A study on English teaching improvement based on stakeholders' needs and wants: The case of the Faculty of International Tourism of the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST)

Aliana Man Wai Leong*, Jacky Xi Li [1]

City University of Macau, Macau, PR China

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Under the burgeoning tourism industry, the effective use of English is a vital element to success. Macau is a developed tourism area, however, the current needs of Macau's tourism industry are not completely responded to by the English competencies of Tourism Management graduates. This scenario requires a serious look into the problems of Tourism English teaching so that suggestions and measures for improvement could be formulated. Through a survey of a representative sample of students and in-depth interview with representatives of English teachers and industry management, the needs and wants of the stakeholders were analyzed and four suggestions were given.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

English competency is a necessity in the globalized world that is experiencing extraordinary changes in all aspects. Regardless of disciplines or fields of occupation, the effective use of English is a vital element to success in the burgeoning tourism industry. Listening and speaking abilities are crucial, but writing skills, professional expressions, and understanding the cultural background of English speakers are all considered as essential points.

Macau is a developed tourism area and the tourism industry is an important pillar of the city's socio-economic development. However, the current standard of English of Tourism Management graduates fail to meet the requirements of the tourism industry, thus a closer look into English teaching in tourism needs to be conducted so that problems could be determined, and suggested measures for improvement could be made.

As one of the leading tertiary institutions in Macau, the Faculty of International Tourism Management (BITM) of the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) is the only tourism education institution offering BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees. The BITM was awarded the Tourism Education Quality (TedQual) issued by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2007, therefore, it could very well be considered the representative in students' numbers and training level in Macau. By exploring the tertiary students' English learning behavior, seeking methods of instruction through literature review, conducting a survey and in-depth interview of English instructors and tourism industry representatives, this study seeks to shed initial light on these issues in order to meet the requirements of the tourism industry.

Therefore, this study aims at understanding the expectations, learning motivations and characteristics of English learning of students majoring in International Tourism Management at the Macau University of Science and Technology.

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +853 8590 2222; fax: +853 8590 2298.
  E-mail addresses: alleong@cityu.edu.mo (A.M.W. Leong), xli@cityu.edu.mo (J.X. Li).
  [1] Tel.: +853 8590 2222; fax: +853 8590 2207.

The objectives of the study are: first, to investigate the students' cognitive awareness towards English learning; second, to study students' perceptions and expectations towards the means and environments of English learning; Third, to evaluate students' effectiveness in English learning from multiple angles; Fourth, to investigate the factors which affect the tourism major students' learning effectiveness; and Fifth, to test through comparative studies if the gathered evidences and conclusion possess commonality among Chinese speakers who are majoring in tourism.

2. Literature review

Tourism English is an excellent example of English for Special Purposes (ESP). Compared with general English teaching, it emphasizes more on the needs of professional and employment-oriented learners. Seen from the English learning condition of students majoring in tourism, the learning outcomes are not only affected by the coordination of teaching and learning, but also by the demands of the tourism industry on the English competencies of employees. From the local and international point of view, scholars were mostly focused on college English teaching circumstances. A more systematic research concentrating on the English learning of students majoring in tourism has not been conducted. Through categorization of studies conducted, it was found that researches on English teaching in recent years focus on the following areas.

2.1. Relative research on English teaching challenges and methods innovation

Researches on English teaching methods are mostly conducted from the perspective of teachers' reflection and innovation in the process of English teaching. Chinese scholars usually carry out studies on English education challenges, English learning barriers, teaching methods innovation and other aspects.

Among the challenges of English education, more frequently mentioned are teaching materials, quality of students varies, not at all interested in English and not very positive effects of extra-curricular learning.

For instance, Chen (2009) stated that current Tourism English textbooks are obsolete in vocabulary, limited in teaching methodologies, and use unitary assessment method. The existing problems in English teaching concerning hotel services are: most of the teachers were not comprehensive enough; the basic skills of students were not so solid, students had poor motivation in using English in class, and students had poor extra-curricular learning outcomes (Qin, 2010). Meanwhile, there were quite different sources of students, not uniformed teaching materials and the lack of unified planning and design. In addition more challenges were mentioned in vocational English teaching in China (Bai, 2007) to be fewer hours, large classes, dull teaching plan and little interest in learning English.

Faced with the information age and network technology available to the public, Gu (2002) and McGugan and Peacok (2005) conducted some studies on teaching English via Internet bases. Gu (2002) advocated that innovative English teaching method which are web-based learning projects do have potential in motivating EFL learners and bringing about positive learning effects. McGugan and Peacock (2005) conducted research on how simulation via Internet could be applied to tourism related major students English learning environments. In addition, the changed role of teachers from the traditional knowledge teacher to the learning organizer and coordinator, and teachers should command some multimedia technology to facilitate teaching, so as to enhance the students' interest in learning is one of the challenges in English teaching in the Internet age (Liu, 2009).

From the students' perspective, the factors affecting English learning include how closely integrated are the English curriculum and the course majors (Song, 2008). Studies in scientific exchange English teaching in China found that students considered the course helpful to their professional development because the curriculum and the practice were closely integrated. Thus, the researchers concluded it is beneficial to students' professional development to integrate professional knowledge with English teaching.

Meanwhile, other factors are affecting the effectiveness of students' English learning. These are: teachers whose backgrounds are lacking unprofessional knowledgebase (Zhang, 2009), students' initiative capability of English teaching to improve their English competencies (Wu et al., 2007), teaching model, teaching philosophy, teaching methods, learning motivation, and learning strategies (Ma, Tian, & Ma, 2007). Faced with the above challenges in English teaching and learning, scholars have proposed countermeasures and innovative directions in English teaching. There are some often adopted teaching modes such as, Development-Centered in Professional English Ability model (DCPEA) (Hu, 2008), 'learner-oriented' teaching methodology (encouraging students in building, expanding and deepening their understanding of tourism subjects) (Wang, 2009), scenario-based teaching methods (Yang, 2003), Functional Teaching (Sun, 2007), Multi-dimensional Teaching Model (Li, 2009), Network and Multimedia Technology based on the theme of teaching model (Lian, 2009) and other methods.

In addition, many foreign English teaching methods proposed in earlier years also have increasingly received more attention from local scholars. Ye (2003) made an innovative thought for the Content-based Instruction (CBI) as a teaching method and analyzed how to apply it to ESP teaching.

2.2. The English learning expectations of students

It is relatively concentrated on the students' learning expectations and demands in the previous English learning studies. For instance, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Jordan (1997) emphasized the importance of demand analysis in