

Needs Analysis for Pre-departure Training Program

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Abstract

This paper aims at describing an attempt to design a pre-departure training program and its learning materials for students and staffs who conduct sit-in and study visit programs in overseas universities. A questionnaire were distributed to 30 randomly selected respondents who had ever taken part in sit-in and study visit programs in the years of 2011-2013 to gain the target needs. The distribution of the questionnaire were done through email and only 18 respondents sent the questionnaire back. The results of the analysis show that the destination are mostly asian countries (80%) and the length of staying is 5 days to 2 weeks. It leads to the need to also provide an introductory course on the local language (28%). English was used mostly for having discussions (39%), sociolizing purposes (39%), and listening to some talks (28%), therefore the language skills to cover in the training are academic speaking and listening, and English for sociolizing. Other knowledge to cover are cross cultural understanding, airporting and international flights, and custom and immigration.

Keywords: pre-departure training, sit-in, study visit

Introduction

In line with the university's mission to equip students and staffs with 'international experience', the Office of the International Cooperation and Partnership of Yogyakarta State University opens some programs that enable students and staffs to travel abroad for sit-in and study visit programs. In the programs, the participants are given the opportunities to learn from the host universities about education management and administration, effective teaching methods, and the effective learning process. In the program the participants also experience different culture during their stay in the foreign country and through their interaction with the native people in that country. The number of the sit-in and study visit group grows as the opportunity to join the program grows as part of reward programs or competition. Many students and staffs seek for the chance to go abroad by joining the programs.

To ensure the participants ready and confident to interact with international colleagues in a foreign environment, there have been efforts from the office to provide the participants with survival English communication skills and CCU courses. The trainings are aimed at preparing the participants with basic skills in English for sociolizing and knowledge of the local culture. Knowledge on international flights and basic immigration rules are also introduced in the trainings. However, the trainings are not yet structurally conducted in a sense that there are no carefully designed language training nor any pre-departure learning materials. A more structured pre-departure training is a necessity to ensure the participants able to take benefits of the visit programs.

Pre-departure Training, Sit-in, and Study Visit

The term *pre-departure training* used in this paper is related to a certain training program which is aimed at providing a person with the skills and knowledge needed to survive in the target (cultural) situation. The training is conducted before the trainees leave the home country to do the internship, sit-in, or study visit programs. A pre-departure training program is conducted to develop behaviour, knowledge, and skills of the trainees to later be able to interact and perform effectively in a different cultural context. In a pre-departure training, participants are provided with materials on language; both English and the local language, cross cultural understanding materials, immigration and customs, and rules and knowledge on international flights.

A study visit is a short-term visit of three to five days for a small group of specialists and decision-makers representing various groups of education and vocational training, ([http:// www. cedefop. europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)). Study visit participants may belong to one of the following categories; company training managers, directors of education and vocational training institutions, centres or providers, directors of guidance centres, directors of validation or accreditation centres, educational and vocational training inspectors, head teachers, teacher trainers, heads of departments, representatives of educational services, labour offices or guidance centres, representatives of organizations, and researchers. The purpose of a study visit program is to learn how a certain program is conducted effectively in the host institution. During the visit, participants listen to explanation and presentation from the host, have some discussions with the host, and may be taken to look around and see the facilities and the running of the program being studied.

Sit-in is seen as a learning activity which aims at observing the teaching learning process or the learning needs. According to the academic rule book issued by the Diponegoro University, sit-in students are those who administratively are registered at the university to join the class activities but are not required to complete other academic tasks such as examination or tests, research studies, and assignments. In a sit-in activity, 'the sit-inner' may act as a passive observer in which he/she sits, observes, and takes notes without involving him/herself in the class learning activity. Sit-in may be done by teachers or lecturers to learn from the attended class the techniques and methods implemented in the classroom. A student may also take part in a sit in program to get more knowledge related to her study. However, a sit-inner may choose to actively take part in all class activities such as discussions, task completing, and presentation.

Needs Analysis

A training is a learning process aiming at improving knowledge acquisition, sharpening skills, concepts, and rules, and changing or modifying behavior and attitude. To meet the intended goals, a training program should be organized systematically. The pre-departure trainings held so far to facilitate the sit-in and study visit participants, had not been designed carefully yet. The effectiveness of the training program, henceforth, cannot be documented and evaluated. This needs survey is an attempt to explore what the participants really need in order to function effectively in the new culture as well as to cope with the language barrier before designing a pre-departure training since "the information obtained can then serve as a basis for planning a training program" (Richards, 2001: 53).

Richards defines needs analysis as procedures used to collect information about learners' needs. Although originally popular in the fields of ESP, needs analysis has developed into necessity as applied linguistics grows and the demand for specialized language programs increases, (2001:51). According to Brown (1995) there are 3 groups of people involved in the needs analysis; namely the target group, audience, and needs analyst. Target group is the people from whom the information will be gathered, audience are those

who will act upon the analysis of the data, and the needs analysts are those persons conducting the needs analysis. In this study the target audience are the former participants of sit-in and study visit programs in the year of 2011-2013 while the audience are the training designers and training instructors who will develop the program and the learning materials.

In collecting the data for needs analysis purpose, there are several procedures a needs analyst may choose. The one applied in this study is questionnaires. According to Richards, questionnaires are relatively easy to use, they can be used with large numbers of subjects, and they provide data which are easy to tabulate and analyze, (2001: 60). However, questionnaires bear weakness in terms of the depth of the data they provide. The data may be very superficial and imprecise. Needs analysts may need follow-up data gathering like confirmation from the respondent to record what the respondents really intended to share.

Research Questions

There are three questions proposed in this study; they are:

1. In what situation is English being used during the sit-in and study visit programs?
2. What are the required learning materials for a pre-departure training program for students and/or staffs who take part in a sit-in or study visit program?
3. What are the suitable learning activities in the pre-departure training program for students and/or staffs who take part in a sit-in or study visit program?

Methodology

The data were collected through questionnaires which were distributed to 30 respondents. The respondents were those staffs and students who took part in sit-in and study visit programs in the years of 2011-2013. The questionnaires were distributed through emails and the respondents were given a week to fill in the questionnaires and send them back to the needs analysis team. However, only 18 respondents responded and completed the questionnaires. The questions listed in the questionnaire were about the nature of the visit programs, the destination country, the length of staying, how English was used, what English language skills and knowledge needed, and what other knowledge and skills to cover in the training program.

Results

Based on the data analysis the destination country are mostly asian countries (80%) and the length of staying is 5 days to 2 weeks. It leads to the need to also provide an introductory course on the local language (28%). English was used mostly for having discussions (39%), socializing purposes (39%), and listening to some talks (28%), therefore the language skills to cover in the training are academic speaking and listening, and English for socializing. Other knowledge to cover are cross cultural understanding, airpotting and international flights, and custom and immigration. The material designed will be presented in the form of a training module and intended to be used in the classroom guided by an instructor. However, the listening materials will be designed as an independent learning program to give learners more opportunities to practice their listening skills.

Although participants usually stay in the host country for a very short period of time, the training is necessarily needed to help participants to cope with language barriers, cultural differences, and overall to improve participants' self-confident in communicating with people from different countries. Participants are also equipped with immigration knowledge to avoid them from immigration problems and to provide them with information of where to seek help due to immigration problems. Most of the participants have never been to other countries, some have never even been on an air plane ride, therefore the pre-departure training participants are also provided training subjects on international flight and airpotting.

Participants need to be made aware of the check-in and custom procedures, the weight and number of baggage they can carry, what they can and can't take into the cabin, and what custom rules apply in the destination country. Safe and comfortable flights may depend on how much these participants are aware of these rules.

Conclusion

A visit to other countries in the form of a sit-in or study visit program may be overwhelming for some people; it may be a challenging and educating new experience. The nature of the programs requires the participants to stay temporarily (5 days to 2 weeks) in the host institution and interact with the new culture in a foreign country. In a pre-departure training participants will be provided with academic English materials wrapped in the form of discussion and presentation skills training since the nature of the program will require them to have lots of discussions and presentations. Participants also need to be provided with some knowledge and skills to be able to communicate with the local people and to act properly in the new culture.

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BIODATA

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