INVESTIGATING THE APPLICATION OF NEEDS ANALYSIS OF AIRLINE STAFF STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the application of needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for airline staff students in Indonesia. The research uses a mixed-methods approach to evaluate whether the language taught aligns with workplace requirements. Data were collected from 50 students and 15 airline staff using questionnaires and an analysis of course syllabi and materials. The findings reveal that while speaking skills were adequately addressed through role-playing activities aligned with real-world tasks, other skills such as listening, writing, and reading were misaligned with workplace demands. Listening tasks failed to address diverse accents encountered during customer interactions, and writing activities lacked relevance to operational documentation. Pronunciation and vocabulary, critical for effective communication, were underrepresented in the course. These inadequacies led to challenges faced by students during internships, including difficulties understanding accents and constructing grammatically correct responses. The study underscores the importance of incorporating authentic materials, informed by comprehensive needs analysis, into ESP course design to better prepare students for professional roles. Future research should explore integrating workplace observations and interviews with industry professionals to enhance alignment between academic instruction and practical requirements.

Keywords: Aviation English, ESP, Needs Analysis, Workplace Communication

INTRODUCTION

English has been the dominant global language for several decades and is pivotal in various sectors such as business, tourism, science, and education. Over the years, the significance of English has expanded beyond traditional communication with native speakers, as it has become essential for interacting within international professional environments. As Dibankanaka and Hiranburana (2012) note, English's widespread use has permeated multiple fields, and the demand for English is now more specific, especially in professional sectors such as aviation. The airline industry is one such sector where English communication skills are not only a necessity but a critical component in ensuring operational efficiency and passenger safety.

In aviation, English serves as a bridge for communication among airline staff and between staff and passengers. As Aiguo (2007) highlights, the ability to communicate effectively in English enables airline employees to navigate the global work environment and deliver high-quality service to passengers. Aviation Job (2009) further emphasizes that a significant portion

of an airline employee's tasks and responsibilities, such as communication with international passengers and ground staff, are carried out in English. These tasks may include giving safety instructions, resolving issues, and coordinating with other airport services, all of which require not only fluency but also specialized language knowledge.

The increasing demand for English tailored to specific professional contexts has given rise to the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP focuses on meeting learners' specific language needs within the context of their professional or vocational roles. As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) explain, ESP differs from general English Language Teaching (ELT) because it is designed based on the "where," "when," and "why" of language use in specific professional settings. Unlike general English courses, which cover broad language skills for daily communication, ESP courses prioritize the practical use of language for job-related tasks. The main objective of ESP is to equip learners with the specific language skills they need to function effectively in their professional environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the key elements of ESP is the use of needs analysis. Needs analysis is a critical process in which the language requirements of learners are assessed and understood to design a relevant curriculum that addresses these needs. As Sysoyev (2001) points out, needs analysis is closely linked to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept that outlines the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can do with guidance from more competent individuals. In the context of ESP, the teacher acts as a mediator who helps learners bridge this gap by providing the necessary support and guidance to reach their learning goals. By aligning course content with the specific language needs of the learners, ESP aims to create an effective learning environment where students acquire the relevant skills for their professional roles.

Vygotsky's ZPD offers a theoretical framework for understanding how language is learned within a professional context. It emphasizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator who helps learners move from their current level of proficiency to a higher level of competence. This approach is particularly relevant in ESP courses, where learners are expected to acquire language skills that directly apply to their work. As Sysoyev (2001) explains, the teacher's role is to assist learners in moving beyond their current capabilities and help them achieve language proficiency that will enable them to perform tasks effectively in their professional environments.

The significance of needs analysis in ESP cannot be overstated. According to Basturkmen (2006), needs analysis is the process of identifying the specific language and skills required for a particular professional context. In ESP, the language taught is directly linked to the tasks and functions that learners will encounter in their workplaces. This process involves analyzing the target situation, which refers to the real-world context in which the

language will be used, and determining the learners' current proficiency levels. By identifying the gap between learners' abilities and the language skills required in their professional roles, needs analysis helps shape the course curriculum and materials to ensure that learners receive the training they need to succeed.

Furthermore, needs analysis involves not only understanding the specific tasks that learners will need to perform in their professional settings but also assessing the learners' existing language skills. West (1997) introduced the concept of "deficiency analysis," which examines the gap between the learners' current proficiency and the language demands of their work. Recent advancements in needs analysis emphasize the importance of aligning language instruction with dynamic workplace demands. As Long (2015) highlights, task-based needs analysis has become a critical tool for identifying the specific tasks that learners need to perform in professional contexts. In aviation, where communication tasks often involve rapid exchanges and adherence to standardized protocols, a granular understanding of these tasks is essential for designing effective ESP curricula.

Moreover, Nguyen and Ngo (2020) argue that modern needs analysis should integrate technological proficiencies alongside linguistic skills. With the increased use of digital platforms for ticketing and customer service, aviation staff must acquire not only language proficiency but also the ability to navigate industry-specific software and tools. For example, training programs should include simulated

environments where learners practice both linguistic and operational tasks, reflecting real-world scenarios. By identifying this gap, needs analysis informs the development of a course that targets the skills that learners need to develop to succeed in their jobs. This approach ensures that ESP courses are relevant, practical, and aligned with the real-world language demands of the learners' professional roles.

In aviation, the need for clear and effective communication is paramount. Aviation English, a specialized form of English, is used in the aviation industry to ensure safe and efficient operations. This specialized language is governed by international regulations, such as those set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and is characterized by its specific terminology and phraseology. As Cabre, Freixa, Lorente, and Tebe (1998) argue, aviation English is a restricted code that simplifies communication to minimize the risk of misunderstandings, which could have serious consequences in this high-stakes environment. Radiotelephony phraseology, also known as "Airspeak," is an example of the specialized vocabulary used in aviation communication to ensure precision and clarity.

The distinct nature of aviation English sets it apart from general English. While general English may be sufficient for everyday communication, aviation English is tailored to the specific communication needs of the industry. As Sullivan and Girginer (2002) observe, effective communication in aviation requires not only the ability to speak and

understand aviation terminology but also the skills to listen attentively and respond quickly. The use of specialized terminology, such as phrases for requesting assistance or communicating technical information, is crucial in ensuring that communication is both accurate and efficient.

Despite the importance of ESP in aviation, research into its application in this field is still limited. While much has been written about ESP in other sectors, such as business and healthcare, there is a notable lack of research focused on the specific language needs of aviation professionals. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Williams (1988) and Nelson (2000), have revealed discrepancies between the language taught in ESP courses and the language used in real-world professional settings. These studies found that many ESP textbooks failed to capture the complexity and specificity of language use in professional environments. In aviation, this gap is particularly concerning, as miscommunication can lead to dangerous situations. As Cabre et al. (1998) highlight, the language used in aviation is not just a tool for communication but a vital element in ensuring safety and operational efficiency.

This study aims to fill the gap in research by investigating how needs analysis is applied in ESP courses for airline staff students in Indonesia. The study will explore how course materials, syllabi, and teaching methods align with the specific language demands of the aviation industry. It will also examine the role of the teacher in conducting needs analysis and how this influences the design of ESP courses. By providing a comprehensive analysis of ESP in the aviation context, this study hopes to contribute valuable insights into how ESP courses can be better tailored to meet the specific needs of aviation professionals, ensuring that they acquire the language skills necessary for effective communication and safety in their work.

METHOD

The research question that guides the design of the study was; Does the language taught during the course meet the students' needs in the workplace? To answer this main research question, two questions were posed as a foundation; (1) What are the language needs of the airline staff? (2) What English language skills and features did the students learn during the course?

To answer the research questions, the study employed a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods are described as the integration of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to achieve a greater depth of understanding of the findings (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). A group of 50 students from two classes participated in the study. Additionally, 15 airline staff members were selected from the airport where the students completed their internships.

The data in this study was collected by using a questionnaire and the syllabus and materials used by the teacher. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions involving 5 open and 10 closed questions which covered job analysis, language needs, recognition of prior learning and personal details. The

questionnaire given to the students and the airline staff employee is the same, there is only additional recognition of prior learning questions for the students.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of closed and open questions. For the closed-ended question, the data was analyzed quantitatively. The open-ended questions, it was analyzed qualitatively by first taking each response's key points and it was then formed into broader categories to describe the content of the response. The syllabus and materials in this study were analyzed by looking at the language skills and language elements taught to the students. The comparison of the findings of the language needs and the syllabus used will answer whether the materials used to teach the students are based on the language needs or not.

RESULT
Students' Perspectives on Language Needs

The data collected from the students underscored the critical role of English in the airline industry, particularly during internships. Among the four language skills, speaking was consistently identified as the most important. All 50 students (100%) reported using speaking skills for customer interactions, which constituted the majority of their language use. This demonstrates the reliance on spoken English for tasks such as checking in passengers and resolving queries. Speaking to colleagues was less common (20%), reflecting the primarily customer-facing nature of their roles, while making announcements was cited by only one student (5%), suggesting it was not a significant task during their internships.

Reading was also identified as an essential skill. Tasks such as reading flight details (75%) and checking passenger information against tickets (50%) were frequently mentioned, reflecting the procedural and documentation-related nature of their responsibilities. Listening, while less prominent, was necessary for understanding customer inquiries (75%) and following instructions (20%). Students noted that listening tasks primarily involved comprehending customer needs, highlighting the importance of active listening in service roles. Writing was less emphasized overall but remained critical for producing flight documents (45%) and reports (35%), which require precise and accurate use of language.

The findings further revealed specific workplace areas where English was most frequently used. Checking-in had the highest mean score (M = 3.35) on a four-point scale, followed by ticketing (M = 2.4). These results indicate that the students' primary tasks involved direct interaction with passengers in front-line roles. Additional tasks performed in English included giving directions to airport facilities and services (M = 3.3) and explaining prohibited items (M = 2.85). Notably, phrases such as "Good morning, may I see your passport and ticket?" and "Would you like an aisle or window seat?" were identified as essential, as they are commonly used in routine interactions with passengers.

Airline Staff's Perspectives on Language Needs

The responses from the 15 airline staff members reinforced the findings from the students, emphasizing the critical role of speaking skills, particularly for customer-facing interactions. While 86.7% of staff identified speaking to customers as essential, a larger proportion (33.3%) compared to students highlighted making announcements as a key task. This suggests that more experienced staff often take on additional responsibilities that require public speaking.

Reading tasks, including reviewing flight details (66.7%) and cross-checking passenger information with tickets (46.7%), were also deemed essential, reflecting the procedural accuracy required in airline operations. Writing, particularly for flight documents (60%) and reports (46.7%), was consistently emphasized, underscoring its importance in operational roles. Listening was necessary for understanding customer inquiries (66.7%) but was deemed less critical for colleague interactions or following instructions, reflecting the hierarchical nature of communication in airline operations.

The most English-reliant workplace areas for staff mirrored those identified by students, with checking-in (M = 3.13) and ticketing (M = 3.06) ranking highest. Tasks such as handling lost property (M = 3.1) and giving directions (M = 3.3) were also frequently cited. These findings highlight the alignment between staff and students in their perceptions of workplace language needs. Staff also emphasized the importance of clear and polite communication, with phrases such as "How many bags are you checking in?" and "Would you like an aisle or window seat?" being commonly used in their roles.

Comparison of Students and Staff

A comparative analysis between the students and staff revealed significant overlaps in their language needs, particularly in the areas of speaking and reading. Both groups ranked customer-facing tasks, such as check-ins and ticketing, as the most English-intensive. However, the priorities diverged slightly when it came to additional tasks. Students ranked providing information about prohibited items as their second most frequent task, while staff prioritized handling lost property. This difference may stem from the varying levels of responsibility and the situational dynamics of internships versus full-time roles.

The comparison also highlighted differences in language features. Both groups frequently used standard phrases like "Good morning, may I see your passport and ticket?" and "Would you like an aisle or window seat?" These phrases were essential for maintaining professionalism and efficiency in routine customer interactions. However, students reported difficulties with pronunciation and accent comprehension, which were less problematic for experienced staff. These findings suggest that targeted training in pronunciation and listening comprehension could significantly improve students' confidence and performance.

Analysis of Course Materials

The evaluation of course materials revealed both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, the course incorporated all four language skills-speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Topics such as check-ins, ticketing, customs procedures, and safety demonstrations aligned well with workplace scenarios. Role-playing exercises, particularly those simulating customer interactions, provided students with valuable practical experience. However, the course's emphasis was uneven, with speaking and reading receiving disproportionate attention compared to listening and writing.

However, significant gaps were identified in other areas. Listening activities focused on scenarios like understanding airport announcements, which were less relevant to customer-facing roles. Writing tasks included exercises such as creating tourist leaflets, which were unrelated to the actual demands of producing flight reports and documents. Similarly, reading activities often centered on topics such as "Things to Do at Haneda Airport," which, while potentially engaging, did not align with workplace tasks such as reading flight or passenger details.

The course also exhibited limitations in its focus on language features. Vocabulary lessons were limited to general airline terminology, while grammar instruction focused solely on modal verbs for expressing obligation. Pronunciation, a critical component for effective spoken communication, was entirely absent. These omissions likely contributed to the challenges reported by students during their internships, particularly in understanding accents and speaking confidently.

Alignment and Gaps Between Course Content and Workplace Needs

The findings indicate that the course only partially met the students' workplace needs. The speaking skills component was well-developed, with role-play activities providing students with practical experience in key tasks like checking in and ticketing. Furthermore, commonly used workplace phrases were incorporated into speaking exercises, demonstrating some alignment with real-world language use.

However, other components showed significant misalignment. Listening tasks failed to address workplace demands for customer interaction and understanding diverse accents. Writing lessons neglected the essential tasks of preparing flight reports and documents while reading materials did not focus on workplace-relevant content. The limited instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation further compounded these issues, leaving students underprepared for the linguistic complexities of their roles.

Challenges Faced by Students

The inadequacies in the course content were reflected in the challenges reported by students during their internships. Many struggled with understanding passengers' diverse accents, which were not adequately addressed in the course. Others reported difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences and hesitated to engage with customers due to a lack of

confidence in pronunciation. These issues highlight the need for a more robust and targeted approach to language instruction, with greater emphasis on pronunciation, vocabulary, and practical listening tasks.

DISCUSSION

The findings illuminate a partial alignment between the ESP course content and the linguistic demands of the airline industry. While the course succeeded in addressing speaking skills for customer interactions, significant gaps were evident in other areas. These gaps suggest a lack of comprehensive needs analysis in the course design, emphasizing the need for better alignment with workplace realities.

The speaking activities were a notable strength of the course, providing students with opportunities to practice key tasks in a controlled environment. Speaking is considered one of the most important skills in EFL that should be acquired well by students (Muslem et al., 2019). Speaking English well has become essential in this age of globalization (Hajar, Helmiyadi, & Mawardi, 2024). Role-playing exercises, in particular, effectively prepared students for check-in and ticketing interactions, which were consistently ranked as the most English-intensive tasks. This finding confirms the observations of Basturkmen (2006), who emphasized the importance of task-based activities in preparing learners for professional roles.

However, the absence of pronunciation training limited students' ability to communicate clearly and confidently, particularly with non-native English-speaking passengers. This is consistent with Nguyen and Ngo's (2020) argument that ESP courses often overlook critical phonological components, which are essential for clear communication in diverse professional contexts. This omission likely exacerbated the challenges reported by students, such as hesitancy and lack of confidence in real-world interactions.

The gaps in listening and writing instruction reflect broader challenges in ESP curriculum development. For instance, the focus on airport announcements, while relevant in some contexts, failed to prepare students for the complexities of customer interactions. Understanding diverse accents, managing conversational nuances, and responding to dynamic situations are critical skills that were not adequately addressed in the curriculum. These gaps left students ill-equipped to handle the linguistic demands of their roles, as evidenced by their internship experiences.

Similarly, writing activities demonstrated a lack of alignment with workplace needs. Tasks like creating tourist brochures, while engaging, were not representative of the operational documentation required in aviation. Writing flight reports and incident logs demands precision, clarity, and familiarity with industry-specific terminology skills that were underdeveloped in the course. The limited focus on writing likely contributed to students' challenges in completing documentation tasks during their internships. These findings align with Long's (2015) emphasis on the necessity of task-specific needs analysis in ESP course design, highlighting the importance of integrating authentic materials and

realistic scenarios into the curriculum.

The course's approach to reading skills was similarly problematic. While reading exercises were included, their content often diverged from workplace requirements. Instead of focusing on technical documents like flight schedules and passenger lists, the course emphasized general topics like airport amenities. This misalignment limited students' ability to quickly and accurately interpret essential information in their roles.

The gaps in language feature instruction further compounded these issues. Vocabulary lessons were insufficiently specialized, leaving students unprepared for the technical terminology required in aviation. Grammar instruction, while present, was limited to basic structures, which did not equip students to construct more complex and nuanced responses. The absence of pronunciation training, despite its critical importance, left students ill-prepared to handle real-world communication challenges.

Overall, the findings point to a critical need for a holistic approach to ESP course design, which incorporates comprehensive needs analysis, authentic materials, and balanced coverage of all language skills. This approach can better prepare students for the multifaceted linguistic challenges of the aviation industry, ensuring their readiness to meet workplace demands.

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to answer the main research question namely: Does the language taught during the course meet the students' needs in the workplace? To answer the question, the students' language needs were found out and compared to the materials taught during the course.

To Sum up, the research finds that the language taught during the course partially fulfilled the students' real language needs in the workplace. Those that have been covered within the course are the speaking skills with a common specific task to speak to a customer and one common phrase, namely, *would you like an aisle or window seat?* However, the other three language skills were unfortunately not relevantly included during the 14 lessons.

Although the tutor provided these three skills within the lessons, nonetheless, all of the topics given did not correspond to the real language used. These findings indicated that in designing or preparing materials, the teacher did not underlie the source of the materials based on the language's actual need or it can also be said that the teacher did not apply needs analysis in preparing the materials for the students. Consequently, it is revealed from the questionnaires that some students feel difficulties in using or practicing English in the workplace. These difficulties can be the underlying source for the teachers in designing the materials in the future.

The findings of this study hold important implications for both ESP practitioners and institutions offering language training for specialized fields like the airline industry. For ESP practitioners, the results underscore the critical importance of aligning course content with workplace-specific language needs. This requires a pedagogical shift that

emphasizes the integration of authentic materials derived directly from the professional context, such as real flight documents, operational procedures, and customer interaction scenarios.

By incorporating such materials, teachers can better prepare students for the linguistic demands they will face. Additionally, the importance of pronunciation training, which was notably absent from the analyzed course, must be emphasized. Pronunciation skills are not only essential for building confidence but also for ensuring clear and effective communication in high-stakes environments. Teachers should also adopt a dynamic approach to course design, informed by continuous needs analysis, to ensure that emerging workplace demands are addressed in a timely and relevant manner.

At an institutional level, the findings suggest a need for stronger support for ESP programs through improved access to industry-specific data. Institutions must facilitate collaboration between educators and industry professionals, enabling the integration of real-world communication samples into the curriculum.

Furthermore, administrators should prioritize ongoing professional development for teachers, equipping them with the skills and tools needed to design and implement materials that reflect current industry requirements. Institutions should also consider revising the structure and duration of language training programs to allow for more comprehensive coverage of all language skills. A balanced focus across speaking, listening, reading, and writing is essential to ensure that students are adequately prepared for all aspects of their roles. On a broader level, the challenges identified in this study highlight a pervasive gap between classroom instruction and workplace application, which may extend beyond the airline industry to other specialized fields.

This underscores the necessity for educational institutions to adopt a more collaborative and flexible approach to curriculum development. Incorporating employer feedback, conducting workplace observations, and evaluating students' performance in real-world scenarios can help bridge the gap between academic preparation and professional expectations. These measures are essential not only for enhancing the effectiveness of ESP programs but also for ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills and confidence needed to succeed in their professional roles.

This study has several limitations. The data collection was confined to a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, while the mixed-methods approach provides valuable insights, further triangulation through direct workplace observations could strengthen the conclusions.

Future research should explore integrating workplace observations and interviews with industry professionals to develop a deeper understanding of the specific language skills required in the aviation industry. Expanding the scope to include diverse educational settings and regions would also provide more comprehensive data to inform ESP course design. By

addressing these aspects, subsequent studies can contribute to bridging the gap between academic instruction and workplace application, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of ESP programs.

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