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ESP needs analysis for tourism agencies staff: the Case of El Oued and Jijel

احتياجات اللغة الإنجليزية لموظفي وكالات السياحة: ولايتي الوادي وجيجل كنموذج

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Abstract:
Tourism agencies are of crucial importance in the promotion of tourism as they represent an important marketing tool. Moreover, English becomes a necessity that the agencies' staff need to market the tourism product. Therefore, this study aims at identifying the English language needs of tourism agencies' staff in the province of El Oued and Jijel because among the main problems encountered by them is the inability to use English in the workplace. The study adopts a mixed method; quantitative and qualitative, and the needs analysis has been conducted using a questionnaire. Results revealed that the agency's staff needs a mixture of all the four language skills and sub skills. Furthermore, English use difficulties include; inability to find the appropriate words to communicate with tourists. The study recommends for the integration of agencies' staff needs into the ESP course design process.
Keywords: Tourism agencies, English language needs, Needs analysis, ESP

ملخص البحث

تحظى الوكالات السياحية بأهمية بالغة في عملية الترويج للسياحة، إذ تمثل أداة تسويقية مهمة. كما أصبح إتقان اللغة الانجليزية أمرا ضروريا بالنسبة لموظفي الوكالات السياحية لتسويق المنتج السياحي. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على احتياجات اللغة الإنجليزية لموظفي الوكالات السياحية في ولايتي الوادي وجيجل، لأن من بين المشاكل الرئيسية التي يواجهونها عدم القدرة على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في مكان العمل. تعتمد الدراسة طريقة مختلطة، وقد تم إجراء تحليل الاحتياجات باستخدام استبيان. كشفت النتائج أن موظفي الوكالة يحتاجون إلى مزيج من جميع المهارات اللغوية الأربعة والمهارات الفرعية. في حين تتمثل صعوبات استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في عدم القدرة

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على إيجاد الكلمات المناسبة للتواصل مع السائحين. توصي الدراسة بإدماج احتياجات موظفي الوكالات في عملية تصميم دروس اللغة الإنجليزية لأهداف خاصة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الوكالات السياحية، احتياجات اللغة الانجليزية، تحليل الاحتياجات، الإنجليزية لأهداف خاصة.

1. Introduction

Tourism and travel agencies are of crucial importance in the promotion of tourism as they represent an important marketing tool. Furthermore, English has become the language of international business, technology and communication. Moreover, learning English is no longer seen as an end in itself but rather as a means of fulfilling the needs and expectations of learners. This fact makes it necessary for people seeking employment in different industries to be fluent speakers of English. This paves the way to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is "…an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (p. 19).This means that learner's needs represent the basis for choosing the ESP course content as well as methods used in the teaching and learning process because ESP concerns mainly with 'why learners learn English'. Hence, learning English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) is of vital importance for learners of tourism as it helps them to deal with tourists' needs and the market expectations.

Nowadays, tourism becomes one of the world's largest economic sectors that creates jobs and fosters prosperity across the world (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2018). The tourism industry has contributed significantly to employment and global tourism today as it provides employment for more than 222 million people worldwide, or approximately one in every twelve workers (WTTC, 2018, p. 4). According to Kamarulzaman (2018), the tourism industry contributes to the income of the local economy, and generates opportunities for jobs in the industry. The Algerian tourism industry contributes to both employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but this contribution and growth has been proved low and is receding year after year due to many reasons. One of these reasons is the lack of highly qualified workers with the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the requirements of the employers in the tourism sector (Bekri, 2012) and the tourists' needs as well.

A high percentage of tourists depend in their travel on the services provided by tourism and travel agencies staff. Therefore, the current study aims at identifying the English language needs for tourism and travel agencies' staff. To achieve the main aim, the researcher had to determine the following sub-aims:

1. Identify the English language skills and abilities the market requires from employees in the industry.
2. Find out the English language difficulties for tourism and travel agencies' employees.

To be able to suggest relevant solutions to the aims stated above this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What kind of English language skills and abilities does the market require from employees in tourism and travel agencies?
2. What are the English language difficulties for tourism and travel agencies' employees?

A number of studies have been conducted about the role of tourism and travel agencies staff in the development of the tourism industry. Koc (2003) conducted a study to explore the role and potential of travel agency staff as a marketing communications tool. The research findings show that the sales staff at travel agencies is not used effectively as a marketing communications tool. Nevertheless, few studies focused on the analysis of the English language needs of tourism and travel agencies staff although they represent an efficient marketing tool to the development of the tourism sector.

2. Tourism in Algeria

Algeria is the largest country in Africa; one of the main tourist attractions is the Sahara, the second largest desert in the world. Algeria has been a member of the World Tourism Organization since 1976. According to a report of the World Tourism Organization, Algeria was the 4th largest tourist destination in Africa in 2013 with 2,7 million foreign tourists (Le Medi Libre, 2014) Moreover, Travel and Tourism contribute about 3.6% to GDP to Algeria's economy. The Algerian government is looking to develop the country's travel and tourism industry, with emphasis on Saharan and cultural tourism. Since 2005, Algiers has reformed its legislation to ease foreign and local investments in the tourism (Fortune of Africa).

Tourism and travel agencies services can be divided into two parts, tourism services for Internal and external tourism. The most important of these services are: Reservation; Tourism agencies book airline tickets and ships, and reserve rooms in local and international hotels. Furthermore, they organize internal and external tourist trips through attractive programs at

attractive and competitive prices. Providing Tourist guides for local or foreign tourists and translators for outbound tourists is another service of travel and tourism agencies. Furthermore, tourism and travel agencies organize religious tourism trips namely Umrah and Hajj. Finally, attracting tourists; tourism and travel agencies present advertising campaigns supported by attractive travel programs at competitive prices to attract the largest possible number of tourists.

3. Needs Analysis

The phrase 'Needs Analysis' (NA) first appears in India in the 1920s, when Michael West developed a definition to encompass two different definitions of 'need' that lead to 'surrender value' of learning: First, what learners would have to do with a foreign language in the target situation, second, how learners should better master the target language during the training (West, 2008). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify two types of needs: target needs and learning needs. Target needs relate to what learners are required to do in the target situation and which are divided into three classes: necessities, lacks and wants. The second type of needs suggested by Hutchinson and Waters is learning needs. This type includes taking into account how learners learn, and provides information about learners, the reasons for learning the language.

Nunan (1988) defines Needs Analysis as “A family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design.” (p. 75). That is to say, the needs analysis method includes gathering information in order to provide the appropriate bases to design a course that will meet the needs of a specific group of students.

A number of authors and educators agree that NA plays an important role in the design of ESP or general English course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988; Long, 2005). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), it is “the awareness of learners’ needs that distinguishes between ESP and general English” (p. 54). Teachers and learners’ awareness of why learners need English is very helpful in the choice of appropriate and reasonable course content. Therefore, Needs Analysis is a key feature to the design of the ESP courses because the English language course will focus on an analysis and interpretation of the learners’ needs.

4. Research methodology

4.1. Research method

As the researchers in the present study are interested to analyze the needs of the participants and collect information about what they want and believe, a mixed method; quantitative and qualitative seems to be the most

appropriate. On the one hand, quantitative research approach allows researchers to use statistical data (Daniel, 2016). Additionally, replicability is another benefit derived from the use of this approach as Brown (as cited in Daniel, 2016, p. 94) mentions "The research study using this research tool is conducted in a general or public fashion because of its clear objective and guidelines, and can therefore be repeated at any other time or place". On the other hand, qualitative data instruments such as open-ended questions, notes are used to collect data from participants in their natural settings. The methods employed in data collection give full description of the research with respect to the participants involved (Daniel, 2016).

4.2. Participants

The study was comprised of 12 employees who work in four tourism and travel agencies located in the province of El Oued and Jijel, Algeria in the summer of 2018. In the current study, the researcher employed the convenience sampling because it seems to be the most appropriate. According to Long (2005) many NAs are conducted using a 'convenience sample', which means informants who are available and willing to participate

4.3. Instrument

Trying to reaching the objectives of the present study and answering the addressed questions, we have used a questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire has been chosen because it is a useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing often-numerical data, being able to administer without the presence of the researcher and being comparatively straightforward to analyze (Wilson and McLean as cited in Cohen et al., 2007) . In addition to, Questionnaires, especially if mailed can procure sizeable amounts of focused, standardized, organized data, potentially from a large sample of respondents quickly and cheaply.

The questionnaire is made up of closed and open-ended questions gathered under three main sections.The first section deals with employees' background information including: gender and age. The second deals with employees' attitudes and perceptions about the importance of the English language. The third section investigates the English language skills and abilities needed by employees in their workplace. All the information gathered is converted into numerical data to facilitate the interpretation of the findings.

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic in order to minimize problems related to ambiguity and misinterpretation. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the draft version constructed by the researcher was modified and revised based on the suggestion of the two English language

teachers. After that, a pilot study was carried out to test the effectiveness and to improve the language appropriateness of the questionnaire. Lastly, the final draft of the questionnaire was revised and administered to the target tourism and travel agencies employees working in 4 national travel and tourism agencies located in Algeria.

5. Data analysis

This section aims to present and discuss the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis carried out by the researcher. Exploratory data analysis, frequencies and percentages, was used to analyze quantitative data whilst content analysis was used to deal with qualitative data gained from the open-ended questions.

Q1. Gender

Table 1. Gender of Informants

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Male	9	75%
Female	3	25%
Total	12	100%

Table-1- shows that the number of males (75% of the participants) outnumbers females (25% of the participants).

Q2. Age

Table 2. Age of Informants

Options	Frequency	Percentage
23-33 years	3	25%
34-44 years	4	33.33%
45-55 years	5	41.67%
Total	12	100%

The results from tabe-2- indicate that the participants' age can be classified into three age categories or groups in the sample selected. 33.33% of informants' age range from 34 to 44, the same percentage is given for the

second category of the participants' age which varies between 45 and 55 (41.67%), and then 23-33 years old which represents 25% of the informants.

Q3. Have you studied English before? If yes for how many years have you studied English, and where?

Table 3. Studying English

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	83.33%
No	2	16.67%
Total	12	100%

Table-3-above illustrates that the majority of informants (83.33%) said that they have studied English, whereas, 16.67% answered with "no". Informants, who answered with 'yes' (83.33%), were requested to say whether and for how many years they have studied English. Five informants mentioned that they have studied English for three (3) years at the university, three of them said for five years also at university, but two mentioned that they took training courses in private schools.

Q4. Is the English language important to you? Please state why.

Table 4. Informants' Perceptions of the Importance of English

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	75%
No	3	25%
Total	12	100%

Table 4- above- shows that the majority of informants (75%) claimed that English is important because, according to them, they need it in their business affairs and to visit international tourism sites. Moreover, some of them claimed that English is an international language and it is the language used in various domains, such as tourism. In addition, English is the language of international business. However, 25% of them considered it unimportant.

They justified their choice by saying that "I do not use English neither at work nor in daily life; hence, it is not important".

Q5. Do you use the English language in your workplace? If yes, when do you use it?

Table 5. The Use of English in Workplace

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	66.67%
No	4	33.33%
Total	12	100%

The results from table 5 show that the majority of informants (66.67) said that they use English in their work environment they mentioned that they use English to talk to foreign tourists and clients. In addition, they use it when they organize tours and picnics for tourists and visitors from other countries their first language is English. A significant percentage of them said that they use English in the marketing of the tourism product. This means that this category of employees use English for the promotion of domestic tourism. However, 33.33% of them claimed that they do not use it. According to them, they are specialist in Hajj and Umrah flights, and they do not deal with foreign tourists, so they do not need to use English.

Q6. What difficulties do you think you face when using the English language? You can choose more than one answer.

1. Find the right words when talking to tourists
2. Writing electronic messages
3. Description of the tourist places for tourists
4. Difficulty pronouncing words in English
5. Difficulty in understanding tourists when speaking in English
6. Other difficulties (please specify)

Table 6. Difficulties Informants find when Using English

Difficulties	Frequency	Percentage
Find the right words when talking to tourists	3	25%
Description of the tourist places for tourists	6	50%
Difficulty in understanding tourists	1	8.33%
Other	2	16.67%
Total	12	100%

This question sought to investigate the difficulties employees face when using English in their work environment. Informants were given a list of suggested difficulties to choose from and were given the opportunity to mention other difficulties they may experience and which are not mentioned in the list (see question 6 above). As table-6-above illustrates, although the informants were allowed to choose more than one difficulty, everyone chose only one and they agreed on three options (1, 3 and 5). 25% of them said that they cannot find the right and appropriate words when talking to tourists because of the lack of English vocabulary related to the field of tourism. Half of informants (50%) claimed that they face problems in the description of the tourist places and sites for foreign tourists and visitors which can be also due to the lack of appropriate terminology from the employees' side. Another difficulty 8.33% of them agreed upon to understand tourists' speech in English because employees do not know the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, etc. tourists use or say. However, 16.67% of informants provided other difficulties that are not mentioned in the choices given in the question. These difficulties include inability to produce grammatically correct sentences, the lack of English vocabulary; specific as well as general so that they can understand relevant scientific texts and articles related to the field of tourism.

Q7.Which of these English language skills do you need most in your work environment?

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Table 7. Language Skills Informants need at Work

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Speaking	1	8.33%
Listening	3	25%
A mixture of all of these	8	66.67%
Total	12	100%

The results as displayed in table 7-above- show that the majority of informants (66.67%) identified their highest need for a mixture of the main language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Furthermore, 8.33% of them claimed that they need only speaking skill and 25% of informants chose only listening. But no one mentioned that they need reading or writing only.

Q8. Please explain your perception of the importance of the following language skills and abilities in the English language.

This question is divided into four main items: Speaking skills, listening skills, reading skills and writing skills. This section of the questionnaire contains four tables each for a language skill. The four tables (Tables 8-11) are devoted respectively to: speaking skills and abilities, listening skills and abilities, reading skills and abilities and writing skills and abilities. Each table includes items that informants rank from 'very unimportant' to 'very important' (5 levels of importance). However, the tables below display only three levels of importance: 'Neutral', 'Important' and 'Very important' because, surprisingly, no participant consider these skills and abilities being 'unimportant' or 'very unimportant'; their answers, then, vary between 'neutral' and 'very important'.

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Table 8. Informants' Perceptions of the Importance of Speaking Skills

Skills and Abilities	N.	Im.	V. imp.
Description of historical places, dishes and festivals	0%	50%	50%
How to give a guided tour	0%	75%	25%
How to prepare job interviews	16.67 %	58.33%	25%
Submit destination guides	0%	50%	50%
Answer phone calls for reservations	16.67 %	33.33%	50%
Reservations by phone	0%	50%	50%
How to plan a tour with tourists	0%	50%	50%
Provide advice and suggestions for tourists	0%	50%	50%
Total percentage for each language skill/ability was 100%			

Table 8 represents the informants' perceptions of the importance of speaking sub-skills. The analysis of the data indicates that the majority of informants perceive these language sub-skills and abilities being either 'important' or 'very important', whereas, the low percentage of informants chose 'neutral' (items 3 and 5). Besides, all the informants (100%) considered speaking skills and abilities in items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 'important' or 'very important'. The data in table-6-above illustrate informants' need English to describe historical places, dishes and festivals, for reservations by phone, planning tours with and providing advice and suggestions for tourists (50% 'important' and 50% 'very important'). In addition, the majority of informants agreed on the importance of using English to prepare job interviews (58.33% 'important' and 25% 'very important') and to answer phone calls for reservations, to submit an oral report on work (33.33%'important' and 50% 'very important').

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Table 9. Informants Perceptions of the Importance of Listening Skills

Skills and Abilities	N.	Imp.	V. imp.
Reservations by phone	16.67%	33.33%	50%
Listen to client/guest inquiries	0%	50%	50%
Listen to customer requests	0%	25%	75%
Listen to directors' instructions	16.67%	41.66%	41.67%
Listen to conversations between agents and clients	0%	50%	50%
Total percentage for each language skill/ability was 100%			

Note: N.-Neutral, Imp.-Important, V. imp-Very important

Table 9-above- represents informants' perceptions on the importance of listening sub-skills and abilities in English. Table-7- illustrates that informants' answers are ranked from neutral to very important. All informants stressed the importance of listening to clients and customers inquiries and requests in English, listening to conversations between clients and agents (items 2, 3 and 5). Moreover, the highest percentage of informants in items 1 and 4 highlighted the importance of listening to reservations on phone and listening to directors' instructions. Informants' answers indicate that English is very important for employees who work in tourism and travel agencies.

Table 10. Informants' Perceptions of the Importance of Reading Skills

Skills and Abilities	N.	Im.	V. imp.
Read texts on how to deal with various complaints	0%	16.67%	83.33%
Preparing plans to develop the tourism agency	16.67%	41.67%	41.66%
Reservation letters from clients	0%	50%	50%
Complaint letters from clients	0%	50%	50%
Job description and duties in English	16.67%	50%	33.33%
Magazines and books to improve knowledge and job skills	0%	66.66%	33.33%
Read the instructions in English	0%	75%	25%
Total number of informants for each language skill was 100%			

Reading skill is a very important skill that helps in developing other language skills. Table-10-above represents the informants' perceptions about the importance of some reading sub-skills and abilities. In all items the

informants agreed on their importance, their answers range between 'important' and 'very important', except in items 2 and 5 some of them are neutral but these are the minority of informants (16.67%). Informants need English to read instructions, complaint letters written in English from clients and also reservation letters.

Table 11. Informants' Perceptions of the Importance of Writing Skills

Options	N.	Im.	V. imp.
Writing emails, faxes and official letters	0%	75%	25%
Responding to customer complaints in the service	0%	66.67 %	33.33 %
Writing meeting minutes	0%	50%	50%
Fill out reservation forms	0%	25%	75%
Fill out the list of requests	0%	37.5%	62.5%
Write a response to customer inquiries about Prices for hotel reservations and Prices for trips.	16.68.33 %	58.337 75%	25% 16.67 %
Writing a field trip reports	25%	25%	50%
Total percentage for each language skill/ability was 100%			

As the informants agreed on the importance of the three previous language skills and abilities, they also agreed on the importance of English writing skills and abilities. Table-11- illustrates informants' perceptions about the importance of writing in English in their workplace. All the informants declared that writing emails, faxes and official letters in English is very important (25% very important and 75% important). In addition, all of them mentioned that using English to respond to customer complaints in the service, write meeting minutes, fill out reservation forms and list requests is of crucial importance. Furthermore, the majority of informants claimed that English is also important to write a response to customer inquiries about prices for hotel reservations and prices for trips (75% important and 16.67very important), and to writing field trip reports (50% very important and 25% important).

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the data gathered has given answers to one major question in this research that is "What kind of English language skills and

abilities does the market require from employees in tourism and travel agencies?" The findings revealed that the agency's staff needs a mixture of all the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. In addition, approximately all employees perceive all the language sub-skills and abilities being very important in the work environment.

The results of the current research paper revealed that employees face many challenges when using English in their work environment namely the difficulty to describe the tourist places and sites for foreign tourists and visitors. In addition to, the inability to produce grammatically correct sentences, and understand scientific texts and articles related to the field of tourism due to the lack of appropriate English terminology; specific as well as general.

Under the light of the foregoing reported and discussed results, some pedagogical implications and suggestions should be made pertaining to the future of the English teaching and learning for the ESP students and teachers. First of all, teachers at universities should develop problem-solving situations to help their learners deal with problems and difficulties they may encounter in their professional setting. Furthermore, teaching and learning materials developers as well as course designers should provide the ESP learners with texts not just being filled with technical terms without opportunities to use these terms in realistic situations, especially in their future workplace. Hence, the findings of this study can be used as guidelines for developing a tourism English syllabus that could lead to the improvement of the employees' communicative competencies and the promotion tourism industry. Moreover, learners' needs in accordance with employees needs should be integrated into the ESP course design process.

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