

Identifying English Language Learning Needs of Hoteliers in a Five-Star Hotel in Jakarta

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Abstract

The need for English proficiency in the hospitality industry has become urgent due to the increasing number of international guests visiting Indonesia for many different purposes business, tourism, and education. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, a needs analysis is essential for instructors to provide their students with the specific language skills they need for their respective jobs. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the needs of hoteliers at a five-star hotel in Jakarta through a semi-structured interview with the English teacher at the hotel as the representative of the Learning and Development (L&D) team. The interview result showed that the hoteliers, especially the Food & Beverage and the Culinary department, urgently needed to improve their English proficiency to communicate with guests and foreign co-workers since they still lacked speaking and listening skills in English. The hoteliers also had a low level of confidence and difficulty in developing ideas. This can be seen from how they tended not to speak much when using the English language. The interview results were transcribed and coded into four categories: necessities, wants, lacks, and learning needs. The results can be taken into consideration for future studies, which involve designing and developing an ESP module specifically tailored for hoteliers.

Keywords: English For Specific Purposes; Needs Analysis; Hotelier

Abstrak

Kebutuhan akan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris di industri perhotelan menjadi mendesak karena meningkatnya jumlah tamu internasional yang berkunjung ke Indonesia untuk berbagai tujuan bisnis, pariwisata, dan pendidikan. Dalam kursus Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus (ESP), analisis kebutuhan sangat penting bagi pengajar untuk dapat memberikan pengajaran kemampuan bahasa yang spesifik yang dibutuhkan oleh para pelajar dalam pekerjaan mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kebutuhan para staf perhotelan di sebuah hotel bintang lima di Jakarta melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru bahasa Inggris di hotel tersebut sebagai perwakilan dari tim Learning and Development (L&D). Hasil wawancara menunjukkan bahwa para staf perhotelan, khususnya bagian food & beverage dan kuliner, sangat membutuhkan peningkatan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris mereka untuk berkomunikasi dengan tamu dan rekan kerja asing karena mereka masih memiliki kemampuan berbicara dan mendengarkan yang kurang baik ketika berinteraksi dalam bahasa Inggris. Para staf perhotelan juga memiliki tingkat kepercayaan diri yang rendah dan kesulitan dalam mengembangkan ide. Hal ini dapat dilihat dari bagaimana mereka cenderung tidak banyak berbicara ketika menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Hasil wawancara ditranskrip dan dikodekan ke dalam empat kategori: kebutuhan, keinginan, kekurangan, dan kebutuhan belajar. Hasilnya dapat menjadi bahan pertimbangan untuk penelitian selanjutnya, yaitu merancang dan mengembangkan modul ESP yang secara khusus dibuat untuk para staf perhotelan.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris Untuk Tujuan Khusus; Analisis Kebutuhan; Staf Perhotelan

Introduction

English is essential in the tourism and hospitality industry as a global language. Its influence is particularly significant in Indonesia. It attracts international hotel visitors who rely on global communication, which has increased over the years. Based on data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics Indonesia, the total number of international hotel visitors in Indonesia has experienced a rapid increase since 2022, reaching 3.027,64 million, which is three times higher than the previous year, 2021, when 649,13 million international visitors stayed in hotels. The number then continued to rise, reaching 6.284,95 in 2023 and peaking at 10.017,418 in 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025).

The significant increase in foreign guests has made English essential for hotels in Indonesia, particularly for hoteliers who have been operating in the industry for many years. Nevertheless, the hoteliers' present proficiency in English has to be enhanced to interact properly with visitors. According to a needs analysis conducted by Guntoro (2021) the front desk employees at Kapal Garden Hotel, Malang, reported that they find it challenging to answer questions in English-speaking conversations. Moreover Panggabean (2023) stated that based on his findings where he observed and interviewed a few hotel executives in Medan, there was a pressing need to improve the English language skills of their front office employees because they were having trouble interacting with foreign visitors in certain duties like managing complaints, outlining local tourist attractions and cuisine, and other things.

In the high-end and international hotel settings, English is needed as a medium of communication demanded to provide excellent service. However, the specific communication tasks to help hoteliers be able to interact with international guests in English are not sufficiently covered in general English instruction. It fails to address the real needs of communication used in the hospitality sector. Basturkmen (2006) mentions that general English instruction is mostly grammar-driven and decontextualized that may not be relevant with the needs.

Besides, Anthony (2018) adds that if the English instruction does not align with the communicative needs, demotivation and irrelevance would affect learners. In that way, English-specific purposes hold a significant role in this case. English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as defined by Smoak (2003) is instruction-based and focuses on actual life tasks rather than simply completing an assessment. ESP is based on needs and focuses on tasks, which makes it distinct from English General Purposes (EGP). ESP can be viewed as a special and specific edition of EGP that incorporates practical linguistic skills to enable students for the successful performance of professional tasks (Potocar, 2002, as cited in Islam, 2015).

Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) study about ESP also emphasizes that ESP is an approach to teaching a language in which every choice about the material and procedure depends on the learners' motivations for learning. Therefore, in order to know the learners' motivations for learning, a needs analysis has to be conducted. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguished between two categories of needs. The first is target needs, which are learners' tasks in the target situation. Target needs include necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities are the things that learners must excel in order to function effectively in the target situation.

Lacks are abilities that the learners lack or miss they are the gap between what they know and what they need to know. Finally, wants are personal preferences for the knowledge that learners wish to acquire. Meanwhile, learning needs are more about the components that learners need to learn the target needs. Aspects that can be considered in assessing learning needs are the learners' behaviors and perspectives, the availability of resources, the learners' learning styles, and the environment in which the course will be

held. Several previous studies have conducted a needs analysis of the hospitality industry. The first one is Yamin (2021), who researched the needs of hoteliers in Bandung to develop an English syllabus for hotel students. The result of the needs analysis shows that out of a few listed language skills, speaking received the highest vote as the language skill that the hoteliers need to excel, with vocabulary and grammar being the least needed than the other three skills reading, writing, and listening.

According to the result, most participants considered giving information about hotel facilities and services as an essential language function, followed by dealing with complaints. Other than that, it is also revealed that there are three main problems that the hoteliers face in using the English language, 1) they tend to be nervous when speaking English with guests, and they are afraid to make mistakes, 2) they lack vocabulary knowledge, 3) having difficulty in listening and understanding different accents and pronunciation which made them hard to respond to the guest.

Another research regarding the needs analysis for hoteliers was done by (Kusuma, Hatim and Uzer, 2023). The study was conducted to determine the needs of students in the Hospitality Industry Department of Muhammadiyah Vocational High School 3 in Palembang, specifically in the culinary and hotel departments. According to the results, participants from both departments indicate that they want to improve their English skills, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading, and the school's passing requirement does not solely drive this desire.

For the necessities, specifically speaking skills, the hotel departments require strong speaking skills to offer menus, answer inquiries about hotel facilities, and handle phone calls for reservations and job interviews. While in the culinary section, speaking skills were essential for explaining menu options, answering questions about hotel facilities, taking orders, conducting job interviews, and negotiating mutual understanding. For listening skills, the students in the hotel department demonstrated a strong demand since every option received a high score.

On the other hand, the culinary department needed active listening the most to understand the manager's explanations of work processes, rules, procedures, and decisions. For writing skills, the writing needs of hotel department students were relatively high for every task mentioned. The culinary section stated that their writing skills are most needed to complete progress reports, reservation forms, menu orders, and restaurant menus. For reading skills, the study found that students in the hotel department had a significant requirement for reading safety instructions. Meanwhile, the culinary department prioritized reading skills in job descriptions and tasks.

In the last category, it was found that students from both departments require assistance with vocabulary knowledge, which also impacts their understanding of the lesson. Moreover, it is also stated that the students have no experience in the required skills. Firharmawan and Andika (2019) also researched the needs of hoteliers at Meotel Hotel Kebumen. The findings revealed that the most needed English skill is speaking, followed by listening, reading, and writing. When discussing language functions, the hoteliers responded that the most frequently used language functions were giving information, offering help, and providing services.

The researcher also investigated the hotelier's need for language skills. For listening, the hoteliers have difficulties in several situations, mainly in understanding intonation patterns and stress. This is because the hoteliers had few opportunities to interact with international guests. Lack of vocabulary, difficulty keeping up with the speed of communication, and difficulty understanding instructions are also listed as the listening problems the hoteliers faced. Regarding speaking skills, the biggest problem for hoteliers is the need for more confidence in using English. This is followed by a need for

more vocabulary, pronunciation, and the ability to start a conversation. In terms of reading skills, vocabulary also became a primary concern. Due to limited vocabulary knowledge, the hoteliers needed to guess the meaning of words. Three other main problems stated by the hoteliers were difficulties comprehending the main points, searching for detailed information, and understanding the text structure, which was the lowest.

The last skill is writing, where hoteliers still need help structuring a sentence. This is followed by the use of punctuation, developing ideas, and structuring paragraphs. This study aimed to investigate the needs of hoteliers working at a five-star hotel in Jakarta by conducting a needs analysis. As a result, this study will be beneficial to the hotel's Learning and Development (L&D) team by providing information on what should be the primary focus of a course when developing and offering English language training to hoteliers. In addition, the outcomes of the requirements analysis may be taken into consideration in future research: creating an ESP module that is specifically designed for these hoteliers.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach which analyzed the responses obtained from a semi-structured interview with the English teacher under the Human Resources team of a five-star hotel in Jakarta, specifically the Learning and Development (L&D) team. The interview questions were formulated based on the types of needs such as necessities, wants, lacks, and learning needs. To collect the data, permission from the hotel was granted and a semi-structured interview was held with the English teacher as the representative of the L&D team. The interview was conducted online using Zoom and was recorded with the participant's permission. After the responses were obtained, each response from the needs was transcribed and categorized based on necessities, lacks, wants, and learning needs.

Results and Discussion

The table below summarizes the findings from the interview with the English teacher as a representative of the Learning and Development team.

Table 1. Findings From The Interview Result

Necessities	Lacks	Wants	Learning Needs
To be able to communicate with foreign guests and coworkers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Misunderstandings caused by mishearing due to similar pronunciation and lack of understanding. - Listening and speaking skills. - Confidence in speaking and interacting with guests. - Grammar knowledge. - The hoteliers still have little to say when describing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is not only for the hoteliers to be proficient in English, but also to be willing to learn English so they can understand the importance of learning English. - Few to zero misunderstandings happen between hoteliers and guests. - Communicate with foreign coworkers and foreigners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The F&B department is in need of an English training/module, followed by culinary, as most students in the English training program are in this batch. - Ideas for learning outside class. - No textbooks or modules have been used yet due to the high level of adjustment needed in the materials.

things and giving directions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To be able to speak a sentence. - Focus more on pronunciation. - Hoteliers can have a template or a list of topics to chat with guests. - Topics suggested for the module (applicable to both F&B and culinary departments) giving directions, describing foods, giving responses, and having small talk with guests. - The module should be designed for advanced students (proficiency level: they are already capable of forming sentences in the correct order). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use books as a reference for the English teacher when making the materials. - Have an assessment in the module to measure the hoteliers' improvement. - The module must be interactive and include gap information. - Create activities that encourage hoteliers to speak more and provide examples of the tasks assigned to them.
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In the interview, the English teacher first shared that learning English has become necessary and urgent for hoteliers, as their job requires them to interact with foreigners, not only guests but also foreign coworkers. This has also become the L&D team's expectation for the hoteliers to be able to speak English and be eager to learn. This was stated by the English teacher in the interview ...to be able to talk, to speak, and to understand what the guest wants, so that's the main important thing, which is communication with the guests. Therefore, there was also pressure from the L&D team for the hoteliers to be able to communicate well.

Consequently, proficiency in the English language is essential for hoteliers to enhance their work performance, particularly for the Food and Beverage department, as they serve as front-liners, and the Culinary department, given that most of the students of this batch's program are from this department and they need the English language to communicate with foreign coworkers. This necessity needs to be fulfilled urgently because competence, friendliness, expertise, and service attitude are the four key customer service traits that significantly impact repeat business and satisfaction in the hotel sector, with competence referring to the ability of the hoteliers in executing their jobs: solving problems and serving guests (Meijerink, Bondarouk and Lepak, 2016).

In the International Encyclopedia of Hospitality Management,' Fisher (2005) discussed how the front-of-the-house department includes employees with extensive guest contact, such as reservationists, front desk agents, and staff in the food and beverage departments. The front office, located in the hotel lobby, has more contact with guests than any other department. The front desk is a focal point for guests, allowing them to register, receive room assignments, inquire about services, and check out. Uniformed service department employees provide personalized guest services, such as bell

attendants, door attendants, valet parking attendants, transportation personnel, and concierges (Fisher, 2005). Among the numerous departments in the hotel sector, a study by Guntoro (2021) found that the front-of-house departments require the English language the most due to their duties.

Afrianto and Gulö (2019) as cited in Guntoro (2021) believe that the English competence of front desk staff is essential for dealing with guests. Although it is clear that English communication skills are essential in the hospitality industry, the findings revealed that there were still aspects that required improvement in English. First, the English teacher shared her concern that some misunderstandings happened between hoteliers and guests due to mishearing certain words that had similar pronunciations. As cited in Kaur (2011); Jenkins (2000) supported the notion that this situation was relevant in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, as different variations of English with some variation in pronunciation and accent can impinge on the clarity and intelligibility of sound segments.

Therefore, when asked what the L & D team wanted the hotelier to achieve after joining the program, she said she wished for fewer misunderstandings between guests and hoteliers because of mishearing ...the problem with misunderstandings that are caused by misheard or miscommunication is lessening, so if it can, then zero problem ya about the issues that I stated before mishear, miscommunication so there is no miscommunication with the guests... the second one is uh after they are able to understand the guest well, they can communicate with the guests... communicate with their.... with foreigners whether it is guests....

Second, the hoteliers still had difficulties speaking and building their confidence to engage in conversation with the guests. When asked to describe things, the hoteliers were unable to talk much.and when I asked them to describe this, they are still gesture they still have very little to say said the English teacher. This aligns with the findings of a study by Baker and Westrup (2003) as cited in Amani and Fedai (2024) which stated that learners struggle to express themselves in a foreign language due to a lack of guidance on vocabulary, syntax, and content. From these, it was concluded that the hoteliers lacked speaking, listening, confidence, and the skill to develop ideas.

This conclusion leads to the notion that the required skills in the hospitality industry do not align with the employees' current abilities. These findings regarding the needs and lack of hoteliers have similar results to those of previous studies on ESP for hotels, as discussed in the introduction. Out of the three previous studies mentioned, all results showed that speaking was voted as the skill hoteliers need to excel. It was also observed that the lack of knowledge among hoteliers is similar, as they often lack vocabulary knowledge.

They also tended to be nervous and lack confidence in interacting with foreigners, which is also the case with the needs analysis done for this study. Moreover, the results of Yamin's (2021) needs analysis indicated that hoteliers were experiencing difficulties in listening to and understanding different accents and pronunciations, which is precisely what also occurred during this needs analysis, as mentioned by the English teacher. Furthermore, this finding also aligns with the results of the interview conducted by Kusuma, Hatim and Uzer (2023) which state that speaking is the most frequently used skill by hoteliers, followed by listening.

Prima, Hartono and Riyanto (2022) mentioned that speaking and listening are commonly considered as inseparable skills, especially in a job that requires frequent oral communication with foreigners... Other than that, the English teacher mentioned pronunciation and lack of confidence, which the hoteliers still lack. Nurdianti and Rachman (2021) found that hoteliers face difficulty with pronunciation. The researcher

also asked some questions to gather information regarding the needs of the English teacher as a representative of the Human Resources team.

She stated that she wants the students not only to have good English proficiency but also to develop an eagerness to learn and understand the importance of the English language in the workplace. The teacher also mentioned that she hopes the hoteliers will be able to communicate effectively in English with foreign visitors and their coworkers, thereby reducing misunderstandings between hoteliers and guests. This point aligns with the previous statements, where a gap exists between the necessities and the lacks. This resulted in the need for an English learning module that can address this learning gap.

Regarding the use of modules and textbooks in this program, the English teacher confessed that there was still no module or textbook used fully as material in class. The teacher stated that she only used books as a reference when making lesson plans and materials for the class. This occurred due to the system of classes in the English training program, where the courses are primarily for general English rather than for particular departments. No textbook... Uh, I mean, I still have references, some books I do have with me, but at the end, the one who still decides what materials will be taught is the teacher herself because, uh, the classes here are very dynamic, right? Haha, this class has more students from this department, while the other class has more students from another department.

Because of this, the English teacher could not specifically use certain books as the material for the entire course because there should be adjustments since the book might not apply to every department and the hoteliers' proficiency. And because of that, we cannot... Uh... I mean, we need a high level of adjustment; therefore, we cannot only follow these books. Also, the adjustments have to be applicable to the students in every department, especially because we are not English for specific departments only; we are more to general English. That's why, so far, I do not have a fixed module that I can simply use.'

Therefore, an ESP module specifically designed for this hotel can be developed for future studies based on the results of the needs analysis. The English teacher suggested some topics for a future module, including one that the food and beverage hoteliers had directly suggested. The food and beverages students wanted to know more about asking and giving directions. The English teacher also mentioned 'describing foods, giving responses, and 'having small talk with guests' about topics. This is supported by the result of a needs analysis conducted by Kusuma, Hatim and Uzer (2023), in which for the culinary department, it was important to use the speaking skill to describe and explain the types of menus.

According to a study by Fujita, Tanaka and Nakai (2023), engaging in small talk with guests helps them feel more comfortable. It is also a way for hoteliers to promote and increase sales. Moreover, when hoteliers talk with the guests, they are capable of acknowledging the guests' wants and needs. The importance of that capability is in line with Blue and Harun (2003); Kim et al., (2020); Kwon (2013); Zahedpisheh et al., (2017) as cited in Kim and Kim (2022) stating that when it comes to English service at five-star hotels, functional aspects of language and the staff's capability to understand guest needs have been at the center of the study (p. 64).

Some language functions noted in previous studies are also aligned with the results of this needs analysis, which involve giving information and explaining hotel facilities, similar to one of the topics mentioned by the English teacher, where hoteliers need to provide information about directions. In conclusion, the needs analysis results reveal a gap between the lacks and the necessities. This gap refers to the skills that hoteliers should possess to perform their work effectively, as well as their current skill

set. A module can be the solution to fill this gap, which is also aligned with the wants and the learning needs, as the English teacher mentioned the desire to have a module specifically designed for English training.

This is supported by the idea that learning modules provide new insights and opportunities for development, which improve students' comprehension and help address current skill shortages (Gordon and Nicholas, 2013). Modules are a component of an extensive and methodically organized collection of educational resources that include a variety of learning activities intended to assist students in reaching particular learning objectives (Hafsah et al., 2016). As a result, the development of a module especially made to cater to the needs of these hoteliers is needed in future research.

Conclusion

Based on the needs analysis, it is evident that the expected target learners were from the Food and Beverages department, as it was mentioned that they were in urgent need of English training due to their role in the workplace as front-liners. Besides, the needs analysis showed that the hoteliers still lacked speaking and listening skills. They tended to lose confidence when speaking English and still had difficulty developing ideas. Pronunciation was also mentioned as a language feature that the hoteliers needed to improve. Therefore, the results of this needs analysis could be considered for a course design in which the projected module is aimed to improve the hoteliers in the Food and Beverages and Culinary departments' listening and speaking skills with the topic suggested by the English teacher, such as describing dishes, giving directions, and small talk. The order of the lesson is suggested to be arranged based on its difficulty and the urgency of need. The study is primarily beneficial to three parties: the hoteliers at the five-star hotel in this study, the Human Resources team, specifically the Learning and Development team, and ESP instructors as the results of this study could be used as a consideration to create an ESP program and to design a course so that the course content, materials, and instructional strategies meet the needs of the targeted learners.

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