



The Analysis of Students' English Skill Needs in the Hotel Management Study Program at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang

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Abstract. This study investigates the English language skill needs of students enrolled in the Hotel Management Study Program (HMSP) at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang, Riau Province, Indonesia. Grounded in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework, the research adopts a descriptive qualitative design; data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant classroom observations. Findings reveal that speaking and listening are the most critical competencies for students who will serve as front-line hospitality professionals, particularly in guest-interaction scenarios such as handling reservations, managing complaints, and delivering hotel information. Three principal challenges were identified: difficulties with accent comprehension and pronunciation, limited industry-specific vocabulary, and communication anxiety. These results carry direct implications for ESP curriculum design in vocational secondary schools: learning materials and classroom activities should be systematically aligned with authentic hospitality communication contexts, including role-play simulations grounded in Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs), task-based interactions, and extensive listening practice featuring diverse accents. The paper contributes empirical evidence to the literature on needs analysis in ESP vocational education and offers practical recommendations for English teachers and curriculum developers in the Indonesian hospitality sector.

Keywords: English Communication; English Skill Needs; Hotel Management; Needs Analysis; Vocational Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become the lingua franca of the global hospitality industry, serving as the primary medium of communication between hotel employees and international guests. In the Indonesian vocational education context, students enrolled in Hotel Management Study Programs (HMSPs) are expected to develop professional English communication competencies that are directly applicable to workplace situations (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023). However, English instruction in many vocational secondary schools remains largely general in orientation, meaning that teaching content is not sufficiently aligned with the specific communicative demands students will encounter during internships or employment in the hospitality sector.

The concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) offers a principled framework for addressing this misalignment. ESP is an approach to language teaching that designs instruction around the specific needs, goals, and contexts of particular learner groups rather than treating language as a monolithic skill developed in the abstract (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In vocational hospitality education, an ESP-oriented curriculum foregrounds the communicative genres and task types most salient in hotel work welcoming guests, explaining services,

managing reservations, handling complaints, and conducting telephone interactions rather than generic grammar and vocabulary instruction (Basturkmen, 2010).

Despite widespread acknowledgement of ESP's importance in vocational education, systematic needs analysis studies documenting the English skill requirements of hotel management students in Indonesian secondary schools remain limited. Existing studies have largely focused on higher-education hospitality programmes (Ma'fiah & Sumardiono, 2023; Firdaus et al., 2025) or have investigated technology-enhanced learning without conducting in-depth skill-need profiling (Sari et al., 2024). The present study addresses this gap by conducting a rigorous needs analysis at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang a vocational secondary school in Riau Province whose HMSP prepares students directly for regional hospitality employment.

Three research questions guide the study: (1) Which English language skills do HMSP students at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang consider most important for their future careers? (2) What specific communicative tasks require the greatest English proficiency? (3) What language learning challenges currently hinder students' preparedness for professional communication? The findings aim to generate actionable insights for English teachers, curriculum designers, and school administrators seeking to strengthen the professional relevance of English instruction in vocational hospitality education.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ESP Framework and Needs Analysis

The theoretical foundation of ESP rests on the premise that learners' needs should determine the content, methods, and materials of language instruction. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) articulate this through their distinction between target needs what learners must do in the real-world context and learning needs what learners need to do to acquire the required language. A needs analysis is therefore the essential first step in ESP course design, enabling teachers and curriculum developers to identify the communicative competencies that learners must develop and the gaps between current proficiency and target performance (Brown, 2016).

In the vocational education setting, Basturkmen (2010) argues that effective ESP pedagogy must engage learners with the authentic communicative practices of their professional communities, going beyond specialised vocabulary to include genre-based and task-based activities. Nation and Macalister (2010) similarly emphasise that language curriculum design must be grounded in a systematic analysis of learners' present situation, target situation, and learning environment. Applying these principles to Indonesian vocational

hospitality schools implies that English instruction should replicate or simulate the communicative contexts that students will encounter as hotel employees.

Recent studies further strengthen the importance of ESP-based needs analysis in vocational hospitality education. Gopal, Quah, and Gengatharan (2021), in their article "*Need Analysis of English for Hospitality Students: A Case Study in Sungai Petani Community College*," found that hospitality students require communicative English skills closely related to workplace interaction, especially speaking and listening competencies for guest services.

Jubaedah and Wirza (2021), through "*An Investigation of the Needs Analysis and English Learning Process for the Hospitality Students at a Vocational High School*," revealed that hospitality students prioritize speaking skills and hospitality-related vocabulary because current English instruction often does not fully meet industry expectations.

Mafiyah and Sumardiono (2020), in "*A Need Analysis Approach to ESP Syllabus Design in Hospitality Vocational Secondary Education: A Survey on Students' Needs*," emphasize that ESP syllabus development for hospitality students should be based on learners' professional communication needs and authentic workplace tasks.

Syaifudin (2024), in "*Needs Analysis of English Learning Skills for Students of Hospitality Study Program*," argues that hospitality students mainly need speaking competence supported by contextual learning materials that reflect real hotel communication practices.

Fitra et al. (2025), through "*An ESP Based Needs Analysis of English Subject for Room Division Students in a Hospitality Higher Education Context*," state that hospitality English courses should integrate interactive activities, simulations, and industry-oriented communication practices to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace demands.

In addition, Satrio, Hustarna, and Yanto (2025), in "*Mapping the English Language Needs of Indonesian Hotel Staff: A Systematic Literature Review*," conclude that English proficiency, particularly in guest interaction and service communication, is increasingly essential for Indonesian hotel employees in facing global tourism development.

Additionally, Rahman and Nurhayati (2022), in their article "*English Needs Analysis in Hospitality and Tourism Vocational Education*," explain that ESP instruction for hospitality students should emphasize communicative competence, intercultural communication, and service-oriented interaction because hospitality workers frequently interact with international guests. Their study highlights the importance of integrating real-life hotel communication scenarios into classroom activities to improve students' workplace readiness.

Furthermore, Nastiti et al. (2026), in the article “*Needs Analysis of Applied English in Hospitality Education*”, found that speaking and listening are considered the most essential skills by hospitality students, particularly for serving guests, providing service information, and handling guest complaints. The study also emphasizes the importance of authentic communication tasks and workplace-oriented English learning materials in hospitality education.

Another relevant study was conducted by Wicaksono (2023), through “*Developing English Learning Material for the Hospitality Students*,” states that English materials for hospitality students should integrate communicative activities and workplace simulations aligned with students' professional needs. The findings show that needs-based ESP materials help improve students' confidence and practical English performance in hospitality contexts.

English Skill Needs in Hospitality

Research consistently identifies speaking and listening as the most critical English skills in hotel work. Walker (2017) explains that front-office employees act as the primary point of contact with guests and must communicate clearly, politely, and professionally in real time. This demands not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic competence the ability to adjust register, deploy appropriate politeness strategies, and manage face-threatening acts such as complaints or refusals.

Firdaus et al. (2025) confirmed that speaking and listening dominate students' perceived needs in vocational hospitality schools, with particular emphasis on customer-service interaction, front-office communication, and telephone conversation. Ma'fiah and Sumardiono (2023) likewise found that Indonesian vocational hospitality students need English for hotel service tasks including welcoming guests, handling reservations, and providing information and that students strongly prefer interactive, industry-related learning over traditional grammar-focused instruction. Baek (2023) further argues that an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)-informed approach, emphasising communicative effectiveness over native-speaker norms, may be better suited to the realities of intercultural hotel communication.

Listening comprehension presents particular challenges because hotel staff encounter guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds with varied accents and speech rates. Bobanovic (2011) demonstrates that unfamiliar accents represent one of the most significant obstacles to effective communication in tourism and hospitality settings, and Kang Shumin (1997) highlights the reciprocal relationship between listening and speaking: learners who cannot process spoken input efficiently are limited in their ability to produce appropriate responses.

Challenges in Hospitality English Learning

Sari et al. (2024) identify recurring challenges for vocational hospitality students: limited exposure to authentic spoken English, insufficient industry-specific vocabulary, pronunciation problems, and communication anxiety. These challenges are compounded by instructional constraints, including over-reliance on textbooks that do not reflect authentic hotel communication and limited opportunities for meaningful speaking and listening practice. Nurhasanah and Kurniawan (2023) argue that needs analysis is indispensable for improving ESP course quality in vocational schools and that teachers should use its findings to systematically revise learning materials and assessment practices.

3. METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design, which is well-suited to capturing the richness and complexity of students' perceptions, experiences, and needs in a naturalistic educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach allowed the researchers to explore the "what," "why," and "how" of students' English skill needs in depth, beyond the surface-level frequency data that quantitative surveys alone could provide.

The study was conducted at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang, a state vocational secondary school in Bangkinang City, Kampar Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. Participants comprised 30 Grade XI HMSP students who had completed at least one semester of vocational-track English instruction, as well as three English teachers assigned to the programme. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience of English learning in a hospitality vocational context and who were preparing for their compulsory industrial work practice (Praktik Kerja Industri/Prakerin).

Three instruments were used to triangulate the data. First, a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (five points, 30 items) was distributed to all 30 students to measure self-assessed proficiency across the four macro skills and students' perceptions of the importance of each skill for hospitality work. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected students and all three teachers to explore target communicative situations, current instructional practices, and perceived gaps between classroom learning and workplace requirements. Third, four non-participant classroom observations (90 minutes each) documented the types of English tasks and interaction patterns currently employed in the programme.

Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution and mean scores) to rank the perceived importance of each skill. Interview and observation data

were analysed thematically following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme definition, and reporting. Member checking and peer debriefing were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Importance of English Skills

The questionnaire results reveal a clear hierarchy of perceived skill importance among the 30 HMSP students. As presented in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1, speaking received the highest mean importance rating ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.41$), followed by listening ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.49$), reading ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.62$), and writing ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.71$). Both speaking and listening surpassed the threshold of $M = 4.0$, indicating that students considered them strongly important for their professional futures, while reading and writing, though valued, were perceived as comparatively less critical to daily hospitality work. These findings are consistent with the hospitality communication literature (Firdaus et al., 2025; Walker, 2017).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Perceived English Skill Importance (N = 30).

English Skill	Mean (M)	SD	Rank	Category
Speaking	4.72	0.41	1st	Very High
Listening	4.58	0.49	2nd	Very High
Reading	3.81	0.62	3rd	Moderate
Writing	3.44	0.71	4th	Low-Moderate

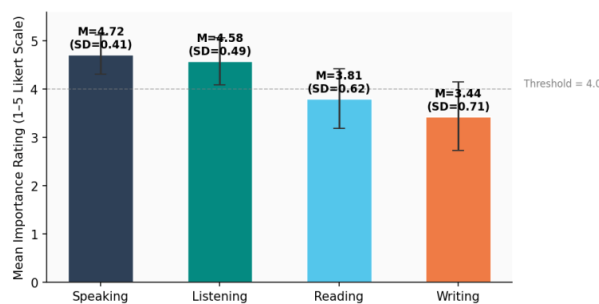


Figure 1. Mean Perceived Importance Ratings of English Skill (N=30).

The pronounced gap between speaking ($M = 4.72$) and writing ($M = 3.44$) reflects the operational realities of hotel front-office environments, where real-time verbal interaction with guests takes priority over documentary or written communication tasks. This divergence of 1.28 mean points suggests that students have a nuanced understanding of their target professional context, aligning with Walker's (2017) observation that front-office personnel serve as the primary oral interface between a hotel and its guests. The relatively higher SD values for reading (0.62) and writing (0.71) further indicate that students' perceptions of these

skills were more varied, possibly reflecting differing exposure to administrative tasks during school-based practicums.

When asked to identify specific communicative tasks in which they anticipated needing English most frequently, students listed (in descending order of endorsement): welcoming and greeting guests (96.7%), handling room reservations (93.3%), providing information about hotel facilities and services (90.0%), responding to guest complaints (86.7%), conducting telephone conversations (83.3%), and assisting with check-in and check-out procedures (80.0%). The distribution of task-specific English needs is visualised in Figure 2, which confirms the overwhelming emphasis on guest-facing oral interaction across all identified tasks. These results indicate that students are highly aware of front-office communicative demands and perceive spoken English as fundamentally instrumental to their professional effectiveness.

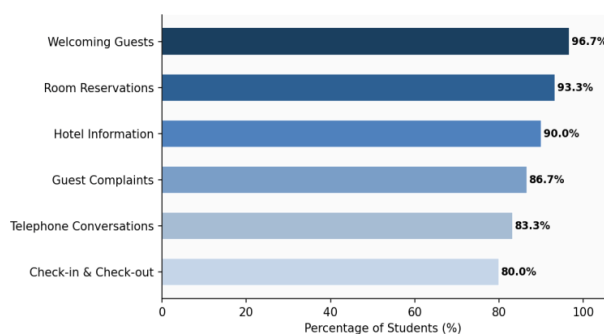


Figure 2. Frequency of English Needed Communicative Tasks.

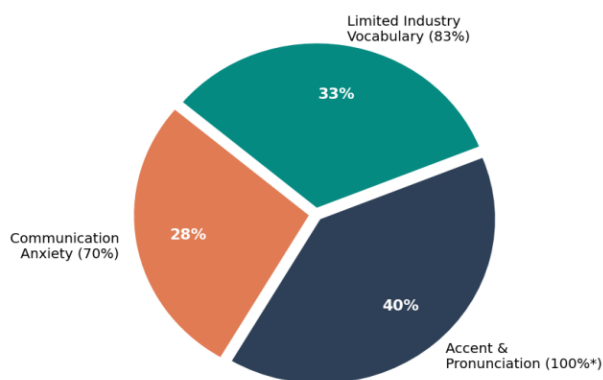
Notably, the highest-ranked task welcoming and greeting guests (96.7%) aligns with the first and most sustained point of contact between hotel staff and international visitors, a moment that sets the tone for the entire guest experience. Complaint handling, endorsed by 86.7% of students, represents a particularly high-stakes communicative encounter that demands pragmatic competence beyond mere linguistic accuracy: staff must manage face-threatening acts, modulate register, and deploy empathy strategies in real time (Walker, 2017). The high percentage endorsing telephone conversation (83.3%) further underscores the auditory and oral demands of hospitality work, where the absence of visual cues elevates listening comprehension challenges. Taken together, these task profiles reinforce the ESP principle that curriculum content must be derived from authentic professional communicative events rather than from general-English syllabi (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Language Learning Challenges

Three dominant themes emerged from the thematic analysis, as illustrated proportionally in Figure 3. The first theme, accent and pronunciation difficulties, was raised by all six interviewed students and confirmed through classroom observation. Students reported that understanding guests with non-standard English accents particularly from Asia and continental Europe was their greatest listening challenge, corroborating Bobanovic (2011). Several students also acknowledged that their own pronunciation, particularly consonant clusters and word stress, might impede communication with guests. One student remarked during the interview that when a European guest spoke quickly with a strong accent, they could not understand even familiar words, pointing to the compounded effect of speed, accent variation, and lexical stress on comprehension. This finding has direct implications for listening pedagogy: instruction must incorporate diverse accent exposure rather than relying solely on a single standard variety.

The second theme, limited industry-specific vocabulary, reflects students' recognition that general-English vocabulary instruction does not adequately prepare them for hospitality communication. Students identified unfamiliarity with hotel terminology (e.g., rack rate, complimentary upgrade, continental breakfast, late check-out fee) as a significant gap between classroom learning and workplace requirements. Table 2 presents a categorised sample of the hospitality-specific lexical items that students most frequently cited as unfamiliar. The breadth of these gaps spanning front-office, food-and-beverage, and housekeeping domains underscores the need for domain-organised vocabulary instruction rather than general wordlists. As Basturkmen (2010) notes, genre-based vocabulary development in ESP must engage learners with the authentic lexical patterns of their professional communities.

The third theme, communication anxiety, was reported by 21 of 30 questionnaire respondents (70%) and elaborated upon in interviews. Students attributed anxiety to limited authentic speaking practice, fear of grammatical errors in front of guests, and lack of confidence in sustaining extended conversations in English. This finding aligns with Sari et al. (2024), who note that communication anxiety is a pervasive barrier to effective English use among vocational hospitality students. Importantly, the relationship between anxiety and limited practice is reciprocal: students who lack confidence avoid speaking practice, which further restricts the development of fluency and confidence. This cycle has particular implications for curriculum design, as communicative activities structured around low-stakes rehearsal environments such as peer role-plays before advancing to teacher-assessed simulations may help break the avoidance pattern.



* All 6 interviewed students cited accent/pronunciation difficulties

Figure 3. Distribution of Language Learning Challenges.

Table 2. Sample of Industry-Specific Vocabulary Gaps.

Domain	Unfamiliar Terms (Student-Reported)	Pedagogical Priority
Front Office	Rack rate, walk-in guest, complimentary upgrade, late check-out fee, no-show policy	Very High
Food & Beverage	Continental breakfast, table d'hôte, sommelier, mise en place, a la carte	High
Housekeeping	Turndown service, DND (Do Not Disturb), amenities, linen change, occupied/vacant status	Moderate-High
Complaint Handling	Escalate, compensate, inconvenience, resolution, goodwill gesture, follow-up	Very High

Alignment Between Instruction and Student Needs

Classroom observations revealed a substantial gap between current instructional practices and the communicative needs identified by students. As depicted in Figure 4, in all four observed sessions, the dominant activity was teacher-centred grammar explanation (averaging 57.5% of session time), followed by written exercises (averaging 28.75%), and brief vocabulary repetition drills (averaging 13.75%). Critically, no role-play simulations, SOP-based dialogues, or listening tasks featuring authentic hospitality discourse were observed across any of the four sessions. This instructional pattern is consistent with what Ma'fiyah and Sumardiono (2023) describe as a mismatch between general-English teaching approaches and the ESP needs of vocational hospitality learners, and stands in direct contrast to the communicative skill priorities identified by students in the questionnaire and interview data.

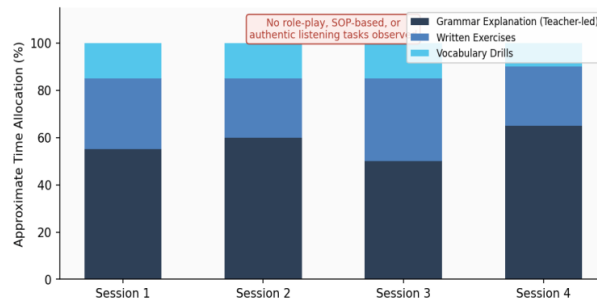


Figure 4. Observed Classroom Activity Distribution Across Four 90-Minutes English Sessions.

The quantitative contrast between students expressed needs and observed instructional practice is stark. While students rated speaking and listening as highly important ($M = 4.72$ and 4.58 respectively), activities developing these skills occupied zero minutes in all four observed lessons. This curricular misalignment represents a significant pedagogical risk: students entering *Prakerin* or hospitality employment will encounter precisely the communicative demands they have identified as critical, yet their classroom preparation has focused almost exclusively on passive grammar knowledge and written competence. This finding resonates with Nurhasanah and Kurniawan's (2023) contention that needs analysis results must be translated into concrete curricular action rather than left as descriptive documents.

Teachers acknowledged the mismatch but cited constraints including limited timetable time, an absence of industry-specific instructional materials, and pressure to cover the national curriculum syllabus. These contextual factors underscore the importance of systemic curriculum development support rather than placing the full burden of ESP adaptation on individual teachers. Institutional endorsement, dedicated professional development, and access to hospitality-authentic multimedia resources would be necessary conditions for meaningful curricular transformation.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings converge on several concrete recommendations. First, speaking and listening should be repositioned as the primary skills throughout the HMSP English curriculum, with reading and writing serving as supporting skills. Second, classroom activities should foreground authentic communicative tasks drawn from real hotel contexts: role-play simulations based on SOP scripts, information-gap activities modelled on front-office interactions, and extensive listening practice using audio featuring diverse accents. Third, vocabulary instruction should be reorganised around hospitality-specific lexical sets front-office terminology, food-and-beverage vocabulary, housekeeping expressions rather than generic wordlists. Fourth, formative assessment should reflect authentic performance criteria:

communicative clarity, appropriate register, and successful task completion rather than grammatical accuracy alone.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that students in the Hotel Management Study Program at SMK Negeri Kesehatan dan Pariwisata Bangkinang have clearly defined English skill needs that are not being met by general-English instructional approaches. Speaking and listening are the most critical skills for students anticipated professional roles, with front-office guest interaction as the most salient communicative context. Three principal challenges accent and pronunciation difficulties, limited industry-specific vocabulary, and communication anxiety must be addressed through systematic, needs-driven curriculum development grounded in ESP principles.

The study contributes empirical evidence to the literature on needs analysis in ESP vocational education by providing context-specific data from an Indonesian regional vocational school. Its findings have direct relevance for English teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators across the Indonesian vocational education system, where similar misalignments between general-English instruction and hospitality sector demands are widespread.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single school site, restricting generalisability. Future research should replicate the needs analysis across multiple vocational schools in different regions, employ longitudinal designs to track changes in communicative competence following needs-aligned instruction, and involve industry practitioner's hotel managers and human resource officers as key informants to enrich the target-situation analysis.

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