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ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED IN MARRIOTT CONVENTION CENTRE IN ALGERIA

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Abstract:

The present research aims at analyzing the need to English in hospitality industry which emphasized two hotels from the Marriott Convention Centre in Algeria. It seeks to find out the need to the English four skills in the specific areas of hotel reception desk, IT and maids departments. Since empirical data were needed for the purpose of the study, two main types of research: were conducted quantitative and qualitative. Hence, structured interviews were conducted and Likert scale questionnaires were distributed to a sample group of thirty six respondents. The results revealed that the majority of participants in this study rated all four skills as highly needed in their work.

Keywords:

English for specific purposes; English language skills; Hospitality industry; Language problems; Language needs.

JEL Classification: I29

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Introduction

The need to English as a global language continues to increase and expand throughout the world which has resulted in the rise of one particular aspect of English Language Teaching (ELT) that is the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Hence, there is a lack of professionals with enough English skills to function correctly and converse well in many business settings and the tourism sector in no exception. English constitutes a vital aspect since it allows providing the best service to foreign visitors who do not know the local language. Furthermore, tourism professionals need to speak English to foreigners to make their visit more enjoyable. People who are required to use English at work for tourism and hospitality purposes need to improve their communicative abilities, language fluency, and accuracy. This language is taught as a second language in educational institutions of various levels since it is a significant element to establish communication with others worldwide. For this reason, the author conducted the present study to explore the opinions of certain hotel workers about the needs for being able to communicate with foreign visitors in English especially when a group of 300 foreigners visited Algeria in 2018 to celebrate the week dedicated for clients and partners of "Global Customer Appreciation Week". Under the theme of "Made Together", this event is organized each year in November for five days in the different hotels of Marriott group in Algeria¹. The research attempts to perform an analysis of English language skills needed in hospitality industry which emphasized 'Le Meridien' and 'Sheraton', two out five hotels of the Convention Centre in Oran-Algeria, as a case study. To undertake this analysis, the author aims to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the English language skills required by employees in the research context?
- b. What are the English language skills related problems that these employees encountered at work?

On the ground of these research questions, it is hypothesize that:

- All English four skills rate as highly needed by Employees in Marriott Convention Centre in Algeria.
- These employees have English language skills related problems that should be solved.

1 Needs Analysis

Based on some scholars, needs analysis is significant in many ways. Nation and Macalister (2010) mention that needs analysis makes sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn. ESP and needs analysis are two aspects which are related to each other. As the learners need specific language skills which need to be performed in their daily work, needs analysis ensure that the syllabus design is in accordance with the learners' need.

Richards (1998) states that needs analysis serve purposes in language curriculum development in many ways. First, it provides a mechanism for obtaining a wide range of input in the content, design, and implementation of a language program through such persons as learners, teachers and administration in process. Second, it identifies general or specific language needs, which can be implied in developing goals, objectives and contents for a language program. It also provides data that can serve as a basis for reviewing and evaluating existing program.

¹ Published by Smail.M in ' Le Temp d'Algerie'

Source: <http://www.djazair.com/fr/author/Smail+M>

The various descriptions on the significance of needs analysis above reveal that it is badly needed in arranging the most suitable material for ESP course. Therefore, ESP syllabus design is an end product of needs analysis; which ensure the connectedness between what learners need to study and what will be studied. To sum up, needs analysis is critical for effective curriculum design, and it is an essential step that must be conducted before curriculum development in ESP. If it is conducted well, this will result in heightened knowledge of what the proper teaching goals are, the right textbooks to use, and the more effective teaching methods. In fact, it should normally be the starting point to any English course either general or specific. It should not only be considered as a pre-stage for the design of language courses; in fact, it is an “on-going process” (White, 1998) and, as evaluation, it can be used to design, improve and implement language programs.

In the context of learning English for tourism requirements, students may have different competencies that should be best rated and required linguistic skills that should be improved. Among the competencies currently required in the work environment of tourism, is the ability to express fluently in English (Avalos and Zapata, 2014). Qualified human talents are required to improve tourism sector. So, efficient communication in English is essential to improve professional profiles (Villafuerte, et.al, 2018).

Within the requirements to provide an excellent service, English appears as essential to communicate with customers. For this reason, the development of language skills is crucial for a good communication process (Bobanovic and Grzinic, 2011). A study conducted by Prachanant (2012) about the needs to English and its use in the tourist industry, revealed that when tourism employees were asked to assess their need for English language skills to function appropriately at work, they rated all four language skills, but speaking turned out to be more important, followed by listening, reading and writing. English is considered for workers in the hotel area as a complement to achieve greater labor efficiency since those who master the language can generate greater profitability to the organization (Gómez de Lunar, 2009). It is an essential aspect of the reception and reservations area. The skills of speaking and listening are applied together in essential activities, such as making reservations by phone (Leslie and Russell, 2006). The use of the language is essential since it is necessary to know terminologies and advanced English to attract future tourists (Korstanje, 2014).

2 Method

Since empirical data were needed for the purpose of the study, two main types of research: were conducted quantitative and qualitative. Structured interviews were conducted and Likert scale questionnaires were distributed to a sample group of thirty six respondents. These were 12 receptionists in FO (Front Office) and Guest Service, four employees in HK (Housekeeping) and two others in IT departments in one hotel. This makes the number of 18 employees which is with the same distribution in the other hotel. The questionnaires cover different needs areas such as listening, speaking, writing, reading which are needed and the different problems encountered in the workplace. They were administered to the target group from December 2019 to January 2020 for a total of one month. The results of the present research try to provide a useful input for developing a curriculum or designing ESP to meet the aforementioned needs, and thus ensure the high-quality service for international tourists.

After checking the completion of each questionnaire, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The statistical devices employed in this study were as follows:

1) A 5-point Likert scale was used to score the levels of the English language skills needed by hospitality employees based on the following criteria:

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Mean range</i>	<i>Need level</i>
5	4.50-5.00	The highest need
4	3.50-4.49	High need
3	2.50-3.49	Moderate need
2	1.50-2.49	Low need
1	1.00-1.49	The lowest need

2) Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) were used to calculate the average level of English skill needed by the employees in search. The highest mean score (M) reflected the more need to the English skill. By the same token, the lowest mean score showed the least need for that activity. The standard deviation (S.D.) depicted the spread or dispersion of the scores of the respondents within the group.

3) Number (n°) and percentage (%) were used to calculate the problems of English language use that the employees encountered in their work.

3 Results

Based on the research aim, the results of data analysis were as follows:

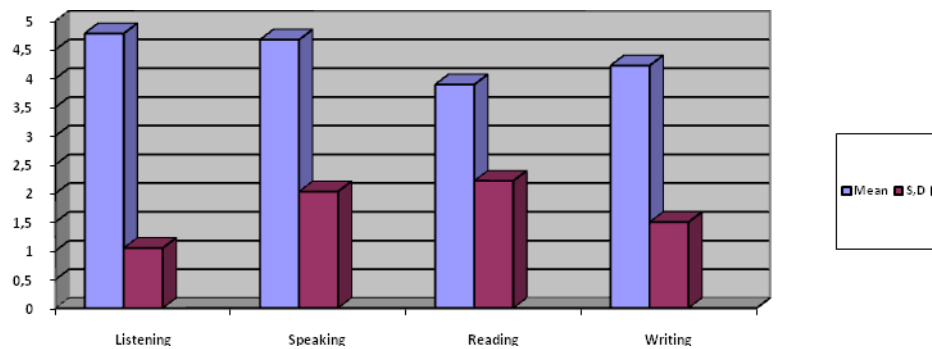
3.1 The English language skills needed

When respondents of the present study were asked to rate their need for English language skills in operating their work, they rated all macro four English language skills high as shown in table 1.

Table 1. The English language skills need

English language skills	M	S.D.	Need Level	Rank
1. Listening	4,78	1,045	Highest	1
2. Speaking	4,67	2,028	Highest	2
3. Reading	3,89	2,214	High	4
4. Writing	4,22	1,495	High	3

As shown in table 1, most hotel employees rated all four skills as important. When considering each English skill needed, according to them listening is considered the most important for their work followed by speaking, writing and then reading. A more precise visual distribution of the numerical data obtained is proposed in the bar-graph below:

Figure 1. Skills' Level of Need According to Mean and S.D

3.2 English Language Problems encountered at work

This section presents the problems encountered by hotel employees when they are in direct interaction with foreign visitors. All participants served according to the necessities of everyone's office. For example, the IT employees were responsible of the facilities provided to the customers regarding the access to the internet, the check-in and check-out and the language guide that promote all these. Their service needs English and they would be lost if they do not know it. The results were illustrated in table 2-5 below.

Table 2. Listening problems encountered at work

Listening problems	n°	%
1. Listening to foreigners in face to face conversations	32	89
2. Listening to foreigners in telephone conversations	24	66
3. Being unable to know the meaning of words	12	33
4. Being unable to understand foreign accent	26	72

Table (2) shows the listening problems encountered by participants in their work. It was found that listening to foreigners in face to face conversations was the most serious problem (n°=32, 89%) encountered. Those concerned here were the FO and HK employees who normally met and interacted with foreigners. Being unable to understand foreign accent constituted the second rated problem (72%). In that only 10 receptionists were able to do so. The third serious problem with a big rate (66%) was that when receptionists had telephone conversations with foreigners while being unable to know the meaning of words was reported as the least serious problem (33%) reported by HK and IT employees.

Table 3. Speaking problems encountered at work

Speaking problems	n°	%
1. Mispronunciation of words and expressions	20	56
2. Lacking vocabularies	16	44
3. Misusing grammatical structures in speaking	24	66
4. Lacking confidence in speaking	8	24

The above table demonstrates the speaking problems encountered by questioned respondents in their work. It was found that misusing grammatical structures in speaking was rated as the most serious problem ($n^{\circ}=24$, 66%) encountered by all number of those in the reception desk; whereas, lacking confidence in speaking was reported as the least serious problem ($n^{\circ}=8$, 24%) encountered by HK employees. The second serious problem ($n^{\circ}=20$, 56%) related to incorrect pronunciation, and the third ($n^{\circ}=16$, 44%) was due to the lack of vocabularies needed in speech.

Table 4. Reading problems encountered at work

Reading problems	n°	%
1. Reading e-mails and information from internet	4	14
2. Reading written notes	8	29
3. Having inadequate vocabulary and terminologies.	12	43
4. Inability of understanding reading terms	10	36

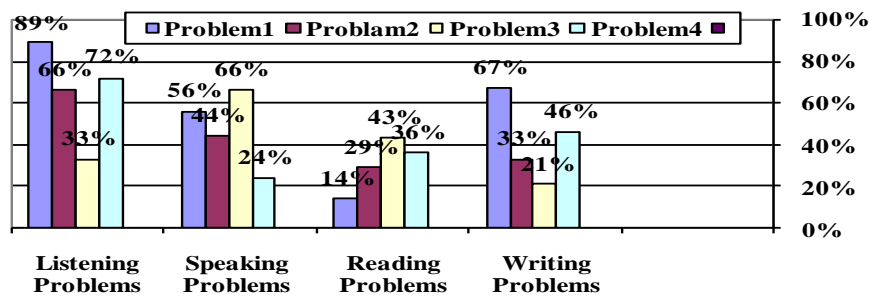
This part concerned only reception desk and IT employees. As shown in table 4, all 4 IT employees and 8 from receptionists (43%) agreed that having inadequate vocabulary and terminologies in reading was the most serious problem. IT employees' problem was technical and related to the English error messages and codes that usually appeared after technical damages in language guides had happened. Those employees with their little knowledge of technical terms stood unable to decode what was read. Thus, inability of understanding reading terms was considered by 10 (36%, 4 were IT employees and 6 receptionists) employees as the second major problem. Reading written notes was reported as the third serious problem ($n^{\circ}=8$, 29%) while reading e-mails and information from internet was regarded as the least one ($n^{\circ}=4$, 14%) in terms of reading skills.

Table 5. Writing problems encountered at work

Writing problems	n°	%
1. Lacking grammar knowledge to write	16	67
2. Lacking vocabulary to write	8	33
3. Being unable to write notes.	5	21
4. Being unable to write e-mails	11	46

This part concerned only the front line receptionists. The above table indicates that the receptionists most serious problem was lacking the grammar knowledge for writing ($n^{\circ}=16$, 67%). Being unable to write e-mails was considered by 11 (46%) receptionists as the second problem while lacking vocabulary to write was the third. On the other hand, being unable to write notes was rated by 5 (21%) receptionists as the least serious problem.

To sum up, when considering the problems of English use among hotel employees of the study in hand, the inability to catch up foreigners' accent in face to face conversations, misusing grammatical structures in speaking, having inadequate vocabulary and terminologies in reading and lacking grammatical knowledge in writing appeared in the following bar graph to be the major problems encountered.

Figure 2. Language problems encountered at work

4 Discussion

The findings from the present investigation can be discussed according to the following points.

4.1 English language skills needed by hotel employees

The findings showed that the majority of participants in this study rated all four skills as highly needed. This may be explained by the fact that since tourism industry has started to be promoted for business aims in Algeria, there are many foreigners who visit the country and as a result of this, hotel employees have had a great deal of opportunity to use English when accommodating them to celebrate their festival in November each year. The results also showed that most respondents perceived listening as the most important skill, followed by speaking, writing and reading, respectively.

Listening is rated as the first needed skill. This clearly explains that listening enquiries is the most important because it is the key factor that leads to understand the things that the foreigners would need and want. The result supports the studies of Currie (1991) and Piyanapa (2004) which stated that the ability to identify and comprehend the information from communication was crucial.

Speaking is needed for tourism employees to function in their routine work. It is perhaps explained by the fact that speaking is important because they need to interact or communicate with foreigners. This finding clearly supports Reinsch and Shelby (1997) claim which stated that the respondents perceived face to face oral events mostly often required them to function in their routine works. In addition, the result parallels with Chaikitkosol (1986), Keyoonwong (1998) and Pingyoad's studies (2005) in which the learners believed that speaking was their greatest need.

Compared with the other two skills, writing was viewed as the third. This is perhaps explained by the fact that writing is only used when hotel receptionists prepare and outline the information that they give or use to serve foreigners. This result is consistent with several studies which are found that writing was ranked lesser than oral communication (Swenson, 1980; Waner, 1995; Maes, et al, 1997).

With regard to the reading skill, it is ranked as the least needed skill. This may be because hotel employees must have adequate vocabulary and terminologies to read information either direct as written or indirect as electronic e-mail or message. This finding supports that of Prachanant

(2012), which regarded the reading main problem is the inadequate vocabulary that is followed by the fact of not understanding this vocabulary.

4.2 English Language problems encountered by hotel employees

It is generally agreed that English is regarded as a foreign language in Algeria. Algerian people study English only at schools not to communicate with speakers of the language but to use it in reading texts using grammar and vocabulary of the target language. In fact, Algerian people do not use English in their daily life. As a result, they face problems when meeting foreigners who speak English. Similarly, the tourism employees in Algeria face a major problem when they are in contact with foreign comers. Their problems are the inability to catch up foreigners' accent in face to face conversations, misusing grammatical structures in speaking, having inadequate vocabulary and terminologies in reading and lacking grammatical knowledge in writing.

This may be explained that not all hotel employees can speak English fluently. Some may use English like a native speaker while others may be able to use a little English or cannot communicate with the language at all. Therefore, it is possible that they cannot comprehend after listening to a group of people speaking English accurately, choose the appropriate words and expressions, use correct grammar when they speak, read and write. This finding supports Suwanla (1999) language skill included: listening skill speaking fast and speaking with a different accent by native and nonnative English speakers, speaking skill vocabulary shortage, reading skill having a shortage of vocabulary words including technical words, and writing skill poor grammar usage. However, the employees mentioned in the current research try their best to when they faced problems concerning communication with the foreign tourists by using gestures or by asking tourists to write down what they needed. Hence, they are still able to serve foreigners with their limited language skills.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study is carried out in order to provide an insight into the needs and problems of English use among hotel employees working in Marriott International Convention Centre in Oran-Algeria. It is hoped to provide a baseline for obtaining a wider range of input into content, design and implementation of an English program by involving such people as learners, teachers, course developers and employees in the planning process. Although the present investigation does not intend to represent all hotel employees in 'Le Meridien' and 'Sheraton', the researcher does believe that the sampling frame might give a relatively good representation of hotel employees working in other convention centres located in other towns in Algeria. Needs analysis is part of the curriculum development that is required before a syllabus development for English language teaching. The findings from this study can be used as guidelines for developing an English syllabus that could lead to the improvement of the employees in hospitality industry.

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