English Needs Analysis of Iran Air Airport Services Personnel at Isfahan Airport

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Abstract
Although English language plays an important role in the job of aviation personnel, language needs of these employees have been taken for granted. This study aimed at investigating the extent to which English is used by the employees at Iran Air airport services at Isfahan Airport, the required level of basic language skills in performing their jobs effectively, and the employees' attitude towards their English professional courses. A questionnaire consisting of 24 items was constructed and distributed among all the employees working at three sections of Iran Air airport services (Ramp Control, Customer Services, and Baggage Services). Besides, Observation was done by the researcher at the airport to find out the basic language problems of the aviation personnel, and interviews were done with the head of each sections. The findings proved that English language is highly used in the employees' jobs and they are not satisfied with their training courses. Also, the Ramp Control and Baggage Services employees considered speaking as the most important skill, while Baggage Services employees considered reading and writing as the important ones. Finally, it can be concluded that revision of the current professional training programs seems to be necessary to offer appropriate ESP course curriculum.

Keywords: Airport services employees, aviation, English for Specific Purposes, Iran Air, needs analysis

Introduction

English language is the universal lingua franca. It plays a very significant role as the primary tool for communication in the global community. On the other hand, aviation is an international industry and as a result involves multiple languages. However, as regarded by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), English is the aviation official language.

Aviation communication is the means by which aircraft crews connect with other aircraft and staff on the ground to relay information. All the international aircraft operators, whether pilots or air traffic control officers, must meet minimum English Language proficiency necessities specified by ICAO which came into effect in 2008. The aim of ICAO is to raise standards in 'Aviation English' communications all around the world, as a means of improving safety both in the air and on the ground.

Nunan (1998) defines Needs Analysis as "a procedure which gathers information about learners and about communication tasks to use in syllabus design" (p.75). It is the first stage carried out before a course so that a course outline, materials and other resources can be considered before teaching begins. Needs analysis affects the learners' educational life at the time of studying and their future life regarding their future jobs and affairs.

Needs analysis is more critical in ESP courses. ESP courses should be closely connected to the field in which students are studying. As the name speaks, ESP is defined to include specific

chunks of language, which a particular group of learners needs to know in order to perform appropriately in the related context.

After all sanctions on Iran civil aviation were lifted in January 2016, Iran Air, as the flag carrier airline of Iran and the oldest airline in the Middle East, is now able to purchase new civil aircraft from any manufacturer. Therefore, the company feels the need for training new staff in different sections both in the air and on the ground. As a result, English as a mean of communication in this industry must be taken into consideration and its needs must be analyzed.

This study aimed at investigating the importance of ESP in teaching English to aviation staff. It was intended to shed light on English language needs, lacks and wants of aviation employees to provide empirical data serving the ESP context of employees in Iran Air airport services. Moreover, it tried to show the lack of English knowledge and proficiency among the employees of airport services.

Also, the research was developed to get opinions of the employees' attitude towards English language, draw their attention to the ESP method, and investigate the difference between EPG and ESP. Besides, the study attempted to find the best level of English language skills for employees to do their job effectively.

Literature Review

The initial flourishing of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement comes from general economy developments in the world in the 1950s and 1960s, the increased use of English as the international language of science, technology and business and raised numbers of international students studying in countries like UK, USA, and Australia (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). The emergence of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching movement resulted from the English language needs of the learners for specific purposes in accordance with their professions or job description. In ESP context, the effect of the historical occurrences resulted from a mass of people across the globe who wanted to learn the English language because of the key language for the fields of science, technology and commerce (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Rodgers (1969 as cited in Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) expressed that "developments in educational psychology also contributed to the rise of ESP by emphasizing the central importance of the learners and their attitudes to learning". According to Hutchinson and waters (1987) different learners have different interest and needs, that have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning. These needs support the development of the courses in which relevance to learners' needs and interests were of great importance.

English as a Language of Wider Communication (ELWC) refers to an environment in which English serves no intra-country uses and instead is used for international communicative purposes (Judd, 1981). Therefore, many people need to use English for scientific, technical and commercial purposes, which are popularly called *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP).

English language needs of the learners for specific purposes which are connected to their fields of profession or job description resulted in the emergence of ESP teaching movement. In ESP context, the effect of the historical developments resulted from crowds of people across the globe who wanted to learn the English language because of the key language for the fields of science, technology and commerce (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). They mention that there are three reasons contributing to the emergence of all ESP: (a) the expansion of demand for English to suit particular needs, (b) development in the field of linguistics, and (c) educational psychology.

According to Robinson (1991) needs analysis can be considered what the students themselves would like to gain from the language course. This view of needs implies that students may have personal aims in addition to (or even in opposition to) the requirements of their studies or jobs.

"Needs analysis refers to procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design" (Nunan, 1998, p. 75). It is a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study. Such parameters include the criteria and rationale for grouping learners, the selection and sequencing of course content, methodology, and course length, intensity and duration. Needs analysis is the first step carried out before a course so that a course outline, materials and other resources can be in place before teaching begins.

Kuen (2001) examined the communicative needs in sales in the Malaysian business context. The study looked at the communicative needs of sales personnel of a Malaysian owner-managers group of companies. More specifically, it focused on the productive skills of speaking and writing which sales personnel needed in their jobs, and the types of communicative events sales personnel were involved in and the communicative skills that they needed.

Meemark (2002) investigated the needs and problems of English language for tourist police. The results indicated that all sections of the tourist police strongly needed all four macro English language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening was considered the most important. The eleven groups of tourist police needed to improve all four English skills. As for specific English courses, most tourist police needed English training courses and English native teachers. The English training courses should emphasize listening and speaking skills, together with vocabulary.

Aunreun (2005) explored the English language needs of travel agents in Chiang Mai. The findings revealed that the English language was perceived as important for the travel agents. They thought of speaking as the skill they use most. Listening, writing and reading were also needed. Grammar and appropriate expressions and pronunciation were perceived as the lowest needs. They also believed that speaking was the skill with which they faced most problems followed by grammar and appropriate expression, listening and translation respectively. They hardly encountered problems in vocabulary in tourism and reading skills.

Tangniam (2006) conducted a research on analysis of English language needs for Thai Airways ground staff. He tried to observe the extent ground staff in Thai Airways needs to use English in their job areas and examine the functional needs of English for ground staff and general difficulties in using English. The population used in the research was 1,166 ground staff working for Thai Airways. A questionnaire was handed out to the respondents who were in duty at international airport terminal. Finally, he stated that all of the employees absolutely agreed that English is essential for their jobs and almost all of them viewed that the English course provided is not sufficient for them.

Mazdayasna and Tahririan (2008) examined the foreign language learning needs of undergraduate medical sciences students studying in faculties of nursing and midwifery in Iran. The participants were consisted of 681 undergraduate students as well as 168 subject-specific instructors and 6 EFL instructors, which was designed on a qualitative-quantitative survey basis using interviews and questionnaires. By analyzing the data, it was revealed that most of the students perceived that before attending their specialized courses they needed to master the foreign language because they needed to use Persian and English sources to study their subject. It showed that over one-third of the students were dissatisfied with the number of students in each class, with the teaching methodology used, the evaluation method, and the amount of foreign culture taught in the class and content of the textbook. Equally, the subject-specific teachers'

responses demonstrated total dissatisfaction with their students' language skills. It can be inferred that this course does not fully prepare the students to embark on their studies because it does not sufficiently take into account their (a) learning needs, (b) present level of foreign language proficiency, (c) objectives of the course, (d) resources available in terms of staff, materials, equipment, finances and time constraint, (e) the skill of the teachers and the teacher's knowledge of the specific area.

Owolabi (2012) believed that to acquire the linguistic needs of the learner there must be some familiarity with the end goals of the students in accordance to their academic and communicative life and syllabus designers should try to evaluate their needs according to these purposes. This aspect of ESP courses is more significant when these courses are presented at English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP). They are two basic domains of knowledge in which the students should become proficient during their academic life.

Karimi and Vahdani Sanavi (2014) investigated English language learning needs among students in aviation training program. The participants of this study comprised 20 undergraduate students, 5 instructors, and 15 graduate students. Their study revealed that the effective English language instruction is greatly needed to perform the jobs effectively and hence plays a crucial role in the careers of aviation professionals. Most of the students examined in this study believed their highly demanding needs to improve their four language skills to meet the requirements of their ESP courses; however, the current course fails to meet their expectations.

Nezamabadi (2014) conducted a research on needs analysis of aviation professionals. The research was carried out on pilots, navigators, air traffic controllers, and radio operators. The study intended to define the extent to which English language is used in the careers of aviation professionals at workplace in Iran. For this purpose, 300 employees were randomly selected and a questionnaire was distributed among them. It was concluded that having high level of proficiency in English for aviation professionals is inevitable.

A research on the needs analysis of Iranian ESP learners in aviation system was carried out by Barkhordari (2015). In her research, she tried to emphasize on the important role of English in the career of the Iran Air personnel at Isfahan sales offices. A questionnaire was distributed among 100 employees at three different branches of Iran Air sales offices at Isfahan. According to results of the research, the English language requirements of the employees were not taken into account in their ESP courses.

Due to the lack of the studies on aviation needs analysis in Iran, the following questions were posed:
1.To what extent is English language used in the careers of Iran Air airport services employees working at Isfahan Airport?
2.What levels of the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are needed for different types of activities at airport services?
3.What is the attitude of airport services employees towards their language ability to meet professional requirements by participating in Iran Air professional courses?

Methodology

The research reported here is a study of needs analysis at Iran Air airport services employees at Isfahan airport in summer 2016. This research utilized descriptive and non-experimental approach to identify the English needs of Iran Air airport services staff. In order to get this job done, questionnaires, interviews, and observation were used to obtain the qualitative data.

Participants

The participants of this study comprised 130 employees working at three main sections of Iran Air airport services (Ramp Control, Customer Services, and Baggage Services) at Shahid Beheshti International Airport, Isfahan, Iran in summer 2016.

Ramp Control (RC) provides departing and arriving flights with services such as, aircraft coordination, cabin cleaning, aircraft push-back and towing, and de-icing and anti-icing services. The responsibility of Customer Services (CS) employees is handling and taking care of passengers from the check-in point to boarding at the departure. Baggage Services (BS) refer to taking luggage out of the airplanes and delivering it to the passengers. All 130 male and female employees were selected as the sample population and the questionnaires were distributed among them all.

Instruments

In this study, the semi-structured interview was used to identify which areas of the English language needs more attention and predict the most necessary subject matters to be included in the syllabus of ESP courses for the employees. These interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind the participant's experiences.

The data were gathered by using a questionnaire in the study. This questionnaire was developed following the common principles of designing questionnaire in second language research. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach Alpha. The Cronbach's alpha value was more than 0.70 which indicated high reliability, internal consistency and homogeneity which was calculated through SPSS version 2.0.

This constructed questionnaire was consisted of four main parts and their sub questions. Most of these sub questions were designed based on Likert-type scale which provided five choices. The first part contained the respondents' information about age, sex, educational background, function, and experience. The second part aimed at finding answer to the first research question which was the extent to which English language is being used by the personnel at Iran Air airport services at Isfahan Airport.

In the third part of the questionnaire the needed information was gathered to answer the second research question which was the required level of the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, which is needed for different types of activities and the priorities of these skills. Finally, the fourth part was designed to get information about the courses that employees had taken before entering the job and the extent to which the employees were satisfied with these courses.

Another instrument used in the study was observation. The working conditions of airport services staff, the way they communicate with each other, and difficulties that employees faced due to lack of knowledge in English language were observed and the information were recorded for data analysis.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Data collection was done at Isfahan International Airport. Permission was granted from the manager of Iran Air airport services employees for distributing the questionnaires. A letter introducing the purposes of the study was submitted to the manager requesting for permission to carry out the research. A copy of the questionnaire was sent to him and after confirmation the data collection procedure was started. Due to familiarity with Iran Air airport services at Isfahan, data collection was done in the due time.

A total of 130 questionnaires were distributed among all the employees, out of which 85 (about 66%) were returned and used for the study. The significance of the research for the employees, different parts and how to answer the questionnaire, and the fact that these data will only be used for the purpose of the research were orally elaborated for the employees. The respondents were informed that their personal information will not be revealed and they were not asked to write their names. Therefore, the confidentiality was observed and there was no violation of private information.

The interviews were done with the manager of Iran Air airport services employees, Ramp Control supervisor, Customer Services supervisor, and Baggage Services supervisor. Their answers were recorded and written on a piece of paper and used for conducting the research.

The frequency and percentage were calculated and then Cronbach's Alpha level was used to evaluate the reliability of the scale. The reason for this was to make sure that the questions were consistent in assessing desired variables. Additionally, chi-squares were used to measure how well the observed distribution of data fitted with the distribution that was expected and to investigate the extent to which the categories were different from each other.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the extent to which English is used by the employees at Iran Air airport services at Isfahan Airport, the required level of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in performing their jobs effectively, and the attitude of the employees towards their English professional courses. The data collected from triangulation of questionnaire, interview and observation are presented in the following tables.

Table 1. *English Language Usage among Airport Services Employees*

Ranking	Statistics	Ramp Control	Customer Services	Baggage Services
Very much	frequency	18	9	3
	percentage	36.7	34.6	30
Quite a lot	frequency	15	7	4
	percentage	30.8	27	40
Somewhat	frequency	13	5	2
	percentage	26.5	19.2	20
Not really	frequency	2	3	1
	percentage	4	11.5	10
Not at all	frequency	1	2	0
	percentage	2	7.7	0
Total	frequency	49	26	10
	percentage	100	100	100

According to Table 1, more than half of the respondents in all the three sections claimed that English language usage at Isfahan airport was 'quite a lot' or 'very much'. The minority of respondents showed that English language had no application in their field of work at the airport.

Table 2. *Necessary Level of Speaking Skills among RC, CS, and BS Groups*

Level of speaking skill	Frequency/ percentage	Ramp Control	Customer Services	Baggage Services
Excellent	F	18	12	1

	P	37.4	46.1	10
Good	F	17	7	3
	P	34.3	27	30
Satisfactory	F	9	4	5
	P	18.2	15.5	50
Poor	F	4	2	1
	P	8.1	7.6	10
Extremely poor	F	1	1	0
	P	2	3.8	0
Total	F	49	26	10
	P	100	100	100

Table 2 demonstrates that most of the employees in Ramp Control and Customer Services believed that 'excellent' level of speaking skill was needed to perform their job effectively. On the other hand, most Baggage Services employees selected 'satisfactory' as the needed level of speaking. Also, less than 10% of the respondents in all three groups believed that 'poor' or even 'extremely poor' level of speaking can meet their speaking needs at the workplace.

Table 3. *Necessary Level of Listening Skills among RC, CS, and BS Groups*

Level of speaking skill	Frequency/ percentage	Ramp Control	Customer Services	Baggage Services
Excellent	F	14	8	0
	P	28.5	30.7	0
Good	F	18	9	3
	P	37	34.7	30
Satisfactory	F	12	6	4
	P	24.4	23.1	40
Poor	F	4	2	2
	P	8.1	7.7	20
Extremely poor	F	1	1	1
	P	2	3.8	10
Total	F	49	26	10
	P	100	100	100

Table 3 proves that more than half of the employees in Ramp Control and Customer Services believed that 'excellent' or 'good' level of listening skill would enable them to perform their job effectively. Besides, most of the Baggage Services employees believed that 'satisfactory' level of listening skill is necessary for their job. 'Poor' or 'extremely poor' level was chosen by the minority of the respondents in all three groups. It is obvious that despite some little differences in the frequencies, the results of the questions concerning the needed level of speaking and listening were close.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the employees in Ramp Control chose 'good', most of the Customer Services employees selected 'satisfactory', and the Baggage Services employees mostly reported that 'excellent' level of reading skill was needed to do their job effectively and with these levels they can meet their reading needs. Only about 10% of the respondents in all three sections believed that 'poor' or 'extremely poor' level of reading was enough at their

workplace. Also, 'extremely poor' was not chosen by any of the employees in baggage service section.

Table 4. *Necessary Level of Reading Skills among RC, CS, and BS Groups*

Level of speaking skill	Frequency/ percentage	Ramp Control	Customer Services	Baggage Services
Excellent	F	11	5	4
	P	22.4	19.2	40
Good	F	19	7	3
	P	39	26.8	30
Satisfactory	F	14	10	2
	P	28.5	38.4	20
Poor	F	3	3	1
	P	6.1	11.6	10
Extremely poor	F	2	1	0
	P	4	4	0
Total	F	49	26	10
	P	100	100	100

According to Table 5, the majority of the employees in Ramp Control and Customer Services believed that 'satisfactory' level of writing skill was enough to perform their job effectively. On the other hand, most Baggage Services employees selected 'excellent' as the needed level of writing. Also, less than 20% of the respondents in Ramp Control and Customer Services reported that 'poor' or even 'extremely poor' level of speaking can meet their speaking needs at the workplace. Whereas, Baggage Services employees did not select 'extremely poor' and just 10% responded 'poor' as the needed level of writing at the airport.

Table 5. *Level of writing Skills among RC, CS, and BS Groups*

Level of speaking skill	Frequency/ percentage	Ramp Control	Customer Services	Baggage Services
Excellent	F	9	5	4
	P	18.4	19.2	40
Good	F	15	6	3
	P	30.6	23.1	30
Satisfactory	F	17	10	2
	P	34.7	38.5	20
Poor	F	6	4	1
	P	12.2	15.4	10
Extremely poor	F	2	1	0
	P	4.1	3.8	0
Total	F	49	26	10
	P	100	100	100

In general, all the respondents in the present study emphasized on the importance of English language at their work place and the crucial role which English language plays in their job. Although all the skills were important in their job, Ramp Control and Customer Services

group focused on the significance of speaking and listening skills over reading and writing. On the other hand, Baggage Services employees showed that having a high level of proficiency in reading and writing is more crucial than speaking and listening.
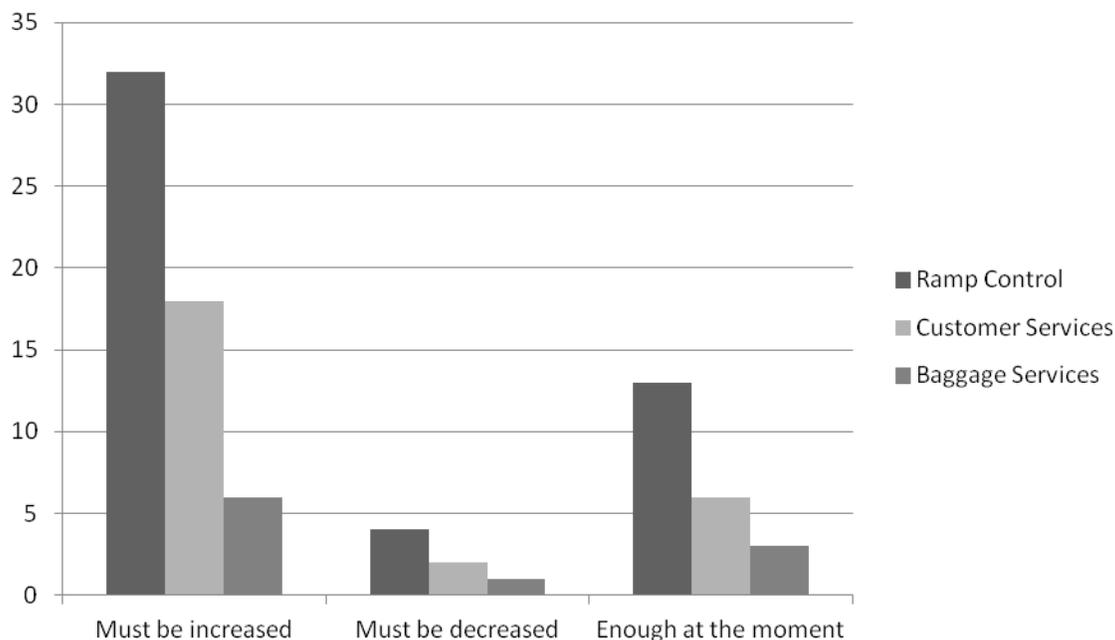

Figure 1. *Distribution of English language lessons rate in the professional courses.*

According to Figure 1, the majority of the respondents in all the three groups, that is, about 65% of Ramp Control employees, 69% of Customer Services employees, and 60% of Baggage Services employees, believed that rate of their professional courses must be increased.

The supervisors of the three main sections of airport services (Ramp Control, Customer Services, and Baggage Services) participated in the interview. All the interviews were done by one of the researchers and were recorded and later transcribed. The interviewees were asked about the necessity of the English language in their job, difficulties they face due to lack of English knowledge, current level of language among the employees, and the medium of communication in their professional courses.

Most of the interviewees emphasized on the fact that English language plays a crucial role in their profession. They pointed out that lack of knowledge in English might cause many financial losses and even could put the passengers and crew's lives in danger. They claimed that at least good level of English proficiency is required to perform their job effectively. The Ramp Control and Customer Services supervisors gave the priority to speaking and listening skills, whereas the Baggage Services supervisor believed that writing and listening skills were more important than other skills. The interviewees argued that the professional courses which employees took to be prepared for their job were insufficient and needed to be improved.

The results of this study were in line with the research conducted by Nezamabadi (2014) and Barkhordari (2015). They investigated the extent of English language usage in the careers of aviation specialists and personnel and importance of having high level of proficiency in basic language skills. He concluded that English language is highly used by aviation employees and it plays a vital role in their careers regardless of their field of work. Moreover, their study revealed

that speaking and listening are the skills which are mostly used by aviation staff such as pilots, navigators, and air traffic controllers.

The results of this part of the study are also in agreement with Karimi and Vahdani's (2014) study. In their study, English language learning needs among students in aviation training program was analyzed. The results showed that despite important needs of the English language in aviation professions, students were not as competent as they should be in the most of skills. In other words, the current courses failed to meet their expectations and the existence ESP course seemed to be lacking the effectiveness that they should have. The study can be beneficial for ESP teachers and students at aviation system. The material developers can also get benefit from the findings by applying more appropriate texts, tasks, and materials based on the needs of aviation personnel. However, this study, similar to other studies, is not complete by itself because it is limited to the setting and context of this particular research. Further research is needed to confirm the findings of the study.

Conclusion

This study aimed at gathering information about the English language needs of aviation employees who are working at different sections of airport services. The findings of the study showed that in all the three sections of the airport services, the majority of the respondents claimed that the rate of English language usage in their workplace is very much. This shows the significance of English language in the aviation; especially in airport services.

In all three sections of airport services, the majority of the respondents selected high rate of English language usage in their workplace. This shows the significance of English language in the aviation; especially in airport services. Also, regarding the change of the language into their first language, most of the employees found no or little possibility to switch to the Persian language. There were no differences in the answers of these three groups.

In respect to communicating with other sections in English at the airport, the answers varied. Ramp Control and Customer Services groups showed that they need more communication with other sections and emphasized on the use of English language, compared to Baggage Services respondents.

With regard to having high level of English language proficiency, only less than 5% of the respondents in all three sections believed that the high level is not important at all. Majority of the choices represented high level of English language proficiency, although there were small differences among the groups. It shows that irrespective of the field that they are working in, it is crucial for the aviation employees to be proficient in using English language at the workplace to perform their job effectively.

Concerning the English usage in the professional training courses, the majority of respondents in all groups chose high rate of English language usage; only 4% reported that they didn't use English in their courses at all. There was no significant difference between the groups. Also, they were asked about the language used in their professional books. Most of the respondents claimed that their professional books are in English.

The majority of the respondents in Ramp Control and Customer Services groups reported that high level of speaking and listening is needed for their job. On the other hand, high level of reading and writing were chosen mostly by respondents in Baggage Services group. The main reason behind it is that Baggage Services employees generally have to read given reports or write reports for other sections in English. Therefore, it was expected that these respondents would give the priority to reading and writing over listening and speaking skills.

In conclusion, all the findings of the questionnaire shown in this article proved that the professional courses which are held for the Iran Air airport services employees in Isfahan airport are not enough. More than half of the employees believe that these courses must be improved. Most of them emphasized on the inadequacy of the courses in satisfying their real communication needs.

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