

Analysis of ESP education for the hotel industry at universities, technical schools, and hotels in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Despite strong promotion of the tourism industry in Japan, little attention has been given to English education for the hotel industry, which plays an important role in welcoming foreign guests and providing a base for tourism. The purposes of this paper are 1) to investigate the English needs and English education in the Japanese hotel industry, 2) to examine and conduct a comparative study of English education in the tourism-related departments of universities and technical schools, and 3) to offer suggestions to improve ESP education for the hotel industry at universities. The analysis of the research results showed what kind of English usage and abilities hotels need for their operation, while revealing their difficulties in providing such English education at their hotels. The survey of English education at universities and technical schools showed that technical schools place more importance on practical education, particularly through greater focus on ESP and overseas internships. The findings of this research shed light on how university English education can respond to the needs of the hotel industry by providing more practical English education.

Key words: ESP education, hotel business, needs analysis

1. Introduction

With the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Law enacted in January 2007, the Japanese government has aimed to increase the number of overseas visitors to 10 million by 2010, and the opening of the Japan Tourism Agency in 2008 seems to encourage the campaign even more. According to a report by the JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization), about 60% of the surveyed foreign individual tourists complained of the difficulty of communication and information access through the medium of English in Japan (JNTO, 2009). In order to promote tourism from foreign countries, it is essential to produce highly competent people with excellent English ability. Hotels play an important role to cater to such foreign tourists, yet there is an unmet need to provide effective English education for the hotel industry.

ESP pedagogy can be utilized for English education in a specific field. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) describe how ESP courses are based on needs analysis, which is one of their indispensable characteristics. ESP courses should be designed to meet the specific needs of learners and learners' present or future "discourse communities"¹ (Swales, 1990, p. 21), so that they promote educational effectiveness and also learners' motivation. There are many studies in

which teachers have conducted needs analysis and made use of it for ESP course design (e.g., Edwards, 2000; Iwai, 2008). However, there is not much research on ESP for the hotel industry.

The only previous research focusing on English education for the Japanese hotel industry was done by Iwai (2005), which studied the English education in the industry by the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative analyses: questionnaire research to the members of the Japan Hotel Association, and participant observation and learners' questionnaire research at two participant hotels. It can be evaluated as a basic research of ESP in this field, but the scope of the research was within the members of the Japan hotel association. Therefore, this paper expands participants to more than 1,000 hotels registered according to the law of Improvement of International Tourist Hotel Facilities. It also revises the questions in Iwai (2005) and adds more questions in the questionnaire for hotels in order to study the education to a fuller extent. In addition, it extends perspectives toward the English education at universities, and also at technical schools with a longer history of education for the industry, which enables the author to conduct a comparative study and make concrete suggestions for effective English education for tourism at universities.

Therefore, the purposes of this paper are 1) to investigate the English needs and English education in the Japanese hotel industry, 2) to examine and conduct a comparative study of English education in the tourism-related departments of universities and technical schools, and 3) to offer suggestions for ESP education for the hotel industry at universities. The paper explores what the needs for English and English education are in the Japanese hotel industry, how the current English education at universities and technical schools meets those needs, and what university English education should do to supply more highly competent personnel to the tourism industry.

2. Survey: Hotels, universities, and technical schools

2.1 Objectives

Questionnaires were distributed to hotels registered according to the law of Improvement of International Tourist Hotel Facilities, and also to universities and technical schools with tourism-related departments, such as a tourism department, hotel management department, or airline-related department. The questionnaire research aims to investigate the needs for English and English education in the hotel industry, and also the present situation of English education at universities and technical schools. The method of distribution was by mail.

2.2 Participants

Participants of each questionnaire research are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Outline of the questionnaire research

	Hotels	Universities	Technical Schools
Time of distribution	Jul & Aug in 2008	Oct & Nov in 2008	Nov in 2008
N of distribution	1,070	177	112
N of responses	199	58	17
Response rate	18.6%	32.8%	15.2%

2.2.1 Hotels

The hotels to survey were those registered according to the law of Improvement of International Tourist Hotel Facilities. The member hotels have to observe certain standards to cater to foreign guests, such as room facilities, lobbies, and restaurants, and they are supposed to have strong awareness of quality service to foreign guests. Moreover, scattered all over Japan, they are suitable as informants for this research to investigate the English education at hotels in Japan. The membership information was provided on the website of Japan Tourism Association. The number of questionnaires distributed was 1,070, with 199 responses, a response rate of 18.6%.

2.2.2 Universities

The universities to survey were chosen based on the information of a web site called *Shingaku net*, which provides information about the universities for those who intend to enter a university. The universities with departments related to the tourism industry were chosen for this research. Since some universities listed more than one department where students could learn about tourism, the number of the questionnaire distribution was large. There were 58 responses out of 177 departments, a response rate of 32.8%.

2.2.3 Technical schools

The technical schools to survey were chosen by the information of technical school guides, which are intended to show prospective students their expertise. The respondents were such departments as hotel business, airline business, and tourism. As with the surveyed universities, some technical schools had more than one such department. Out of 112 questionnaires sent out, 17 technical schools responded, a response rate of 15.2%.

3. Results and interpretations

This section describes the main results of the questionnaires filled out by hotels, universities, and technical schools.

3.1 Hotels

3.1.1 Overall present situation of the responding hotels

As for the awareness of the need for English education, many hotels (84.4%) acknowledged that they needed to conduct English education to a certain extent by choosing "Need English education very much" or "Need English education" as their top two choices out of five. The English ability level most employees have was "Some command of English with a limited range" (48.7%), the third choice out of five. The top five hotel departments where English is needed were "Front Desk" (100%), "Restaurant" (70.7%), "Operator" (57.6%), "Bell Service" (33.8%), and "Concierge" (33.8%) (multiple answers). The difference among those items can be accounted for by the organization of departments: Every hotel has a front desk and a restaurant, while some hotels do not have operators, bell service or concierge.

3.1.2 Skills required of hotel staff

Figure 1 shows how much each English skill is thought to be needed at the hotels. The research perspectives of this question are two-fold: employees in managerial and non-managerial positions. Overall, oral communication skills in English seem more important than reading and writing skills for hotel employees. However, there seems to be a difference between employees in managerial and non-managerial positions. For oral communication skills, hotel employees in non-managerial positions tend to need them more than those in managerial positions. For reading and writing skills, however, the results are reversed: employees in managerial positions need the English literacy skills more than those in non-managerial positions.

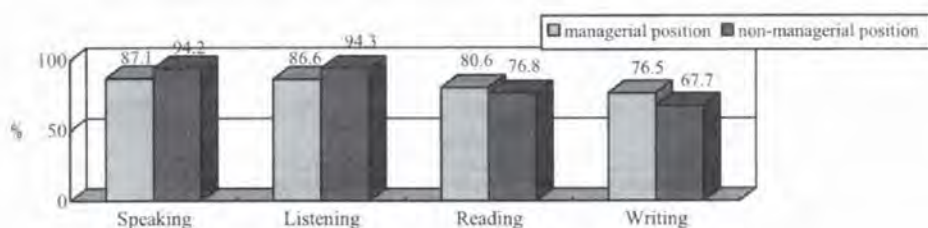


Fig. 1 Required English skills

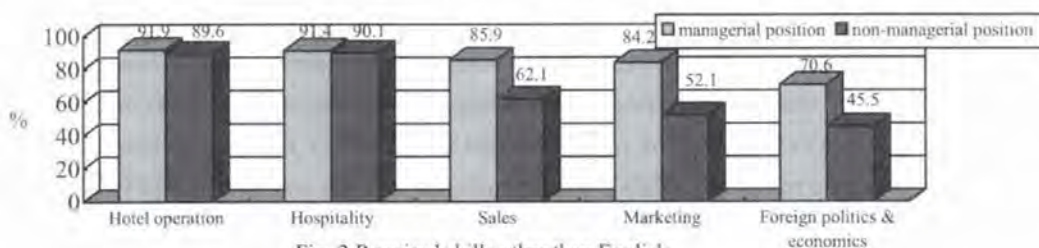


Fig. 2 Required skills other than English

Regarding skills other than English required for hotel employees, Figure 2 shows the five most frequent answers. "Knowledge and skills of the hotel operation" and "Hospitality," fundamental skills for the hotel business, are strongly needed (about 90% or higher) for employees both in managerial and non-managerial positions. However, "Sales," "Marketing," and "Foreign politics and economics," which are related skills and knowledge for customer service, are required much more for employees in managerial positions than those not in management. The results suggest that employees in managerial positions need more related knowledge in addition to skills directly associated with the hotel business.

3.1.3 Provision of English education

Table 2 shows English education at the responding hotels: Only 23.4% reported that they provided English education. Figure 3 shows the relationship between provision of English education and the number of rooms. The more rooms a hotel has, the greater likelihood it has of providing English education. As for the type of English education, the most popular way to provide

English education was “Classroom teaching” (78.0%), while the least popular way was “e-Learning” (4.9%).

Table 2: English education at hotels (the most common answer for each item is shown)

Provision of English education	“Yes” (23.4%, n = 197)
Type of English education	“Classroom teaching” (78.0%, n = 41, multiple answers)
Class division	“No standard” (40.0%, n = 45)
Selection of learners	“By learner’s request” (65.2%, n = 46, multiple answers)
Content of lessons	“Hotel conversation” (78.3%, n = 46, multiple answers)
Purpose of English education	“To learn Basic English” (78.7%, n = 47, multiple answers)
Problems of English education	“Scheduling lessons” (63.0%, n = 46, multiple answers)

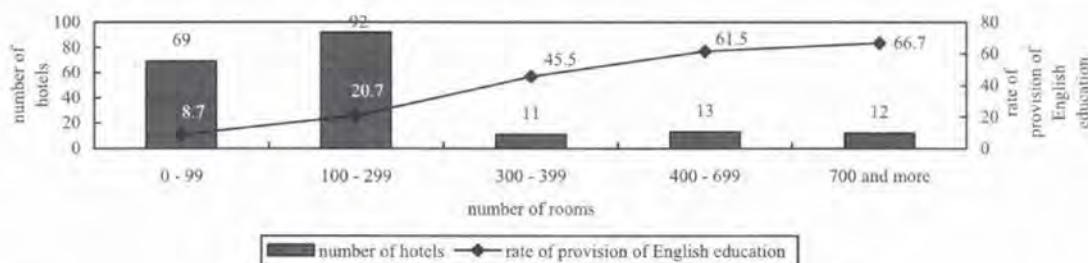


Fig.3 Room scales and rate of provision of English education (n = 197)

Regarding the placement of learners into classes, many of the hotels (40.0%) do not have any standard. Moreover, as for selecting the learners, “By learner’s request” was the most common answer (65.2%), with the next most common answers “By request from the company” (37.0%) and “By job sections” (37.0%). This result suggests that many of the English classes were formed by those who wanted to study English from different job sections and with varied English abilities.

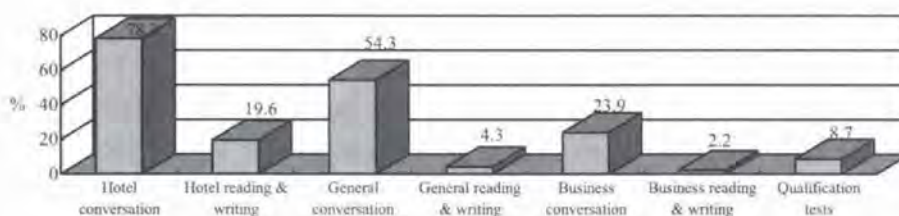


Fig. 4 Content of English lesson (n = 46, multiple answers)

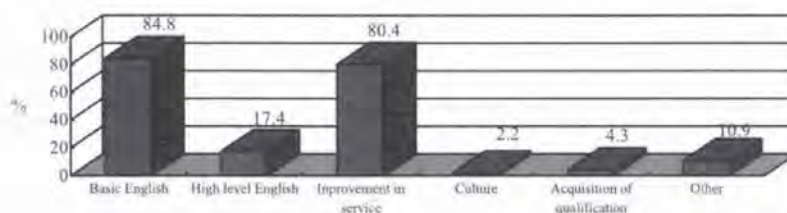


Fig. 5 Purpose of English lesson (n = 46, multiple answers)

As for the content of the English education, the top three answers were “Hotel conversation” (78.3%), “General conversation” (54.3%), and “Business conversation” (23.9%), all of which focus on oral communication. Those results suggest how important oral communication is at hotels. As the purposes for the English education, 84.8% of the respondents answered “Basic English,” and 80.4% chose “Improvement in service.” The results show that they aim to focus on useful skills most closely related to the hotel business.

Turning to problems English education faces at hotels, the most common answer was “Scheduling lessons” (63.0%). This problem can be attributed to the type of English education being “Classroom teaching,” as mentioned above. Hotels operate on a 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year system, and it is very difficult for learners to get together to take an English course. This means that they cannot expect a good attendance rate, nor can they achieve effectiveness in their English education. The second most frequent answer was “High cost” (43.5%). The data were collected in July and August of 2008, just before the so-called “Lehman shock,” and it is highly likely that the percentage citing the costs of training would be higher now, as companies are forced to be more conscious of costs.

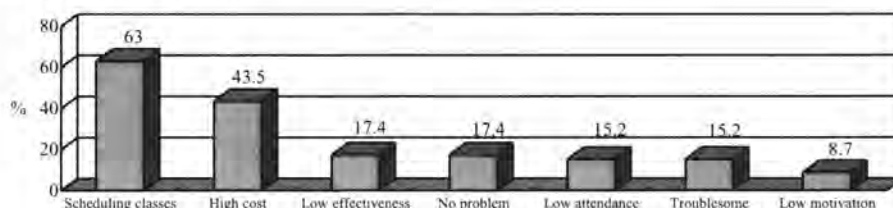


Fig. 6 Problems of English education (n = 46, multiple answers)

Judging from the information obtained by the question about problems in providing English education, they could benefit from a teaching methodology that transcends time and place. In that case, e-Learning could fit into situations like the hotel business. Figure 7 shows the provision of e-Learning education at hotels, universities, and technical schools. The hotels which already implemented e-Learning education were only 2.1%, with universities 34.5% and technical schools 11.8%. As for the reasons why the hotels did not utilize e-Learning for their English education, some salient reasons were “Not sure of its effectiveness” (39.5%), “No budget for it” (36.8%), and “Don’t know e-Learning at all” (35.5%) (n = 76).

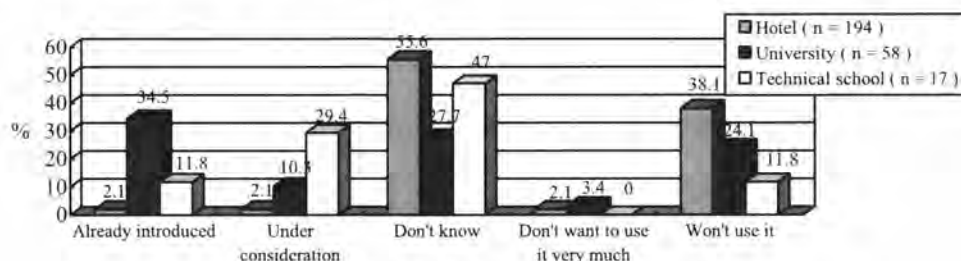


Fig. 7 Introduction of e-Learning

In cases where hotels did not provide English education, the questionnaire tried to elicit the reasons. The most frequent answer was that the “Hotel is busy” (40.0%). This means that there are not enough hotel employees available to send some of them to regular English lessons. As in the above question about the problems of English education, “Cost” (30.3%) was the third most frequent answer why they did not provide such training at all (See Fig. 8).

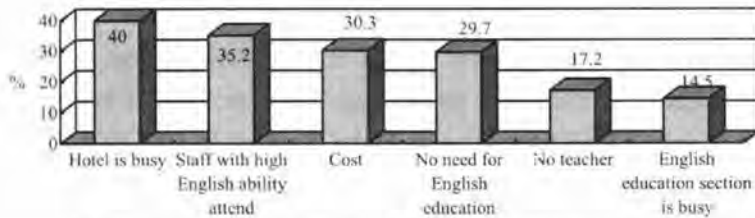


Fig. 8 Reasons for not providing English education (n = 197, multiple answers)

3.2 Universities & technical schools

This section describes the comparative analysis of the results of questionnaire research for the participating universities and technical schools, because they are both higher educational institutions supposed to cultivate personnel for the hotel industry.

3.2.1 Jobs for the students

In order to anticipate the needs of students in view of their likely future discourse communities, it is important to investigate what kinds of jobs the students tend to obtain after their graduation.

As for the jobs of the students in a tourism-related department, most universities answered “Hotel” (91.7%) as a field of business to which they send their students after their graduation (n = 36, multiple answers). The next most frequent choices were “Travel” (86.1%), “Retailer” (66.7%), “Airlines” (36.1%), and “Financial services” (36.1%). Similarly, all of the responding technical schools chose “Hotel” (100%) as the most popular field of business to which they send their students after their graduation (n = 17, multiple answers). The next most frequent choices were “Travel” (82.4%), “Airlines” (58.8%), “*Ryokan*” (Japanese style inns) (41.2%), and the “Restaurant business” (41.2%). It is very probable that the hotel industry is one of the major jobs that the students of such universities and technical schools tend to choose.

3.2.2 EGP education

Regarding the content of EGP (English for General Purposes) education at these universities, the most frequent answer was “English conversation” (76.5%), and the second most frequent was “Integrated skills” (72.5%), while 2.0% of universities answered “No EGP” (n = 51, multiple answers). Similarly, the technical schools’ most frequent answer was “English conversation” (64.7%), and the second most frequent was “Integrated skills” (58.8%), with only one technical school answering “No EGP” (5.9%) (n = 17, multiple answers). These results show that most of the

universities and technical schools provide some form of EGP, with an emphasis on oral communication in English.

3.2.3 ESP education

As shown in Table 3, 64.3% of the university respondents provided ESP education for tourism in general, whereas 94.1% of the technical school respondents did. In addition, as for provision of ESP for the hotel business, about 60% of all the universities which provided ESP for tourism in general did that, while 81.2% of all such technical schools did. These results suggest that technical schools tend to provide more ESP education for the hotel business along with ESP for tourism than universities. Regarding the duration of ESP courses for the hotel business, it was for one year at most of the technical schools (72.4%), whereas it was half a year at most of the universities (83.7%). In addition, as for the type of the ESP courses for the hotel business, they were required subjects at most of the technical schools (93.1%), but they were elective subjects at about half of the universities. These results suggest that technical schools place more importance on ESP education for the hotel business than universities do. Many universities (72.2%) and all of the technical schools answered that one of the purposes of their ESP education for the hotel business was that their students could utilize those English abilities when they worked at a hotel in the future. Regarding the teachers' job experience at a hotel, many universities (67.4%) and technical schools (62.1%) chose "No experience." The result parallels what Garcia (2002) observed, namely, most teachers of English for business purposes do not have related job experience. At many universities (61.9%), the English teachers for the hotel business were full-time teachers, while their counterparts at the technical schools tended to be part-time teachers. Japanese was the native language of an average of 72.1% of the teachers at the universities and 75.9% at the technical schools.

Table 3: Comparison of ESP education at universities and technical schools
(the most common answer for each item is shown)

	Universities	Technical Schools
Provision of ESP for tourism in general	"Yes" (64.3%, n = 56)	"Yes" (94.1%, n = 17)
Provision of ESP for the hotel business	"Yes" (60.0% of all the "Yes" universities above, n = 35)	"Yes" (81.2% of all the "Yes" technical schools above, n = 16)
Duration	Half a year (83.7%, n = 43)	One year (72.4%, n = 29)
Type	Elective (51.2%, n = 41)	Required (93.1%, n = 29)
Purpose	To work at a hotel (72.2%, n = 18)	To work at a hotel (100%, n = 12)
English teacher in charge	No experience (67.4%, n = 43)	No experience (62.1%, n = 29)
Hotel business experience		
Working conditions	Full-time (61.9%, n = 42)	Part-time (75.9%, n = 29)
Native language	Japanese (72.1%, n = 43)	Japanese (75.9%, n = 29)

3.2.4 Overseas education

This section presents the results on overseas education. The results show that 72.2% of the responding universities have a system for their students to study abroad, while 13.4% fewer technical schools do (See Table 4). However, as for the internships, the situation is reversed: Only 18.2% of the universities provide opportunities for overseas internship, whereas close to twice as many technical schools do. It is suggested that technical schools value practical training more than classroom study. As for the field of business of the overseas internships, 40% of the universities ($n = 10$) and 100% of the technical schools ($n = 6$) answered “Hotel,” which was the most common at both institutions.

Table 4: Comparison of overseas education at universities and technical schools

		Universities	Technical Schools
Overseas education:	Study abroad	72.2%, $n = 55$	58.8%, $n = 17$
	Internships	18.2%, $n = 55$	35.3%, $n = 17$

3.2.5 Qualification tests

Regarding the application of qualification tests to English education, many responding universities (55.7%, $n = 52$) and technical schools (71.6%, $n = 17$) utilize qualification tests for evaluation or placement. The most popular English qualification test at universities is “TOEIC” (76.0%, $n = 25$), while technical schools’ most frequent answer was “Eiken” (83.3%), with “TOEIC” second at 75.0%. This goes along with the technical schools’ relatively high rate of provision of a preparatory course for “Eiken” (70.6%), while that of universities is 27.3% (See Fig. 9). Most of the responding universities (83.2%, $n = 55$) and technical schools (94.1%, $n = 17$) implemented preparatory courses for English qualification tests. As shown in Figure 9, “TOEIC” seems to be the most popular English qualification test at both universities (69.1%) and technical schools (88.2%). Furthermore, as for the Tourism English Proficiency Test (TEPT), the only ESP qualification test in this field, the higher rate of providing preparatory courses at technical schools (64.7%) suggests that they place greater importance on it than universities (18.2%). Overall, technical schools provide preparatory courses for English qualification tests at higher rates than universities do.

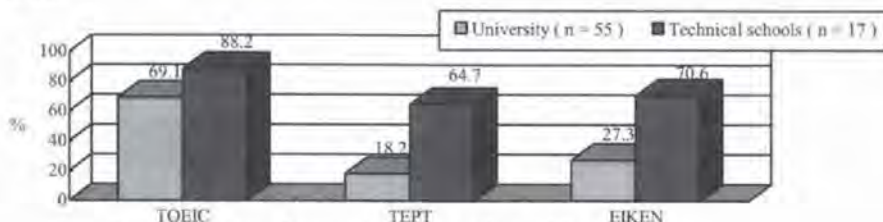


Fig. 9 Provision of preparatory courses for qualification tests

4. Discussion

The above results of three questionnaire studies contribute several perspectives to discuss

university English education.

With many universities and technical schools sending their students to hotels after their graduation, it is quite reasonable to teach hotel English at universities and technical schools. Compared with universities, technical schools place more importance on ESP education for the hotel business. In addition, the rate of provision of English education at hotels was low, although most of the hotels answered that they needed English education. Therefore, university English education should fill the gap, by providing practical ESP education for the hotel industry.

Based on the analysis of English usage at hotels, hotel employees need oral English communication for their job, especially in the face to face interactions such as at the front desk. While oral communication is needed more by the staff in non-managerial positions, writing and reading skills are needed more by the staff in managerial positions. Therefore, students need reading and writing skills as well as oral English communication skills if they wish to have a job with greater responsibilities. The ESP courses at universities should also focus on skills such as writing and reading e-mails for hotel reservations and business letters for the industry in general, and understanding Web sites to collect information for marketing. Higher skills in oral communication for customer service are also needed in managerial positions in order, for example, to deal with complaints from guests.

Another possible ESP education in this field at universities could utilize the Tourism English Proficiency Test (TEPT), although few universities have provided a preparatory course for the TEPT. This qualification test is intended for learners who will use their English ability for customer service in the tourism industry. The test focuses on various business situations in the tourism industry. The first grade examination also has questions about cultures and geography of Japan and the world, international relationships among countries, and basic knowledge about global tourism. It requires a wide range of knowledge to pass the first grade examination of TEPT, while the second grade and the third grade are to test English skills for basic business interactions in this field, which can be suitable content for students first studying English for tourism. People need various kinds of knowledge and life experience in order to attend to guests or customers properly, because there are diverse people with different backgrounds of nationality, culture, education, and experience. Universities provide many types of courses for such knowledge and it would be effective for universities to implement preparatory courses for TEPT in connection with such related courses.

As for overseas internships, university education is far behind that of technical schools. However, overseas internships can provide a practical opportunity for students to learn ESP. Iwai (2006) claims that learners can often learn English from their colleagues at work. Lave & Wenger (1991) state that people learn through legitimate peripheral participation in their "communities of practice"² such as their jobs. Therefore, if students can have a working experience at a hotel through overseas internships, such a workplace could prove most effective for ESP learning.

Regarding e-Learning, only a few percent of the hotels provided it. However, English education by e-Learning meets the needs of hotels which have difficulty of scheduling classes. Many of the hotels did not seem to know about the effectiveness of e-Learning, and therefore,

future research should develop investigate the effectiveness of e-Learning for the staff training and the results of the research should be shared with hotels.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the present situation of ESP education for the hotel industry at universities, technical schools, and hotels. It attempted to analyze ESP education for the hotel industry in Japan more thoroughly than Iwai (2005) did. This paper also expanded the research perspective to ESP education at universities and technical schools, and thus it offered more concrete suggestions about university education to meet the needs of the hotel industry. Hotels seemed to have difficulty in providing English education because of the cost and scheduling. Therefore, universities should focus on more practical education such as ESP for the hotel business and overseas internships at hotels, and in addition, they should provide education to equip their students with a wide range of knowledge to meet the needs of all guests with various backgrounds.

There are several limitations in this research. First of all, the number of responses to the questionnaire by technical schools is small. To obtain a more accurate picture of the present situation of tourism-related English education at technical schools, further efforts are needed to get more responses from them. Secondly, this research conducted quantitative research only, and to investigate English education thoroughly, qualitative analysis is definitely needed as well.

Some of the main goals for the future research should be to investigate how English education at universities, and technical schools, and hotels is actually conducted, and to evaluate it by the actual performance of learners working in English at hotels. Further research on qualitative analysis on ESP would investigate how learners perform professionally in the field by using English. The evaluation should not be based on just English proficiency, but it should be based on their total performance: how they work as a professional and how they function for the purposes of their "discourse communities."

In order to meet the needs of the industrial world, such further research will enable ESP education at universities to be more effective. It is important to obtain wider perspectives toward the improvement of ESP education based on continual studies of needs analysis, investigations of actual conditions in practice, and evaluations of the effectiveness of ESP education.

Acknowledgment

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Note

1 Swales (1990) defines a discourse community as having six characteristics: an agreed set of common public goals, mechanisms of intercommunication among its members, participatory mechanisms, one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims, specific lexis, and a threshold level of members.

2 The relationship between the notion of a discourse community in ESP and that of communities of practice in the

social theory of learning are discussed in Flowerdew (2000), Iwai (2006), Johns (1997), and Mavor & Trayner (2001). Discourse communities and communities of practice are deeply interrelated because both of them are social groups of people with common goals.

3 This paper is a modified version of a paper presented at the JACET 48th Annual Convention held at Hokkai Gakuen University on September 5, 2009.

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