

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH FOR AIRLINES STAFF CANDIDATES

A Study from a Training Center

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Abstract

The growth of airlines industry in Indonesia triggers training centers to develop their courses; one of them is their English class. This study looks closer into an EOP course in an Indonesian training center, and reveals some challenges of teaching and learning English for Airlines Staff Candidates. Data are collected through some interviews with teachers and students, also document studies focusing on teaching materials, class activity, and final scoring within a training batch. Both teachers and students have issues which related one another hindering the objectives of teaching and learning that strongly impact the course output. The findings can support teaching evaluation, material development, ideas in teaching methodologies, and need analysis in aviation training.

Keywords: teaching English, airlines staff candidates, training center

Introduction

English for Specific Purpose is a broad topic that has attracted interest since its emergence in the middle of 20th century. (Basturkmen, 2010). The broad scope of ESP is divided into some sub topics, such like English for Academic Purposes, English for Occupational Purposes, and English for Vocational Purposes (West, 1994). One of the branches of English for Occupational Purposes is Aviation English (Moder, 2012) that is “English used by pilots, air traffic controllers, and other aviation professionals”. However, it is popular that this term is owned by the English used by pilots and air traffic controllers (Parohinog and Meesri, 2015; Karimi and Vahdani, 2014) since there have been many research under this topic. This might be because of its urgency. In aviation industry, the communication of pilots and air traffic controllers is very important, in order to ensure smooth flow and coordination. Alderson (2009) noted aviation accidents are caused by miscommunications on this.

Cutting's work in 2012 initialized views that communication among other aviation personnel deserves studies, too. Cutting described language used by airport

ground staffs under the position of: security guards, ground handlers, catering staff and bus drivers. Besides, Ting (2010) noted the detail on course design for airport ground staff working at the Information Desk.

Airlines service in Indonesia is growing rapidly. Recently, a significant total amount of customers have used the service, showing the improvement as much as 20% (INACA, 2018), and more airports are built. A good thing is that the interest on aviation professionals training is getting increased, either. Some prestigious events in ASEAN level related to Aviation Training Awareness were held started in 2011 supported by Ministry of Transportation and government-support organization, continue until present.

Aviation Training in Indonesia is barely found in university level. Usually, the professionals in aviation industry are trained in flight academy, college, and training center. They are offered programs they can choose based on their intended jobs such like to be pilots, cabin crew, ticketing / reservation, ground staff, flight safety, cargo service, and others (such like cleaning and wrapping). However, it seems like some institutions offered attractive programs such like short-term training in less than 6 months

and the students will get recommendation from the owner of the training center to get a job in the airlines company or other related service agents. In this short course, English is one of the subjects to master, so that the graduates can be qualified and competitive in the job field. Now the inquiry is that how the process of English teaching and learning in the training center occurs. What challenges are found there in teaching and learning process?

Methodology

This study intended to discover challenges of teaching and learning English for Airlines Staff Candidates by employing qualitative approach. Data are collected through in-depth interviews, discussion, and document studies focusing on the following points: teaching materials, class activity, and final scoring. Interviews and discussions involved some informants; three English teachers, an academic staff, and ten students (three of them taking ground staff program, seven students are into cargo service). Other than that, documents such like handouts, teaching journals, and lesson plan are examined for source triangulation. The researcher was also given a chance to observe a few class activities. The process of collecting and analyzing data continuously bundled together to complete information comprehensively, as Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that in Qualitative Design, Data Collection, Data Display, Data Reduction, and Data Verification or Conclusion connect each other.

Findings and Discussion

1. How English is brought into the classrooms

From document study and interviews, the researcher found that during this eight-week training program, the allotted time of learning English is 24 hours in total, involving three teachers for three separated English classes; Job Interview (6 meetings), Professional English (8 meetings), and Basic English (10 meetings).

2. Teaching Materials

In all those three afore mentioned English Classes, each teacher provides handout for the students, and usually the teachers arrange the content by themselves based on the direction of academic staff.

In English for Job Interview, the students feel that the materials are very helpful. They learned much about frequently asked questions in job interview through video and in-class practice or simulation. To cross-check, the researcher found that the handout of English for Job Interview is concise with well-organized content. It provides the questions mostly asked in the interview, answer tips with examples, and tips for interview preparation. The students feel that handout is easy to learn.

In the class of Professional English, the layout of the handout looked less organized. Its pieces of papers seemed loose and bundled in some groups, but the students looked confused when trying to show some written conversation practice because it was not in order, and there was no content list. The handout contained dialogue in the airport, ticket booking, and baggage handling. However, seeing the printed format and layout of the draft that is still rough here and there such like the front size, spacing, and margins, further revision and minor edit would be best. The students wish they could have a better handout, too, in order to get them learn better. Another thing is that tenses and grammar are taught in this class as an additional material in relation to dialogues provided, for example, the explanation about passive voice after baggage handling dialog.

For the class of Basic English, the handout is well-organized in an e-book file. This file contains materials about small talk, time and numbers, stating and refuting opinion, and how to do presentation in formal setting. Basic theory, examples, and exercises are provided in every chapter. The students like this e-book. However, they feel that sometimes it is hard to understand the content because of their limited vocabulary

and ‘high-level’ diction. This thing even makes the students whose English proficiency is low becomes more struggling.

3. Class Activity

The researcher had a chance to visit the class of English for Job Interview. At that time the students were introduced to job interview example through a video and they looked enthusiastic. The video was not played till the end, because it was a long video. Part played was when the interviewer asked about strength and weakness. The video was paused several times to make sure students got the meaning of sentences shown and students asked questions. Apparently the teacher carefully gave space for students so that they feel confident and comfortable with the materials.

After example and tips were provided, the teacher asked the students to think of their real answers if they are being asked the question of strength and weakness. The teacher asked them to find each three of their greatest strength and weakness. Then, she asked the students to practice answering the question in pairs.

During the latter session, it is clear that the students with low English proficiency struggled. They lack of vocabulary and less confident. Whenever they could not speak fluently, the other students who know better gave help.

In the class of Professional English, the activities were mostly conversation practice. Although on the handout were some tenses and grammar, the teacher did not spend time to discuss or explain them. The same problem was there, that the students with low proficiency struggled hard. They had long pause when they performed conversations.

In the last class, Basic English, the scope of materials are broader. However, some students still found it hard to keep up, mostly when it deals with listening and speaking practice. At many times they look confused and struggling, but the teacher is quite sensitive that she quickly noticed them.

This class needs full of creativity, and sometimes teacher brings games to the class.

4. Final Scoring

The three classes have different final scoring. In class of English for Job Interview, there will always be job interview simulation in the final meeting for scoring students’ performance. The students have to answer questions orally face-to-face with the teacher. They will be scored under the criteria: speaking, performance, and fluency.

In the class of professional English, it is surprising that the scoring was not to have students perform dialog, but job interview. The students informed that it was an exercise, even though English for Job Interview was also a different subject. However, some students stated that it is beneficial for them, such like killing two birds with one stone.

Lastly, in the class of Basic English, students are obliged to perform a formal presentation under the theme of culture and traditional wellness. For some students, the topic is less relevant with their study. They expected topics such like airlines or more basic talks.

5. Teaching Challenge

From the findings above, it is revealed that there are some teaching challenges in the English class of this training center. Teachers with English education background without knowledge about the field, or they are who quite professional and experienced in the field but no background in teaching English are difficult but true matter.

Another thing is that the teachers must teach students who have different (sometimes very big difference): ages, backgrounds (education, English skill level, community), interest, confidence. It seems that they need community or sharing group of English teachers in this special field, instead of being an independent fighter.

Meanwhile, in case about English teaching material, it is very important to conduct very thoughtful needs analysis

related to the learning goals and objectives, in order to make learning become more meaningful and specific. (Basturkmen, 2010; West, 1994; Williams, 2014; Paltridge and Starfield, 2013)

6. Learning Challenge

Students with poor English proficiency felt left very much behind. In reverse, top students feel bored and stuck when they actually wanted to learn more or other things in their level of proficiency. This will not happen if there are placement test prior to class starting. However, it is difficult to have ideal situation when there are just a couple students with limited time and teachers.

Conclusions

Rapid and positive growth of aviation industry should be supported by appropriate system and implementation in aviation training as an effort in order to have professional employees. Language is a very important aspect to pay attention. There should be a special attention for English for airlines service in Indonesia.

In the process, it is found some discrepancies between expectation (objectives) and reality in the teaching and learning materials. For a maximum result, there should be full effort in needs analysis, learning facilities, teacher training, coordination, and unity in order to overcome the challenges detected.

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