

The Key English Language Skills Needed by Eleventh Grade Hospitality Students at SMKN 1 Sukasada

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Abstract

Careers in the hospitality industry require strong English communication skills, particularly in speaking. This study aims to identify the English language skills needed by eleventh-grade hospitality students at SMKN 1 Sukasada. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, involving 13 purposively selected students. Data were collected through both closed- and open-ended questionnaires and analyzed descriptively. The findings revealed that speaking is perceived as the most essential skill in hospitality, yet students have limited exposure to English in their daily lives. Major challenges identified include limited vocabulary, difficulties with pronunciation, and low self-confidence. Therefore, the study recommends increasing English exposure outside the classroom, incorporating more speaking-focused activities, and providing targeted vocabulary and pronunciation practice. A supportive learning environment is also crucial for enhancing these skills. Despite its small sample size, this study provides valuable insights for the development of English curricula that address the specific communicative needs of vocational hospitality students.

Keywords: English Language, Hospitality, Language Needs, Speaking Skills, Vocational Students.

INTRODUCTION

In the global hospitality sector, careers in the hospitality industry demand not only technical service skills but also strong English communication abilities. As frontline professionals frequently interact with guests from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the ability to speak English fluently and appropriately has become a fundamental requirement for success in this field (Buditama, 2021; Ma'fiyah, 2023). In Indonesia, where tourism plays a significant role in national development, vocational high schools (SMKs) with hospitality programs are tasked with preparing students to meet these international communication demands. One such institution is SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada, which serves as a training ground for future hospitality professionals in Bali. Despite the integration of English into vocational curricula, challenges in equipping students with the necessary spoken English skills persist, limiting their readiness to operate in real-world hospitality environments (Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023; Setiyowati & Ningsih, 2025).

The central issue faced by students in this context is the gap between classroom instruction and workplace language needs. Many students are taught general English (EFL), which lacks the practical focus required for hospitality-specific interactions (Ahmed, 2023; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021). This study, involving 13 eleventh-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada, found that although students recognize the importance of spoken English in their future careers, their actual use and proficiency remain limited due to low exposure to English outside the classroom. As a result, they continue to struggle with

vocabulary limitations, pronunciation difficulties, and low confidence when speaking factors that directly impact their ability to engage with guests effectively. This mismatch between instructional content and communicative demands is a key concern that needs urgent attention.

The significance of this issue lies in its direct impact on students' employability and professional growth. If vocational graduates lack the spoken English skills required by the industry, their competitiveness in the job market diminishes (Ahmed, 2023). Therefore, there is a clear rationale for revisiting English teaching approaches in hospitality programs to better align with the real communicative contexts students will encounter (Rahmani & Laratmase, 2024; Riastini et al., 2025). A shift toward English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly with a focus on spoken interaction, vocabulary development, and pronunciation practice, is crucial for enhancing both learner competence and confidence (Putri et al., 2024).

Previous research has consistently identified speaking as the most challenging skill for vocational students, often citing low exposure, anxiety, and limited vocabulary as contributing factors (Ahmed, 2023; Fauzi, 2024; Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono, 2023; Mohammad et al., 2022; Ramli & Adnan, 2020). While these studies provide useful insights into general challenges, few have focused specifically on the needs and perspectives of hospitality students at the school level. There is a lack of localized, student-centered research that captures the lived experiences of learners within a particular educational context such as that of SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada regarding their English language needs for future hospitality roles.

To address this gap, the present study aims to identify the key English language skills needed by eleventh-grade hospitality students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. Using a qualitative descriptive design and collecting data through questionnaires, this research explores the students' perceptions of their strengths, challenges, and expectations in learning English. Particular attention is paid to spoken communication, including fluency, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation, as these areas were frequently highlighted by students as crucial yet underdeveloped.

The findings of this study provide important contributions for hospitality educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Recommendations include increasing English exposure through extracurricular activities, integrating more spoken interaction in classroom activities, and providing targeted support for vocabulary and pronunciation. Furthermore, fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment can play a pivotal role in enhancing students' confidence and communication abilities. While the study's small sample size may limit the generalizability of its conclusions, it offers a valuable starting point for further research and program development aimed at improving English language instruction in vocational hospitality education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring the specific English language needs of eleventh-grade students in the hospitality program at SMKN 1 Sukasada. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of students' learning experiences, challenges, and expectations regarding English usage in hospitality contexts, aligning with the nature of needs analysis in educational settings (Sugiyono, 2020).

The research was conducted at SMKN 1 Sukasada, a vocational school located in Bali, Indonesia, known for its hospitality program. The participants were 13 eleventh-grade hospitality students selected using purposive sampling. This technique was employed to ensure that the selected students were directly involved in English learning relevant to hospitality and were willing to provide honest responses. Ethical clearance was obtained from the school, and all participants provided informed consent.

The research instrument used was a questionnaire, designed with both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was carefully constructed to be accessible to students with varied levels of English proficiency and was distributed in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity. It focused on several components: students' use of English in daily life, perceived important skills in hospitality, encountered difficulties, and their expectations for English instruction. To ensure validity, the questionnaire items were adapted based on relevant literature and reviewed by language education experts prior to distribution.

The procedure of the study involved distributing the questionnaires during a scheduled class session, allowing approximately 30 minutes for completion. The researcher remained present to supervise and support participants if needed. The students completed the questionnaire independently and were encouraged to respond thoughtfully. The data collection took place in a single session, ensuring consistency and reducing external variables.

The data analysis technique involved both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in students' responses regarding English language skills. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring patterns and common themes related to students' difficulties and instructional expectations. This combined analysis approach allowed the researcher to interpret the findings holistically and provide nuanced insights into students' language learning needs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. Question 1

No	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	Do you frequently communicate using English in your daily life?	3 siswa	5 siswa	3 siswa	2 siswa	-

Table 2. Question 2

No	Question	Vocabulary	Grammar	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
2	Out of these six language skills, which do you consider most important in hospitality?	-	2 siswa	9 siswa	2 siswa	-	-

Table 3. Question 3

No	Question	Students Response
3	What difficulties do you face when learning English in hospitality classes?	<p>Student 1: Respond using English</p> <p>Student 2: Difficulty in understanding English when the teacher explains using English, I do understand what is explained but cannot respond to it. Student 3: Lack of vocabulary and pronunciation</p> <p>Student 4: Lack of vocabulary</p> <p>Student 5: I don't know how to pronounce the words</p> <p>Student 6: I don't know how to forming words</p> <p>Student 7: I don't feel confidence</p> <p>Student 8: Speaking</p> <p>Student 9: I don't know how to speak</p> <p>Student 10: Memorize the words</p> <p>Student 11: Lack of pronounciation</p> <p>Student 12: Understanding the language</p> <p>Student 13: I don't know how to speak</p>

Table 4. Question 4

No	Question	Students Response
4	What do you expect from English language learning programs in hospitality to help you achieve your career goals?	<p>Student 1: Allow us to speak with native speaker at school</p> <p>Student 2: I hope for more practice using English than mostly theory. It is easier to understand when practiced rather than just explained through theory.</p> <p>Student 3: A lot of speaking practice using English</p> <p>Student 4: A lot of speaking practice using English</p> <p>Student 5: A lot of speaking practice using English and teachers in English.</p> <p>Student 6: I can understand better</p> <p>Student 7: I can achieve my dream</p> <p>Student 8: To become fluent in English.</p> <p>Student 9: To become fluent in English.</p> <p>Student 10: Direct English practice</p> <p>Student 11: More theory than practice.</p> <p>Student 12: My hope in learning English for hospitality is to have more practice so that I can directly apply it or interact directly.</p> <p>Student 13: Graduate with the highest marks or honors.</p>

This questionnaire employed a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather data on the English language learning experiences and needs of hospitality students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. The data in this study were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 13 eleventh-grade hospitality students at SMKN 1 Sukasada. The results are organized into four tables based on each research question. The first table (Table 1) explored how often students use English in their

daily lives. Out of 13 students surveyed, only 3 reported frequent English communication. This suggests a limited exposure to English outside of the classroom setting also. This suggests that most students lack consistent opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, a factor that could hinder speaking fluency development. Table 2 asked students to identify the most important English skills for hospitality and focuses on the skills students consider most important for hospitality careers. Interestingly, vocabulary and grammar weren't chosen by a majority. Instead, Speaking was selected by 9 students, while grammar and listening were each selected by 2 students. No students chose reading, writing, or vocabulary, emphasizing the perceived importance of oral communication in hospitality-related contexts.

Table 3 focused on the challenges students encounter in learning English. The most common responses were difficulty with vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking. Several students also mentioned a lack of confidence, difficulty forming sentences, and limited comprehension. Here, vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties are prominent. Multiple students mentioned lacking vocabulary and not knowing how to pronounce words correctly (Students 3, 4, 5, 11). Additionally, several students reported feeling a lack of confidence (Students 7, 8, 9, 13) and difficulty understanding explanations in English (Students 2, 12). These findings highlight the multifaceted barriers students face, particularly in active communication skills. Table 4 addressed student expectations from their English language program. The overwhelming desire is for more speaking practice (Students 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12). Some students wished for interaction with native speakers (Student 1) while others expressed a preference for a practical approach over theory-heavy lessons (Students 2, 12). Interestingly, only one student (Student 11) desired more theory than practice. Overall, the responses reflect a strong emphasis on spoken communication and a need for increased practical application in the English language program for hospitality students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada.

This questionnaire is designed specifically for students enrolled in the Hospitality program at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. The focus on students stems from the need to understand their current English language proficiency and the challenges they encounter within the context of hospitality careers. By identifying their specific needs and learning preferences, the program can be tailored to better equip them with the necessary English language skills to thrive in the global hospitality industry.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the key English language needs of eleventh-grade hospitality students at SMKN 1 Sukasada. The findings align with existing research on language learning needs in vocational education and provide valuable insights for improving the English language program at the school.

The survey results (Table 1) revealed that most students (10 out of 13) have limited exposure to English outside of classroom settings. This aligns with research by Efrizah et al., (2024), Huang et al (2022), Setyowati et al (2025), Xiangyu (2023) who noted that vocational students often lack authentic language exposure, reducing their ability to apply classroom learning in real-world situations. Limited exposure also affects fluency and confidence critical traits for hospitality professionals who frequently interact with diverse guests. The finding that speaking is considered the most important skill (Table 2) reinforces previous

research emphasizing the centrality of oral communication in service industries (Annisa et al., 2023). While grammar and vocabulary are foundational, speaking enables dynamic interactions with guests, from greeting to complaint resolution.

The reported challenges faced by students (Table 3), these challenges included vocabulary limitations, pronunciation difficulties, and a lack of confidence. Several students highlighted vocabulary limitations (Students 3, 4) and pronunciation difficulties (Students 3, 5, 11) as obstacles to learning English. These findings align with Annisa et al (2023), Ma'fiyah & Sumardiono (2023) emphasis on vocabulary knowledge and accurate pronunciation as fundamental building blocks for effective communication. Students struggling with vocabulary may struggle to understand instructions, express themselves clearly, or engage in meaningful conversations within the hospitality domain. Pronunciation difficulties can create misunderstandings and hinder service delivery.

Another significant challenge identified was a lack of confidence (Students 7, 8, 9, 13). This aligns with Indrianty (2016) Rahmawati & Rizqiya (2023) who emphasize the role of self-confidence in overcoming language learning anxieties. Students lacking confidence may be hesitant to participate in class activities or real-world interactions, hindering their progress. These challenges suggest that the current program may not be adequately addressing students' fundamental language skills and confidence levels.

The student expectations (Table 4) for more speaking practice and practical application (Students 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12). It indicate a disconnect between their needs and existing instructional methods. This supports findings by (Rahayu et al., 2020) who found that many vocational teachers in Indonesia lack the ESP training needed to deliver communicative, context-specific lessons. Several students desired interaction with native speakers (Student 1) and a practical approach focused on real-world application (Students 2, 12). This highlights a need for the program to incorporate more interactive activities and real-world simulations to enhance communication skills and build confidence.

Taken together, the results highlight a consistent theme: the need for a more targeted and practice-oriented English language program. Students are aware of the specific skills they require particularly in speaking and recognize the barriers that hinder their progress, such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of confidence. Despite this awareness, they often lack sufficient instructional support to overcome these challenges. Addressing these issues requires a shift toward communicative and task-based learning approaches that emphasize real-world application through vocabulary enrichment, pronunciation drills, and interactive speaking activities (Handayani & Titania, 2025; Purwati et al., 2023).

These findings reinforce and extend existing research on English language learning in vocational education, particularly within the hospitality context. Consistent with prior studies from Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021), Prabowo & Saptiany (2024) this study confirms the central role of spoken communication in hospitality careers and the persistent difficulties learners face in mastering this skill. However, this research also underscores the importance of addressing the foundational challenges that inhibit students' ability to speak fluently. These include gaps in linguistic knowledge, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient practice opportunities.

Therefore, this study suggests a strategic enhancement to the current focus on spoken communication in hospitality English Language Programs (ELPs). While maintaining the

emphasis on speaking, a more holistic instructional model should be adopted one that integrates vocabulary development, pronunciation practice, and confidence-building exercises. By implementing such modifications and grounding them in learners' actual needs, the English language program at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada can foster a more effective and empowering environment, equipping students with the practical communication skills necessary to succeed in the global hospitality industry.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the key English language skills needed by eleventh-grade hospitality students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and a student-centered questionnaire, the research identified speaking as the most essential skill for hospitality careers. The findings clearly highlighted speaking as the most essential skill, significantly outweighing other language domains such as grammar, listening, and writing. This preference reflects the practical demands of hospitality careers, where effective spoken communication is critical for guest interaction, service delivery, and professional confidence.

Despite recognizing the importance of speaking, students revealed significant challenges in their English learning journey. These included limited exposure to English in daily life, insufficient vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and low self-confidence. Moreover, many students expressed frustration with theory-heavy instruction and voiced a strong preference for practical, interactive learning experiences. These findings point to a disconnect between the current English language curriculum and the real-world communicative needs of students preparing for hospitality careers.

The study also confirmed the broader literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes the importance of aligning language instruction with learners' professional contexts. While existing programs often focus on general English proficiency, the hospitality field requires more targeted skills particularly in spoken communication, cultural appropriateness, and service-related vocabulary. Thus, a more responsive and practice-oriented approach is needed, integrating communicative activities such as role-playing, simulations, pronunciation drills, and vocabulary exercises contextualized to hospitality settings.

This research contributes valuable insights for English language educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers working in vocational education. It provides empirical evidence that students are aware of their learning needs and career goals but are constrained by instructional practices that fail to address them adequately. By reformulating English language programs around the principles of ESP and task-based learning, educators can better prepare students to navigate the linguistic demands of the hospitality industry with competence and confidence.

However, this study is not without limitations. The small sample size limited to 13 students from a single school restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the exclusive reliance on questionnaires, without supporting data from interviews or classroom observations, limits the depth of the qualitative insights. Future research could expand the sample across multiple schools and incorporate mixed-methods approaches, including interviews with teachers and students, to build a more comprehensive understanding of language needs in vocational education.

In conclusion, the study underscores the urgent need to realign English language instruction with the practical realities of the hospitality field. Through targeted interventions and communicative pedagogy, vocational schools like SMKN 1 Sukasada can empower students to develop the critical language competencies required for successful careers in a globally interconnected industry.

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