

Need Analysis of English Skills in Front Office Department of Hotel Industry

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Abstract

English as international language plays an important role, such as establish social communication or relationship with other people in the world. If we have good ability in English, it will be easy for us to conduct an international relation with all nations in the world. Hotel is one of tourism industry that has relationship in English communication where the process of communication happens as services given to the guest. The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative, the method to give description of needs in the use of English by Front Office department hotel in Malang. The researcher limited the hotels only the members of Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) in Malang. The respondents of this study were taken from 88 hotels in Malang who has 3 years up working experience in Front Office Department. At the end of the research, the researcher found that speaking skill was maximally used in hotel front office. The hotel front office showed a strong tendency toward using speaking skill more frequently.

Key Words: English language skills, English for specific purpose, Hotel Front Office

INTRODUCTION

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are, in the first instance, auditory and they are produced by the so-called "organs of speech." Language cannot be separated from the existence of human life. This shows how important it is to communicate emotion or ideas between human beings. In fact, human beings and social group are held together by the use of language.

English is as an International Language that plays an important role, such as to establish social communication or relationship with other people in the world. It is easy for us to conduct an international relation with all nations in the world if we have good ability in English.

English for specific purposes has been defined by many writers and researchers. It was a new branch of English teaching and learning. ESP had emphasized the learners' abilities to use language as a tool for communication and was also concerned with the learners'

problems. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), they defined it as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning.

Hotel is one of tourism industry that still has relationship in English communication where the process communication happens as services given to the guest. All of departments within to the hotel offer services, Front Office Department. Service industry opens to the public and cover many facilities open 24 hours a day. Hotel is the one of type of accommodation service that provides guest room, foods and beverages and others.

As one part of Hospitality Industry, hotel has duty to welcome those travellers whether they were domestic or from abroad. Communication is a way to know the need of the guests. If the guests are local, the language used to communicate will be Indonesia. If the guests are foreigners, English will be the language to be used to communicate. Front Office (FO) is the important part in a company especially in Hotel. It is main part in hotel before entering the hotel. All information about hotel found in Front Office Department.

It is in line with Widiningrum (2010) who stated that English is a worldwide language and it is interesting to know the English communication needs in Hospitality Industry. The more the hotel and tourism industry in Malang growing up, the more English skills are needed for people who work in this field. English is one of the most important tools that will help front office department to work proficiently and effectively. Not

surprisingly, the basic qualification required for hotel front office department is an excellent command of English skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The front office department is one of the departments in the hotel using English skills while working. In general, hotel front office department spend much of their time for conversation, preparing and writing formal letter, and email. They use reading skills when they gather information to make front office documents. Not only writing and reading skills are required, but also other skills are needed. Speaking and listening skills are required when they have a short communication with the guests.

The front office department's staff found some difficulties to deliver the idea or conversation using English. It occurs with several contribution such as education background, the frequency of using English, and untrained staff for English communication. Hotel staff is considered in supporting factor in determining customers satisfaction. Language proficiency is necessary for the hotel staff in the hotel industry especially the front office staff. However, lack of English skills and difficulties in communicating with customer affect the service and customers' satisfaction. Furthermore, the researcher formulated the research problem as follows: "What is the most English skill need by the front office department in their work?"

METHOD

This study focuses in finding the English communication needs in all hotel in Malang. They are many foreigner stayed in that hotel which

support the intensity in using English to communicate. There is one goal of this study that is to interpret the English need, which is required by hotel front office staff.

The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative, a method to give description of needs and problems of English used by front office department hotel in Malang. A descriptive design determines and reports the way of the research. The researcher look at the context of events, natural setting, subjects' perspectives, unfolding and uncontrolled events, reason for the events and phenomena needed which is needed for more exploration and explanation. This study was intended to determine the terms used in front office hotel and used some theory to analyse the data.

Qualitative method used to understand phenomena and situations as evaluators. The usual approach of research design is collecting data on a numbers of some aspects such as setting of study in order to put them together in a complete picture of the social dynamic situation or planning. In addition qualitative research does not strictly bound to formal research condition.

The instruments employed in this study were interview and questionnaires. This study limited to the perception of the subjects based on these two research instruments. The target limited only members of the *Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI)* in Malang which are supported by the Tourism and Culture Department of Malang, where the subjects in this study are 88 Hotels who has 3 years up working experience in this field

The questionnaires were written in English, the items used in the questionnaires were both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were designed to obtain 3 parts of the following information. The questionnaires were developed based on literature, research reviews, and the responses from the preliminary interviews with some hotel front office department. Then, the draft of the questionnaires was edited and revised according to the suggestion from the experts and sources relevant to the need of research. It was also tried out in the pilot study with some hotel front office department. Therefore, it should be reasonable to claim the face validity as the justification of the research instruments. The questionnaires was designed to obtain the following information: (1) General information of the respondents, such as age, position at work, place of work, educational background, and working experience; (2) General language English skill used

The methods employed are survey questionnaires and semi-structured interview. The samples of the study were the hotel that has had 1-3 years of working experience in the target hotels. 88 Of 93 hotels front office were selected to be the participants to answer the questions. All of them were interviewed to elicit self-reports of their opinions and attitudes toward English in use in their occupations.

The data from the questionnaires were analysed to identify the needs and problems in using English of hotel front office in their workplaces with following steps (1) Summarized the data what

is in the data; (2) Analysed the data to identify the needs in using English in their workplaces.

The researcher contacted the director of the human resource department or sent a letter to them asking for their permission and cooperation to collect data from their employees. Three days after sending the letter, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and collected by the researcher one week afterwards. In addition, to strengthen the data the researcher also used survey questionnaires and interview to the front office staffs. The interview were conducted in Malang with various time length from 20 - 30 minutes. It was necessary to ask permission from some subjects for a follow up interview, as more information was sometimes required.

FINDING

General Background

The age range of the respondents was between 23 and 39 years old. The higher percentage is 43.18% the respondents' age around 23 - 25 years old. The number of the respondents who received a bachelor and a master's degree are slightly different (76.1% and 23.8%, respectively), while no respondents received doctoral degree. Most of the respondents graduated from a university in Indonesia using Indonesia language as a medium in teaching-learning activities (62.5%). The number of the respondents who graduated from a university abroad and a university in Indonesia using English language as a medium in teaching-learning activities are nearly the same (20.5% and 17%, respectively). Most of the respondents had taken some extra English courses, which are not

compulsory courses in the university, at language institutions in Indonesia (59.1%). Interestingly, some respondents had taken extra English courses abroad (22.7%). However, 18.2% of respondents presented that they had never taken any extra English courses

The majority of the respondents have had work experience in hotel FO for 1-5 years (63.7%). Only, 36% of the respondents have had work experience in hotel FO for 6-10 years. Focusing on work experience in hotel FO at international hotels, the number of the respondents who have never had work experience and the respondents who have had work experience in hotel FO at international hotels are slightly similar (51.1% and 48.9%)

General Language English Skill Used

The respondents were asked to arrange four English skills used during working according to the frequency of usage. Four skills are used unequally by the hotel front office department. The speaking skill is most frequently used while working in maximal degree ($X = 3.11$, $SD = 1.10$). Also, the writing skill is used maximally during working ($X = 2.69$, $SD = 1.04$). Next, the listening skill is used minimally while working ($X = 2.20$, $SD = 0.95$). However, reading skill is the least used English skill by the hotel FO ($X = 1.99$, $SD = 1.05$).

DISCUSSION

According to the data obtained, each English skill was used unequally. The speaking and writing skill was rated frequently used skill in the domain of work. It was relevant to the job

responsibilities of hotel front office, who mostly used the speaking and writing skill, including explaining information, preparing the hotel's information, and composing some letters.

The speaking was maximally used while working. The hotel front office showed a strong tendency toward using speaking skills more frequently. This could be due to the fact that English serves a variety of functions in the front office working process. For example, giving information, simple conversation, writing e-mail messages and faxes, handling telephone inquiries, dealing with tourists and co-workers in various situations, all were carried out in English.

From the findings, it could be interpreted that the respondents had a positive attitude toward English. Although they graduated and received bachelor and master's degrees, they still had taken some extra English courses. They also indicated that it would be helpful and useful if any language institutes open English courses that meet the needs of people in different working fields such as English for the hotel FO, English for secretaries, or English for engineers. They suggested that the human resources department should support their staff to gain more knowledge in English by inviting language specialists to teach them after working time.

IMPLICATION

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) indicated that the purpose of an ESP course is to enable learners to function adequately in a situation in which learners will use the language they are learning. This

study has been influenced by the work of Hutchinson and Waters. They defined needs in term of "target needs" and "learning needs". Target needs are understood as 'what the learner needs to do in the target situation, and learning needs are what the learner needs to do in order to learn. The main concern of this study is an analysis of the target needs of the subjects in the workplace only.

Due to the findings of this study, it is recommended that universities should add English courses for hotel front office in their curriculum. These courses should also be created in accordance with actual usage of English for hotel front office. Not only English for hotel front office, but also the other fields such as English for secretaries or English for engineers should be established in the curriculum as well.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The tourism of Malang has been successful in terms of increasing the number of tourists and revenue generated. The number of international tourists traveling to Malang tends to rise continuously. The hotels in Malang would have a great opportunity to welcome and directly contact international tourists. It is very necessary to prepare and train all staff to communicate with international guests by using English effectively and appropriately. Because of the responsibility of the hotel front office, they are expected to have an excellent command of English skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate English authentically used by the hotel front office which analysed their needs. The results obtained from this study may be used as guidelines for course designers to develop a specific English course for current hotel front office and the students who want to work as hotel front office in the future.

According to the data obtained, the speaking was maximally used in front office hotels while they are working. The hotel front office showed a strong tendency toward using speaking skills more frequently. This could be due to the fact that English serves a variety of functions in the front office working process.

Suggestion

In relation to the results of this study, the researcher suggest that in universities, ESP should take place as a selective English course. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) stated that the use of authentic material can make the connection between two worlds possible, the academic and the professional, in a practical way. Adults need to obtain information they can apply outside the academic world. Therefore, the content of the course should be based on the activities that are related to the real working situation.

Besides, the human resources department should support their staff to gain more knowledge and skills in English by inviting the expert of English to teach them after working time. The finding of this study might be used as a guideline for setting the English course for hotel front office. Furthermore, the

organization should encourage and empower them to use English confidently.

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