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English Communication Skills of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian Cabin Crew in Aviation

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Introduction

The era of globalisation has propelled the English language into new dimensions of importance across various business fields, daily activities, and educational research. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the aviation sector has experienced a notable increase in revenue due to international passenger transportation. The proliferation of passenger transportation has increased linguistic diversity in the aviation sector, requiring flight attendants to be proficient in English and other languages. Therefore, the significance of English proficiency within the aviation industry cannot be overstated. It is a lingua franca between passengers and aviation personnel, ensuring effective communication.

In 2007, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) established language proficiency requirements (LPRs) as operational level 4. This level denotes “the ability to speak and understand the language used in radiotelephone communication” (Albritton, 2007). Proficient speakers must communicate effectively in voice, whether face-to-face or via interphones.

The rapid advancement in the aviation industry creates numerous employment opportunities. The cabin crew position is particularly attractive to many young job seekers due to the financial and lifestyle opportunities it offers. Consequently, employers often seek ideal candidates with excellent spoken and written English skills. This requirement is prevalent in the job applications of international airlines such as Qatar Airways, Emirates, and Air Algérie, to name a few. The need for English skills arises from aviation manuals, documents, reports, and training materials being predominantly in English.

The case of North African flight attendants from Maghreb countries like Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia may lack communicative efficiency in English as a lingua franca. This deficiency is attributed to the status of the English language in these countries, which are influenced by diverse linguistic

factors such as Arabic and French. For instance, in Algeria, the position of English within the educational system is evolving, with some suggesting its displacement from a second language (FL2) to the first foreign language (FL1) due to its global dominance (Haddam, 2022).

Moreover, Hazrati (2015) highlighted that individuals of different nationalities may hinder effective communication among aviation personnel. The complex linguistic tapestry of the Maghreb countries, including Algeria and its neighbouring countries, Morocco and Tunisia, emphasises the need for tailored English communicative courses since the introduction of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in these countries. This article aims to design such a course, focusing on the language skills most needed by flight attendants sharing the same linguistic background.

The findings have shown an urgent need to assist this category of cabin crew in boosting their communicative competence, which is required for the efficient use of the English language while in service. This will be achieved through a needs analysis process, the design of adequate courses, the selection of appropriate materials, and the address of their lacks, wants, and needs.

1. Review of Literature

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged in response to the diverse linguistic needs of professionals and academic learners, aiming to support individuals requiring English for their future careers and academic pursuits. According to Helsvig (2012), ESP excels in refining students' communication skills tailored to their specific professional specialisations. In the scope of this study, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) serves as the foundational language for various professional disciplines such as medicine, aviation (including pilots and flight attendants), engineering, and more. Developing an ESP course for these professionals to impart communicative skills essential to their distinct roles proves more pertinent than any conventional English Language Teaching (ELT) approach.

Aviation English encompasses the language utilised by pilots, air traffic controllers, flight attendants, and other personnel in the aviation industry (Estival et al., 2016). In 1998, a significant number of accidents were attributed to human errors, with language identified as a major factor leading to miscommunication (Young, 1994). Consequently, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, established proficiency standards for aviation English, specifically addressing abnormal situations and unforeseen safety and security scenarios, such as evacuations.

The Chicago Convention of 1944 designated the English language as the international language of aviation. This decision aimed to facilitate effective communication among aviation professionals across borders, achieving communication efficiency among the multinational aviation workforce. This decision was instrumental in contributing to the prominence of ESP in this context.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of Flight Attendants

Flight attendants, often referred to as cabin crew or air hostesses, play a crucial role in ensuring flight safety and security while providing various customer services throughout their duties. According to Damos et al. (2013), the cabin crew's responsibilities are categorised into three main tasks: safety, security, and customer service.

First, flight attendants are tasked with conducting pre-flight safety briefings. During these sessions, they provide information about the aircraft type, various onboard equipment, emergency exits, and passenger load capacity. Given Boeing's American origin, most equipment charts, evacuation drills, and aircraft descriptions are documented in English. Consequently, cabin crew members must possess strong reading and comprehension skills to interpret these documents and ensure correct pre-flight checks.

In addition to safety, during security duties, flight attendants must vigilantly monitor all ground personnel entering the aircraft to maintain a secure cabin environment and identify potential hazards such as unruly passenger behaviour. Effective communication is essential in conveying messages professionally. Beyond safety and security, flight attendants are entrusted with delivering an outstanding customer service experience, including serving meals and beverages and welcoming passengers on board to ensure a smooth flight.

An illustration of these duties involves assisting passengers with special needs, including wheelchair users, pregnant individuals, and visually impaired customers. This demands proficient listening and speaking skills in the target language to address diverse requests from such passengers.

Moreover, the flight attendant's role extends to composing formal emails in English to report equipment discrepancies and handle passengers' complaints. Therefore, the Algerian, Tunisian, as well as Moroccan cabin crew members must possess strong communication skills in English to assist passengers from different nationalities and effectively manage any evacuation scenario. The General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) defines a successful evacuation as the ability to evacuate passengers of various linguistic backgrounds from an

aircraft within 90 seconds. This underscores the need for cabin crew members to deliver precise evacuation commands in English. Consequently, aviation English courses must be meticulously designed to cater to flight attendants' multifaceted responsibilities and linguistic needs.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1. Needs Analysis

Romanowski (2017, p. 149) defines needs analysis as “the process of establishing the 'what' and 'how' of a course.” It involves combining target situation analysis (TSA), which outlines what learners are expected to grasp by the end of the module, with present situation analysis (PSA), indicating what learners already know at the course's outset. The gap between PSA and TSA is termed “lacks” (Chambers, 1980; Robinson, 1991; West, 1994; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Therefore, needs analysis serves as a tool to identify the course content, duration, and methodology. Furthermore, Marson (2019) adds that needs analysis can be utilised to upskill employees, enabling them to acquire new skills to enhance their performance in their current roles. Reskilling, on the other hand, involves learning a completely new skill from the ground up to transition into a different job.

Needs analysis can be subjective for each individual, shaped by learners' perceptions and attitudes towards English language skills. The researcher employed inductive and deductive needs analysis methods to comprehend the specific requirements of the Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan flight attendants working for international airlines. Inductive methods encompassed observations, case studies, and so on, while deductive methods involved questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and similar techniques (West, 1994).

This study utilised needs analysis to explore the speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills most essential for the specific Maghrebi flight attendants. The results obtained can serve as a basis for adjusting both local Algerian and international aviation training courses utilised by aviation centres. This targeted approach allows flight attendants to focus on the skills deemed most crucial for achieving effective communication in their work.

3.2. Methodology

This section of the paper presents the methodology applied to conduct the needs analysis of the Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan cabin crew members. A case study was employed to evaluate the essential English language skills necessary for achieving effective communication in this categorised context of cabin crew. The following research questions guided it:

- Which specific English language skills are considered most critical for improving the communication efficiency of the Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan cabin crew members working for international airlines?
- What English language skills do you want to enhance the most to achieve the desired communication efficiency at work?

To conduct a needs analysis on learning requirements, a questionnaire was conducted with a group of 40 Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan male and female flight attendants employed by international airlines such as Qatar Airways (QR) and Emirates Airlines (EK), among others. These individuals, with majors unrelated to English language studies, were purposefully selected for the questionnaire survey. They were also observed during that period through covert participant observation, which allows the researcher to examine what people do and say. It is essential to note that the sampling method was not random, as indicated by the specific criterion of having a major not related to English. To ensure transparency, respondents were chosen through the Snowball sampling technique.

3.3. Data Collection

In this case study, the observation involved the researchers watching and analysing the ongoing behaviour of their participants. However, the questionnaire employed for this study was developed from the theory of needs analysis framework of Hutchinson and Waters (2008) to assess the predominant English language skills essential for the role of flight attendants, including their attitudes and preferences concerning language proficiency conducive to effective communication. This endeavour aimed to develop and select appropriate instructional materials for their aviation training curriculum.

Comprising twelve questions, the questionnaire transitioned from closed-ended to open-ended inquiries, commencing with yes or no choices, progressing to multiple-choice queries, and culminating in open-ended questions. These questions were strategically categorised into three distinct phases—pre-flight, during-flight, and post-flight—facilitating a systematic evaluation of language skills pivotal for the tailored design of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in aviation.

The researcher administered the questionnaire manually, ensuring a comprehensive understanding, and remained available to clarify any ambiguity.

3.4. Participants

The participants selected for this case study were a combination of 40 male and female Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan flight attendants. Their working experience ranged from two to eight months. During this phase, the staff were still in the probation period and adjusting to living in a country where English is used all the time to communicate at work and outside work, which helped the researcher spot the difficulties in communicating entirely using English. The flight attendants who work for Emirates Airlines as well as Qatar Airways and whose major at university is not English language studies were assessed to identify their strains while communicating in the target language, hence spotting the skill to focus on more to reach an adequate communication level in English.

The participants of this study were purposefully chosen due to the fact that they share the same mother tongue, which is Arabic, then French as the first foreign language, followed by English as the second foreign language. Thus, it was easier for the researcher to spot the language skills they lack proficiency in to pick the right materials to design the adequate training courses that will help them reach communicative efficiency accordingly.

4. Findings from Action Research and Observations

4.1. Results

The following graphs show the results of a survey administered to the above-mentioned Maghreb flight attendants working for the international airlines Emirates and Qatar Airways. The pie charts portray the relationship between the most needed English language skills throughout three phases of a flight, which are: pre-flight, during the flight, and post-flight phases, to achieve meaningful communication while working as a flight attendant.

4.1.1. Needs

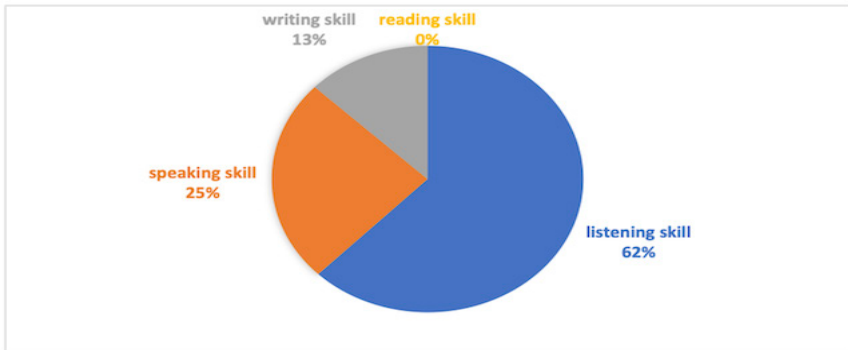
Question 1: How often do you use the following English language skills at work as an Arab native-speaker cabin crew member in the pre-flight phase?

As illustrated in Figure 1, 62.5% of the respondents (25) advocated using listening skills frequently during the pre-flight stage. They considered this a learning phase, in which they were exposed to several instructions and knowledge about the flight details like the passengers' load, profile, and what was expected from them. Hence, most of them claimed that they were most likely engaged in active listening to learn about the flight at this stage. However, only 25% (10) of the flight attendants believed that speaking

skills before the flight phase were barely needed since the seniors passively communicated most discussions.

The other 12.5% of the respondents (5) expressed that they needed writing skills for taking notes during the briefing and sending emails to the purser (the chief flight attendant) to ask about any ambiguity they might face. As for the reading skills at this stage were not needed since most of the discussions and materials presented before the flights were given as verbal instructions, and no written material was presented to the flight attendants at this stage. They further explained that reading skills were mainly used during the training phase because the manual was written in English and contained many phrases, symbols, and expressions related to aviation English.

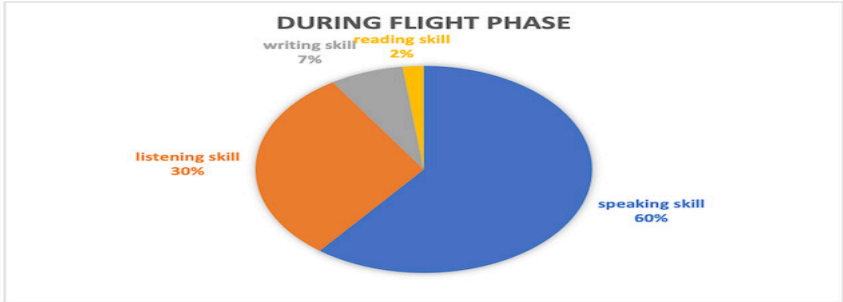
Figure 1. English language skills frequency of use during pre-flight phase



Question 2: How often do you use the following English language skills at work as an Arab native speaker cabin crew member in the during flight phase?

During the flight phase, the majority of the respondents, 60% (24), claimed that they frequently used their speaking skills either through face-to-face interactions or via the interphone. The topics of communication varied from safety briefings to selling duty-free items. This was followed by listening skills, where 30% (12) mentioned they needed good listening abilities to understand the distinct needs of customers, whether it was a request or a complaint. They needed good listening abilities in English, as most of the passengers are non-native speakers of English who have different English accents and competencies. These people could be passengers or colleagues of different nationalities. However, a small minority of 7% (three persons out of 40) claimed that reading and writing (2%, which is only one person), were seldom used on board during the flight.

Figure 2. English language skills frequency of use during flight phase

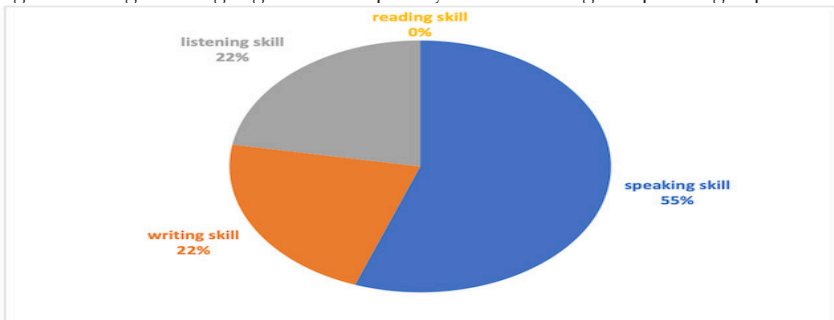


Question 3: How often do you use the following English language skills at work as an Arabic native speaker cabin crew member in the post flight phase.

Figure 2 exhibits that 55% (22) of the cabin crew agreed that speaking was the most needed and used skill at the post-flight stage. This skill was used to communicate at airports, hotels, and public areas, so good comprehension and speaking skills were needed as they were exposed to various English accents and vocabulary words. At this phase, the flight attendants used English as a lingua franca. Then, 22% (9) declared that their writing skills were needed during the post-flight phase. Most of the time, they communicated with the management via emails to report incidents that occurred during the flights or to communicate between the flight attendants and the purser, who is the senior chief of the flight. The cabin crew preferred using emails to communicate with the seniors as a matter of politeness and respect. As a result, they needed to know how to write emails in formal English.

The remaining 22% (9) equally believed that listening was as important as writing in the post-flight phase. Nevertheless, none of them assumed that reading skills were used in their duties after the flights, and further explained that reading was mostly needed during their training phase.

Figure 3. English language skills frequency of use during the post flight phase



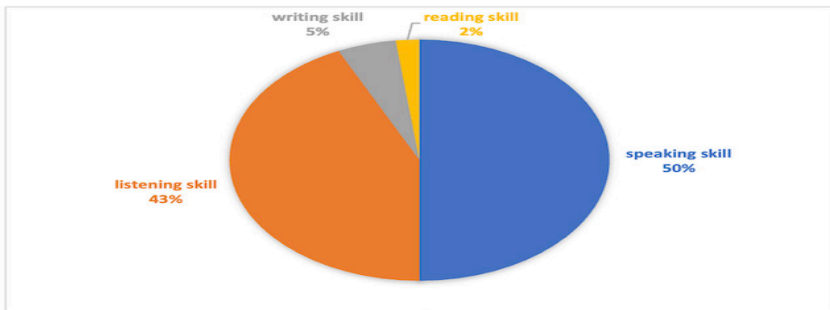
4.1.2. Wants

In addition to the following results, when the researcher asked the following question, the results are demonstrated as follows in figure 4.

Question 4: the most desired English language skill to enhance by the Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan flight attendants?

Figure 3 indicated that approximately 50% (20) of the respondents claimed that they wanted to enhance their speaking skills the most since they were often engaged in speaking activities on board, such as making announcements, answering passengers' queries and requests, dealing with complaints, and selling duty-free items. They further explained that speaking skills went hand in hand with listening skills because every time they needed to communicate, listening skills were involved. Henceforth, 43% (17) of the flight attendants expressed their desire to practice their listening skills since they were exposed to several English accents while communicating with both native and non-native speakers. On the contrary, a small number of respondents, 5% (2), claimed that they rarely required English writing skills due to their position in the company as junior flight attendants in economy class. They explained that writing skills were mostly employed by the purser, who had the task of reporting to the company. Nevertheless, the minority, 2%, stated that reading skills were used during the training phase to read the manual, which is written in English.

Figure 4. English language skills desired to enhance during the training of the Arab flight attendants



4.1.3. Lacks

The linguistic lacks faced by the flight attendants while speaking English were identified through action research. Since the researcher is a full-time flight attendant from the same linguistic background, she took the opportunity to reflect upon the difficulties her colleagues encountered while communicating

in English. The researcher systematically observed and analysed the linguistic pitfalls faced by the flight attendants to improve their English communicative efficiency. The needs analysis revealed several linguistic deficiencies due to the significant difference between the respondents' native language, Arabic, and their second foreign language, English. These challenges were categorized into phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic linguistic lacks.

First, the phonological difficulties were observed in pronouncing certain sounds, such as /P/ and /B/, which were accompanied by semantic and lexical gaps in understanding some aviation vocabulary and technical terms in English that were not easily translatable into the respondents' native language. It is important to note that Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan flight attendants are native speakers of Arabic, a Semitic language with a completely different structure and sounds. Additionally, cultural nuances in speech intonation and the speed of sound articulation can influence the politeness aspect of communication. These linguistic lacks may hinder communication and could lead to miscommunication that jeopardises passenger safety. The identified lacks can be addressed by implementing ESP training courses focused on the language skills needed to communicate efficiently.

4.2. Action Research Observation Results

The researcher engaged in action research through unstructured covert observation to capture live communication patterns between Maghrebian flight attendants and their passengers in the cabin. Patton (1990:202) suggests that observational data should enable the researcher to enter and understand the situation being described.

The sample population was observed over a period of 2 months during 16 international flights where English was used as a lingua franca. The researcher systematically observed factors impacting communication efficiency between the flight attendants and the passengers or colleagues and summarized these factors under the following points:

- **Intercultural Communication Factors:** This includes how people communicate with each other, such as the pitch, of tone, speed, and body language (nonverbal communication). In some cultures, avoiding eye contact while speaking can create misunderstandings for flight attendants.
- **Psychological Factors:** Several flight attendants reported that communicating in a foreign language can be stressful. This fear of not sounding native or making mistakes can prevent Maghrebian flight attendants from communicating effectively with both native and non-native speakers.

- **Linguistic Factors:** Code-switching between the mother tongue, first foreign language, and English was observed. Additionally, difficulties in pronunciation and confusion between heteronyms were observed. The researcher identified various psychological, cultural, and linguistic factors affecting the communication efficiency of the flight attendants.

The unstructured covert observation provided the researcher with closer insights into how English was communicated in the work setting of Maghrebian flight attendants, leading to the observation of natural communication on board and factors hindering its efficiency.

Discussion

The data collected from the questionnaire revealed the needs and preferences of Maghrebian flight attendants from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco regarding the use of English in their roles within an international aviation company. The survey results indicate that proficiency in the four language skills—speaking, reading, writing, and listening—is essential for effective communication when using English as a lingua franca at work. However, the data shows that speaking and listening skills are the most sought-after, followed by writing and reading. Flight attendants expressed a desire to improve their communication through a better understanding and use of aviation terminology and phraseology. Additionally, the findings highlighted the impact of both the mother tongue and French on their use of English, leading to a sociolinguistic phenomenon known as code-switching.

In response to these identified needs and desires, the proposed solution involves designing an aviation course focused on speaking and listening activities to address the deficiencies in the target language. This approach aims to enhance the overall communicative competency of flight attendants from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

Conclusion

In summary, this study underscores the importance of the four English language skills in enhancing the communicative efficiency of flight attendants working for international airlines. The results of the needs analysis revealed that all four English language skills are utilized in performing the duties of a flight attendant while using English as a lingua franca. However, speaking and listening skills were found to be the most crucial for effective communication in the aviation industry.

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for designing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses tailored to the aviation context. By incorporating more tailored ESP-oriented materials into the aviation

training curriculum, communication efficiency can be improved, and the language skills of flight attendants can be enhanced, addressing the identified deficiencies. This study provides valuable insights into the English language needs of flight attendants from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia and contributes to the literature for further research in this field.

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Appendix

The Maghribi Flight Attendants Questionnaire : Needs Analysis on English Language Skills

Instruction: Please rank the level of your need for training in each skill by putting it in the appropriate box, from 5 to 1.

Listening skills

	Very much needed (5)	Needed (4)	Undecided (3)	Somewhat needed (2)	Not needed (1)
1.1 Listening to briefing. 1.1.1 Emergency-related questions from the crew member in charge (CIC) and pilot in command (PIC)					
1.1.2 Passengers' information, e.g. how to deal with passengers with special needs, inadmissible passengers, and deportees					
1.2 Listening to passengers' requests and inquiries. 1.2.1 Airport knowledge, including your home-based airport at the destination					
1.2.2 Flight information details, e.g. flight time, weather, and route					
1.2.3 Vocabulary used on board regarding English and sessions, food and drinks, and services					

Speaking skills

	Very much needed (5)	Needed (4)	Undecided (3)	Somewhat needed (2)	Not needed (1)
2.1 Answering passengers' requests					
2.1.1 How to give positive responses					
2.1.1.1 Proper ways to respond when passenger requests can be granted					

	Very much needed (5)	Needed (4)	Undecided (3)	Somewhat needed (2)	Not needed (1)
2.1.2 how to give negative responses					
2.1.2.1 Proper ways to say when passenger's request cannot be granted					
2.1.2.2 Phrases for apologizing					
2.1.2.3 Offering options when passenger requests cannot be granted					
2.2 How to make requests to passengers					
2.2.1 Proper ways to ask passengers to follow the instructions					
2.2.2 Vocabulary used to make requests to passengers in a particular situation					
2.3 Miscellaneous					
2.3.1 Vocabulary used on board regarding English expressions, food and drinks, and services					

Reading skills Writing skills Which English language skill do you want to improve the most? Circle the correct answer

Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
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Abstract

The present study examines the English language skills perceived as most needed by Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan flight attendants to communicate effectively while working for international airlines. A needs analysis was conducted using two main research tools: a questionnaire and an observation diary through action research to analyse the needs, wants, and lacks. This case study in the aviation English language context is used to design an appropriate English course by focusing on the skills needed by flight attendants to communicate effectively in their jobs. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively for this research case study. Forty respondents working for Emirates and Qatar Airways were purposely selected to elicit their needs, wants, and lacks regarding their communicative skills in aviation English. The results revealed that four English language skills were needed to communicate in the setting of those flight attendants with the same linguistic background. However;

most of them claimed that speaking and listening were the skills they wanted to enhance the most due to the nature of their job. In the end, this study offers remedial measures to enhance communication efficiency by incorporating more ESP-oriented materials that focus on the language skills needed the most in the context mentioned above.

Keywords

Needs analysis, aviation English, flight attendants, communication efficiency, ESP-oriented materials.

مستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية التي تُعتبر الأكثر حاجة لدى مضيفي الطيران الجزائريين والتونسيين والمغاربة للتواصل بفعالية أثناء العمل في شركات الطيران الدولية. تم إجراء تحليل للاحتياجات باستخدام أداتين رئيسيتين للبحث: استبيان ومذكرة ملاحظة من خلال البحث العملي لتحليل الاحتياجات والرغبات والنواقص. تُستخدم دراسة الحالة التالية في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية للطيران لتصميم دورة لغة إنجليزية مناسبة تركز على المهارات التي يحتاجها مضيفو الطيران للتواصل بفعالية في عملهم. تم تحليل البيانات كمياً ونوعياً لهذه الدراسة. تم اختيار أربعين مشاركاً يعملون لدى كل من طيران الإمارات والخطوط الجوية القطرية بشكل متعمد لاستخلاص احتياجاتهم ورغباتهم ونواقصهم فيما يتعلق بمهاراتهم التواصلية في اللغة الإنجليزية للطيران. كشفت النتائج أن هناك أربع مهارات في اللغة الإنجليزية كانت ضرورية للتواصل في سياق مضيفي الطيران الذين يتشاركون نفس الخلفية اللغوية. ومع ذلك، أكد معظمهم أن التحدث والاستماع كانتا المهارات التي يرغبون في تحسينها بشكل أكبر بسبب طبيعة عملهم. في النهاية، تقدم هذه الدراسة تدابير علاجية تهدف إلى تحسين كفاءة التواصل من خلال إدخال المزيد من المواد الموجهة حسب تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة (ESP) التي تركز على المهارات اللغوية الأكثر حاجة في السياق المذكور أعلاه

كلمات مفتاحية

تحليل الاحتياجات، الإنجليزية للطيران، مضيفو الطيران، كفاءة التواصل، مواد موجهة حسب تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة (ESP)

Résumé

Cette étude examine les compétences en anglais jugées les plus nécessaires par les agents de bord algériens, tunisiens et marocains pour communiquer efficacement dans les compagnies aériennes internationales. Une analyse des besoins a été réalisée à l'aide de deux principaux outils de recherche : un questionnaire et un journal d'observation par la recherche-action, afin d'analyser les besoins, les désirs et les lacunes. Cette étude de cas dans le contexte de l'anglais de l'aviation est utilisée pour concevoir un cours d'anglais adéquat

en se concentrant sur les compétences nécessaires aux agents de bord pour communiquer efficacement dans leur travail. Les données ont été analysées de manière quantitative et qualitative pour cette étude de cas. Quarante répondants travaillant pour Emirates et Qatar Airways ont été sélectionnés intentionnellement pour identifier leurs besoins, désirs et lacunes en matière de compétences communicatives en anglais de l'aviation. Les résultats ont révélé que quatre compétences en anglais étaient nécessaires pour communiquer dans le contexte de ces agents de bord qui partagent le même arrière-plan linguistique. Cependant, la plupart d'entre eux ont affirmé que l'expression orale et la compréhension orale étaient les compétences qu'ils souhaitaient le plus améliorer en raison de la nature de leur travail. Enfin, cette étude propose des mesures correctives visant à améliorer l'efficacité de la communication en intégrant davantage de matériaux orientés ESP, centrés sur les compétences linguistiques les plus nécessaires dans le contexte mentionné ci-dessus.

Mots-clés

Analyse des besoins, anglais de l'aviation, agents de bord, efficacité de la communication, matériaux orientés ESP