

The English Language Needs of Employees in Selected Islamic Institutions in Malaysia

Keperluan Bahasa Inggeris bagi Pegawai - Pegawai di Institusi Islam Terpilih di Malaysia

Nur Shafiqah Abdullah¹, Aishah Amirah Zainal Abidin², Zuraifah Zaini³ & Puziah Wahab⁴

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the English language needs of selected Islamic Institutions in Malaysia. The aim is to better grasp the English language demand at workplace. It also aims to prove the urgent needs for the students studying Islamic courses to equip themselves with practical English skills to be able to be relevant to the industries. Three major Islamic Institutions, JAKIM, Tabung Haji and MAIS were chosen as the participant in this research. Quantitative method and nonprobability sampling were used to carry out the research. The main instrument used was questionnaire. The data was analysed using the SPSS. The result of the study found that it is evident that English is needed by the selected Islamic Institutions.

Keywords: *ESP, Needs Analysis, Islamic Institutions.*

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji tentang keperluan Bahasa Inggeris di institusi Islam di Malaysia. Tujuan kajian adalah untuk mengetahui dengan lebih lanjut akan kepentingan Bahasa Inggeris di tempat kerja. Selain itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk membuktikan bahawa terdapat keperluan yang tinggi bagi pelajar berlatar belakangan pengajian Islam untuk melengkapkan diri mereka dengan kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris yang praktikal supaya menjadi relevan kepada industri apabila melangkah ke alam pekerjaan. Tiga industri besar telah dipilih sebagai peserta kajian iaitu JAKIM, Tabung Haji dan MAIS. Kajian berbetuk kuantitatif dan persampelan tak kebarangkalian telah digunakan untuk menjalankan kajian ini. Instumen utama yang digunakan adalah berbentuk soal selidik. Data telah dianalisis menggunakan SPSS. Berdasarkan analisis data, adalah jelas bahawa Bahasa Inggeris diperlukan oleh institusi terpilih dalam kajian ini.

Keywords: *ESP, Analisis Keperluan, Institusi Islam*

¹ Nur Shafiqah Abdullah, Master of Applied Linguistics (UPM), Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor, shafiqah@kuis.edu.my.

² Aishah Amirah Zainal Abidin, Master of Applied Linguistics (UPM), Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), aishahamirah@kuis.edu.my.

³ Zuraifah Zaini, Master in TESL (UKM), Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), zuraifah@kuis.edu.my.

⁴ Puziah Wahab, Post Grad Dip (ELS), (IIUM), Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), puziah@kuis.edu.my.

Introduction

The rising of globalisation in the workplace has led institutions and businesses to equip themselves with necessary skills to meet the growing demand of the workplaces. One of the vital requirements includes good and effective communication skills internally and externally. For instance, employers who hold the managerial position would never achieve success without efficient communication skills in the management sector (Wilson, J. P, 2005). According to Stivers et.al (2000), oral communication skill or speaking skill in English in general is an important skill for the management of a company to possess in order to carry out tasks efficiently at the workplace. There is still a skill gap in workplace situations as according to Smith (2000), where it could be seen between the expectations of industries and what the universities offer to the students.

The study aimed to fulfill the following objective; to examine the differences in the English language needs of the employees in the Islamic Institutions in Malaysia. It also aimed to answer the research question of; what are the differences in the English language needs of the employees in the Islamic Institutions in Malaysia. The students undertaking Islamic Studies courses in Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor are required to take a subject on workplace communication skills as part of the undergraduate requirement. The nature of the subject resembles the workplace communication needs of actual business or institutions. Problem arises when some part of the syllabus is considered outdated in comparison to the current trends. In order to stay relevant and provide the students with suitable skills beneficial for them in the workplace, a study that explores the English language needs of selected Islamic Institutions is urgently needed. The students of Islamic Higher Institutions act as a feeder and future employees to the Islamic industries, hence preparing them with relevant skills will help the institutions in getting proficient and reliable employees in the future.

In relation to the focus of the study which is on the Islamic institution, the Islamic institutions in Malaysia also need to keep abreast with the current workplace needs as it also contributes to the economic and social affairs of the nation. The term, Islamic Institutions is very broad. It can be said to be a blanket term for institutions managed by Muslim and/or using Islamic values as its basis of business. It comprises of institutions from a lot of field of work, namely; Banking, Finance, Religion, and Social field to name a few. For the purpose of this study, the parameter used for defining the Islamic Institutions are as follow; (1) Owned and have Muslims as majority of the employees, (2) Cater to the Islamic affairs of the Muslim community in Malaysia, (3) Institutions that have departments which deal with inter-religious issues and/or global communities.

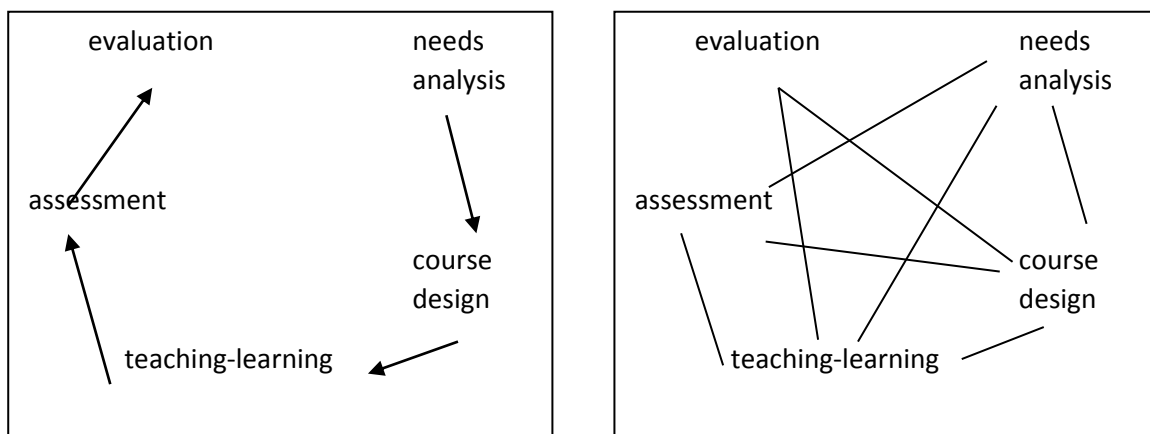
English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Theoretically, the study utilized the principle of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) in the research design. The early development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has begun 1962 with the paper published by Barber in 1962 entitled *Some Measurable Characteristics of Modern Scientific Prose*. ESP has been introduced more than 50 years ago and it has developed into its own discipline with many sub-disciplines. There were many prominent figures in ESP where one of them were Hutchinson & Waters (1987). They viewed ESP as an approach rather than a product. Their concerns were related to the question on why students

need to learn foreign language. According to them, ESP as an approach is an ongoing process of determining the learners, the language needs, the content and context of the language used and many others without just looking at ESP as a one-time course that needs no review or alteration once the objectives are set.

On the other hand, ESP according to Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) concerned with numerous aspects of language learning and teaching including the procedures in analyzing the needs of the learners. The main stages in ESP are; needs analysis, course (and syllabus) design, materials selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation. These stages appear in cyclical process rather than a linear stage-by-stage process. Figure A, by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) shows the process in ESP operations in an ideal setting. However, Figure B, as suggested by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) would be more accurate to represent the process in reality.

Figure A & B: ESP Operations (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998)



Furthermore, according to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), ESP has been classified into two main areas which are English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EOP assists the study on ESP based on the demands from teachers, supervisors, government agencies, professionals, students or others who see a need for language courses in which certain content, skills, motivation, processes, and values are identified and integrated into specialized, often short-term, courses (Johns and Price-Machado, 2001).

When one discusses the definition of ESP, it is wise to look at the key stages that make up ESP. The key stages represent the broad definition of ESP as being practical in nature. The key stages in ESP are; needs analysis, course (and syllabus) design, materials selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation. These stages appear in cyclical process rather than a linear stage-by-stage process. The stages are revisited as the course progresses and sometimes the stages happened simultaneously.

Needs Analysis

Besides ESP, Needs Analysis was also utilized in the study. According to Brown (2007), needs analysis is “the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the

language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation” (p.36). From Brown’s definition of needs analysis, it can be implied that needs analysis is a process that is done prior to the development of curriculum. It can also be stated that needs analysis takes into account subjective and objective information, or in other words, information that is readily available such as the content and information that can only be acquired by eliciting it from relevant and dependable sources. This definition of needs analysis is still somewhat vague if one decides to create a curriculum for a certain group of learners because it lacks the working definition or the how-to to get the information.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of needs analysis can be found through the definition proposed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). They first discussed the many terms of needs proposed by scholars in ESP and then provide their own definition of it. The various terms of needs will not be discussed here as the study will take the definition of needs as suggested by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have proposed three terms that can nicely summarize the concept of needs analysis in ESP. They are; a) target situation analysis (TSA), b) learning situation analysis (LSA), and c) present situation analysis (PSA). TSA serves to meet the objectives, perceived and product-oriented needs. The objectives and perceived needs are usually seen as the being derived by the outsiders which are formulated from some known and verified information. Product-oriented needs focuses on the goal and target situation. LSA sets to include the subjective, felt and process-oriented needs. The subjective and felt needs represent the needs deduced from the insider and tend to the cognitive and affective factors. Process-oriented needs were based on the learning situation of the learners. PSA on the other hand, aims to seek the strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, and learning experiences.

From the description of needs provided by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), it can be inferred that TSA serve as the strongest if not most important needs of all the three needs. The data collected from TSA can be used to help the instructor design the syllabus of the intended course, prepare instructional materials and decide on the teaching methodology or approaches to be adopted. It can also be said that the data from TSA serves as the pillar in deciding what to teach to the learners as well as being very crucial to have before ones decide to start an ESP course. The information collected from PSA and LSA can be used as an additional reference as to how the course will be run, the environment of the course as well as the learning preference of the learners.

Based on these two theories, the study was designed to investigate the English language needs of employees in selected Islamic institutions in Malaysia. The result of the study later will be discussed according to the four skills of the language.

Methodology of the Research

The study was conducted using the quantitative method. It used the non-probability sampling for the respondents. The institutions involved as respondents were; Tabung Haji (TH), Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), and Majlis Agama Islam Selangor (MAIS). These institutions were chosen as respondent as it fulfills the parameter of Islamic Institutions mentioned in the introduction.

The main instrument used was questionnaire. Specifically, the needs analysis questionnaire (NAQ) used was constructed based on the theory by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), with reference to the respondents' TSA. The NAQ consisted two parts; Part 1, Demographic and Part 2, The English Language Needs. Part 2 of the NAQ served as the TSA of the respondents. It covered the four language aspects; Speaking, Reading, Writing and Listening. The items included were based on the common tasks that the respondents need to do in their respective workplaces. As for the PSA and LSA, it was not included in the NAQ because the objective of the study was to examine the English needs of the respondents without the intention to provide a holistic ESP course for the respondents as the outcome of the study. The NAQ self-reported measure using a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. This NAQ has a high Cronbach's Alpha value of .938 when tested in a pilot test.

Scoring for NAQ was calculated in Statistical Package for the Social Science Software (SPSS). In Part 2, higher score indicated a lower English language needs and lower score indicated a higher English language needs. Upon analysis data, The Kruskal-Wallis H was used to determine the significant differences of English language needs of the respondents, and also the differences of English language needs from different designation and position. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to conduct statistical test because the dependent variable was in ordinal scale (the 4-point Likert Scale), and the independent variable consist of more than two categorical.

Findings of the Study

Table 1 shows the differences of English language needs in Malaysian Islamic Institutions for need of speaking, writing, reading and listening. High mean score indicated a lower need and lower mean score indicated a higher needs.

MAIS had the highest mean rank for the need of speaking, writing and listening with each 76.17, 74.53 and 68.52 mean rank. While Tabung Haji had the highest mean rank for the need of reading 70.01. JAKIM had the lowest mean rank for all needs with speaking 63.60, writing 64.07, reading 59.16, and listening 61.67.

Table 1: Differences of English Language Needs in Malaysian Islamic Institutions for Need of Speaking, Writing, Reading and Listening.

	Malaysian Islamic Institutions	N	Mean Rank
Need_Speaking	JAKIM	46	63.49
	MAIS	18	76.17
	TH	67	64.99
	Total	131	
Need_Writing	JAKIM	46	63.92
	MAIS	18	74.53
	TH	67	65.13
	Total	131	
Need_Reading	JAKIM	46	58.63
	MAIS	18	69.92
	TH	67	70.01

	Total	131	
Need_Listening	JAKIM	46	61.87
	MAIS	18	68.42
	TH	67	68.19
	Total	131	

Table 2 shows the Kruskal-Wallis H test has no significant difference for need of speaking [$\chi^2(2, N = 131) = 1.579, p > .05$], need of writing [$\chi^2(2, N = 131) = 1.116, p > .05$], need of reading [$\chi^2(2, N = 131) = 2.891, p > .05$], and need of listening [$\chi^2(2, N = 131) = .922, p > .05$].

The result shows that the needs of the institutions are the same.

Table 2

	Need_Speaking	Need_Writing	Need_Reading	Need_Listening
Chi-Square	1.579	1.116	2.891	.922
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.454	.572	.236	.631

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: MALAYSIAN ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS

English Language Needs According to the Designation/Position

Table 3 shows the difference of English language needs between each designation for need of speaking, writing, reading and listening.

Managerial position showed the lowest need of English speaking skill with 70.08 mean rank, followed Junior Executive second with 66.90 mean rank, Executive position 65.24 and Senior Executive need the highest skill at 62.11 mean rank.

Junior Executive position showed the lowest need of English writing skill at 73.20 mean rank, followed by managerial position 66.25, senior executive 62.00, and executive position at the lowest need at 60.49 mean rank.

English reading need is needed most by the managerial position at 72.03 mean rank, followed closely by junior executive position at 71.32, executive position at 61.10 and senior executive at 59.50. While listening need is needed most by junior executive position 69.87, senior executive position 68.41, managerial position 62.75 and executive position need lowest reading skill at 62.17 mean rank.

Table 3: Differences of English Language Needs between Each Designation for Need of Speaking, Writing, Reading and Listening.

	Designation/Position	N	Mean Rank
Need_Speaking	Junior Executive/Officer	45	66.90

	Executive/Officer	43	65.24
	Senior Executive/Officer	23	62.11
	Managerial	20	70.08
	Total	131	
Need_Writing	Junior Executive/Officer	45	73.20
	Executive/Officer	43	60.49
	Senior Executive/Officer	23	62.00
	Managerial	20	66.25
	Total	131	
Need_Reading	Junior Executive/Officer	45	71.32
	Executive/Officer	43	61.10
	Senior Executive/Officer	23	59.50
	Managerial	20	72.03
	Total	131	
Need_Listening	Junior Executive/Officer	45	69.87
	Executive/Officer	43	62.17
	Senior Executive/Officer	23	68.41
	Managerial	20	62.75
	Total	131	

Table 4 shows the Kruskal-Wallis H test has no significant different for need of speaking [$\chi^2(3, N = 131) = .619, p > .05$], need of writing [$\chi^2(3, N = 131) = 3.294, p > .05$], need of reading [$\chi^2(3, N = 131) = 2.892, p > .05$], and need of listening [$\chi^2(3, N = 131) = 1.514, p > .05$].

Table 4

	Need_Speaking	Need_Writing	Need_Reading	Need_Listening
Chi-Square	.619	3.294	2.892	1.514
df	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.892	.349	.409	.679

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: DESIGNATION/POSITION

Discussion

Based on the results presented above, we could see that the needs varied across the three selected Islamic institutions in Malaysia. Although the differences are not big in number but there are few factors that may lead to the given responses. One of the institutions that have shown tremendous needs of the four language skills was JAKIM. This could be explained by looking into one of the functions of JAKIM as an institution to oversee the Halal certification of the products in Malaysia. Thus, the employees are required to communicate both spoken and written forms with vast spectrum of people from various industries. In addition, in view

of JAKIM as a division that looks into the Islamic affairs of the country, the use of English is crucial especially when dealing with people from other countries.

The employees of JAKIM especially the senior executives showed the awareness of the demand of English language in regards of the speaking and reading skills. This can be observed from a study by Chin and Wu (2010) reporting on the reading as one of the most important and frequently required ability got employees in most financial service categories. The possible reason for the occurrence is that they are the ones who deal with most of the clients where they include the government ministries, departments and agencies, public and private sectors. The employees might have to communicate using English language in business meetings, presenting ideas in proposal presentations as well as handling internal and external emails. According to Kassim, H. and Ali (2010), the management will be involved in problem solving and decision-making discussions which require them to offer solutions, agree and to disagree as well as to convince others. In addition, Chin and Wu (2010) added that good command of English listening and speaking skills can ensure accurate exchange of information during multinational conference call. On the other hand, the executive officers need more attention of the language in terms of the writing and the listening aspects. This is because they might be dealing more with the internal administrative work such as attending meetings, writing letters and proposals as well as listening to presentations.

As for the other two institutions, the needs of the language were demonstrated in all four skills with slightly lower ranks as compared to JAKIM. In contrast to result of the study on HRD trainees (Mohammad Ali Moslehifar and Noor Aireen Ibrahim, 2012) in which the study reported that it is the nature of any business to communicate with the clients and customers. This is because from the table, MAIS showed the least needs of the language skills. This could be explained by the nature of MAIS as an organisation under the state of Selangor with only few subsidiaries and in fact, the employees deal with work that focuses on the welfare of the community in the state level in which the majority is the Malay. Therefore, the employees might not aware of the needs of English language as less frequent usage of the language at their workplace.

Conclusion

From the discussions on the findings of the study, it is evident that the three Islamic institutions did not show big gap in the needs of English at the workplace. A modest needs of English are shown in the three institutions, with insignificant results. Nevertheless, the findings provide important insight to the course developers in developing new courses which are relevant in content in which it also serves the purpose of upgrading the existing courses that would assist the graduates to the real world of working especially for the Islamic institutions.

Bibliography

- Brown, H.D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching. Fifth Edition.* Pearson Education Inc.: USA.
- Dudley-Evans, T & St. John, M.J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kassim, H. and Ali, F. (2010). English Communicative Events and Skills Needed at The Workplace: Feedback from The Industry. *English for Specific Purposes*. 29.
- Mohammad Ali Moslehifar and Noor Aireen Ibrahim. (2012). English Language Oral Communication Needs at the Workplace: Feedback from Human Resource Development (HRD) Trainees. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 66.
- Smith, M. C. (2000). What will be the demands of literacy in the workplace in the next millennium? *Reading Research Quarterly*. 35(3).
- Stivers, G., Campbell, J. E. and Hermanson, H. (2000). An Assessment Program for Accounting: Design, Implementation, and Reflection, *Issues in Accounting Education*. 15(4).
- Wilson, J. P. (2005). *Human resource development: Learning and training for individuals and organizations* (2nd ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- Wu, R. Y. F. and Chin, J. (2010). An investigation into the English language needs of banking and finance professionals in Taiwan. *Proceedings of the 12th Academic Forum on English Language Testing in Asia, Taipei*.