types of tasks performed in the area of English Correspondence in hotel context, their frequencies, and degree of difficulty. By recognizing the types of tasks, the types of correspondence used that need to be included in the materials, will be found out.

2 Theoretical Framework

This research aimed to carry out task-based needs analysis of English Correspondence course for vocational students in university level. It investigated the tasks commonly performed in the area of English Correspondence in hotel context, their frequencies, and degree of difficulty. English correspondence itself is a type of English for Specific Purposes or commonly known as ESP. Below are explained some relevant literature related to the study.

2.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English as a foreign language can be divided into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and General English (GE). What differentiates ESP to GE is that in ESP, all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning. This characteristic

implies that ESP teachers have much work to do for designing courses that are appropriate for specific groups of learners. Designing courses will include designing the syllabus, materials, teaching and learning, as well as evaluation. This course design will answer the needs of the learners. Further, in Hutchinson and Waters' tree of ELT, ESP can be further divided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) depending on the reasons of the students in learning English [7]. English correspondence in this classification is included in English for Occupational Purposes, as the materials are designed for the learners to perform tasks in the area of correspondence in any form: email, letter, fax, etc.

2.2 Task-Based Needs Analysis

Task-based needs analysis is a model of needs analysis that adopts tasks as the basis of syllabus design. Tasks are classified into two: real life tasks that refer to the use of language in the real world outside the classroom, and pedagogical tasks, which refer to what the learners do in class, rather than outside the classroom [8].

Task-based needs analysis is the first step of Task-based Language Teaching. The complete steps are: conducting task-based needs analysis to identify target tasks in the real work place where the language will be used, classifying the tasks into several types, deriving the pedagogical tasks to be done in classroom, listing the pedagogical tasks in sequence, writing the complete syllabus, assessing students' performance using task-based, criterion-referenced performance tests [9].

2.3 Empirical Review

A few other researchers have conducted task-based needs analysis in the needs analysis of an ESP course. Huh [4] conducted a research on task based-needs analysis for business English [4]. The objective of the analysis was to identify the business English business tasks frequently performed by Korean business professionals. Their previous experiences during taking business English course, their attitudes as well as wants regarding the course were also investigated. The research resulted in a list of business English tasks and their frequency which then further classified into more abstract target task types to be developed into syllabus [4]. In addition, another study related to task-based needs analysis in Business Spanish was conducted [6]. The needs analysis took place in two phases. In the first phase, the needs analysis identified the tasks which were relevant for business graduates, business instructors, and business professionals through semi-structured interview and a survey. In phase 2, a close-ended Likert scale questionnaire was administered to the respondents to obtain data on their perception on their frequencies and degree of difficulty. The results of the study listed 40 target tasks, with 21 of them were reportedly frequently done by the respondents. These 21 tasks were then categorized into five more abstract super-ordinate tasks that made up the syllabus of one semester of business Spanish [6]. Another outstanding research was conducted on task-based needs analysis to identify communicative needs for study abroad students in Japan. The study employed two kinds of instruments, namely semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The research revealed the students' immediate speaking needs and several important but difficult tasks they need to do [10].

3 Method

This study is a survey study applying mixed method. The instruments used were questionnaire in the form of Google form, and semi-structured interview guidelines. The questionnaire was developed by taking into account the results of interviews with three front officers that had been working in hotel, particularly reservation section, for more than 25 years and literature review. For the literature review, a few books and articles were studied to identify types of correspondence commonly performed by Front Office staff. The interview with the three respondents and literature review resulted in a list of tasks normally performed in the area of English correspondence in Front Office section. This list then became basis for the questionnaire development. The questionnaire itself is a 5-point Likert scale and validated by two experts; one was a lecturer in university level who also holds assessor certificate or Front Office, the other one is a resort manager of a hotel in North Bali that had experience working in hotel for more than 30 years. After being calculated by using Gregory formula, the validity score was 1, which means that the questionnaire was valid to be used as an instrument to collect data. The questionnaire used had four sections. The first section contained demographic data, containing the email address and the length of the experience of the respondents in working with English correspondence. The second section surveyed the types of tasks commonly performed by FO officers in relation to English correspondence. The third section surveyed the frequency of each task, and the fourth section surveyed the degree of difficulty of each task.

There were 25 respondents taking parts in filling in the survey, who had experience working in hotel from 3 until 30 years. Data triangulation then was done by interviewing five of the respondents to confirm the results of the questionnaire analysis. The responses from the respondents were classified and counted, and the percentage was obtained. The percentage will show whether the tasks listed are performed in their workplace, the frequency of each task, and the degree of each task. The results of the interview were also transcribed.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Findings

This research aimed to carry out task-based needs analysis of English Correspondence course for vocational students in university level. It investigated the tasks commonly performed in the area of English Correspondence in hotel context, their frequencies, and degree of difficulty.

Table 1 displays the results of the analysis on the tasks performed by the respondents in their daily work.

Regarding the types of tasks, among the 16 tasks listed in the questionnaire, namely 1) Answering inquiry email, 2) Checking detailed information about guests, 3) Sending invoice, 4) Updating contract rate, 5) Writing and sending confirmation email, 6) Writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp, 7) Writing and sending order email (to transport vendor, etc.), 8) Writing and sending order WhatsApp (to vendors outside

Table 1. The English correspondence tasks performed

No	Tasks	Responses	
		Yes	No
1	Answering inquiry email	100%	0%
2	Checking detailed information of guests	100%	0%
3	Sending invoice	96%	4%
4	Updating contract rate	64%	36%
5	Writing and sending confirmation email	96%	4%
6	Writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp	96%	4%
7	Writing and sending reservation/booking email (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	92%	8%
8	Writing and sending reservation/booking WhatsApp (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	84%	16%
9	Writing memo for teammates	92%	8%
10	Writing logbook for teammates	92%	8%
11	Writing letter	96%	4%
12	Writing report	96%	4%
13	Writing message form	92%	8%
14	Writing and sending fax	4%	96%
15	Responding to complaints via email	88%	12%
16	Responding to complaints via WhatsApp	88%	12%

hotel), 9) Writing memo for teammates, 10) Writing logbook for teammates, 11) Writing letter, 12) Writing report, 13) Writing message form, 14) Writing and sending fax, 15) Responding to complaints via email, 16) Responding to complaints via WhatsApp, all were performed by the respondents, though the percentages were varied. Answering inquiry email and checking detailed information of guests were two tasks that were done by all respondents (100%), followed by writing report (96%), and writing and sending confirmation email (96%), writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp (96%), writing message forms (92%), writing memo for teammates (92%), and writing logbook for teammates. Writing and sending fax seemed to be the least done task (4%).

The results were confirmed by the interview, as presented in the following transcription.

“I think we reply emails every day, that is inquiry email. We also check guests’ details, like number of room, date, special requests, things like that. You have to focus in doing that. You cannot make mistake” (R1)

“We don’t use fax anymore. We use WhatsApp a lot. In our hotel, there is phone in the room. We use WhatsApp. The guests are okay with that” (R3)

Being focus in checking the guests' details and writing or inserting data in the system (writing report) is one skill that the interviewees highlighted. They explained more than one time during the interview that the staffs have to be focused in doing those jobs. If there is a mistake in the data, that would be a complicated job to revise and re-arrange the booking.

From the findings, the forms of the correspondence or paper works that are done in the area of English correspondence in hotel context are: emails, which may be replies to inquiry (giving information about hotel and negotiating, confirmation with quotation), reports that contain information on guests' reservation details, replies to complaints, memo, logbook, message form, letter, invoice, contract rate, WhatsApp messages, and invoice.

Regarding the frequency of the tasks, Table 2 displays the findings.

For the first task, answering inquiry email, more than half of respondents do it on daily basis, the rest did it often (16%), sometimes (12%), rarely (12%), and none of them reported that they never did it. For the second task, 72% reported that they did it on

Table 2. The frequency of performing the tasks

No	Tasks	Responses				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Everyday
1	Answering inquiry email	0%	12%	16%	16%	56%
2	Checking detailed information of guests	0%	4%	8%	16%	72%
3	Sending invoice	4%	12%	32%	24%	28%
4	Updating contract rate	36%	8%	24%	20%	12%
5	Writing and sending confirmation email	0%	4%	8%	28%	60%
6	Writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp	4%	0%	16%	32%	48%
7	Writing and sending reservation/booking email (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	8%	12%	28%	32%	20%
8	Writing and sending reservation/booking WhatsApp (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	16%	16%	24%	28%	16%
9	Writing memo for teammates	8%	0%	16%	20%	56%
10	Writing logbook for teammates	8%	4%	4%	20%	64%
11	Writing letter	4%	20%	28%	20%	28%
12	Writing report	0%	4%	16%	40%	40%
13	Writing message form	8%	8%	24%	24%	36%
14	Writing and sending fax	96%	4%	0%	0%	0%
15	Responding to complaints via email	12%	0%	52%	20%	16%
16	Responding to complaints via WhatsApp	12%	4%	44%	20%	20%

daily basis, and none of them reported that they never did it, though 16% said that they did it often, 8% sometimes, and 4% rarely. For the third task, sending invoice, almost all respondents did it, but at different frequency, 32% of them reported that they did it sometimes, 24% of them reported that they did it often, 28% every day, 12% rarely, and 4% never. For task no. 4, updating contract rate, 36% of them reported that they never did it, 24% sometimes did it, 20% often did it, 12% every day, and 8% rarely. Regarding writing and sending confirmation email, all of them reported that they did it, with 60% did it on daily basis. Respondents also reported that they sent confirmation WhatsApp, to agents and guests, but with different percentages. There was only 1 person (4%) that reported that he/she never did it. The respondents also reported that they wrote and sent reservation/booking emails and WhatsApp to outside parties, for example reservation for reservations, restaurants, entertainments, etc., but with different percentages. Regarding written communication with their teammates, the respondents reported that they wrote memos and logbooks too. For memo, 56% reported that they wrote or used it every day, and for logbooks, 64% reported that they used it every day. Regarding message form, all of them reported that they did the task, but with different percentages. Regarding fax, most of them never used it, only one person reported that they still used it, but rarely. For responding to complaints via email, more than half of them reported that they sometimes did it, 20% often did it, 16% did it every day, and 12% never did it. Regarding responding complaints via WhatsApp, 44% reported that they sometimes did it, 20% often did it, another 20% did it on daily basis, 12% never did it, and 4% rarely did it.

The interview with the respondents confirmed the results of the questionnaire, as it is shown in the transcription below.

“I think I almost every day write and send emails, like confirmation, with quotation, and reply to email from agents or guests.” (R12)

“For memo, we write for our team, not to the guests. We also write message form here, for the guests, if there is message” (R1)

“For our team, we use log book. Important things we write there.” (R4)

These findings of the frequency of each task give us basis to decide which topic/task should be given more time or emphasis in the lesson plans or instructions in class. More than half of the respondents reported that they performed answering inquiry emails, checking detailed information of guests, writing and sending confirmation email, writing memos and logbooks to teammates on daily basis. So, those topics/tasks should be given more time allotment during the instructions in class.

Table 3 displays results on the respondents' report on the degree of difficulty of the tasks.

Regarding the respondents' perception on the degree of the difficulty of the tasks, there were three tasks which received responses on the category of very difficult, although with low percentage, namely updating contract rate (12%), writing and sending reservations via WhatsApp to outside parties (4%), and responding to complaints via emails (12%). There were also respondents who reported some tasks to be difficult. The tasks were sending invoice (4%), updating contract rate (8%), writing and sending reservations to outside parties (4%), writing memos for teammates (4%), writing logbooks for teammates (4%), responding to complaints via email (8%), and responding to complaints

Table 3. The degree of difficulty of the tasks

No	Tasks	Responses				
		Not Difficult at All	Somewhat Difficult	So So	Difficult	Very Difficult
1	Answering inquiry email	64%	20%	16%	0%	0%
2	Checking detailed information of guests	88%	8%	4%	0%	0%
3	Sending invoice	64%	28%	4%	4%	0%
4	Updating contract rate	40%	12%	28%	4%	16%
5	Writing and sending confirmation email	72%	20%	8%	0%	0%
6	Writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp	84%	0%	16%	0%	0%
7	Writing and sending reservation/booking email (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	56%	20%	24%	0%	0%
8	Writing and sending reservation/booking WhatsApp (to outside parties/service providers/vendors)	56%	16%	20%	4%	4%
9	Writing memo for teammates	88%	0%	8%	4%	0%
10	Writing logbook for teammates	88%	0%	8%	4%	0%
11	Writing letter	64%	24%	12%	0%	0%
12	Writing report	60%	24%	16%	0%	0%
13	Writing message form	76%	8%	16%	0%	0%
14	Writing and sending fax	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
15	Responding to complaints via email	28%	32%	20%	8%	12%
16	Responding to complaints via WhatsApp	32%	36%	20%	12%	0%

via WhatsApp (12%). The results of the interview also depicted similar perception of the respondents.

“Handling complaints directly or by email or by phone is not easy, but thank God I’m quite experienced in it, so I don’t get panicked” (R2)

“In updating contract rate or in reading in writing any information, we should not make mistakes. Sometimes if we don’t concentrate, we make mistakes” (R14)

“Yes, I think new employees or trainees need to learn how to handle complaints. Sometimes guests can be very angry. We have to stay calm and patient” (R15)

The respondents who were interviewed highlighted the importance of training on handling complaints, be it directly, by phone, or by email. Respondent 15 also suggested that learners should be prepared in class complaint cases in hotels, so they will be able to practice to handle them.

These results indicated that invoice, contract rate, reservations via WhatsApp or emails, memos and logbooks, handling complaints through emails and WhatsApp need to be given emphasis during the instructions. More tasks and case studies can be provided for the learners to get exposed to the real needs in hotel English correspondence.

4.2 Discussion

The research results indicated some most common types of tasks related to English correspondence, namely writing and sending emails, which may be replies to inquiry (giving information about hotel and negotiating, confirmation with quotation), writing reports that contain information on guests' reservation details, writing replies to complaints, memo, logbook, message form, letter, invoice, contract rate, WhatsApp messages, and invoice. Emails remained one body of correspondence most frequently done in hotel contexts. This is in line with the previous research which developed English correspondence handbook for administrative staff of one public university in Bali. Even though the research was not in hotel context, but in university instead, the basic needs of correspondence learners should learn were emails and letters [11]. Writing these two can be problematic. In addition, in line with a research on developing material of English correspondence using task-based approach for students of a public university in Semarang, most of the students were reported facing difficulty in understanding and writing formal letters. They lacked of knowledge about types of formal letter, letter style, and concept of letter sections. In addition, they also faced problems with grammar, spelling, and punctuation [12]. So, lessons on those areas are needed to improve students' ability in writing formal letters, which will be needed by them in the work filed.

The results of this research are also in line with the previous study concerning a needs analysis for business material at a private university in Indonesia revealed that in terms of correspondence, the needs were writing emails, letters, contract/agreement documents, and report documents, with emails and letters gained bigger percentage from the respondents [13].

The research results of a study regarding Business Spanish needs analysis revealed similar findings, where in the area of English correspondence, writing a formal email, a formal letter, a report a brief memo are reported as frequently done tasks by the respondents. Regarding the difficulty in performing the tasks, not significant number of respondents reported that they were quite difficult. Most of them reported that the tasks were not at all difficult (for writing emails), not much (for writing a formal letter), so (for writing a report on the business summary and writing memo) [6].

5 Conclusion

The data analysis indicated that the tasks that were performed related to correspondence in English in hotel context were 1) answering inquiry email, 2) checking detailed information about guests, 3) sending invoice, 4) updating contract rate, 5) writing and sending confirmation email, 6) writing and sending confirmation WhatsApp, 7) Writing and sending order email (to transport vendor, etc.), 8) Writing and sending order WhatsApp (to vendors outside hotel), 9) Writing memo for teammates, 10) Writing logbook for teammates, 11) Writing letter, 12) Writing report, 13) Writing message form, 14) Writing and fax, 15) Responding to complaints via email, 16) Responding to complaints via WhatsApp. Among them, more than half of the respondents reported that answering inquiry emails, checking detailed information of guests, writing and sending confirmation email, writing memos and logbooks to teammates on daily basis were done on daily basis. These results on the frequency and degree of difficulty indicate that these four topics could be given more time allotment in the instructions in class.

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