The Perception and Challenges of Airport Ground Staff Towards the Use of English Language at Pattimura International Airport

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions and challenges of airport ground staff regarding English language usage at Pattimura International Airport, Indonesia. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, data were collected from 30 front-line airport staff through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The quantitative analysis revealed unanimous recognition (100%) of English as essential for airport operations, while qualitative findings provided deeper insights into implementation challenges. Key findings indicate that despite positive perceptions toward English usage, staff face significant challenges in speaking (60% reporting anxiety) and listening comprehension (40% reporting language conversion difficulties). The absence of formal language training (reported by 100% of participants) has led to reliance on self-directed learning strategies. Staff primarily utilize informal methods such as watching movies with subtitles and listening to English songs to improve their language skills. This study highlights a critical gap between institutional requirements and support systems in English language development at the airport. These findings have important implications for aviation language training policies and suggest the need for structured institutional support to enhance staff English proficiency and confidence in professional communication.

Keywords: *Airport Ground Staff, English Communication, English Skills, Perception, Aviation English*

INTRODUCTION

English is the predominant form of global communication, and it plays an important part in globalization processes. According to Clyne (2008), the influence of globalization is inextricably linked to English, making it an indispensable instrument for integrating service-based economies on a worldwide scale. This language universality fosters transnational relationships, allowing entities to communicate their perspectives and identities globally. The importance of effective communication abilities, particularly in English, cannot be emphasized in today's competitive work environment. According to Roshid and Chowdhury (2013), English has become a basic instrument of communication around the world, which increases the likelihood of obtaining better jobs. In a corporate setting, English proficiency is regarded as particularly beneficial for employees (Akkakoson, 1994), indicating the language's growing importance in the international business world. This significance extends to the service sector, particularly for professions that need

interaction with foreigners, such as airport ground crew. Beyond security concerns, English language skills are essential for projecting a positive image of airports, assisting passengers, and impressing visitors (Phithakphongphan, 2016). The aviation sector emphasizes the necessity of English as the official language for all communications, which ensures safety and efficiency in international air travel.

Despite these global trends, observations at Pattimura International Airport in East Indonesia indicate possible communication shortages, particularly among airport ground workers interacting with multicultural consumers. Language proficiency, particularly in English, is emphasized as a requirement for public services to efficiently handle concerns and provide support in this diverse and dynamic environment. Dhanasmithivesn (2007) conducted studies at Srinakharinwirot University on the English language abilities necessary by Thai flight attendants employed by Chinese carriers, notably those stationed in Bangkok and working for China carriers. The study classified attendants according to their flying experience: 6 months to 4 years, 5 to 8 years, and 9 to 12 years. The data found that reading abilities were the most frequently used and required the greatest training, whereas writing was the least used and required the least instruction. Speaking scored second in usage but third in training demand, while listening ranked third in frequency but second in training required. Experience was an important factor in shaping the shift in language skill usage and training requirements. Pannuan (2018) conducted a study of Suvaranabhumi airport passenger service agents, focused on their English oral communication needs. The study emphasized the importance of agents' speech and listening abilities, particularly when communicating with passengers and apologizing for errors. Listening skills were very important for understanding passengers' requirements. Varying degrees of experience altered task prioritizing, with the group with six or more years of experience highlighting the necessity of understanding foreign cabin workers and following supervisor directions.

The differing results of these studies highlight the need for additional research, particularly in the context of Indonesian airports, particularly Ambon. A study concentrating on airport staff's perceptions of the use of English could provide useful insights into their requirements and concerns, thereby improving employee English competence. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions and challenges of Pattimura International Airport ground staff towards the use of the English language in their workplace with three research questions: What are the perceptions of the Pattimura International airport ground staff towards the use of English in their workplace? What are the challenges that airport ground staffs face in communicating by using English in their workplace? And how does the Pattimura International airport ground staff improve their English for communication in their workplace?.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English as Global Language

People may easily converse with the other all over the world using a single language. A single language would help in the reduction of misunderstanding and miscommunication. In our nation, we use our local language or mother tongue, and we use a second language, in this instance global language, to communicate with individuals who do not speak or know anything about our mother tongue, or for other reasons such as employment, travel, migration, and commerce. To achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. When a language develops a unique role that is acknowledged in every country, it acquires really global significance. (Crystal, 2003). Language does not exist independently, in some mythical region aside from the humans who speak it. 13 Language lives exclusively in the users' minds, mouths, ears, hands, and eyes (Dewi, 2013). As the world grows more global, the necessity for global language is recognized not just by worldwide academic and corporate institutions, but also by individuals as the world becomes more and more global. The power of its people is one of the most important factors in making a language universal or worldwide. The power includes military, politic and economic. As global communication develops, so does the demand for a global language, one that is recognized and understood by individuals all over the world. English is that language in many places of the world.

Many nations use English as an official or semi-official language. It is the primary language used in books, newspapers, airports, air traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, international contests, music, and advertisements. According to Crystal (2003) approximately over two-thirds of all scientists worldwide write in English. Three quarters of the world's mail are written in English. Of all the information in world's electronic retrieval systems, 80% is stored in English. It has become the language spoken by millions of people worldwide, the mother tongue, the language used for international communications, and the language taught in millions of schools. This, in turn, makes English dominates international business, politics and culture more than any other language in human history.

The Needs of English Proficiency in a Workplace

English is an important instrument extensively utilized in international communication all over the world. It has become a required component of a successful personality as a result of globalization. The globalization of knowledge, as well as the globalization of higher education, is leading to an increase in the use of English as a medium of instruction. (Graddol, 2010). English

is required at work, yet it differs from common conversational English. Each job domain has its own set of communication requirements. There may be specific reports or paperwork to complete out, or interactions with consumers may need to adhere to business policy. English communication abilities are required for job advancement. Because English is a widely used language in the business world, knowing it is regarded as one of the employable skills (Durga, 2018). English language ability is essential for job success and progress.

English communication skills have been acknowledged as essential workplace capabilities for corporate success (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996 as Durga Cited). It is a person's capacity to perform in a language. English language competency is defined as an individual's ability to communicate effectively in English (Dev & Qiqieh, 2016). The capacity to utilize language in real-world settings in spontaneous interactions and non-rehearsed contexts in a way acceptable and suitable to native speakers of the language is 15 defined as proficiency. It displays what a language user is capable of doing regardless of where, when, or how they learned the language. Independent demonstration of how the language was learnt; the context may or may not be known; competency evaluation is not restricted to the content of a certain curriculum that has been taught or studied. Proficiency refers to varied levels of functional language proficiency, ranging from early stages to sophisticated uses of language. Proficiency is not a proportion of how many words a person knows, but rather the degrees of real-world usage in circumstances like as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A person's speaking ability may be greater than their literate ability (Willner, 2019).

The Essence of English as a Communication Tool

English language is widely recognized as a bridge to higher education and job prospects. The English language is critical in bringing the world together. Being able to communicate effectively is the most important of all life skills. Simply said, communication is the act of passing information from one person to another. It can be delivered orally (through speech), written (via printed or digital media such as books, 16 magazines, websites, or emails), graphically (via logos, maps, charts, or graphs), or nonverbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). According to Ahmad (2016) Communication is the exchange of feelings, ideas, and points of view with others. Communication is the exchange of feelings, ideas, and points of view with others. We live in communities, and man is inherently a social being. We share our ideas with others because societal necessities demand it. Communication is a twoway process that inspires, informs, advises, cautions, commands, changes behavior, and establishes stronger connections to make conversation meaningful and to make oneself known. Effective communication skills in the workplace include the capacity to present information to others in a clear and straightforward

manner, facilitating task comprehension and completion (Kermode, 2011). This includes the ability to clearly deliver and receive communications, as well as the value of recognizing and comprehending your target audience. Communication is crucial to the success of any organization, and using strategies to remove barriers to good communication is beneficial (Wambui, 2015). Differences in culture, expectations, experiences, viewpoints, or cultural styles can all serve as impediments.

The Role of English in Avitiation Services

Effective communication is critical in the hospitality industry, particularly in airline services, where interactions between passengers and ground crew determine the latter's social function (Powers, 1992). Tangniam (2006) emphasizes the importance of ground personnel in delivering services that improve customers' comfort. To effectively comprehend and meet the demands of passengers, ground workers must be fluent in English. The English language's global prominence makes it the universal aviation lingua franca (Day, 2001). It acts as a tool for international aviation safety and efficiency, transcending political considerations. Airport ground staff must be fluent in English in order to properly contribute to aviation goals (Phithakphongphan, 2016).

Challenge Found by Airport Ground staff in Using English in Their Work

Ground staffs play a critical role in ensuring that aircraft depart safely and smoothly. As aviation's frontline, they conduct a variety of passenger service jobs such as checking in passengers, providing flight information, aiding with inquiries, and delivering excellent customer service. However, complications exist, particularly when handling foreign passengers, due to linguistic barriers. Communication difficulties in English, particularly in listening and speaking abilities, provide substantial challenges for ground staff. The foreign noises and dialects make effective conversation difficult. Misinterpretation may occur, resulting in delays and confusion. Employees frequently hesitate to switch to English, fearing language errors or a lack of competence, which impairs their ability to engage effectively with passengers. Overcoming these linguistic barriers is critical for ground staff to improve accuracy and effectiveness when handling international passengers

METHOD
Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate ground staff responses towards English usage at Pattimura International Airport. Following Creswell's

(2014) framework, the research was conducted in two sequential phases: a quantitative phase utilizing questionnaires, followed by a qualitative phase comprising in-depth interviews. This design was selected to provide comprehensive insights, as the quantitative findings informed and guided the subsequent qualitative investigation.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at Pattimura International Airport in Ambon city, Indonesia. Participants were selected through quota sampling, following Visanou Hassana's sampling theory. The sample consisted of 30 front-line officers who regularly interact with passengers, including airport customer services personnel, gate check staff, X-ray officers, check-in counter staff, and immigration officers. While all participants completed the quantitative phase questionnaire, interview participants for the qualitative phase were selected based on their active employment status as front-line staff and their responses to the initial questionnaire.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved two primary instruments: a hybrid questionnaire combining closed-ended and open-ended questions, and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was administered to all participants, allowing for both structured responses and detailed elaboration of participants' perspectives. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gather detailed qualitative data, providing deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives.

The analytical framework incorporated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaire data were analyzed using percentage analysis following Sudijono's (2011) formula, where the percentage was calculated by dividing response frequency by the total number of respondents and multiplying by 100. For the qualitative component, interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's triangulation approach. This process involved data reduction through the selection and simplification of interview transcripts, followed by thematic organization of reduced data, and culminating in the synthesis of findings.

The research procedure followed a systematic sequence beginning with obtaining participant consent and preparing research instruments. This was followed by participant selection, data collection through questionnaires and interviews, data transcription and coding, and finally, data analysis and conclusion formulation. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive examination of the research questions while maintaining academic rigor throughout the investigation process.

FINDINGS

Perceptions and Challenges of Airport Ground Staff Toward English Usage

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data regarding airport ground staff's perceptions and challenges toward English usage at Pattimura International Airport. The findings integrate statistical analysis of questionnaire responses (N=30) with thematic analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with two ground staff members, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding English language use in this professional context.

1. Staff Perceptions and Institutional Context

Table 1 presents the statistical analysis of staff perceptions regarding English language usage in their professional environment.

Table 1 Airport Ground Staff's Perceptions of English Usage (N=30)

Statement	Yes		No	
	f	%	f	%
English is a global language	30	100	0	0
English is important in field of work	30	100	0	0
English should be included in staff recruitment	30	100	0	0
English fluency should measure performance	12	40	18	60
English is main tool for foreign passenger communication	30	100	0	0

The quantitative data revealed unanimous agreement (100%) on several fundamental aspects of English in the aviation context. All participants acknowledged English as a global language, recognized its importance in their field, and supported its inclusion in staff recruitment criteria. This universal recognition was particularly evident in the qualitative interviews, where participants emphasized the strategic importance of English proficiency:

> *"English is not only used by flight attendants or pilots and co-pilots, but also for us terminal or airport officers, because there are not only domestic visitors or passengers but also international passengers. For that I think English is important in the world of aviation." (AGS1)*

However, a notable divergence emerged regarding the role of English proficiency in performance evaluation. Only 40% of respondents supported using English fluency as a performance metric, while 60% opposed this view. The qualitative data provided context for this division:

> *"It's important, apart from what I said, it's rarely used and there is a language barrier, but when there's a moment when a passenger needs help when boarding or checking in a ticket, like it or not, we have to adjust the language to help because it's included in the service." (AGS2)*

2. Operational Challenges and Usage Patterns

Table 2 presents a detailed analysis of the challenges reported by airport ground staff in their English language usage.

Table 2 Challenges Encountered in English Usage (N=30)

Challenge Category	Response Type	f	%
Frequency of English Use	Frequently	0	0
	Infrequently	24	80
	Not at All	6	20
Communication Barriers	Language Conversion	12	40
	Speaking Anxiety	18	60
Workplace Support	Training Provided	0	0
	No Training Provided	30	100

The data revealed significant patterns in English usage frequency, with 80% reporting infrequent usage and 20% reporting no usage. This limited exposure was elaborated in the qualitative interviews:

"When it comes to work, English is rarely used. Only used when needed... well, it's like when only interacting with foreign visitors." (AGS1)

Communication challenges emerged as a predominant theme, with 94% of respondents reporting difficulties in English communication. These challenges manifested in two primary forms:

1. Language Conversion Difficulties (40%):

"For me personally the problem is in the pronunciation of the way I pronounce a word in English, because sometimes my pronunciations affected by how I pronounce words in Bahasa Indonesia." (AGS1)

2. Speaking Anxiety (60%):

"The biggest problem or challenge in using English skill is I always nervous to speak because when I want to explain something, sometimes I got the moment when I don't know the word I want say in English so it requires me to explain the definition of the word first in order to make they understand, so it takes extra time and a long explanation." (AGS2)

3. Professional Development and Institutional Support

A critical finding emerged regarding professional development opportunities. The quantitative data indicated a complete absence of institutional language training, with 100% of

respondents reporting no training provision. The qualitative interviews revealed the implications of this institutional gap:

1. Self-Directed Learning Strategies:

"I prefer to practice independently through listen some English songs while working." (AGS1)

2. Alternative Learning Methods:

"I am more on my own initiative to learn independently like watching western movies... I usually download movie with its indo subtitles." (AGS2)

DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, this study reveals significant insights into the perceptions and challenges faced by airport ground staff at Pattimura International Airport regarding English language usage in their professional context. The analysis demonstrates that airport ground staff unanimously recognize English as an international language crucial for their professional duties, aligning with Woong's (2013) assertion that English enables global communication. This recognition stems from their role in handling both domestic and international passengers, where English serves as an essential communication medium.

The findings indicate that airport ground staff perceive English proficiency as fundamentally important in their workplace, particularly given their front-line role in passenger services. This aligns with Phithakphongphan's (2016) observation that English proficiency is vital for airport personnel who engage in face-to-face interactions with travelers. The necessity of English language skills is particularly evident in various operational contexts, including check-in procedures, information dissemination, and passenger assistance.

However, despite this recognition, the study reveals significant challenges in English language implementation. The primary difficulties emerge in speaking and listening skills, corroborating Pitaloka, Jaya & Petrus's (2021) finding that these skills present the greatest challenges among language competencies. Speaking difficulties manifest in multiple dimensions, including limited vocabulary, which impedes effective idea expression. The psychological barriers are particularly noteworthy, with staff reporting anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes during English interactions. These findings align with Shen and Chiu's (2019) identification of psychological factors as significant impediments to effective English communication.

Listening comprehension emerges as another critical challenge, with staff struggling with unfamiliar vocabulary and utterances. This difficulty aligns with Azizah's (2014) emphasis on the importance of understanding uttered language for effective listening. The challenges are

compounded by difficulties in managing rapid speech rates and diverse accents, as noted by Rossa & Diora (2020) and Pratiwi (2021). These findings suggest that accent familiarity significantly impacts comprehension and communication effectiveness.

In response to these challenges, the study reveals that staff primarily rely on independent learning strategies to improve their English proficiency. This approach, as described by Fajar & Agustina (2019), involves self-directed learning habits particularly suited to adult learners. The staff's preferred methods include watching Western movies with subtitles and listening to English songs. This aligns with Tahir's (2015) assertion regarding the effectiveness of English movies in language skill development and Setyaningsih's (2007) observation about the value of songs in building linguistic repertoires.

The adoption of these self-directed learning strategies reflects both necessity and practicality. As suggested by Nur Hikmah (2020), movies serve as an effective learning medium by developing both receptive and productive skills. Similarly, English songs provide a flexible learning tool that, according to Prasetia (2017), enables relaxed, continuous learning. These methods are particularly relevant given the absence of formal language training programs at the institution.

The findings highlight a critical gap between institutional requirements and support systems. While English proficiency is essential for effective airport operations, as emphasized by Cahyani & Nur (2017), the lack of formal training programs leaves staff to develop their language skills independently. This situation suggests a need for more structured institutional support to enhance staff English proficiency and confidence in professional communication.

These findings have significant implications for airport management and language training policies. The research suggests that while independent learning strategies are valuable, they should be complemented by formal training programs that specifically address the psychological and linguistic challenges identified in this study. Such an integrated approach would better support airport ground staff in meeting the linguistic demands of their roles in international aviation.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided comprehensive insights into the complex dynamics of English language usage among airport ground staff at Pattimura International Airport. The findings reveal a significant disconnect between the recognized importance of English proficiency and the practical challenges faced by ground staff in their daily operations. Through quantitative analysis, the study identified that while all participants (100%) acknowledged English as crucial for aviation services, significant barriers exist in its implementation, particularly in speaking (60% reporting anxiety) and listening skills (40% reporting language conversion difficulties). The psychological

barriers, including anxiety and lack of confidence, significantly impact staff's willingness to engage in English communication, while linguistic challenges, particularly in vocabulary and pronunciation, affect the quality of service delivery. Most notably, the complete absence of formal language training programs (reported by 100% of participants) has created a dependency on self-directed learning strategies, which, while commendable, may not fully address the specific needs of aviation English communication.

These findings have several implications for airport management and language training policies, suggesting the need for a more structured approach to English language development in aviation contexts. Future initiatives should focus on developing comprehensive language training programs that address both psychological and linguistic barriers while considering the specific requirements of aviation English communication. Further research could explore the effectiveness of various training approaches and investigate the specific needs of different airport service departments. Additionally, comparative studies with other regional airports could provide broader insights into best practices for English language development in aviation contexts. This research contributes to the understanding of English language challenges in aviation services and provides a foundation for developing more effective language training strategies in international airports, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that combines institutional support with individual learning initiatives to enhance the overall quality of airport services.

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