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Identifying the English Language Skills Required by Non-native English Speaking Pilot Trainees during Flight Training

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The International Civil Aviation Organization predicts an international demand for 520,000 new pilots by 2030. In the Asia / Pacific region, it is forecasted that there will be a shortage of about 9,000 pilots annually. In order to respond to this shortage, the number of flight training institutions has increased sharply worldwide, which has increased the number of trainees who are non-native English speakers. Such trainees face various challenges not faced by native English speakers. The purpose of this presentation is to report the results of a survey and identify the required English language skills of flight trainees who are non-native speakers of English. A survey questionnaire and interview were conducted with 57 non-native English trainees enrolled in a flight training program at an institution in the United States. Results revealed that among the perceived challenges, most trainees struggled not only with English for operational needs, but also when they tried to communicate with their instructors. As a non-native English speaker, they felt not only language skills related to operation of aircraft but also non-linguistic skills, such as intercultural skills, are essential for the quality of flight training. Developing a good relationship with instructors, not only during

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flight training, but also off-hours, greatly influenced the quality and the progress of training. Practical communication skills, such as writing emails, making phone calls, and having daily conversations were considered essential. Non-native English trainees usually improve their English skills through studying for certification tests (i.e., TOEFL®, TOEIC®) before starting the training program. However, the skills they need for communication during flight training were not exactly the same academic skills acquired through test preparation. The results of this study show that instruction on general communication skills is also necessary for non-native English speakers who are taking flight lessons in English.