NEEDS ANALYSIS: HOTEL RECEPTIONISTS' USE OF ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Needs analysis is critical in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) development of teaching and learning because it decides learners' goals, needs, or deficiencies in the environmental situation. Learners are often taught and led in educational practices by textbooks authored by native speakers Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2008). However, Vietnam received a record of over 18 million of international arrivals in 2019 arrivals (VNAT, 2022). An analysis must evaluate real-life conditions to find difficulties met when working as a hotel receptionist. This research looks at the lives of eighteen hotel receptionists in Can Tho, Vietnam. A quantitative approach is used in this research to find out in what ways hotel receptionists use their positions and the obstacles they experience on the job. The study results show that hotel receptionists employ four skills, but speaking and listening are significantly more critical in this sector. Furthermore, hotel receptionists need help with these abilities when speaking with non-native visitors. The findings imply that, besides textbook resources, educators and curriculum designers could include distinct accents from non-native English speakers into a curriculum for ESP learners. Practical markets, particularly in Asia, now have implications for real-world tourism development practices.

Keywords: ESP, hotel receptionist, English, needs analysis

1. Introduction

Tourism is critical to the development of the whole nation. It brings economic advantages to the area, encourages cultural interchange, and allows visitors to experience the local way of life. With its incredible natural landscape and legacy, Vietnam has become one of the most desirable Southeast Asian destinations for international travelers (VNAT, 2019). In recent years, the tourist business in Vietnam has grown, resulting in increased employment and salaries for locals. Furthermore, foreign language fluency is becoming increasingly vital for tourist firms in Vietnam. Most students are only taught in English, yet, owing to a lack of experience, they need to be competent communicators. As a result, many tourist firms find it challenging to locate local personnel with the essential language

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skills and expertise to succeed in their professions. It is not surprising, therefore, English has become the most widely used language in the world, with an estimated 1.5 billion people speaking it. To keep up with the demands of modern society, many people have to learn English to stay competitive in their fields. As a result, there has been a significant interest in researching workplace workers' most effective use of English. There is a high demand for qualified hotel employees with a wide range of skills.

According to Alexandra et al. (2019), hotel employees must be fluent in English to provide service. Alexandra et al. (2019) also advocated more study into university-level teaching approaches to improve students' English abilities. Listening skills relate to the capacity to listen to and understand the messages of others. Listening skills are vital for success in tourism and hospitality because they enable you to understand customers' needs, desires, complaints, or explanations (Ratmanida et al., 2020). Active listening, understanding, and reacting to the speaker's message are all components of good listening abilities (Ratmanida et al., 2020). Many studies have indicated that university-level students lack the listening skills required to work in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Alexandra et al., 2019). Speaking abilities are required in the hotel industry to connect and interact with visitors. Reading abilities are essential in the hotel sector since reading tour reservations, customers, and paperwork is required (Ratmanida et al., 2020). Writing skills are also important since they enable hotel employees to communicate effectively via memos, emails, and reports.

Altarawneh & Osam (2019) argued for the English for Tourism advocated curriculum to be revised in terms of goals, content, and assessment to better meet the demands of Jordan's tourism sector. According to Amirbakzadeh & Vakil Alroaia's (2020) research, listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities substantially affect successful communication and education in English, especially in tourist development and the importance of language competence in tourism sectors. The gap here, however, is the skills between textbooks and the workplace. A needs analysis is required to understand hotel receptionists' English use and the challenges of modifying learning materials to support students' practical abilities in the future workplace.

1.1 Research objectives

Following Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) needs analysis model, this study aims to:
1) Find out in what ways hotel receptionists use English in their workplace;
2) Find out the challenges hotel receptionists face in their job.

1.2 Significance of the study

Curriculum designers must comprehend the practical use of English in the tourist sector to contribute to developing a curriculum for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in the hotel business (Kardijan, Emzir, & Rafli, 2017). Teachers use new or existing resources to help their students get jobs in the future, especially as hotel receptionists.

2. Literature review

2.1 Needs analysis

Since the 1960s, the notion of needs analysis has expanded, resulting in various terminologies. Needs are classified as "*objective*" or "*subjective*" (Brindley, 1989). There are also "*necessities*," "*wants*," and "*lacks*" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). These phrases were coined to explain the many circumstances and viewpoints that led to the evolution of the idea of needs. Needs analysis has been used in language education for at least two decades and is seen as an essential step in ESP, syllabus design, and teaching and learning (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). According to Johns (1991), the initial phase in curriculum design needs analysis, which provides legitimacy and relevance for all subsequent curriculum design activities. Needs analysis includes actions that collect information from learners in their natural surroundings to address a curriculum's fundamental needs. Need analysis is critical in developing an ESP syllabus design since it gathers critical information tailored to the learners' specific requirements (Brown, 1995). Needs analysis is described as assessing and prioritizing the needs of learners or groups of learners who need a language or as recognizing the language and skills to select the contents of ESP courses (Basturkmen, 2010).

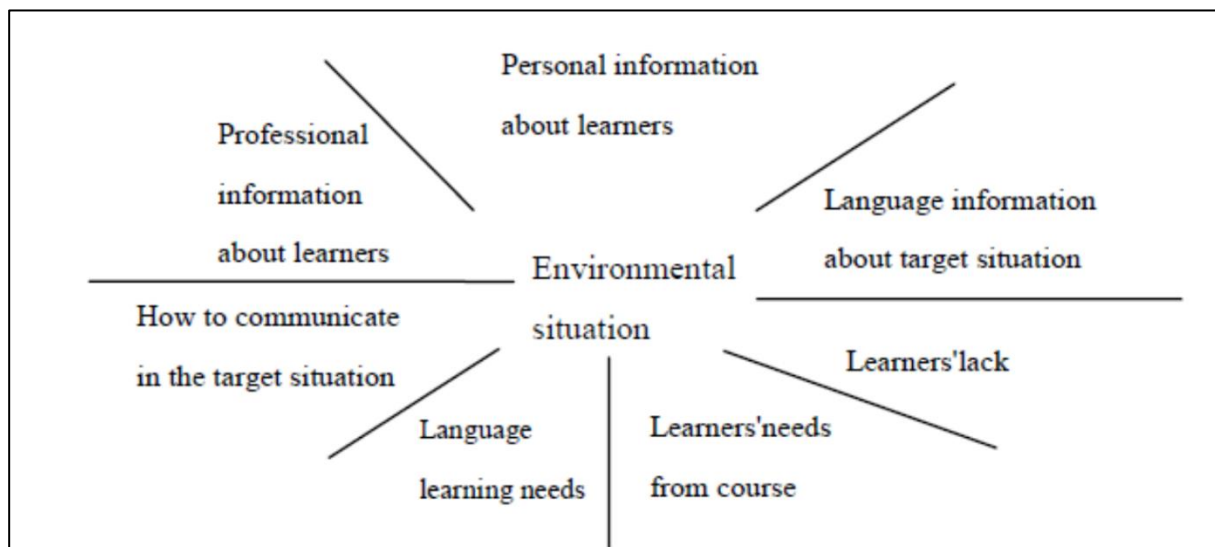### 2.2 Dudley-Evans and St John's Model of Needs Analysis

Figure 1: Dudley-Evans & St John's Model of Needs Analysis

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), anyone who requires ESP analysis should follow the following procedures: The first is about professional knowledge regarding tasks and activities for which learners are or will be utilizing English. The second component includes personal information about the learners, such as learning experiences or attitudes about English (wants, subjective needs, and lacks). The third is current language usage and learners' abilities. The fourth category is the shortage of learners, defined as the gap between the target language and current skills. The methods

listed below are effective for learning skills and language. The sixth idea is knowledge of how language and abilities are employed in goal contexts. The next step is to determine what is expected from the course. The last component is information on how the course will be conducted.

2.3 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes is thoroughly detailed. ESP, as described by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), is an approach to language education that tries to match the requirements of specific learners. ESP delivers a proper language learning activity that fits the learner's desire by concentrating on the use of language for goals and delivering an in-depth, personalized learning experience. Teaching or learning English for a particular job, such as tourism, hotel management, law, medicine, or general business, is called "English for Specific Purposes". There is a reason English is learned, and this purpose decides the language learners must learn, the vocabulary they should get, and the abilities they must have to become competent in their chosen sector. English for Specific Purpose is a style of English language instruction described by Robinson (1989) as "*goal-oriented language learning*" (Robinson, 1989, p. 398), which implies learners have a specific aim to achieve.

2.4 Previous studies

Christison & Krahnke (2004) investigated non-native English-speaking university students in the United States. According to the findings, listening and reading skills were more important than speaking and writing abilities while speaking and listening were considered the most challenging skills in English. Maniruzzaman (2006) investigated Bengali learners' English challenges. The findings revealed that people struggled with pronunciation because Bengali-speaking learners are naturally habituated to articulating Bengali consonants, which differ from English consonants in many ways. Lertchalermtipakoon et al. found negotiating for understanding, English consonants, and vowels as factors causing problems with speaking ability (2021). Inappropriate language usage leads to ineffective speaking skills. Ratmanida et al. investigated the English language requirements in tourism and the hotel industry (2020). It is considered while developing English material. According to the results of a purposive sample approach with 41 workers, the most required abilities are listening skills speaking skills, and joint reading and writing skills are the third most needed.

Communication skills and ability in English with international visitors are critical attributes in easing the tourist and hospitality industries (Shieh, 2012). As a result, it is critical for universities and colleges that supply training programs in these fields to graduate students who are fluent in English. For example, Chan Mei-Yuit (2002) evaluated the English language training requirements of hotel front office staff in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and found that listening and speaking skills were the most important for the job. Reading and writing were not listed as essential skills for the study's participants. As a result, she proposed that the English language communication training program for hotel front office staff emphasize listening and speaking skills. According to Blue & Harun (2003), the English language is chosen as a professional skill in the hotel

business above communication skills. Thus, English ability is critical for students seeking a profession in the hotel business since there is a consistent engagement with customers. Some "*multifunctional language abilities*" are needed from hospitality graduate students, including "soft skills" such as the capacity to communicate, take part in what the speaker is saying, or make the message plain (Blue & Harun, 2003, p. 87).

3. Methods

3.1 Research questions
This current study aims to answer two following questions:
1) In what ways do hotel receptionists use English?
2) What are challenges that hotel receptionists have in their job?

3.2 Participants
Participants were hotel receptionists working in hotels in Vietnam are ranging from 20 to 40 years old. They work in one-star hotels to three-star hotels in Can Tho, Vietnam.

3.3 Instruments
This study used a questionnaire divided into four different parts. Part one provided the respondents' personal information with three short questions about gender, age, and educational background. Part two was about general information, with nine questions related to the current position, working length, the number of foreign tourists, and their opinion about the necessity of English language skills. Part three was in English, with twenty-five job activities. Part four provided English difficulties with six tables relevant to their scales of *very difficult*, *difficult*, *easy*, and *very easy*. The research instrument used in this study was a closed-ended questionnaire, a self-assessment questionnaire with items derived from Charunsri (2011); some were modified to suit the Vietnamese context.

3.4 Data collection and analysis
The invitation letter was sent via email to forty hotel receptionists in Can Tho. After getting permission, questionnaires were sent via email. Eighteen copies were completed and returned, with a response rate of 45 percent after two weeks. The data obtained from the returned questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) as follows: Percentage and frequency count were used to analyze the answer in the part about background information. The Arithmetic Mean was used to depict the difficulties of using English as well as the attitudes of tourists toward hotel receptionists. By inferring references from literature and material linked to the subject of the study, a descriptive analysis method was used (Ratmanida et al., 2020; Charunscri, 2011).

4. Findings

Most receptionists (94,4 percent) had bachelor's degrees and worked for one to three years (83,3 percent). In this part, English was divided into four sections: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Each has job duties to ensure proper English usage at the reception.

4.1 Gender
The poll found a mix of male and female receptionists. According to the poll, 44,4 percent were men, and 55,6 percent were females. As a result, female employees were paid more than male employees.

4.2 Age
This survey divided hotel receptionists into four age groups: under 20, between 20 and 30, between 31 and 40, and over 40. The results revealed that 94 percent of those questioned were between the ages of 20 and 30. 5,6 percent of those polled were between the ages of 31 and 40.

      The survey divided education into three categories: less than a bachelor's degree, a bachelor's degree, and a bachelor's degree or above. Most receptionists (94,4 percent) had bachelor's degrees, 5,6 percent had less than a bachelor's degree, and no one had an education greater than a bachelor's degree.

      Working time in the present position: The questionnaire divided working time in the present position into three categories: 1-3 years, 3-5 years, and more than five years. The majority (83,3 percent) had been in this current position for 1-3 years; 16,7 percent had been in the same position for more than five years.

      There were five categories of foreign tourists per week: 3-5 people per week, 6–10 people per week, 11–20 people per week, and more than 20 people per week. 55,6 percent of hotels had more than 20 people per week; 27,8 percent of hotels had between 10 and 20 people per week; 11 percent of hotels had between 3 and 5 people per week, and 5 percent of hotels had between 5 and 10 people per week. Below are details for findings of research questions 1 and 2.

4.3 Speaking
94,4 percent were for welcoming and greeting; 83,3 percent were for the requirements of guests and suggestions for tours and transportation; 77,8 percent were for giving instruction about the hotel and speaking with different tourists around the world; 72,2 percent were for the phone call connection and explaining mistakes to tourists; 66,7 percent were for giving directions, and 61,1 percent are for travel agency. Refer to Table 1 for the illustration of the frequency and percentage of speaking activities.

Table 1: The frequency and percentage of speaking activities

The use of English in speaking	Frequency (N)/18	Percentage (%)
Welcoming & Greetings	17	94,4
Giving instructions about the hotel	14	77,8
Giving directions	12	66,7
Speaking by phone call	13	72,2
Speaking politely with guests' requests	15	83,3
Suggesting for tours, travel transportations and accommodation	15	83,3
Explaining the mistakes about room facilities	13	72,2
Speaking to travel agents	11	61,1
Speaking with native English tourists from America, New Zealand, Australia	14	77,8
Speaking with non-native English tourists from Italia, France, Spain, Singapore, China, and others.	14	77,8

Most job activities were easy for hotel receptionists (x = 2.77). Separately, welcoming and greeting (3.39), giving instructions about the hotel (3.00), and giving directions (x=2.94) were completely easy for them. Others, such as speaking on the phone (x = 2.72), politely responding to guests' requests (x = 2.83), and suggesting tours, transportation, and accomodation (x = 2.89), were also simple. Furthermore, explaining the mistakes about room facilities (x = 2.67), speaking to travel agents (x = 2.5), and speaking with native English tourists from America, New Zealand, and Australia (x = 2.5) were average. Moreover, they had difficulties speaking with non-native English tourists from Italy, France, Spain, China, and Singapore (x = 2.22). Refer to Table 2 for speaking difficulties.

Table 2: Speaking difficulties

Job activities	$\overline{x}$	Std. Deviation	Level
Welcoming & Greetings	3.39	.502	Easy
Giving instructions about the hotel	3.00	.485	Easy
Giving directions	2.94	.639	Easy
Speaking by phone call	2.72	.669	Easy
Speaking politely with guests' requests	2.83	.514	Easy
Suggesting for tours, travel transportations and accommodation	2.89	.583	Easy
Explaining the mistakes about room facilities	2.67	.686	Quite easy
Speaking to travel agents	2.5	.618	Quite easy
Speaking with native English tourists from England, America, New Zealand, Australia	2.5	.707	Quite easy
Speaking with non-native English tourists from Italia, France, Spain, China, Singapore, and others.	2.22	.732	Difficult
Average	**2.77**	**.614**	**Easy**

4.4 Listening

Listening skill was used by most of the hotel receptionists. 88,9 percent of the demand comes from customers and their complaints; 83,3 percent comes from listening to American and British English; 77,8 percent from phone calls, and 66,7 percent from other

accents. Refer to Table 3 for the illustration of the frequency and percentage of listening activities.

Table 3: The frequency and percentage of listening activities

The use of English in listening	Frequency (N)/18	Percentage (%)
Listening and understanding what the customers want	16	88,9
Listening to the customer's complaint	16	88,9
Listening to phone call	14	77,8
Listening to native English tourists (British, American, Australian)	15	83,3
Listening to non-native English tourists (Italian, Spanish, French, Singaporean, Chinese)	12	66,7

Hotel receptionists encountered many difficulties in their listening activities. No one gave an easy or very easy answer in general. Listening to and understanding what the customers want (x = 2.89), and listening to the customer's complaint (x = 2.89), were relatively easy. Listening to phone calls (x = 2.67), listening to American English (x = 2.67), and listening to British English (x = 2.61) were average. However, listening to Italian English (x = 2.28), listening to French English (x = 2.22), listening to Spanish English (2.17), listening to Singaporean English (x = 2.39), and listening to Chinese English (x = 2.22) were difficult. Refer to Table 4 for the illustration of listening difficulties.

Table 4: Listening difficulties

Job activities	$\bar{x}$	Std. Deviation	Level
Listening and understanding what the customers want	2.89	.676	Quite easy
Listening to the customers complaint	2.89	.676	Quite easy
Listening to phone calls	2.67	.594	Quite easy
Listening to American English	2.67	.767	Quite easy
Listening to British English	2.61	.850	Quite easy
Listening to Italian English	2.28	.575	Difficult
Listening to French English	2.22	.732	Difficult
Listening to Spanish English	2.17	.618	Difficult
Listening to Singaporean English	2.39	.608	Difficult
Listening to Chinese English	2.22	.647	Difficult
Average	**2.50**	**.674**	**Quite easy**

4.5 Writing

Writing emails & responding to customers were used most by 94,4 percent; 66,7 percent for a message for customers; 61,1 percent for thank-you letters and business formats used occasionally with only 38,9 percent. Refer to Table 5 to illustrate the frequency and percentage of writing activities.

Table 5: The frequency and percentage of writing activities

The use of English in Writing	Frequency (N)/18	Percentage (%)
Writing email & responding email to customers	17	94,4
Writing business formats	7	38,9
Writing thank-you letters	11	61,1
Writing messages for customers	12	66,7

It was easy to write emails (x=2.94), thank-you letters (x=2.72), and messages to customers (x=2.94). However, hotel receptionists got difficulties writing business formats (x=2.27). Refer to Table 6 for the illustration of writing difficulties.

Table 6: Writing difficulties

Job activities	$\overline{x}$	Std. Deviation	Level
Writing email & responding email to customers	2.94	.416	Easy
Writing business formats	2.27	.461	Difficult
Writing thank-you letters	2.72	.575	Easy
Writing messages for customers	2.94	.539	Easy
Average	**2.72**	**.497**	**Easy**

4.6 Reading

Almost all reading activities were used in high percentages, with 100 percent for reading hotel bookings, 89 percent for emails and tours, 78 percent for travel books or brochures, and 72 percent for travel agency.

Table 7: The frequency and percentage of reading activities

The use of English in Reading	Frequency (N)/18	Percentage (%)
Reading travel books, hotel documents	14	78
Reading emails from travel agency	13	72
Reading the hotel bookings	18	100
Reading emails from tourists	16	89
Reading tour information	16	89

Most of the reading activities were easy (x = 3.07). Separately, reading travel documents, hotel documents, and brochures (x = 3.00), reading emails from travel agency (x = 3.00), reading hotel bookings (x = 3.06), reading emails from tourists (x = 3.17), and reading tour information (x = 3.11). Refer to Table 8 for the illustration of reading difficulties.

Table 8: Reading difficulties

Job activities	$\overline{x}$	Std. Deviation	Level
Reading travel, hotel documents, brochures	3.00	.767	Easy
Reading emails from travel agency	3.00	.594	Easy
Reading the hotel bookings	3.06	.539	Easy
Reading emails from tourists	3.17	.514	Easy
Reading tour information	3.11	.583	Easy
Average	**3.07**	**.599**	**Easy**

5. Discussion

The four most common job activities were welcoming and greeting with 94 percent, listening and understanding what the customers want with 88 percent, writing and responding to emails with 94 percent, and reading hotel bookings with 100 percent. It also revealed the four most minor job activities. They listened to Chinese, Italian, Spanish, French, and Singaporean accents 66,7 percent of the time and wrote business formats 38,9 percent of the time. Furthermore, the last was reading emails from travel agency.

This study supports a prior study by Christison & Krahnke (2004), which found that listening is the most challenging skill for hotel receptionists to master. The reasons for the findings might be like those given by Maniruzzaman (2006), where pronunciation is a barrier; English consonants and vowels were highlighted as challenges that impede understanding Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021). In this current study, hotel receptionists struggle with varied English accents while dealing with guests from various places who are not native English speakers. As a result, according to Ratmanida et al., 2020, listening skill is the most important in this study as a sign for curriculum designers. This suggests that students in the hotel sector must be fluent in English and be able to negotiate meaning with tourists to engage in discussions rather than say nothing due to misunderstanding (Blue & Harun, 2003). This study is relevant to Shieh (2012) and Chan Mei-Yuit (2002), which prove that reading and writing are less critical at work.

With 94 percent agreement, welcoming and greeting are the most popular activities in the hotel industry. Furthermore, the findings revealed that hotel receptionists handle check-in, check-out, and tour service. It was discovered that 15 of 18 hotel receptionists used English to suggest tours and transportation. This implies that those who work in hotels appear to have a broad knowledge of tourism and hospitality. Speaking activities are divided into four categories: welcoming and greeting, face-to-face and phone instructions, tour service, and business partners.

However, they struggle to communicate with tourists from non-native English-speaking countries. This highlighted the critical gaps when students must constantly listen to native English accents. As a result, when actual life practices have communication issues, it is clear in their listening difficulties when they confirm having difficulty with these accents. Reading and writing are the most underutilized skills in the hotel industry.

Speaking and listening skills are still used primarily in the hotel industry. The most used job activities were welcoming and greeting, listening to customers' wants, writing emails to guests, and reading hotel bookings. Therefore, they must be good at four English language skills for work. Besides, the least used job activities were connecting to an online travel agency or writing for online businesses. Hotel receptionists rate their listening, reading, and writing abilities as moderate. Only speaking is entirely reasonable to them. Most hotel receptionists have spoken and listening difficulties with Italian, French, Spanish, Singaporean tourists. When misunderstandings occur, this makes effective communication extremely difficult.

6. Conclusion

Hotel receptionists use four English skills for the job, which are crucial to their work. However, there are some highlights to reconsider to meet the curriculum for ESP learners. Speaking skills are often used in the hotel industry; however, there is a need to add different accents of tourists besides the textbook listening audio. Most hotel receptionists had the same problems working, speaking, and listening to Italian, Chinese, Spanish, Singaporean, and French. Clearly, learners listened to conversations, practices, and audio from native speakers of English, so it seems to be incredibly challenging when they meet different accents from tourists worldwide. Consequently, trainers, teachers, or educational or curriculum designers should consider it a significant stage to support learners' communication skills in universities or colleges.

The study's findings suggest several areas for future investigation. Further study should be undertaken based on visitor reports from various places to uncover the various English accents and to pay attention to communication ability. Hotel employees should undergo brief training classes to learn more practical duties. Many levels of four fundamental English skills were detected; thus, more studies will be conducted on students' problems when learning English.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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