

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICES FOR HOTEL STAFF: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The hotel, hospitality, and tourism industries have rapidly developed over the past few years. English skills are undoubtedly required in these industries, especially for those who work in five-star and international hotels, including the ones located in Indonesia. It turns out, however, that many hotel staff seem to have a lack of appropriate English language use competence in their workplace. Having taught English to hotel staff for almost two years, it revealed that only a few of them can communicate in English appropriately. Some of the staff do not even know how to make sentences in English. Taking this phenomenon into account, effective English language teaching practices are urgently needed and therefore, this study attempts to discuss some strategies to promote effective English language teaching practices for hotel staff. The strategies were investigated by interviewing the hotel staff who attended an English class held by a five-star hotel located in South Jakarta, Indonesia. The interview consisted of open questions which resulted in significant data on what makes most of the hotel staff unable to communicate in English appropriately, how the teacher should teach the hotel staff, and lastly, what should be discussed and learned during the teaching and learning sessions.

Keywords: English, hotel staff, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, English has played a significant role in most industries, including hotels, hospitality, and tourism. A study conducted by Almomni et al. (2023) reported that English has made a positive contribution in the way that hotel guests would feel comfortable staying in a hotel whose hotel staff can speak English appropriately. It turned out, however, that not all hotels employ hotel staff whose English proficiency is pre-intermediate or above. For example, in a five-star hotel located in South Jakarta, Indonesia, most of the staff's English language contains word-by-word translation, which sometimes impedes communication. In addition, their utterances contain grammatically incorrect phrases such as, 'What would you like to have anything else?', 'What you like sit here?', 'What do can I see wine the list?', or 'What the taste?'

Taking this phenomenon into account, the hotel staff must learn English to be able to communicate appropriately with the hotel guests. Thus, a series of English training was conducted in a five-star hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was an onsite training and attended by 20 English for Food and Beverage (English for F&B) staff. As the trainees were adult learners and most of their English was at the starter level, it is paramount to promote an effective language teaching practice. This study, therefore, discusses the practices that include some strategies generated from a discussion between the trainer and the trainees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

On the communication continuum, a lot of the speaking exercises used in classrooms today are located at or close to the communicative end. Some of them which are widely used are acting from a script, communication games, discussions, prepared talks, questionnaires, and simulation and role play (Harmer, 2001). In line with Harmer, Parrish (2004) proposed interactive speaking activities for adult learners such as picture stories, information-gap activities, groupings, mingling activities, discussion, problem-solving activities, and role play. Among these, learners derive great benefits from simulation and role play since they simulate real-life situations (Harmer, 2001). According to a study by Mayasyarah (2017), role-play was thought to be a suitable way for hotel staff to improve their English-speaking skills.

Lestari, et al. (2017) underlined that to promote effective English language teaching for the F&B staff, particular language functions should be included:

- a. permissive (to soften utterances, to avoid repetition, and to adjust intonation);
- b. interactive (to greet, to have small talks, and farewell);
- c. informative (to introduce, to show, to state, to explain, to ask, to agree, to reject, and to confirm);

- d. persuasive (to offer, to promise, to suggest, and to persuade);
- e. directive (to tell, to order, and to request);
- f. indicative (to praise, to complain, to thank, and to apologize).

METHOD

Without any quantitative data to rely on, the present study used a descriptive qualitative approach to describe effective language teaching practices. 20 subjects were involved in this research. As this was preliminary research, the subjects of the study were given a few open questions to reveal strategies for effective language teaching practices. They include:

1. What makes you unable to speak English appropriately?
2. Which speaking activities work best for you?
3. What should you learn to be able to use English for F&B service?

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Having been asked the three open questions, here are the findings.

1. What makes you unable to speak English appropriately?

Out of 20 trainees, 10 of them said that *they had very little exposure* to the English language, particularly English for F&B. When they were at school, they had a lack of English practices which were supposed to put them in real-life situations dealing with English for hotel and hospitality. They just *worked on exercise sheets* without practicing the language through speaking skills or activities. Five (5) trainees reported that they were stationed in the divisions in which they had few opportunities to communicate in English. The banquet department staff, for example, do not speak English very often with the hotel guests as they only set up meeting rooms and prepare food and drinks for the hotel guests. When preparing the food/snacks, utensils, and other facilities for the guests, they do not have to speak to the hotel guests very often because they have been instructed by the manager to only set up rooms, food, and beverages. Unlike those who work for the banquet, the hotel staff placed in restaurants, cafes, or lounges are required to speak English properly because they have to interact with the guests when they order food and drinks, including taking complaints, and billing.

The self-confidence of the hotel staff also contributes to their English competence. They agreed to the same statement stating “We lack confidence when we speak English to any foreigner.’ They are afraid of making mistakes that might lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding with international guests. One of the hotel staff working for a lounge called ‘lobby lounge’ even ‘ran away’ from the guests since he did not feel confident with his English. He preferred to call for assistance when he was dealing with international guests.

2. Which speaking activities work best for you?

The trainees enjoyed doing simulation and role-play because these two activities have more advantages than other speaking activities. They value simulation and role-play since *they experienced the use of English in real-life settings*. They can be waiters, waitresses, or hotel guests with the real menu available in the hotel. With all of the teaching aids such as the restaurant, café, and lobby lounge menus, tables, and chairs like in the restaurant, café, and the lobby lounge, the trainees felt that ‘they were working’, not learning English. This seemed to have a good impact on their learning progress.

3. What should you learn to be able to use English for F&B service?

During the training, all of the trainees requested particular materials dealing with their job descriptions, especially appropriate language expressions used in some situations with the hotel guests. Some of them include appropriate expressions for:

- a. Greeting the guests
- b. Taking the guests to the table
- c. Taking an order
- d. Confirming an order
- e. Serving the guests at the table
- f. Taking complaints
- g. Billing
- h. General conversation

The last point, general conversation, plays an important role in English for F&B service because the hotel guests occasionally ask the hotel staff questions such as how long they have been working in the hotel, the nearest malls, money changers, or tourist attractions from the hotel, public transport, and sometimes they ask for directions to certain places. Therefore, they should be able to give directions properly to the hotel guests.

DISCUSSION

Deriving from the findings of the study, there are several significant points which can be discussed here. Firstly, the trainees have to have plenty of language input through listening activities as one of their weaknesses, in terms of language aspects, is pronunciation and intonation. Yin’s study (2015) suggested some positive relationships between an authentic English environment and listening improvement which is believed that listening improvement can help learners improve their speaking skills, especially the mastery of authentic language expressions. Input, output, and interaction are the three highly significant components whose

function in second language (L2) learning has steadily come to be recognized. It is now commonly acknowledged that input is necessary for language learning. It is acknowledged that interaction is just as important to learning L2 as input (Zang, 2009). Therefore, the results of this study pedagogically imply that the trainees should have more interactions through, for example, role play or simulation dealing with their workplace upon the acquisition of language through, for instance, listening activities.

Secondly, studies by Gulrer (2015) and Mega & Sugiarto (2020) have examined the relationship between language learners' confidence and the development of their speaking abilities. Their research showed a strong relationship between speaking abilities and self-confidence. Thus, gaining confidence is crucial when learning a language, particularly when trying to get better at speaking.

The findings of this research also suggested that role-play and simulation take the first place of speaking activities when attending English training. This is proven by a study carried out by Mayasyarah (2017) and Pinatih (2021) underlining that role-play improved learners' speaking skills. Harmer (2001) claims that during role-playing, students experience a real-life situation—like a business meeting, an encounter in an airplane cabin, or an interview—as if they were actually in that situation. They can also assume the role of a character who is not necessarily similar to themselves or who has thoughts and feelings that they do not necessarily share. This makes role-play has a good impact on speaking skills enhancement.

Another important finding from this research showed that the trainees need to be exposed to more various language expressions of certain language functions which may include:

- a. Greeting the guests
- b. Taking the guests to the table
- c. Taking an order
- d. Confirming an order
- e. Serving the guests at the table
- f. Taking complaints
- g. Billing
- h. General conversation

This is in line with a study by Lestari et al. (2017) which found that learners should learn how to soften utterances, greet, engage in small conversation, bid farewell, introduce, show, explain, inquire, confirm, offer, propose, thank, and apologize to increase effective English language instruction for F&B service. The aforementioned linguistic functions are all comprised of the functions highlighted by Lestari, et al. (2017).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to promote effective English language teaching practices, the trainees should be given more opportunities to practice the language, be exposed to a great variety of language expressions of English for F&B, and practice them through role-play activities. This way, expectantly, can build up their confidence. In addition, effective English language teaching for the hotel staff may include particular functions such as softening utterances, greeting, engaging in small conversation, bidding farewell, introducing, showing, explaining, inquiring, confirming, offering, proposing, thanking. These functions can be integrated into specific functions for English for F&B service including greeting the guests, taking the guests to the table, taking an order, confirming an order, serving the guests at the table, taking complaints, billing, and general conversation.

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