Need analysis of English for Hospitality students: A case study in Sungai Petani Community College

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Abstract: Malaysia, as a rapidly developing nation, plays a crucial role in equipping its graduates with all the necessary skills which are considered highly in demand in the current market. Course designers need to consider the target learning needs of ESP students in redesigning an appropriate syllabus that will cater to their working needs. Needs analysis is a way of determining and outlining syllabus and teaching methods to achieve a valuable learning environment. Instructors and teachers conducting English classes ought to identify their students' needs to build an appropriate curriculum that facilitates a better learning process. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the English Language needs of Community College English for Hospitality students. 40 internship Hospitality students from a Community College, and 40 industry personnel participated in this study. All these participants were from Malaysia. The questionnaires were used as the main instruments in this study. The finding shows that 62.5% of the respondents' main reason for learning English is to improve their speaking skills as they are mainly dealing with answering telephone calls, inquiries on hotel facilities as well as handling hotel reservations. The finding further reveals that major emphasis should be given to listening and speaking skills as they are more widely used when dealing with the guests. It is hoped that the findings of this study are used to propose an English for Specific Purposes syllabus, which would benefit future hospitality students in public or private colleges.

Keywords: community college, course design, English for specific purposes, needs analysis

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, as a rapidly developing nation, plays a crucial role in equipping its graduates with all the necessary skills which are considered highly in demand in the current market. Course designers should take into account the target learning needs of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students in redesigning an appropriate syllabus that will cater to their working needs. Moreover, the course designed should be tailored according to the proficiency level of the students to produce a fruitful result on their performance in the working field (Tabiolo1 & Villar, 2019).

The community college system in Malaysia provides a wide range of vocational and technical post-secondary education courses within the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (Don, Daud, Kasim, Sakdan, & Omar, 2014). Disciplines covered include accounting, electrical, architecture, construction, engineering, entrepreneurship, hospitality, culinary, automotive, beauty services, multimedia production, and visual arts. Community colleges in Malaysia are administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE) via the Polytechnic and Community Colleges Educational Department *(Jabatan Pendidikan Politeknik dan Kolej Komuniti* [JPPKK]) of the Ministry's Community College Management Department.

This paper focuses on conducting a needs analysis on community college students who are taking hospitality courses. According to Lahap, O'Mahony, and Dalrymple (2016), communication is an important component in the industry of hospitality. Excellent oral and written communication skills are the highly-rated skills crucial for hospitality practitioners at different levels. Prabhu and Wani (2015) claimed that communication skill is important among learners in the hospitality industry. It is pertinent that existing and potential employees, employers and educators have a consensus of the competencies required to be instilled in learners in preparing them for the industry of hospitality. Prabhu and Wani (2015) supported the fact that students who are likely to pursue a career in Tourism and Hospitality workforce must understand that communication skills are seen as vital to the workforce. Soft skills, particularly communication skills in English, make students more employable. According to Prabhu and Wani (2015), English is vital for hospitality and tourism students since it is the principal international language of science and is looked upon as an effective means for enabling those students to become familiar with professional texts written in English. Hence, students have to accept the fact that being students they need to master English language skills, since books, papers and journals are written in English. Even after completing their studies, they still need to use English language skills to perform well in their job. This study intends to identify if the students' needs correlate with the industries' needs on the current English language syllabus used in their English language class. Students' needs will be compared to the industry' needs to gauge the gap on which language skills the students need to carry out their hospitality task and does the industry needs match with the students' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia is known for various ethnic groups such as Malays, Chinese and Indians. These are the three ethnics that make up the main population of Malaysia. In accordance with this, each ethnic group carries its mother tongue, and for most of them, English is considered to be their second language. English is integrated as a second language in the Malaysian Education System curricular syllabus. Students need to learn English from primary to secondary school. Hence, there is a minimum of eleven years of compulsory English learning environment for the students. However, according to the Community College Graduate Tracking Study Report in 2018, although more than 80 percent of Hospitality students were employed, they did not

work in a field directly related to their qualification. Forty percent of the students are working in a different field from hospitality such as in factories and sales department. This had stirred doubts about the effectiveness of the current education system in hospitality. According to Aris and Zawawi (2016), English as the language of international communication is largely used in Malaysia and with the rapid evolving of globalization, this country will face competition from other foreign countries. Thus, Malaysian students need to be well equipped with a solid education foundation, including the capability to communicate well in English. Students who are proficient in English have a higher chance to be employed since these multinational companies consider both academic achievement and English proficiency when offering a job to graduates. In a nutshell, English plays a major role in helping them to excel in their studies as well as to secure a job in the competitive job market (Aris & Zawawi, 2016).

The Role of English Language in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

English is largely spoken in the world, and many individuals prefer to learn English as their additional language to extend their skills and professional development. Sadly, many people miss the chance of getting promoted and progressing in their career due to the lack of proficiency level and confidence in English. If the person can converse in more than one language, especially English, he or she is fit to be in the hospitality industry (Mujawar, 2013).

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is a way of determining and outlining syllabus and teaching methods to achieve a valuable learning environment. Instructors and teachers conducting English classes ought to identify their students' needs to build an appropriate curriculum that facilitates a better learning process (Sularti, Drajati, & Supriyadi, 2019). According to Sönmez (2019), needs analysis is a way of gathering and examining learners' information as a way to determine objectives and acceptable subject matters of a syllabus in accordance with the learners' needs. Hence, needs analysis is greatly suggested to be carried out. According to Li (2014), needs analysis indicates the actions of gathering information, which acts as the foundation in developing a syllabus that will meet the needs of a specific group of students. English is considered essential in this globalized era, whereby interactions among individuals throughout the world are borderless.

According to Al-Saadi (2013), technical skills alone are not sufficient for the success of a job, but the capability to converse clearly and convincingly, to comprehend others and work with them easily, often makes the difference between success and failure, both for individuals and their organizations. As a result, the skills in using English language have become a necessity in many businesses to achieve their goals. The demand for English for Specific Purposes is expanding, especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language with the continuing increase of international communication

There are certain issues to be measured before developing an ESP course. When developing an ESP course, the key issue is the study of learners' specific needs. Other issues include objectives, goals, grammar, and language skills. Though ESP contexts view these issues from their standpoints, the proposed framework for ESP course development is argued to profit teachers who may come upon glitches in ESP course design (Silvia, 2016).

This study focuses on improving the current ESP course, which was designed for students of Hospitality in the community college. This research was carried out to investigate the English language skills needed by hospitality students focusing on which of the four language skills they most needed and which language skills the students want to emphasize more to enable them to converse actively during their industrial training.

METHODOLOGY

The instrument used is the set of questionnaires which was adapted from Noor (2008) entitled Language Needs for Hotel and Catering Students. This questionnaire was divided into (2) sections. Section A consisted the students' details such as their Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) results, gender and the reason why they wanted to learn English while section B contained questions from a 5-point Likert scale ranged from 'always', 'frequently', 'seldom', 'sometimes' and 'never'. Section B consisted of activities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing that will be used most by the hospitality students to carry out their work-related tasks. Items in Section A will supply their demographic information as well as their English proficiency level and items in Section B focused on identifying the needs and perceptions of the hospitality students towards the current English syllabus taken by them. Their feedbacks will aid in proposing a new syllabus that implies the importance of certain language skills and benefits their job scope in future. Respondents were given twenty minutes to answer the questionnaire, and the researcher had assured that their participation was entirely voluntary, and their response would not affect them in any other way else. The pilot test result was analyzed using SPSS version 22, and the validity of the items was checked. The reliability score obtained from the students' questionnaire was 0.95. On the other hand, the same set of questionnaires with some modifications done on the items was sent to the industry personnel. The reliability score obtained from the industry personnel questionnaire was 0.94.

RESULTS

Demographic Data from Students

The first question in Section A required the students to indicate their SPM Result. The table below described the respondents' SPM results.

Table 1: SPM Result

Grade	A+	A	A-	B+	B	C+	C	D	E	G
Respondents	0	0	0	1	3	6	14	12	3	1
Frequency (%)	0	0	0	2.5	7.5	15	35	30	7.5	1

According to Table 1, none of the respondents obtained A+, A, A- in their SPM. Only one respondent obtained B+ (2.5%). Three respondents scored grade B in their SPM, which is equivalent to 7.5 %, and six respondents obtained C+ that contributes to 15% of the population. The majority of respondents obtained grade C (35%), which were 14 respondents. Twelve respondents scored grade D (30%), and three respondents obtained grade E (7.5 %). Only one respondent obtained a grade G from the overall respondents. The SPM score up to C is considered a pass grade while grades D, E, and G are considered as fail grades. Most respondents obtained a grade D in their English SPM paper, and this indicated that the respondents are not excellent in their English. This is common in a community college since a community college does serve the basis of providing tertiary education to SPM leavers who did not obtain flying colours in their SPM result. This leads to the interpretation that these respondents must have acquired some formal English language knowledge in the process of obtaining the grades in their English SPM paper. Next, the second question of Section A is

about the gender of the respondents who took part in the study. This study involved 40 students which comprised of 18 (45%) male students and 22 female students (55 %). The third part of Section A required the respondents to choose the reasons for learning English. The table below indicated the respondents' reasons for learning English.

Table 2: Reason for learning English

I want to learn English because	Total Respondents	Percentage (%)
English is an international language	2	5
I want to improve my speaking skills	25	62.5
I want to improve my writing skills	3	7.5
I want to improve my listening skills	1	2.5
I want to improve my reading skills	3	7.5
It is the requirement of the course	6	15

As shown in Table 2, two respondents (5%), wanted to learn English because it is an international language. Twenty-five respondents (62.5%) provided the reason that they wanted to learn English to improve on their speaking skills and only one respondent (2.5 %) said that the reason for learning English is to improve listening skills. Three respondents (7.5%) stated that they wanted to learn English to improve on their writing skills, three more respondents (7.5 %) claimed that they wanted to improve on their reading skills while six respondents (15 %) stated that they need to learn English because it is the requirement of the course.

English Needs Analysis – Students

Section B of the questionnaire investigated on the   language skills needed by the respondents when they need to carry out their tasks during their internship. The table below indicates the language skills needed by the respondents when they need to perform their tasks during their internship. Students ranked answering phone calls for reservations as the most important task in speaking skills (M=4.75), followed by replying to a complaint about rooms (M=4.62), reacting to customers' complaints about food (M=4.60), and telling visitors about transportation arrangements (M=4.60).

Table 3: Students' need for English language skill usage (Speaking)

Activities	Mean
Speaking	
1. Attend to the customers (restaurant and front office)	
2. Present and answer enquiries about the menu orally	4.58
3. Describe and explain types of menu	4.52
4. Respond orally to customer's complaints on food and beverage	4.60
5. Answer enquiries on a local establishment	4.52
6. Answer enquiries on hotel facilities	4.62
7. Respond to customer complaints on hotel services	4.57
8. Conduct tours on hotel facilities	4.52
9. Arrange and inform guests of transport arrangement	4.60
10. Answer telephone calls for reservation	4.75
11. Respond to a complaint on rooms	4.62

In terms of listening skills, students perceived that listening to customer complaints (M=4.76) was the most skill-intensive activity, followed by listening to the manager's explanation of hotel policies, procedures, and decisions (M=4.76), listening to the manager's instruction (M=4.73), and listening to customer orders (M=4.72).

Table 4: *Students' need for English language skill usage (Listening)*

Activities	Mean
Listening	
1. Listen to customer's/guest's inquiries	4.65
2. Listen to customer's orders	4.72
3. Listen to customer's complaints	4.76
4. Listen to the manager's explanation of the work process	4.62
5. Listen to the manager's explanation on hotel policies, procedures and decision	4.76
6. Listen to instructions from managers	4.73
7. Listen to the manager's explanation of safety precaution	4.70

For activities involving the use of writing in English, students viewed filling out menu orders as the most common (M=2.28), followed by taking notes during meetings (M=1.73), writing to respond to customer inquiries about hotel facilities (M=1.60), and writing to respond to customer inquiries about food and beverage (M=1.58). These are some of the most important requirements for writing skills that students must meet during their internship.

Table 5: *Students' need for English language skill usage (Writing)*

Activities	Mean
Writing	
1. Write in response to complaints from customers	1.58
2. Write minutes of meetings	1.52
3. Take down notes during meetings	1.73
4. Write to reply to customers' enquiries on room rates	1.50
5. Write to reply to customer's enquiries on hotel facilities	1.60
6. Write to reply to customer's enquiries on food and beverage	1.58
7. Write reports on occupancy	1.43
8. Write to reports on a field trip	1.33
9. Write reports on an accident	1.48
10. Write sales report	1.45
11. Write daily report	1.43
12. Write progress report	1.43
13. Fill in reservation forms	2.28
14. Fill in menu order	1.53
15. Write menu to be used in the restaurant	1.53

Students evaluated reading job specifications and duties in English as the most commonly used activity (M=1.75), followed by reading complaint letters from clients (M=1.60), reading instructions on safety precautions (M=1.58), and reading journals and books to develop their abilities (M=1.48). Following these tasks, the remainder of the reading skills activities are presented.

Table 6: Students' need for English language skill usage (Reading)

Activities	Mean
Reading	
1. Complaint letters from customers	1.60
2. Job specification and duties in English	1.75
3. Recipe and instruction in English	1.48
4. Journals, books to improve job knowledge and skills	1.48
5. Instruction on safety precaution	1.58
6. Letters of reservation from customers	1.58

Demographic Data from Industry

The demographic data of industry personnel, such as gender, age and education qualification will be reported in this section of the analysis. There were 25 female (63 percent) industry personnel and 15 male (37 percent) industry professionals among the 40 industry respondents. All of the respondents work in hotels in Kedah. These respondents were chosen based on the hotels where the students were doing their internships or receiving industrial training. Out of 40 industry respondents, 13 (33%) were between the ages of 41 and 50, 22 (55%) were between the ages of 21 and 30, and 5 (12%) were between the ages of 31 and 40. Following that, 20 respondents (50 percent) had fewer than five years of experience, while 12 respondents (30 percent) had more than 11 years of experience. Six respondents (15%) had work experience up to ten years, whereas only two (5%) had work experience between 16 and 20 years.

English Needs Analysis – Industry

This section will report on the English abilities required by internship students to do their tasks, as perceived by industry personnel. According to industry personnel, English is used more frequently to answer telephone calls for reservations (M=4.65), followed by responding to complaints about rooms (M=4.60), responding to guest complaints about food and beverages (M=4.60), and responding to customer complaints about hotel services (M=4.58). According to the mean value, speaking as to answer phone calls for reservations is the most needed ability under this activity.

Table 7: Industry's need for English language skill usage (Speaking)

Activities	Mean
Speaking	
1. Attend to the customers (restaurant and front office)	4.46
2. Present and answer enquiries about the menu orally	4.56
3. Describe and explain types of menu	4.50
4. Respond orally to customer's complaints on food and beverage	4.60
5. Answer enquiries on a local establishment	4.53
6. Answer enquiries on hotel facilities	4.60
7. Respond to customer complaints on hotel services	4.58
8. Conduct tours on hotel facilities	4.50
9. Arrange and inform guests of transport arrangement	4.55
10. Answer telephone calls for reservation	4.65
11. Respond to a complaint on rooms	4.60

Listening to manager's explanation on hotel policies, procedures, and decisions (M=4.70) was rated as the activity in which English Language listening skill is used the most by industry personnel, followed by listening to customer's orders (M=4.65), listening to customer's explanations on safety precautions (M=4.65), and listening to customer's complaints (M=4.60).

Table 8: Industry's need for English language skill usage (Listening)

Activities	Mean
Listening	
1. Listen to customer's/guest's inquiries	4.58
1. Listen to customer's orders	4.65
2. Listen to customer's complaints	4.60
3. Listen to the manager's explanation of the work process	4.60
4. Listen to the manager's explanation on hotel policies, procedures and decision	4.70
5. Listen to instructions from managers	4.53
6. Listen to the manager's explanation of safety precaution	4.65

As shown in Table 9, for activities related to the use of writing in English, results indicated that industry personnel rated write to reply to customer's enquiries on room rates as the main focus under writing skills (M= 1.80). This is followed by writing to reply to customers' enquiries on food and beverages (M=1.78), take down notes during meetings (M=1.70) and write to reply to customer's enquiries on hotel facilities (M=1.68). Industry personnel viewed almost all the activities in writing are needed to carry out their task but only the level of importance differs from each other. Some writing activities that are less significant are writing sales reports, writing the daily report, writing reports on accidents and writing progress reports and this can be seen from each activity's mean values.

Table 9: Industry's need of English language skill usage (Writing)

Activities	Mean
Writing	
1. Write in response to complaints from customers	1.50
2. Write minutes of meetings	1.65
3. Take down notes during meetings	1.70
4. Write to reply to customers' enquiries on room rates	1.80
5. Write to reply to customer's enquiries on hotel facilities	1.68
6. Write to reply to customer's enquiries on food and beverage	1.78
7. Write reports on occupancy	1.55
8. Write to reports on a field trip	1.58
9. Write reports on an accident	1.50
10. Write sales report	1.48
11. Write daily report	1.65
12. Write progress report	1.48
13. Fill in reservation forms	1.80
14. Fill in menu order	1.68
15. Write menu in a restaurant	1.55

As shown in Table 10, for activities related to reading skills, industry personnel viewed this differently. As per their feedback, reading job specifications and duties in English comes first (M=2.00), followed by reading journals and books to improve job knowledge (M=1.88), reading instruction on safety precaution (M=1.80) and reading complaint letters from customers (M=1.63). Some other reading activities comes after these activities. Some activities

under reading skills such as reading a letter of reservation from customers gained less mean value, perhaps due to less frequent usage when carrying out their task. Next, industry personnel perceived reading recipes and instruction is quite important (M=2.00).

Table 10: *Industry's need for English language skill usage (Reading)*

Activities	Mean
Reading	
1. Complaint letters from customers	1.63
2. Job specification and duties in English	2.00
3. Recipe and instruction in English	2.00
4. Journals, books to improve job knowledge and skills	1.88
5. Instruction on safety precaution	1.80
6. Letters of reservation from customers	1.60

The Comparison of Mean between the Students' and Industries' Need

To address research question 2, the mean scores of the respondents from the industry experts and students were calculated. According to the industry experts, the hotel industry is based on the service sector, with the major purpose being, communicating and dealing with clients and guests. As shown in Table 11, industry personnel were requested to complete a questionnaire on the primary activities that hotel staff may perform. The primary functions were categorized into 4 distinct skills. These activities were similar to those described in Blue and Harun (2003). The perspectives of students and professionals regarding the application of the four language skills in various activities are shown in Table 11. Data in Table 11 reveals that students perceived speaking skill (overall M= 4.59), listening skill (overall= 4.71), writing skill (overall = 1.56), and reading skill (overall= 1.58) as the most commonly used skill in specific activities. According to the industry's needs, the most commonly used skill in specific tasks were speaking skill (overall M=4.56), listening skill (overall M=4.62), writing skill (overall M=1.63), and reading skill (overall M=1.82).

Table 11: *Comparison between Students' and Industry's need of English language skill usage*

Activity	Mean Students	Mean Industry	Total Mean Students	Total Mean Industry
Speaking			**4.59**	**4.56**
Attend to the customers (restaurant and front office)	4.58	4.45		
Present and answer enquiries about the menu orally	4.58	4.55		
Describe and explain types of menu	4.52	4.50		
Respond orally to customer's complaints on food and beverage	4.60	4.60		
Answer enquiries on a local establishment	4.52	4.53		
Answer enquiries on hotel facilities	4.62	4.60		
Respond to customer complaints on hotel services	4.57	4.58		
Conduct tours on hotel facilities	4.52	4.50		
Arrange and inform guests of transport arrangement	4.60	4.55		
Answer telephone calls for reservation	4.75	4.65		
Respond to a complaint on rooms	4.62	4.60		
Listening			**4.71**	**4.62**
Listen to customer's/guest's inquiries	4.65	4.58		
Listen to customer's orders	4.72	4.65		
Listen to customer's complaints	4.76	4.60		

Listen to manager's explanation of work process	4.62	4.60		
Listen to manager's explanation on hotel policies, procedures and decision	4.76	4.70		
Listen to instruction from managers	4.73	4.53		
Listen to manager's explanation of safety precaution	4.70	4.65		
Writing			**1.56**	**1.63**
Write in response to complaints from customers	1.58	1.50		
Write minutes of meetings	1.52	1.65		
Take down notes during meetings	1.73	1.70		
Write to reply to customers' enquiries on room rates	1.50	1.80		
Write to reply to customer's enquiries on hotel facilities	1.60	1.68		
Write to reply to customer's enquiries on food and beverage	1.58	1.78		
Write reports on occupancy	1.43	1.55		
Write to reports on field trip	1.33	1.58		
Write reports on accident	1.48	1.50		
Write sales report	1.45	1.48		
Write daily report	1.43	1.65		
Write progress report	1.43	1.48		
Fill in reservation forms	2.28	1.80		
Fill in menu order	1.53	1.68		
Write menu to be used in the restaurant	1.53	1.55		
Reading			**1.58**	**1.82**
Complaint letters from customers	1.60	1.63		
Job specification and duties in English	1.75	2.00		
Recipe and instruction in English	1.48	2.00		
Journals, books to improve job knowledge and skills	1.48	1.88		
Instruction on safety precaution	1.58	1.80		
Letters of reservation from customers	1.58	1.60		

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The first research question was intended to discover the language needs of hospitality students during their internship. The findings of the study proved that all four language skills are needed to carry out the related job task. However, some skills are found to be more important and frequently used than others, especially when the students were assigned tasks that dealt directly with guests or customers. In this study, listening and speaking skills were perceived as mostly used by the students to carry out their tasks. They do use other skills such as reading and writing, but speaking skill was given more priority.

The second research question was intended to seek the answer if the students' needs correlate with the industry's needs. The researcher found out that professionals were of the view that the hotel industry depends solely on the service factor, and according to the overall findings of the questionnaire, industry personnel need the internship students to interact with their guests mainly in attending to the customers at the front office, restaurant, answer enquiries about the menu orally, respond to customers 'complaint, answer telephone calls and other specific listening and speaking tasks. All industry personnel were unanimous in the priority given to speaking and listening compared to the other two skills, which were used to carry out the hospitality task as well but are used less frequently.

English language programs have become alert of the need for curriculum evaluation to cater to both industry and students' needs. Due to this, English language courses ought to be modified with the course syllabus when the students could not perform well at their workplace. The course syllabus procedure should be reviewed on a regular basis in order to make the

required modifications that will result in improved outcomes for that specific course. To create better-qualified community college graduates, flaws in the current curriculum should be corrected.

This study's findings clearly solved all of the research problems raised previously. The initial research goal is to assess the language demands of Hospitality trainees during their internship, and the findings show that internship students require more listening and speaking abilities when working in hotels. The second research objective is to determine whether the students' needs correlate with the industry's needs, and industry personnel unanimously agreed that they place a greater emphasis on staff listening and speaking skills because hotel industries are service sectors that require frequent communication with customers. Hence, the industry's needs do correlate with the student's needs in the English language. Nevertheless, this study has shed some light on the main focus to be taken into account before redesigning the new English syllabus for the Hospitality students.

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