ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF THE COLLEGE STUDENTS OF THE HOTEL AND RESTAURANT DEPARTMENT IN ENGLISH COMPETENCES FOR INTERNATIONAL CAREERS WITHIN ASEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: English as a tool for communication in the globalized world has lead to the need to shift the focus of the teaching orientation. The teaching of English should shift from General English (GE) to Specific English (SP). This anticipates the follow-up action of the ASEAN Community in 2015 on the agreement of the movement of five areas: free flow of goods, services, investment, capital and free flow of skilled labors. So, preparing the students to have international careers within ASEAN is one of the responsibilities of the English lecturers. This research aims to assess the needs of English competences in the supervisory to managerial levels. The method is basically qualitative with some data collected quantitatively through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and focused group discussion from hotel supervisors and managers. Data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. The results reveal several English competences in language skills required in hotel workplaces. Also, several language functions in language skills to function in certain roles and responsibilities in managerial and supervisory levels are discovered. Several topics relevant to the roles and responsibilities in hotel context as contents are also identified. Some suggestions for future work are offered.

Keywords: needs, English competences, ASEAN, students of hotel and tourism

Introduction

According to an official speech by the Minister of Creative Economy, Marie Elka Pangestu, at a Hildiktipari Conference in Bandung, 13 May 2014, the number of international tourists visiting Indonesia by area in 2013 reached 1.087 billion visitors, and this visit is 5% greater compared to international tourists’ visit in 2012 figuring at 1.035 billion tourists. The ASEAN area is considered to be the fastest growing tourism industry in the world: 8.2% during the period of 2005-2012, compared to global growth of 3.6 percent in 2013. ASEAN grew 12% and reached 92.7 million tourists compared to global growth of 5%. Indonesia ranks the fourth position in the number of tourist arrival in 2013, figuring at 8,044,462 tourists. The tourists who visited Indonesia are from the main market of intra ASEAN Singapore, Malaysia and Australia. This shows that the ASEAN area is the most promising destination as seen from the number of tourists’ arrival which undoubtedly has a significant impact on the economic growth.

Based on the blueprint of the ASEAN Economic Community 2013, there are agreements among the ASEAN countries in the fields of free flow of goods, services, capitals, and investment, as well as skilled labors. In the field of free flow of skilled labors, there is a policy to facilitate the issuance of visas and employment passes for ASEAN professionals and skilled labors. Specifically the policies are strengthening cooperation among ASEAN University Network members to increase mobility for both students and staff within the region, developing core competencies and qualifications for occupational jobs and trained skills required in the priority services sectors and other service sectors. The third one is strengthening the research capabilities of each ASEAN Member Countries in terms of promoting skills, job placements and developing labor market information networks among ASEAN Member Countries (henceforth AMC). Based on that policy, education institutions have to prepare their human resources to have international competitive advantages to meet the needs of the global market. The tourism sector is the priority, besides health, on-line services, logistics and airline services.

English as what Graddol states (2007) is growing to be a lingua franca, and now it really is obvious in ASEAN countries. To take part in the ASEAN Economic Community Education, institutions specifically English Department are supposed to anticipate by reevaluating their ESP curriculum so that they meet the needs of the priority sectors to equip the students to compete in AMC. Hotel and Tourism Colleges anticipate it by preparing students of all levels: craft, supervisory and managerial to compete in AMC. The first requirement for those levels is solid mastery of ESP. Therefore, to prepare ESP courses that meet the needs for job qualifications already provided in Indonesia, the National Work Competence Standard has to be introduced to and referred to by Tourism Colleges and English Education Institution Management which can be accommodated in ESP.

English competences will be of the first requirement for competing in the position of any employment opportunity in AMC. Among the ten AMC, Indonesia is the most populous country; however in terms of the number of skilled labor based on Human Development Index, Indonesia is below neighboring countries: Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines (Aritonang, 2013 www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013).
Indirectly this situation is linked to the human resources’ English mastery in those countries. Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines use English as the official language and in those countries English has the position as a second language. The early introduction of English to young learners even is enhanced. ASEAN will be the global market and English will be used as a language for communication and a language for five important sectors: tourism, health, logistics, airline, and online services. To Indonesians, English is not the only problem but also soft skills and the certification on the job qualifications. Certificates of the campus without having a job certification will not be much of use in meeting the requirements of the job vacancy in AMC. Indonesia has to prepare its human resources and actions have to be made to take part in ASEAN Economic Community (Muhrofi-Gunadi, 2013).

The present study aims assessing the college students’ needs of English competences in the area of supervisory to managerial levels. More specifically, the present study tries to reveal these concerns: what context of situation of language use managers function, what English skill is needed most, what level of formality is English used, and what language functions are needed most in each language skill.

**Methods**

The present study employs a qualitative design with some data collected quantitatively through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and focused group discussion from hotel supervisors. The study was conducted on December 2012 and July 2013.

In needs assessment, data needed were collected from different sources: hotel general managers (GMs), hotel department supervisors. In relation to focus group discussion with hotel supervisors, the data presented are limited to the data of hotel department supervisors. The current study involved 3 (three) general managers (GMs) of each of four -star hotels who are selected on purpose basis and 5 (five) supervisors involved in the present study in four -star hotels as the target of this present study. These hotels are located in Indonesia and Malaysia. Data collection was performed through interviews and observations which are aimed mainly at identifying the roles and responsibilities of general managers, channels of communication, degree of formality in which the communication progresses, language functions utilized. In addition to these, the context of situation in which the roles and the responsibilities that general managers assume is also identified. Data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed.

**Findings**

The needs assessment of data of hotel department supervisors involves hotel supervisors in different hotel departments. These hotel supervisors, who have the responsibilities in their corresponding hotel departments, are Front Office Managers, Executive Housekeepers, Food and Beverage Managers, Marketing Managers, and Human Resource Managers.

In general it was revealed that hotel general managers assume the roles and responsibilities as follows: stating the philosophy of a hotel, stating the target, stating the quality standards, maintaining productivity and profitability, guiding the staffs, and supporting staffs to have higher career. The context in which the hotel managers execute their roles and responsibilities includes different situations as meeting, briefing, socializing the program, site visit monitoring, and informal gathering. The channel of communication that hotel managers utilize in different contexts of situation also differs in terms of type and intensity. The channels that are utilized include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the intensity varies, ranging from listening (40%), speaking (40%), reading (10%), and writing (40%). In different contexts the managers also employ different degree of formality. However, two types of formal and informal language are utilized. In terms of language functions, the hotel managers serving as the data source of the present study also employed different language functions to function in different roles and responsibilities. These include explaining, directing, suggesting, agreeing, disagreeing and reporting.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted by discussing the result of the study in with (5) five hotel supervisors. There were some useful comments. First, English was highly needed for their careers. They had to be able to express many kindsof job in English in the workplace. This is because in some hotels specifically in chain hotels the staffs are multi-cultural. In listening and speaking however what they needed is not only about hotel matters but also how to speak politely using appropriate gestures or body language when speaking with the superior and the guests. The intonations, the volume of the voice, the eye contact, the facial expression are important in communication. They also had the comments of how to speak politely in the situation where they were in the condition of under pressure. There was always a peak time on the day and in the week and the peak seasons on holidays.

**Discussion**

With a varying degree, language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing have high roles in many kinds of duties and responsibilities with the priority skills in Listening and Speaking. Reading and Writing are the
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next priorities. The content of the four skills are quite specific in the hotel fields. However, in the everyday communication in the workplace they are not sufficient. Soft skills in speaking and listening, and job certifications are important requirements too.

The compelling situation is a non-technical matter including soft skills that also need a lot of practice. The person who is in the condition of under pressure when serving the guests is of course has to listen and to speak to the guests. The non-technical skills accompanying listening and speaking has to be seriously considered. The empathy is needed. They must put themselves in the customers’ shoes and should make every attempt to understand his / her personality, behavior, attitude and actions. The Indian hospitality industry setting international footprints, demand or employees with the right soft skills is certainly of the high congruence today with the Indian hospitality industry setting international footprints, demand or employees with the right soft skills is certainly of the high demand (Rao, 2009). To have soft skill capability needs a lot of practice in the workplace. Internship is the right way to train the trainees. The research finding of the students who had internship for six months to one year revealed that most trainees could work for 12 hours, were emotionally controllable, had a high confidence in handling guests, had better grooming and performance, and finally had the impact on better English mastery (Muhrofi-Gunadi, 2011).

English is growing to be a lingua franca, and now it is now taking place in ASEAN Countries (Graddol, 2007). To take part in the ASEAN Economic Community Education institution specifically English Department is supposed to anticipate by reevaluating an ESP curriculum that meets the needs of the priority sectors to equip the students to compete in AMC. Free flow of goods and services and sectors will influence the way how education institute arranges the curriculum. The education institution needs collaboration with Indonesia Professional Certification and the Industry. Fortunately this has been anticipated by authority of the Hotel and most Tourism Colleges in the craft, supervisory and managerial levels to compete in AMC. The first requirement for those levels is ESP, therefore preparing ESP that meet the needs for job qualifications that are already provided in Indonesia National Work Competence Standard has to be acknowledged and referred by Tourism Colleges and English Education Institution Management which can be accommodated in ESP.

Socilaization of the certification specifically the 5 sectors has to be continuously promoted and there should be a quick action. The statement of Minister of Education and Culture on the ASEAN Free Trade Area as there are still many professions have not been certified including engineers, teachers and doctors need not to be worried provided that related departments sit together to find solution and action (Sertifikasi Profesi, Kompas 6 juli 2014). In tourism sectors for tourist guide though it has been prepared since 2004, and has been socialized since then has not been reached the local tour guides in the world tourist destination Mount Bromo National Park. Of 100 local tour guides they did not meet the standards but after the training 32 the local tour guides meet the standards of SKKNI (Supriadi and Muhrofi-Gunadi, 2014). The key factors are socialization, training, and joining competency standards examination.

Figure 1 outlines the proposed model for collaboration in order to help the students in taking part in ASEAN Economic Community.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Indonesia together with other member ASEAN countries have made the agreement in ASEAN Economic Community. This has a big consequence in preparing human resources in the primary five sectors and free flows of goods, services, capital, investment and skilled labors. Education institution is responsible to
support it by redefining the curriculum and preparing the job qualification. The result of the assessments of English competences in the forms of language and specific hotel content is still not sufficient. TOEIC and job certifications are also needed in the workplace. What the education has to do is equipping the students with the right requirements based on the ASEAN Economic Community Standard or SKKNI. To meet this, education institutions are supposed to collaborate. To provide the students with such an access, English Department could collaborate with Tourism Department and Indonesia Professional Certification Authority and the related industry.

International tourism is very close to English use and the collaboration will be of a great advantage in enhancing the quality of human resources both the students of English Department and Tourism by revitalizing ESP and at the same time Tourism Department will share the content of many areas of tourism in the hospitality sectors and other related tourism sectors. This of course needs a shift in teaching from EGP to ESP. The facts indicate that ESP is now highly inevitably needed. The birth of Content Based Instruction and Content Language Integrated Learning in TEFIL demonstrates that content is considered obligatory not compatible. As for future researchers, they are expected to conduct further studies using other variables of elements of SKKNI of hotel and tourism or hospitality and restaurants by specifying only on a certain level, for example, the one only for senior staff with multi skills or examining the use of the elements of Asia-Indonesian food, and develop them into instructional materials. This will not only help the students’ quality but also take part in maintaining Indonesia Food Heritage and promoting internationally.

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This research aims to assess the college students’ needs of English competences from the supervisory to managerial levels. The research design is basically qualitative with some data collected quantitatively through observations, interviews, questionnaires, and focused group discussion from hotel supervisors and managers. Data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. The results reveal several English competences in language skills required in hotel workplaces. Also, several language functions in language skills to function in certain roles and responsibilities in managerial and supervisory levels are discovered. Several topics relevant to the roles and responsibilities in hotel context as contents are also identified. Some suggestions for future work are offered.

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