PAEDAGOGIA
*Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*
http://jurnal.uns.ac.id/paedagogia

DOI : 10.20961/Paedagogia.v29i1.114774
Vol. 29, No. 1, 2026, pp. 67-77
p-ISSN 0126-4109
e-ISSN 2549-6670

# Initial Need Analysis of Applied English for Students of English Study Program in the Hospitality Field

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**Keywords:** *Applied English, English For Specific Purposes, Hospitality, Initial Needs Analysis, Vocational Education*

**Article history**
Received: 18 January 2026
Revised: 16 February 2026
Accepted: 27 February 2026
Published: 28 February 2026

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DOI: 10.20961/paedagogia.v29i1.114774

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**Abstract:** In the field of vocational hospitality education, English instruction is often not fully suited to the specific communication requirements of workplace interaction, especially for students with primary languages preparing for hospitality careers. Although previous ESP needs analyses focused primarily on hospitality or tourism courses, limited research has examined the corresponding English needs of English-based students in vocational polytechnics. The study aims to identify the priority language skills, the context of work place communication, learning preferences and perceived constraints of these students. Data collected from 50 students were analyzed using descriptive quantitative survey designs and frequency and percentage distributions. The results indicate that students prioritize speaking and listening skills for guest interaction and service communication, emphasizing the need for a specific vocabulary and contextual, practice-oriented learning for guests. Despite a strong recognition of the demands of the professional language, students report continuing challenges related to vocabulary mastery, pronunciation and communication confidence, revealing a gap between the goals and actual preparations. The study contributes to ESP research by extending the accommodation-oriented needs analysis to students of the English Study Programme and highlighting the coexistence of professional consciousness and communication constraints. The results support the development of English instruction based on performance, based on scenarios, in vocational contexts.

**How to cite:** Nastiti, I. A., Noviabahari, J. L. & Prakosha, D. (2026). Initial Need Analysis of Applied English for Students of English Study Program in the Hospitality Field. *PAEDAGOGIA*, 29(1), 67-77. DOI: 10.20961/paedagogia.v29i1.114774

## INTRODUCTION

The development of the hospitality industry has continued to increase in line with the expansion of globalization, which enables people to travel to various countries and tourist destinations. This condition requires the hospitality industry to possess effective communication skills to serve guests from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds. To support this demand, proficiency in English plays a crucial role and has become a primary requirement for workers in the service sector. English has been designated as an official language of the United Nations, considering its status as an international language with a very wide global distribution of users (Supena, 2024; Siregar, 2018; Iriance, 2018; Shobikah, 2017). Considering current trends, students who are prepared to enter the hospitality industry are required to master English, particularly English that is oriented toward the service industry (Afifulloh, 2018; Wulandari & Rahmawati, 2020; Wibowo & Kristina, 2018).

Polytechnics are higher education institutions that provide vocational education. Vocational education is designed to produce graduates who are work-ready and possess practical skills in accordance with industry needs (Ariyanti, 2021; Avana, 2024; Maulana & Hamidi, 2020; Zukna & Sasi, 2024; Suherman et al., 2024). One of the programs offered in polytechnic education is the English Study Program. This program does not merely emphasize theoretical mastery, but also focuses on the ability to use English in an applied and practical manner. Based on this background, English instruction in vocational settings needs to be adjusted to industrial contexts, including the hospitality sector, which demands intensive active communication skills (Rusmala, 2018; Yuanti & Vardhani, 2021; Sriyanto, Azir, & Sitorus, 2023).

In English language teaching, the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been widely recognized as an appropriate approach to address learners' specific language needs in professional contexts. ESP emphasizes the alignment between language instruction and learners' future occupational demands, ensuring that language learning is relevant and goal-oriented (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In vocational education, ESP plays a crucial role because students are expected to acquire language skills that can be directly applied in workplace situations. Therefore, the implementation of ESP in hospitality-oriented English programs is essential to enhance students' readiness for professional communication.

Students who have learned General English are often unable to meet the requirements of applied English or English for Specific Purposes. Vocabulary and terminology used in the hospitality context are not specifically taught in General English, as ESP vocabulary and terms are contextual and field-specific (Juliana & Juliani, 2020; Hyland, 2022; Fitria, 2020). ESP is required in various professional fields, each of which has its own linguistic specifications. In the hospitality field, ESP particularly emphasizes language use in specific situations such as tourism services, serving guests, providing information, and handling complaints (Hsu, 2014; Chilingaryan, 2020; Arafah, 2019).

Previous studies have also indicated that hospitality students require a strong emphasis on communicative competence, particularly speaking and listening skills, as well as confidence in using English in real interactions. Effective communication in hospitality involves not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic competence and the ability to respond appropriately to guests' needs in real-time situations (Bury & Oka, 2017; Bilodid & Vorobel, 2022). Without sufficient exposure to contextualized language practice, students may experience difficulty transferring classroom knowledge into professional performance.

Despite the growing importance of ESP in vocational education, empirical evidence suggests that English instruction is often not fully aligned with the communicative demands of actual workplace settings. Classroom instruction tends to remain theoretical in nature (Arteaga, Biesbroek, Nalau, & Howes, 2024; Aven, 2023). Students may understand language structures theoretically, yet still encounter difficulties when required to use English in practical and professional situations (Thomas, 2008). For example, learners who possess basic knowledge of English tenses are often found to make errors or experience confusion when applying them in diverse communicative contexts (Aryanti, 2021). This misalignment is particularly critical in hospitality contexts, where communication is interaction-driven, immediate, and service-oriented. Frontline hospitality roles—such as serving foreign guests, providing service information, and handling complaints—require not only linguistic knowledge but also fluency, pragmatic appropriateness, and communicative confidence.

One of the initial steps in developing effective applied English instruction is conducting a needs analysis. Needs analysis provides an overview of the types of English skills most required by students to prepare for work in the hospitality field. It also helps identify language skills, contexts of language use, and difficulties faced by students. The results of a needs analysis can serve as a foundation for developing relevant learning materials and instructional strategies that better align classroom learning with workplace demands.

While previous ESP needs analysis studies have examined English needs in hospitality and tourism programs, most of them focus on students majoring directly in hospitality management or tourism departments (Kusuma, Hatim, & Uzer, 2023; Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023; Lertchalermtipakoon, Wongsubun, & Kawinkoonlasate, 2021). Limited attention has been given to students of English Study Programs in vocational polytechnics who are prepared to enter the hospitality sector as language professionals or service communicators. This distinction is significant because English Study Program students receive more extensive language instruction, yet their training may not always be sufficiently contextualized within specific hospitality service situations. Consequently, it remains unclear whether their applied English learning adequately addresses the communicative realities of frontline hospitality roles. Therefore, this study specifically investigates the applied English needs of English Study Program students who are oriented toward careers in the hospitality service sector within state polytechnics. By focusing on this underexplored learner group and emphasizing interaction-based hospitality contexts, this study seeks to address a gap in existing ESP needs analysis research.

This situation indicates a critical problem in vocational English instruction. Although English courses are formally provided in polytechnic institutions, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding whether the applied English instruction received by English Study Program students is fully aligned with the communicative demands of frontline hospitality service roles. The mismatch between classroom-based English learning and workplace communication realities raises important questions about the relevance, focus, and adequacy of current instructional practices. If applied English instruction does not accurately reflect target workplace situations—such as guest interaction, service information delivery, and complaint handling—students may graduate with theoretical knowledge but without sufficient communicative readiness.

The lack of context-specific data on student needs for the English Applied Study Program in the context of the hospitality industry is the main issue addressed in the current research study. The purpose of the research is to answer the following questions: (1) Which aspects of English language proficiency are important for use in hospitality service occupations? (2) What are the contexts in which English will be required in conjunction with actual hospitality service jobs? (3) Which instructional methods are effective for teaching hospitality-oriented skills in the English language? (4) What barriers are impeding students' ability to communicate effectively? This study will answer these questions and illustrate the alignment between applied English instruction and the actual demands of doing business in the hospitality industry.

With respect to the above purpose, the research will focus on identifying the necessary skills required for using English in the hospitality service environment among students enrolled in an English Study Program at state polytechnics. The analysis will include identifying the most important skill areas, the actual workplace contexts for using English, and barriers faced by students in performing their required communicative functions using English in the hospitality industry. The findings of this study should assist in creating English language training that aligns more closely with the needs of the students and the expectations of the hospitality sector.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design using a survey method to conduct a preliminary needs analysis of applied English among students of the English Study Program with a hospitality orientation at a state polytechnic. The quantitative descriptive approach was selected because the primary objective of the study was to obtain an overview of students' perceived English language needs rather than to test hypotheses or examine causal relationships. The survey method was considered appropriate for this study as it enabled the researcher to collect data efficiently from a relatively homogeneous group of respondents and to identify general patterns of target needs and learning needs. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research, questionnaires are widely used in the initial stages of needs analysis to map learners' priorities, perceived difficulties, and communicative requirements before conducting more in-depth qualitative investigations (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Basturkmen, 2010). As this study was positioned as a preliminary investigation, the survey approach was considered sufficient to provide foundational data for curriculum development in hospitality-oriented applied English courses.

### Participants

The participants consisted of 50 students enrolled in the English Study Program with a hospitality orientation at a state polytechnic. Purposive sampling was employed to select students who had completed hospitality-related English courses and were preparing for careers in the hospitality service sector. Since the study focused on students' perceptions of applied English use in hospitality contexts, these participants were considered appropriate respondents for a needs analysis study.

### Research Instrument

Data were collected using a needs analysis questionnaire developed based on established ESP frameworks. The construction of the instrument was informed by Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) classification of target needs (necessities, lacks, and wants) and Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998)

target situation analysis model. These frameworks emphasize the identification of learners' communicative requirements in specific professional contexts. The questionnaire also considered findings from previous ESP studies in the context of hospitality to ensure contextual relevance in service-oriented communication situations, such as guest interaction, information provision, and complaint handling. The instrument consisted of 20 closed-ended items organized into four indicators: (1) English language skill needs; (2) Contexts of English use in hospitality service settings; (3) Learning material and activity needs; and (4) Constraints in applying English.

Each indicator was represented by five items. A four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4) was used to encourage clear and decisive responses without a neutral option. Several negatively worded items were included to reduce response bias and were reverse-scored during data analysis. The questionnaire was designed as a multidimensional needs analysis tool intended to explore different aspects of applied English needs rather than to measure a single latent construct. Therefore, the items represent distinct components of learners' perceived needs in hospitality-oriented communication contexts.

### Validity and Reliability

Two experts in ESP and vocational English teaching reviewed the questionnaire to ensure content validity and readability. Revisions were made based on their feedback regarding clarity, contextual appropriateness, and alignment with hospitality communication situations. A small pilot test was conducted prior to full distribution to verify that respondents clearly understood each item of the instrument. The internal consistency of the instrument was examined to provide preliminary reliability information. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was low, which may reflect the multidimensional nature of the instrument, as it was developed to measure various aspects of applied English needs rather than a single unified construct. In needs analysis research within ESP contexts, descriptive interpretation is generally prioritized over psychometric scale validation, as the primary objective is to identify priority areas and contextual language challenges.

### Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms, enabling quick and efficient data collection from all participants. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for each item and indicator. The results were used to describe students' applied English needs, identify priority language skills and learning contexts, and highlight challenges faced by students. These findings were then interpreted to provide implications for the development of English language learning that is more relevant to hospitality contexts in vocational education.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings obtained from the needs analysis questionnaire on applied English for students of the English Study Program in the hospitality field. The data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages to provide an overview of English language skill needs, contexts of language use, learning needs, and the constraints faced by students.

### English Language Skill Needs

This section presents the results related to students' perceptions of the English language skills most needed in the hospitality field. The analysis focuses on identifying which language skills are considered essential for effective communication in hospitality contexts. The items that include in this indicator are: Speaking ability is important for me to work in the hospitality field; Listening ability is necessary for me to understand the requests of foreign guests; Reading ability is needed in hospitality-related work; Writing skills serve only as a complementary skill in the hospitality industry; I do not need to master all language skills in the hospitality work context. The findings provide an overview of students' priorities regarding English language skills based on their future professional needs.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Responses on English Language Skill Needs

| No. | Statement | SD | D | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Speaking is important for hospitality | 0% | 0% | 24% | 76% |
| 2 | Listening is important to learn | 0% | 22% | 58% | 20% |
| 3 | Reading is needed in hospitality | 0% | 62% | 34% | 4% |
| 4 | Writing is only complementary | 4% | 12% | 84% | 0% |
| 5 | It is not necessary to master all skills | 0% | 10% | 72% | 18% |

According to Table 1, the results of the study showed that oral communication skills were viewed as the most important skills for students preparing for career paths in hospitality. All respondents agreed that speaking (verbally communicating with guests) was the most important skill in hospitality — and a very large number of them strongly agreed. These findings suggest that students think of hospitality as primarily involving lots of opportunities for direct interaction with guests, in which they have to use their verbal communication skills confidently (and possibly immediately) to respond directly to guest requests.

Listening is also considered to be one of the most important skills, although not quite as high in intensity of agreement as speaking. This pattern suggests that, while students understand the need to listen to and understand guests' requests, they place a higher priority on being able to facilitate effective communication than to simply understand. In contrast, both reading and writing were seen as less critical components of hospitality work, with most respondents indicating that reading is not a necessity and writing is merely supplemental to hospitality work.

Overall, these findings point to the viewpoint of hospitality as an interaction-based field where interactions will occur more frequently than texts, i.e., face-to-face interactions occur more often than text-based forms of communication.

There was also a strong agreement among the most of students that mastering all four language skills are not necessary skills to succeed in hospitality fields, which indicates a desire for practical communication rather than perfecting language.

### Situations of English Use in the Hospitality Field

This section describes the results concerning the situations in which English is used in hospitality-related contexts. The data illustrate students' perceptions of how frequently and for what purposes English is required in various workplace situations, such as serving guests, providing information, and handling professional tasks. The items that include in this indicator are: I need English to serve foreign guests; I need English to provide hotel service information; I rarely use English to handle guest complaints; I use English to write office reports or documents; and When writing emails, I rarely use English. These findings help clarify the communicative demands faced by students in the hospitality industry.

**Table 2**. Distribution of Responses on Situations of English Use

| No. | Statement | SD | D | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Serving foreign guests | 0% | 0% | 42% | 58% |
| 2 | Providing service information | 0% | 0% | 86% | 14% |
| 3 | Rarely used to handle complaints | 0% | 64% | 36% | 0% |
| 4 | Writing reports/documents | 28% | 72% | 0% | 0% |
| 5 | Rarely used for emails | 0% | 0% | 82% | 18% |

In Table 2, the students' responses indicate that they feel oral skills are a priority in the workplace as well. The students agreed strongly that they need English to serve foreigners and give them service-related information, showing that English is most often associated with front-line service interaction. These results also support the previous emphasis placed on speaking and listening as the two main areas of competency in hospitality communication.

In addition, most of the students did not agree with the statement that they rarely use English to manage guest complaints, indicating their belief that managing guest complaints is an important communicative event and is dependent on English proficiency. This indicates an awareness of the hospitality industry as a career field that involves both routine service communication and providing

solutions through communication with international guests. Conversely, written communication does not appear to hold a similar value, as students generally disagreed that English is used for writing reports/documents and would use very little English for correspondence via email. This indicates that administrative/documentation type duties are not likely anticipated primary responsibilities for this group of students.

### Learning Needs in Hospitality English

This section presents the results related to students' learning needs in Hospitality English. The analysis focuses on the types of learning materials, activities, and instructional approaches that students perceive as necessary to support their English language development. The items that include in this indicator are: I need hospitality-specific vocabulary; I need authentic dialogues that reflect real hospitality workplace situations; English learning should focus on communicative practice; General English materials are sufficient without a hospitality focus; and I need to learn how to write emails in English. The findings reflect students' preferences for practical and contextualized learning that aligns with hospitality communication needs.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Responses on Learning Needs

| No. | Statement | SD | D | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hospitality-specific vocabulary | 0% | 0% | 18% | 82% |
| 2 | Role-play is not necessary | 14% | 68% | 18% | 0% |
| 3 | Focus only on practice | 0% | 44% | 48% | 8% |
| 4 | General English is sufficient | 20% | 72% | 8% | 0% |
| 5 | Email writing | 16% | 80% | 4% | 0% |

The results based on Table 3 demonstrate that there is a strong preference among students for English language instruction that is contextualized in their profession, with a significant proportion of students expressing a strong need for vocabulary specific to the hospitality industry. This response indicates that students understand that simply speaking English at a high level does not ensure that they can communicate effectively in their workplace.

The response to the survey indicates that students have a clear response to the ability to separate the proficiency they have in General English from their need to communicate in the industry they will be entering. Students also demonstrated a preference for communicative/interactive approaches in their learning. Many respondents disagreed with the belief that role-play in their education is not a valid option, thus indicating that they view simulators and interaction as viable methods for providing them with practical communication skills.

Although most students indicated that the learning of English should be primarily focused on the practice of the language, their response levels for this aspect of their education were moderate; therefore, it would appear that while they are interested in a disproportionate amount of time being spent on practical learning vs. the use of formal learning, they also maintain a strong preference for a balance between the two methods of learning.

Written communication was the least common form of communication mentioned by the respondents for the purpose of communicating with customers in the hospitality industry. This is consistent with previous research indicating that written communication is less important than oral communication in the hospitality industry. Overall, the data suggests that students prefer learning environments that are practical, authentic, and relevant to the real-life experience of the service they will provide.

### Constraints Faced by Students in Using Hospitality English

This section reports the results concerning the challenges encountered by students when using English in hospitality contexts. The analysis highlights linguistic and affective constraints that may hinder effective communication, including vocabulary limitations, pronunciation difficulties, and confidence-related issues. The items that include in this indicator are: I feel a lack of confidence when speaking English; I experience difficulties with hospitality-related vocabulary; I experience difficulties with

pronunciation; I do not experience any difficulties in using English for hospitality purposes; and I have no difficulties in using English in hospitality field. These findings provide insight into the factors that need to be addressed to improve students' readiness for professional communication.

**Table 4.** Distribution of Responses on Constraints

| No. | Statement | SD | D | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lack of confidence | 0% | 4% | 86% | 10% |
| 2 | Limited vocabulary | 0% | 0% | 76% | 24% |
| 3 | Difficulty with pronunciation | 0% | 0% | 28% | 72% |
| 4 | Already proficient | 24% | 76% | 0% | 0% |
| 5 | No difficulties | 6% | 90% | 4% | 0% |

Students have identified a number of major constraints despite having a preference for oral communication. In Table 4, the majority of students indicated that they lack confidence speaking English, which suggests that there is an affective component to their overall performance in communicating in English. The findings indicate that psychological readiness is as important as having linguistic competence (knowledge of the English language) when it comes to communicating within the hospitality industry.

There were also limitations in terms of their understanding and use of the English language. A majority of students reported challenges with vocabulary and pronunciation related to hospitality, which correlates to their prior emphasis on needing vocabulary specific to their industry as well as needing to practice using that vocabulary; this supports the earlier observation that the students' perceived needs stem directly from their actual performance gaps. Almost all respondents also rejected the statements indicating they have no problems or are already proficient. This demonstrates a realistic assessment of their own abilities and indicates that there is still a need for specific instructional support. In summary, the constraints reported by the students support the communicative requirements of being employed within the hospitality industry where being able to pronounce the words fluently, use specialized vocabulary, and communicate with confidence are critical skills.

## DISCUSSION

Results demonstrate that students are very aware of how essential English communication skills are in the field of hospitality. Similar to the results of Prabowo and Saptiany (2024) students identified that having proficiency in English contributes to the quality of service for an international guest and increases their value in the profession. This awareness is also a reflection on the formation of a vocational identity. Students enrolled in hospitality type programs see English as more than an academic requirement; they see it as professional capital that has a direct effect on the ability to be employed and perform in the workplace. Therefore, English is functioning as both a communicative tool and an indicator of professional competence within the service industry.

The fact that students value speaking and listening skills emphasises how hospitality work relies on interaction. Bury and Oka (2017) support this finding, as they established that communicative competence (especially oral communication and confidence) is at the heart of success in the workplace. This pattern is found to occur because hospitality communication is immediate, unpredictable, and service-oriented. Unlike many other professional domains that are primarily written, hospitality requires spontaneous interaction, a response to guests' requests and the resolution of complaints. Thus, oral competence becomes not only a linguistic priority but also a situational necessity in the discourse practices of hospitality workplaces.

The results regarding workplace situations further support this interpretation. Students strongly associate English with serving foreign guests and providing service information, which aligns with Bilodid and Vorobel (2022), who emphasize the practical role of foreign language mastery in hospitality and tourism professions. However, this study extends existing knowledge by showing that students in an English Study Program—rather than hospitality majors—internalize similar communicative priorities. This

suggests that even language-focused vocational students conceptualize English through a service-performance lens when oriented toward hospitality careers. Therefore, the applied English curriculum in such programs should integrate occupational discourse practices rather than rely solely on general communicative competence frameworks.

Although students report high levels of awareness of their communication needs for work, many students reported continuing communication barriers, including lack of confidence, limited vocabulary and pronunciation issues. This is consistent with Prabowo and Saptiany's (2024) findings, which show that students struggle to understand guest requests and maintain their ability to communicate confidently. As these constraints have been documented in other studies, the consistent presence of these difficulties indicate a structural disparity between what the students know to be important in their field and their ability to use English appropriately for the purpose of communication. This suggests that merely being aware of what is needed for communicative competence does not result in communicative competence. From an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) perspective, this disparity identifies the difference between "target needs" and "deficiencies" as defined in the needs analysis models. In summary, students have a clear understanding of the qualifications needed to perform their job, but continue to experience linguistic and emotional barriers that prevent them from performing effectively.

The findings provide three contributions to the existing body of ESP research. First, the results confirm the predominance of oral and relational communication in the hospitality industry (HOSP) and reaffirm the previous studies conducted by Bury & Oka, 2017; Bilodid & Vorobel, 2022; Prabowo & Saptiany, 2024). Second, these findings add to the ESP knowledge base by expanding the sample to include ESP students at vocational polytechnic institutions, a sample that has received little attention in the hospitality industry-oriented ESP literature. Third, the results of the study demonstrate that while students possess a high level of professional awareness, they also continue to experience many communicational barriers that have not been resolved.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that hospitality-oriented ESP instruction should move beyond general communicative practice and adopt a performance-based approach grounded in authentic workplace discourse. By addressing both linguistic competence and affective readiness, vocational English programs can more effectively bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional hospitality communication.

### Limitation

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample from a single vocational polytechnic, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other institutional contexts. In addition, the reliance on a self-reported questionnaire means that the findings reflect students' perceived needs and constraints rather than their actual communicative performance in authentic hospitality settings. Although the instrument was developed based on established ESP frameworks and underwent expert validation and pilot testing, its survey-based and multidimensional nature may restrict the depth of analysis regarding workplace discourse practices. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as exploratory and context-specific, providing indicative rather than definitive evidence of applied English readiness in hospitality-oriented vocational education.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the goal was to identify the English needs of learners in the English Study Program who are preparing to enter the hospitality field in a vocational polytechnic environment. The results indicate that speaking and listening skills are of utmost importance to learners for providing service and interacting with guests verbally. The learners considered English as primarily a means of communicating verbally in real time to provide service, as opposed to communicating in writing for bookkeeping or administration. Furthermore, there is a wide discrepancy between learners' expectations in the workplace and their level of readiness to do so, with many learners expressing concern about difficulties with vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence in their communication skills.

This study adds to ESP literature by providing evidence of the needs of vocational learners

interested in pursuing careers in hospitality, while providing a deeper understanding of how they view English as primarily a workplace competence and a primary means of communicating with co-workers. In addition, this study also helps to support the distinction between "target needs" and "lacks" in the framework for ESP needs analysis studies. Finally, the study emphasizes the need for English courses specifically designed for the hospitality field that provide practice with vocabulary development, pronunciation training, and simulated interactions to build the learner's confidence in communicating with guests.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its single-institution sample and reliance on self-reported survey data. Future research involving multiple institutions and mixed-method approaches, including observational and performance-based data, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of hospitality English needs and instructional effectiveness.

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