

# Voices behind the front desk: A triangular lens on English competence in hospitality education

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## ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry, as a linguistically and culturally charged domain, demands communication that extends beyond grammatical correctness toward adaptive, service-oriented performance. This study investigates the state of English competence among vocational hospitality students in Yogyakarta by integrating perspectives from three key stakeholders, i.e. students, lecturers, and industry practitioners. The research adopts a mixed-methods design to uncover the alignment and dissonance between classroom instruction, communicative readiness, and workplace expectations. Quantitative data from 86 student respondents reveal that over 80% face persistent challenges in spontaneous English interaction, citing limited vocabulary, hesitation, and low confidence. Complementary qualitative insights from focus group discussions with five lecturers and interviews with twelve hotel professionals illustrate that English proficiency in hospitality is increasingly perceived as a form of professional capital: a synthesis of linguistic agility, intercultural empathy, and emotional intelligence. The findings highlight the inadequacy of conventional, grammar-driven ESP pedagogy and advocate for a transformative, partnership-based learning model that embeds authentic industry participation, simulation-driven practice, and performance-based evaluation. The study contributes to ongoing discussions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by reframing communicative competence as a professional, affective, and intercultural construct rather than a linguistic artifact. It argues that recontextualizing English learning through design thinking and work-integrated learning principles can foster communicative resilience, industry alignment, and global employability among vocational graduates.



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## 1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality sector stands as one of the most dynamic industries worldwide, requiring professionals who are not only technically skilled but also linguistically and interculturally competent (Trang, 2023). English continues to serve as the principal medium of international communication in this field, particularly in hotels that accommodate guests from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Marasabessy et al., 2025). In Indonesia, and specifically in Yogyakarta, an educational and tourism hub the need for effective English communication in hospitality settings has become increasingly evident. Recent observations among vocational hospitality students reveal a persistent discrepancy between the English language skills taught in the classroom and the communicative competencies required in real-world hospitality operations. From the learners' perspective, more than 80% still experience difficulties in managing spontaneous interactions with foreign guests, often struggling with limited vocabulary, low

confidence, and hesitation in oral communication (Chou, 2024). They express a strong motivation to enhance both speaking and listening skills simultaneously, reflecting an awareness that successful communication in hospitality is dialogic, responsive, and contextually grounded rather than grammar-centered. From the academic standpoint, lecturers acknowledge that the current English for Hospitality curriculum remains largely conventional, dominated by textbook-based instruction and limited exposure to authentic communicative contexts (Van, 2018). This pedagogical gap restricts the development of learners' intercultural sensitivity and practical communication strategies. As a result, English instruction tends to focus more on language form than on communicative function, overlooking the situational demands of hotel operations such as Front Office, Food and Beverage, and Guest Relations.

Industry practitioners, meanwhile, emphasize that effective communication competence goes beyond linguistic accuracy. They highlight the importance of emotional intelligence, service-minded interaction, and adaptive cross-cultural behaviour as essential indicators of employability (Alyousuf et al., 2024). The hospitality sector now places greater emphasis on employees who are able to communicate with guests smoothly and understand cultural backgrounds or expectations and demonstrate professionalism through language use (Grobelna, 2015). However, these expectations are often unmet by graduates whose English exposure has been limited to classroom simulations without authentic guest interaction. The convergence of these perspectives underscores the urgency for a transformative approach to vocational English education one that integrates industry collaboration, authentic learning environments, and design thinking principles. By embedding experiential learning and practitioner partnership into the curriculum, vocational institutions can bridge the gap between academic instruction and workplace reality (Cremers, 2016; Iiescu, 2025). Such innovation is crucial to strengthen students' communicative readiness, intercultural competence, and overall employability within the global hospitality landscape.

While previous studies have examined English competence in hospitality from either pedagogical or industry-based perspectives, few have integrated the voices of students, educators, and practitioners into a single analytical framework. This study addresses this gap by adopting a triangular lens approach a conceptual and methodological integration of three stakeholder perspectives to reveal the alignment and dissonance between classroom instruction, learner experience, and workplace communication demands. This approach not only contributes to the limited literature on partnership-based ESP but also redefines communicative competence in hospitality as a shared construct co-created through academic and professional collaboration.

To address the gap between existing English instruction in vocational hospitality programs and the communicative demands of the workplace, this study seeks to explore stakeholders' perspectives and identify key pedagogical directions for model development. Understanding how current practices are perceived by students, lecturers, and industry practitioners is essential for designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning model that is contextually relevant, practice-oriented, and responsive to industry needs. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Questions are following: 1. How do vocational hospitality students, lecturers, and industry practitioners perceive the relevance, effectiveness, and limitations of current English learning practices in preparing students for real workplace communication? 2. What components and pedagogical features should be integrated into a partnership-based ESP model to enhance communicative competence, confidence, and work readiness among hospitality students?

This study analyzed the English language proficiency and training needs of vocational hospitality students based on survey data. The findings reveal a critical need for enhanced practical English communication skills among these students, essential for successful careers in the international hotel industry. These insights provide an empirical foundation for developing a more responsive, industry-aligned ESP curriculum that better prepares vocational hospitality graduates for real workplace communication demands.

### 1.1. English as Professional Capital in Hospitality

The hospitality and tourism sector is widely recognized as a linguistically intensive and interculturally dynamic industry in which English functions as both a communicative medium and a marker of professionalism (Metcalf, 2019; Al-mughairi et al., 2021; Zalil, 2022). Across global contexts, English proficiency has become an essential component of employability, particularly in guest-facing roles that demand clarity, empathy, and adaptability (Rana, 2024; Alapati, 2023; España, 2025). Previous studies emphasize that effective communication in hotels is not limited to grammar or vocabulary mastery but

represents an enactment of professionalism, confidence, and service ethos shaping guests' perceptions of quality (Kharouf, 2019). Linguistic competence thus operates as a form of professional capital a symbolic resource enhancing both credibility and operational performance (Mahowald, 2024). In developing economies such as Indonesia, however, a persistent mismatch remains between vocational English instruction and workplace communication demands. Despite completing formal English courses, many hospitality students continue to feel hesitant and linguistically underprepared for spontaneous, culturally nuanced service interactions.

## 1.2. Communicative Competence and ESP in Vocational Contexts

This gap underscores the need to reconceptualize English competence not as static linguistic knowledge but as adaptive service communication embedded in emotion, cultural awareness, and relational intelligence. The evolution of communicative competence theory supports this view. Position language is as a situated social practice encompassing sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions (Sumskaya, 2020). Within hospitality contexts, communicative success relies more on interactional agility than grammatical precision. Research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) similarly prioritizes performance-based proficiency, emphasizing meaning negotiation, tone, facial expression, and contextual sensitivity (Españo, 2025). Consequently, scholars advocate task-based, interaction-driven pedagogies that mirror authentic workplace scenarios and promote communicative readiness rather than linguistic formality.

## 1.3. Situated Learning and Authentic Hospitality Communication

When students engage in service role plays, case-based discussions, and problem-solving simulations, English is learned as a professional tool rather than an academic subject (Hiranburana, 2017). This approach aligns with Hall's notion of situated communicative performance, where learners develop the capacity to think and act in English within the affective environment of hospitality service (Simatupang, 2024). Hospitality communication spans multiple operational domains Front Office, Food and Beverage, Housekeeping, and Event Management each requiring distinct discourse conventions (Wan, 2024). Studies show that exposure to authentic genres, such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and workplace documents, strengthens occupational literacy. Genre-based ESP instruction enables learners to link linguistic forms with professional purposes, fostering both fluency and contextual awareness (Wen, 2022).

## 1.4. Partnership-Based Learning and Work-Integrated Language Learning

A growing body of literature supports Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) as an effective strategy for bridging classroom instruction and industry practice (Wen et al., 2022). In hospitality English, this approach materializes through partnership-based ESP models where industry practitioners act as mentors, co-instructors, and assessors. Such collaboration ensures curricular relevance and professional validation of communicative competence. Studies demonstrate that practitioner involvement enhances learner confidence, authenticity of learning, and employability outcomes (Chettiar, 2024). The concept of Work-Integrated Language Learning (WILL) further situates ESP instruction within communities of practice, framing language learning as social participation rather than isolated skill acquisition (Lubbe, 2022).

## 1.5. Intercultural and Emotional Dimensions of Hospitality Communication

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is an indispensable dimension of hospitality English. Service encounters often involve culturally diverse guests, requiring employees to interpret varying verbal and non-verbal norms. Miscommunication frequently stems from pragmatic misalignment rather than lexical deficiency (Braslauskas, 2021; Jin, 2023). Incorporating emotional intelligence empathy, adaptability, and emotional regulation into vocational English instruction is therefore critical (Godoy, 2025). Reflective dialogue, intercultural role play, and scenario-based empathy training support learners in developing culturally responsive and emotionally balanced communication practices essential for service excellence (Álvarez, 2020; Lamiani, 2021).

## 1.6. Performance-Based Assessment in ESP

Assessment practices in ESP have shifted toward performance-based evaluation to capture the complexity of real hospitality interactions. Traditional grammar-focused tests inadequately reflect communicative competence. Authentic assessment methods simulations, interviews, and situational dialogues allow evaluation of responsiveness, tone, and professional conduct (Nguyen, 2020). Competency-based assessment prioritizes observable effectiveness in interaction, supported by reflective

self-assessment and peer feedback, reinforcing metacognitive awareness and professional growth (Ibarra-sáiz, 2020).

## 2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the alignment between vocational students' English competence, pedagogical practices, and industry expectations in the hospitality sector of Yogyakarta Indonesia. The research integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure both breadth and depth of understanding. Participants consisted of three stakeholder groups: Eighty-six hospitality students representing Front Office, Food and Beverage, and Housekeeping divisions, Five English lecturers from vocational institutions and Eleven hotel practitioners, including managers and HR trainers. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to English for Hospitality contexts. Data were collected through questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire explored students' proficiency, learning needs, and communicative challenges. FGDs with lecturers investigated curriculum implementation and teaching strategies, while interviews with hotel practitioners identified real-world communicative demands and industry expectations. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using percentage and frequency distributions to capture students' language profiles and preferences. Qualitative research as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied (Aspers, 2019). Triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity and reliability of findings. Ethical procedures were observed through informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The study draws conceptually from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), and Design Thinking frameworks to interpret English competence as professional capital a synthesis of linguistic, intercultural, and emotional skills required in global hospitality communication.

The statistical tests and analytic procedures are included here. Data analysis in this study was conducted through an integrated mixed-methods framework to capture a comprehensive picture of English language needs in vocational hospitality education. The analysis was designed to identify students' linguistic gaps (lacks), learning preferences (wants), and workplace-oriented competencies (needs) by triangulating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from lecturers and industry practitioners.

### 2.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were obtained from a needs analysis questionnaire administered to 86 vocational hospitality students in Yogyakarta, representing Front Office, Food and Beverage, and Housekeeping divisions. The questionnaire explored students' self-perceived English proficiency, priority language skills, preferred learning media, confidence levels, desired learning models, and perceptions of industry involvement. The data were analyzed descriptively using percentage and frequency distributions to identify dominant patterns and tendencies across responses. Descriptive statistics were considered appropriate as the primary objective of the study was not hypothesis testing but mapping communicative readiness and learning needs in authentic hospitality contexts. Students' responses were subsequently categorized into three analytical dimensions:

Students' responses were subsequently categorized into three analytical dimensions, lacks, wants and needs. Lacks refer to existing communicative limitations such as low fluency, hesitation, and difficulty understanding SOPs and guest expressions. Wants reflect students' preferences for speaking listening integration, simulation-based learning, and authentic interaction. Needs indicate workplace-driven competencies such as handling complaints, understanding intercultural cues, and performing service communication in real hotel scenarios. This categorization enabled the identification of recurring mismatches between current English instruction and students perceived readiness for professional communication.

### 2.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were derived from focus group discussions (FGDs) with English lecturers and semi-structured interviews with hotel practitioners. These data were analyzed thematically following an iterative interpretive process. Initial coding focused on recurrent concepts related to communicative

competence, curriculum relevance, authenticity of learning, and industry expectations. Codes were then clustered into broader themes that reflected shared and divergent perspectives among stakeholders.

Lecturers' data were analyzed to examine pedagogical practices, curriculum adaptation strategies, and perceived student challenges, while industry interview data emphasized communicative performance, confidence, and professional identity in real workplace interactions. The qualitative findings were not treated as isolated narratives but were systematically compared with quantitative results to confirm, enrich, or problematize emerging patterns.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Here are the quantitative findings based on the need analysis of English for hospitality in vocational education in Yogyakarta Indonesia with 86 respondents:

#### 3.1. Quantitative Findings from Students' Needs Analysis

To address the first research question, quantitative data were analyzed to identify vocational hospitality students' English proficiency levels, communicative challenges, and learning priorities. Rather than reporting item-by-item questionnaire results, the findings are organized thematically to highlight dominant patterns relevant to ESP model development.

##### a) *Students' English proficiency and communicative lacks*

The findings indicate that the majority of students perceive their English proficiency as insufficient for authentic hotel communication. As shown in Table 1, more than 80% of respondents reported limited ability to communicate in English fluently during workplace-related interactions. Most students experience hesitation, restricted vocabulary use, and difficulty sustaining spontaneous conversations with international guests.

**Table 1.** Self-Perceived English Proficiency for Hospitality Work

Proficiency level	Percentage (%)
Limited ability, frequent difficulty	46.5
Basic communication with simple vocabulary	34.9
Fluent in most situations	15.1
Very limited proficiency	3.5

*Source:* Author's Data Analysed (2025)

English proficiency is performative rather than declarative, enacted through interaction rather than recalled as knowledge.

##### b) *Students' wants and the shift toward experiential ESP*

Students' strong preference for speaking listening integration and simulation-based learning signals a growing awareness of how English functions in hospitality workplaces. Their learning wants align with experiential and task-based ESP approaches, where language is acquired through action, problem-solving, and role enactment. Rather than demanding more linguistic content, students seek learning environments that mirror workplace realities. This finding resonates with situated learning theory, which positions knowledge as contextually embedded and socially constructed. In hospitality education, communicative competence develops when learners engage with service scenarios that require empathy, negotiation, and adaptive language use. The students' expressed preferences therefore represent not only motivational factors but also pedagogically sound directions for ESP curriculum reform.

##### c) *Workplace needs and English as professional capital*

From the industry perspective, English competence is framed as professional capital a visible marker of credibility, service quality, and institutional reputation. Employers' emphasis on confidence, responsiveness, and intercultural sensitivity suggests that hospitality English operates as a form of symbolic and emotional labour. Employees are expected to manage not only information exchange but also guest emotions, expectations, and cultural norms through language. This conception expands traditional ESP frameworks by positioning English as service communication rather than a technical skill. The ability to handle complaints, interpret indirect requests, and maintain composure in English under

pressure reflects professional maturity more than grammatical proficiency. Consequently, vocational English education must integrate pragmatic awareness, emotional intelligence, and intercultural competence as core learning outcomes.

d) *Triangular alignment and the need for partnership-based ESP*

The convergence of students' needs, lecturers' pedagogical concerns, and industry expectations underscores the necessity of a partnership-based ESP model. The triangular alignment observed in this study suggests that effective hospitality English instruction emerges through collaboration rather than unilateral curriculum design. Industry practitioners function not merely as external stakeholders but as co-educators who validate communicative competence in real-world settings. This finding supports Work-Integrated Language Learning (WILL) frameworks, which advocate embedding professional participation within language education. By involving practitioners in material development, simulation design, and performance-based assessment, vocational institutions can ensure curricular relevance and communicative authenticity. Such collaboration transforms ESP from a classroom-bound subject into a living professional practice.

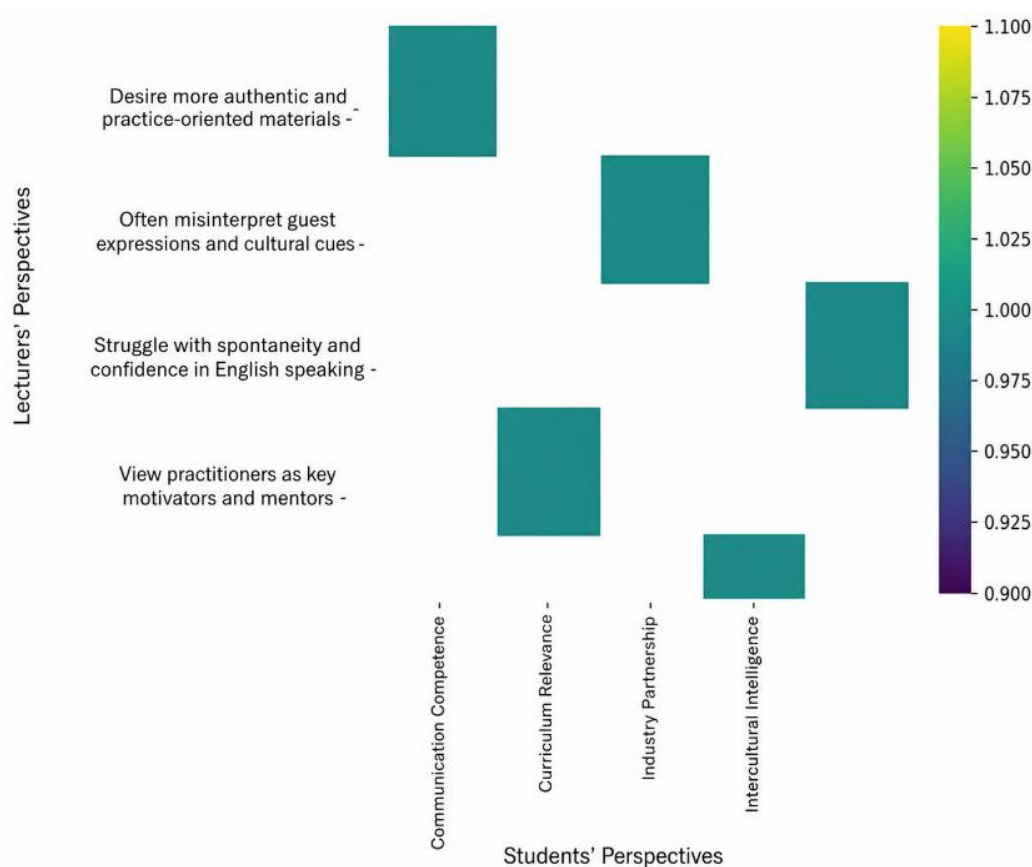


Fig. 1. Heatmap of students' perspectives on English competence in the hospitality sector

Source: Processed primary data from Collab Research (2025)

The heatmap demonstrates a clear convergence between lecturers' and students' perspectives (Figure 1. Figure 2), revealing shared priorities across communicative competence, curriculum relevance, industry partnership, and intercultural intelligence. The alignment between "Struggle with spontaneity and confidence in English speaking" and "Communicative Competence" supports the finding that learners possess limited fluency and functional ability, emphasizing the need to prioritize communicative adequacy over grammatical accuracy. The connection between "Desire more authentic and practice-oriented materials" and "Curriculum Relevance" confirms students' preference for contextualized, occupation-specific learning resources that integrate authentic hospitality discourse (Fei, 2025). Similarly, the strong link between "View practitioners as key motivators and mentors" and "Industry

Partnership” validates the partnership-based ESP model, highlighting the importance of practitioner involvement in bridging academic instruction and workplace communication (Chettiar, 2024). Meanwhile, the intersection of “Often misinterpret guest expressions and cultural cues” with “Intercultural Intelligence” points to a shared concern regarding sociocultural understanding and the need to integrate intercultural competence into English instruction (Fahmi, 2020). Overall, the visualization confirms that both stakeholders favor experiential, performance-oriented, and contextually grounded learning approaches where authentic practice, confidence building, and real industry engagement serve as key mechanisms for developing communicative effectiveness and professional readiness (Kitchen, 2025).

### 3.2. Qualitative Findings

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted with English lecturers from five vocational hospitality institutions in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, generated in-depth insights into current English teaching practices and their alignment with industry expectations. Analysis of the FGD data revealed three major themes: (1) communicative performance as a priority skill, (2) curriculum adaptation through contextualization and industry input, and (3) the strategic role of partnerships in maintaining curriculum relevance.

#### a) Theme 1: Communicative performance as a priority skill

All participants consistently emphasized that speaking competence is the most critical skill for vocational hospitality students entering the workforce. Lecturers agreed that graduates are evaluated primarily based on their ability to communicate effectively with guests rather than on grammatical accuracy.

One lecturer explained:

*“In the hospitality industry, students are assessed immediately by how they speak to guests. Grammar mistakes are acceptable, but hesitation and inability to respond fluently are not”* (Lecturer 2).

Similarly, another participant highlighted the dominance of oral communication in hotel operations:

*“Most complaints from industry partners are not about grammar, but about students not being confident or responsive when speaking English with guests”* (Lecturer 4).

These excerpts indicate that oral fluency, confidence, and situational vocabulary are perceived as core components of employability in the hospitality sector, reinforcing the view that communicative performance outweighs formal linguistic accuracy.

#### b) Theme 2: Curriculum adaptation through contextualization and industry input

The FGD findings reveal that English lecturers actively adapt the curriculum to reflect authentic hospitality contexts and evolving industry demands. Participants acknowledged that standard textbooks often fail to capture real workplace communication, necessitating contextual modifications.

As one lecturer stated:

*“We rarely use textbooks exactly as they are. We contextualize the materials based on real hotel situations, such as front office interactions or handling guest complaints”* (Lecturer 1).

Another participant emphasized the role of industry feedback in shaping curriculum content:

*“We revise our teaching materials after receiving input from hotel supervisors, especially regarding expressions commonly used in daily operations”* (Lecturer 3).

These statements demonstrate that curriculum adaptation is driven by both contextual relevance and industry engagement, ensuring that classroom instruction reflects actual communicative practices in hospitality workplaces.

#### c) Theme 3: The strategic role of partnerships for curriculum relevance and evaluation

Partnerships with hospitality industry stakeholders were identified as a strategic mechanism for maintaining curriculum relevance and evaluating learning outcomes. Lecturers viewed collaboration with hotels not only as a placement opportunity but also as a source of curriculum validation.

One participant noted:

*“Without collaboration with hotels, we would not know whether our curriculum still matches current industry practices”* (Lecturer 5).

Another lecturer further explained:

*“Industry partners help us evaluate whether students’ English skills meet workplace expectations, especially during internships”* (Lecturer 2).

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with English lecturers from five vocational hospitality institutions in Yogyakarta Indonesia provides a rich understanding of how English is taught, adapted, and aligned with industry needs. The lecturers collectively emphasized that speaking remains the most critical skill for vocational students entering the hospitality sector. All participants agreed that communicative competence especially oral fluency and situational vocabulary defines employability more than grammatical accuracy. Three major themes emerged from the FGD data: (1) communicative performance as a priority skill, (2) curriculum adaptation through contextualization and industry input, and (3) the strategic role of partnership for curriculum relevance and evaluation.

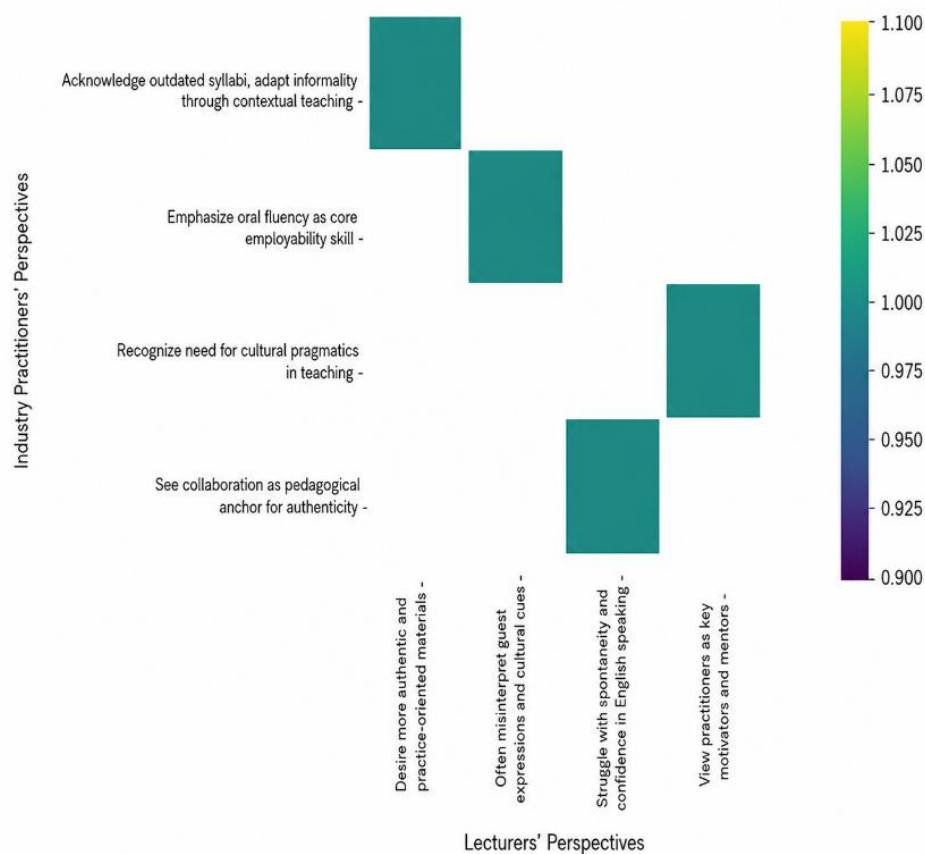


Fig 2. Heatmap of lecturers' perspectives on English competence in the hospitality sector

Communicative performance as a priority skill emerges as the most salient finding from the heatmap analysis, indicating a strong alignment among lecturers, students, and industry practitioners regarding the core demands of English learning in vocational hospitality education. This convergence confirms that employability in the hospitality sector is primarily determined by students' ability to perform effective, spontaneous, and context-sensitive oral communication rather than grammatical accuracy alone (Rexach, 2016). Lecturers consistently emphasized that students often struggle to sustain interaction beyond memorized dialogues, particularly when handling guest complaints or responding to unexpected service situations. One lecturer explicitly stated, “Seventy percent of hospitality English is speaking; students may know the expressions, but they cannot continue when the situation changes.” Another participant

similarly noted, “Most students hesitate when guests ask something outside the script; they are afraid of making mistakes.”

This concern was also echoed in practitioner interviews, where communicative performance was directly associated with professional conduct and service quality. As one hotel supervisor remarked, “Guests do not expect perfect grammar; they expect staff who can respond confidently and politely in English.” These excerpts collectively demonstrate that oral communication in hospitality functions as a performative act an enactment of empathy, attentiveness, and service values rather than a static linguistic skill acquired through rote learning. Consequently, language is positioned as a lived professional behavior that reflects hospitality identity and workplace readiness, not merely grammatical knowledge (Tummon, 2020). Furthermore, it demonstrates a significant intersection between curriculum adaptation and contextualized pedagogy. Lecturers recognized a persistent tension between institutional syllabi and the realities of the workplace. While official curricula prescribe generic topics such as introductions or business correspondence, teachers tend to prioritize practice-oriented materials directly relevant to hotel operations, including handling guest complaints, telephone etiquette, and guest interaction scripts. Informal needs analyses are frequently conducted each semester to identify students’ learning challenges and ensure instructional relevance. This reflective process leads to pedagogical creativity such as the use of role play, cue cards, video-based simulations, and authentic case studies that mirror real hotel scenarios (Qandil, 2021). Such practices serve as pedagogical bridges between classroom instruction and workplace demands, cultivating students’ ability to act, improvise, and communicate meaningfully rather than merely recite prepared expressions (Eachempati, 2020).

The strategic role of partnership for curriculum relevance and evaluation emerges as a central finding from the heatmap and interview data, underscoring the indispensable contribution of industry collaboration in sustaining the authenticity and effectiveness of ESP instruction in vocational hospitality education. Participants consistently emphasized that without systematic engagement with industry practitioners, English curricula risk becoming detached from the evolving communicative practices and service realities of the hospitality sector. This finding positions partnership not as a supplementary component, but as a pedagogical anchor that ensures curricular alignment with real workplace communication demands (Asiri, 2025; Metcalf, 2019). Lecturers highlighted that collaboration with hotel partners through guest lectures, site visits, and internship supervision provides critical feedback for curriculum validation. One lecturer stated, “*Industry feedback is the most honest evaluation of our curriculum; it shows whether students can actually communicate in real situations.*” Another participant similarly noted, “*We often revise materials after receiving comments from hotel supervisors during internships.*” These accounts indicate that industry input functions as a formative evaluation mechanism, enabling lecturers to recalibrate instructional focus and assessment criteria based on authentic performance rather than classroom simulations alone. Industry practitioners reinforced this perspective by emphasizing their role in shaping communicative standards for employability. As one hotel manager remarked, “*When we are involved in teaching or assessment, we can ensure that what students learn matches what they face at work.*” Such excerpts substantiate the finding that partnership facilitates not only curricular relevance but also evaluative legitimacy. By contributing authentic service expressions, workplace vocabulary, and scenario-based materials, industry actors operate as co-educators rather than passive stakeholders. This collaborative model strengthens the alignment between educational outcomes and professional expectations, situating partnership as a strategic mechanism for sustaining relevance, accountability, and communicative authenticity in ESP programs (Bagiyan, 2021; Korucu-Kış, 2021).

### 3.3. Discussion

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine the alignment between vocational students’ English competence, pedagogical practices, and industry expectations in the hospitality sector of Yogyakarta Indonesia. The research integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of students’ communicative needs, instructional practices, and workplace demands in the hospitality context.

This discussion draws on both quantitative and qualitative findings to address the two research questions of the study. While the quantitative data provide empirical evidence of students’ communicative challenges and learning priorities, the qualitative findings from lecturers and industry practitioners offer contextual explanations of how these challenges manifest in classroom instruction and workplace communication.

This section focuses exclusively on interpreting the findings of the study and explaining how they relate to existing literature. The discussion integrates quantitative and qualitative results to address the two research questions and to situate the findings within previous research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational hospitality education. Regarding the, the quantitative findings reveal that communicative challenges are both prevalent and substantial among vocational hospitality students. More than 80% of respondents reported limited ability to communicate fluently in English in workplace-related situations, particularly during spontaneous interactions with international guests. Common difficulties include hesitation, limited vocabulary, and low confidence in oral communication. These findings confirm earlier studies reporting that hospitality students often struggle with real-time oral communication despite having basic linguistic knowledge (Van, 2018; Chou, 2024). The qualitative findings strongly support this quantitative evidence. Lecturers reported that students rely heavily on memorized expressions and experience difficulty sustaining interaction when confronted with unpredictable service situations such as guest complaints or unexpected requests. Industry practitioners similarly emphasized that effective communication in hospitality depends more on responsiveness, confidence, and empathy than on grammatical accuracy. This convergence aligns with ESP research that conceptualizes communicative competence as performance-based and context-dependent rather than form-focused (Rexach, 2016; Tummon, 2020). Taken together, the findings clearly indicate that communicative performance is a priority skill for employability in hospitality contexts.

Students' learning preferences identified in the quantitative data further reinforce this interpretation. Most students expressed a strong preference for speaking–listening integration, simulation-based learning, and authentic practice. These preferences are consistent with previous studies advocating task-based and experiential ESP approaches, where language is learned through participation in realistic workplace scenarios (Walsh, 2015; Qandil, 2021). The alignment between students' preferences and lecturers' contextualized teaching practices suggests that experiential learning is both empirically justified and pedagogically appropriate in vocational hospitality education.

With respect to the second research question, the findings highlight the strategic role of partnership for curriculum relevance and evaluation. Quantitatively, students perceived industry practitioners as credible evaluators of English competence and as important contributors to their learning motivation. Qualitatively, lecturers and industry practitioners emphasized that feedback from hotels particularly during internships provides the most valid assessment of students' communicative ability in real professional contexts. This finding supports previous research on Work-Integrated Learning, which underscores the importance of industry involvement in validating learning outcomes and ensuring curricular relevance (Cremers, 2016; Wachiraporn, 2021)

Furthermore, the study shows that industry partnerships contribute directly to curriculum refinement. Lecturers reported revising learning materials and assessment criteria based on practitioner feedback to better reflect actual workplace communication demands. This finding is consistent with ESP literature advocating collaborative curriculum design and performance-based assessment to maintain authenticity and employability relevance (Bagiyan, 2021; Korucu-Kış, 2021). Rather than introducing new pedagogical concepts, the findings empirically demonstrate how partnership functions as a practical mechanism for aligning vocational English education with professional communication needs.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study examined English competence in vocational hospitality education by integrating the perspectives of students, lecturers, and industry practitioners. The findings demonstrate that English competence in this context extends beyond grammatical knowledge toward communicative performance that is responsive, contextualized, and professionally grounded. Both quantitative and qualitative results reveal that many students experience difficulty engaging in spontaneous English interaction, particularly in authentic workplace situations, highlighting communicative performance as a priority skill for employability in the hospitality sector. The study further shows that students' learning preferences, lecturers' pedagogical practices, and industry expectations are closely aligned in emphasizing experiential and practice-oriented English learning. Quantitative data indicate students' strong preference for speaking listening integration and authentic learning activities, while qualitative findings illustrate how lecturers adapt curricula through contextualized instruction and how practitioners evaluate competence based on real communicative performance. This convergence underscores the importance of aligning classroom instruction with workplace communication demands. In addition, the findings highlight the strategic role of industry partnership in enhancing curriculum relevance and evaluation.

Collaboration with hospitality practitioners provides vocational institutions with critical feedback that supports curriculum refinement and more valid assessment of communicative competence. Rather than presenting a new instructional model, this study offers empirically grounded insights that can inform pedagogical decision-making and curriculum development in vocational English education. Taken together, the study contributes to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by providing evidence-based implications for improving English instruction in vocational hospitality programs. By foregrounding communicative performance, contextualized pedagogy, and sustained industry collaboration, the findings offer a foundation for future research to further explore and systematically develop partnership-oriented approaches to ESP in diverse vocational and cultural contexts.

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This study examined English competence in vocational hospitality education by integrating the perspectives of students, lecturers, and industry practitioners. The findings demonstrate that English competence in this context extends beyond grammatical knowledge toward communicative.

### Declarations

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- Ethic Declaration** : The authors confirm that this research was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles and complied with the institutional regulations of the affiliated university. All necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant institutions prior to the data collection process. The authors fully support ELTEJ's commitment to maintaining high standards of academic integrity, professional conduct, and honesty in all academic and professional activities.
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