INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
IJOSSH, Vol 2(2) 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25047/ijossh.v2i2.6677

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Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia



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Student's Perception of the Use of English in Internship Programs: Real-life Reflections

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Abstract

Internship programs are expected to give many benefits to the students with the real-work experience. For students from English department, this program will be a perfect time to practice and sharpen their English proficiency as well as their capabilities in interacting and communicating with other. This recent study is trying to elicit and elaborate the students' perspectives toward the use of English during their internship programs. A qualitative case study method was used in this research by interviewing two students who had finished doing internship program in international resorts. Moreover, their internship journal reports were used as secondary data to complete the interview. Then, the analysis of the data was done using thematic analysis. The analysis of the findings has revealed four themes regarding with their opinions on: (1) real-life English use, (2) communication challenges and strategies, (3) gaps between classroom instruction and workplace realities, and (4) suggestions in English instruction.

Keywords: *English, internship programs, student's perception, front office*

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization and the rapid growth of the hospitality industry, English has become the main language of communication across international service encounters. As a means of communication, English plays a crucial role in ensuring smooth interaction between hospitality staff and guests from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015). Front office staff, such as receptionists and concierge staff, are expected not only to perform technical and administrative duties but also to communicate

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effectively in English to meet the expectations of international guests and maintain the high service quality (Kijpoonphol & Linh, 2021)

Many academic institutions, especially vocational higher education, have responded to the significance of English in hospitality settings by incorporating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses into their curricula. These ESP courses are designed to equip students with the communicative skills needed in professional service contexts. However, despite these educational efforts, studies have shown that many hospitality students still struggle with real-time English usage during internships. The gap between classroom instruction and workplace demands often becomes apparent when the students are required to use English in real situations involving real guests with no script provided (Kijpoonphol & Linh, 2021; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021).

Internship programs, particularly those that place students in multinational companies, such as international resorts, serve as crucial bridges between academic preparation and professional workplace. They offer opportunities to the students to experience firsthand the front-liner roles, including the linguistic, cultural, and emotional challenges. Yet, many students have reported facing difficulties, such as lack of confidence in spontaneous conversations, limited vocabulary for handling guest complaints, and fear of making language mistakes in front of supervisors or guests (Rinda et al., 2022; Vo et al., 2022). These challenges have not only affected their ability to perform well but also revealed potential weaknesses in how English is taught and practiced within the classroom.

This recent study is driven by the need to better understand the perspectives of internship students regarding their use of English as a front office staff. The main problem addressed is the mismatch between the English language instruction received during the studies and the communicative demands the students experienced during internships in international resorts. While many researchers have written about the importance of English in tourism, there remains limited qualitative research that explores how students actually experience language use in real workplace contexts and how they reflect on their own preparation. Regarding this problem, this study aims to explore the real experiences of internship students in using English during their time as front officers. To be more specific, this article tries to: (1) understand how students apply their English skills in workplace communication during internship program, (2) identify the linguistic challenges they face in the internship program, (3) examine how well their English courses prepared them for the internship program, and also (4) collect their suggestions for improving English instruction in vocational settings.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the improvement of vocational English language instruction in higher education. By considering the

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students' views and analyzing both interview data and internship journal reports, the study offers practical insights for language teachers, curriculum designers, and internship coordinators. These insights may inform the development of more contextual as well as responsive, needs based, and communicative English courses that better prepare students for the realities of hospitality work. Furthermore, the findings can serve as a foundation for future research on workplace language use and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the tourism and hospitality sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. English in the Hospitality Industry

The hospitality industry is inherently international, serving guests from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Communication is central to this industry, as it directly influences customer satisfaction, service quality, and organizational success. Guests expect not only efficient service but also clear and courteous communication throughout their stay. In this context, English functions as the main means of communication in tourism and hospitality, enabling interaction across borders and allowing staff to serve a diverse business (Jenkins, 2015b; Kijpoonphol & Linh, 2021b; Vo et al., 2022b). Without sufficient English skills, hospitality staff may face many obstacles to provide seamless services, which could impact the overall guest experience and the reputation of the establishment.

The front office is often described as the "face" of the hotel. Staff members such as receptionists, concierge officers, and guest service agents are typically the first point of contact for arriving guests. Their responsibilities involve more than basic greetings; they extend to handling check-in and check-out processes, explaining hotel facilities, managing reservations, and resolving guest concerns. Each of these tasks requires not only communication competence of English vocabulary and pronunciation but also sociolinguistic competence, which includes the ability to use polite forms, adjust tone, and demonstrate cultural sensitivity (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023; Vo et al., 2022b). The ability to combine language with empathy and professionalism is what distinguishes excellent service from ordinary interactions.

Moreover, communication in hospitality settings is not always predictable. Unlike classroom role-plays or textbook scenarios, real-life service encounters are dynamic and often require improvised responses. For example, guests may arrive with unexpected requests, urgent complaints, or cultural preferences that challenge staff to think and react quickly. Tiansoodeenon et al. (2023) point out that frontline employees often face such unanticipated situations that demand both rapid decision-making and linguistic

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flexibility. A receptionist may need to explain complex hotel policies to a guest who speaks limited English, or a concierge may have to respond to a sudden complaint about room service. These situations test not only staff members' vocabulary knowledge but also their ability to paraphrase, clarify, and negotiate meaning in real time.

As a result, English language proficiency in the hospitality industry cannot be reduced to memorized scripts or rehearsed dialogues. While standard phrases are useful as starting points, genuine service encounters require staff to demonstrate real-time communicative competence. This involves active listening to identify guest needs, appropriate turn-taking during conversations, effective paraphrasing when misunderstandings occur, and careful management of emotional tone to maintain professionalism. Employees must therefore balance accuracy with fluency, adapting their language use to the situational demands of each interaction.

In addition to linguistic competence, intercultural awareness plays a significant role in communication within hospitality. Guests bring with them different cultural norms regarding politeness, gestures, and expectations of service. A phrase or tone that seems acceptable in one culture may be perceived as rude or dismissive in another. Thus, English communication in hospitality must be context-sensitive and culturally adaptable, ensuring that language use enhances the guest's overall experience rather than creating barriers. This cultural dimension highlights the complexity of English usage in the hospitality industry: it is not only about transmitting information, but also about building rapport, conveying empathy, and creating memorable guest experiences.

2.2. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Vocational Education

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of English language teaching that focuses on equipping learners with language skills tailored to specific professional or academic contexts. Unlike general English courses that emphasize broad language competence, ESP programs are designed with clearly defined needs in mind, often linked to particular fields such as business, medicine, engineering, and hospitality (Basturkmen, 2022; Feak & Chan, 2025). In vocational education, ESP plays a crucial role in preparing students to meet the linguistic demands of their future workplaces, where communication tasks are directly tied to professional duties.

In the context of hospitality, ESP courses typically include instruction in functional language patterns such as greeting guests, handling reservations, explaining facilities, managing complaints, and providing tourist information. These courses also emphasize hospitality-specific vocabularies and polite expressions which are considered essential for professional interactions with guests from different countries. Role-plays and simulations are frequently used as teaching strategies to allow students to practice

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workplace scenarios in a safe classroom environment (Feak & Chan, 2025; Widodo, 2016; Worawong et al., 2017). Such activities are intended to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application by exposing learners to service-oriented communication before they enter internships or employment.

However, many research have indicated that ESP instruction in vocational education does not always fully align with the realities of workplace communication. Tiansoodeenon et al. (2023) and Vo et al. (2022) found that many hospitality graduates still face difficulties in spontaneous conversations with international guests, despite having completed ESP courses. This misalignment is often attributed to the limited authenticity of classroom tasks, which may rely too heavily on scripted dialogues or textbook scenarios that do not reflect the fluidity of real service encounters. As a result, students may enter internships with the ability to recall phrases but without the confidence or flexibility to adapt them to unique, unpredictable situations.

Another challenge in ESP implementation is the insufficient integration of workplace technology and operational systems into language training. Many researchers(Putra & Mulyawan, 2024; Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023; Vo et al., 2022b), modern hospitality roles increasingly require students to navigate hotel management systems, write email correspondence, or respond to online guest reviews, which involve reading and writing in English. Yet, these forms of professional communication are often underrepresented in classroom instruction, which tends to prioritize spoken interactions. This creates a gap between the language skills students practice at school and the multimodal communication tasks they encounter in the workplace.

Despite these challenges, ESP remains a valuable approach for vocational institutions, as it provides a needs-based framework that directly connects language learning to learners' career goals. Basturkmen (2022) highlights that ESP is most effective when courses are developed in close collaboration with industry stakeholders, ensuring that the content reflects the actual communicative tasks required in the workplace. In the case of hospitality, this means designing curricula that simulate a real front office staff duty, incorporate authentic materials (such as reservation forms or hotel scripts), and expose students to intercultural communication challenges they will likely face during internships.

2.3. Challenges in English Communication during Internships

Internship programs are a crucial stage in vocational education, providing students with opportunities to apply their classroom knowledge in authentic workplace contexts. In the hospitality sector, internships immerse students in environments where they must use English on a daily basis to interact with international guests. While these experiences are

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invaluable for skill development, they also show significant linguistic and psychological challenges that students often encounter when transitioning from the classroom to the workplace (Putra & Mulyawan, 2024; Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023; Vo et al., 2022b).

One of the most common challenges is difficulty in understanding and producing spoken English in real-time interactions. Unlike controlled classroom environments, service encounters in international resorts expose students to a wide variety of guest accents, speech speeds, and communication styles. Rinda et al. (2022) found that many hospitality interns struggle to comprehend guests with unfamiliar accents, leading to miscommunication or the need to ask for repetition. Similarly, limited vocabulary, particularly specialized terms for hotel facilities, food and beverage items, or recreational activities, can hinder students from providing accurate information or instructions. These linguistic gaps often cause interns to rely on non-verbal communication or to avoid complex exchanges altogether.

Another recurring issue is performance anxiety. Hospitality internships often place students in high-pressure situations where they must respond to guest requests promptly and professionally. For many learners, this creates nervousness about making mistakes, being misunderstood, or appearing incompetent in front of both guests and supervisors. Islam et al., (2022) state that this anxiety can reduce fluency and lead to overly simplified speech, further limiting effective communication. Lestari et al. (2025) also highlight that lack of confidence is a major barrier for Indonesian hospitality students, who may know the correct expressions but hesitate to use them in real-life conversations.

Beyond language proficiency, students often face difficulties in applying appropriate sociolinguistic and intercultural strategies. Hospitality work requires more than grammatical accuracy, it demands sensitivity to politeness norms, tone of voice, and cultural expectations. Worawong et al. (2017) argue that cross-cultural competence is essential in tourism communication, yet many students enter internships without sufficient preparation in this area. As a result, they may unintentionally come across as impolite, overly direct, or culturally insensitive when dealing with international guests. Such misunderstandings can negatively affect service quality and guest satisfaction.

Students also report challenges in handling unexpected or conflict situations. Complaints, service failures, or guest dissatisfaction require interns to use English persuasively and empathetically to calm guests and resolve issues. However, these are precisely the kinds of interactions that are rarely practiced in classrooms, leaving students underprepared for the linguistic and emotional demands of real complaint management (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023). In such cases, interns may revert to formulaic apologies or

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rely on supervisors to take over, limiting their own growth in problem-solving communication.

To cope with these challenges, students often develop compensatory strategies, such as simplifying their speech, using gestures, or relying on translation applications. While these strategies can help maintain interaction flow, they also reflect the limitations of current ESP instruction in fully equipping learners with workplace-ready communication skills. As (Lestari et al., 2025) emphasize, preparing students for internships requires not only teaching vocabulary and grammar but also training them in real-time adaptability, active listening, and crisis communication skills.

2.4. Reflective Practice and Student Perspectives in Language Learning

In recent years, reflective practice has been increasingly emphasized in education, particularly in professional and vocational fields such as hospitality. Reflection refers to the process of looking back on one's experiences, analyzing them critically, and drawing insights that inform future behavior (Moon, 2013). Within the context of language learning, reflective practice allows students to evaluate their communicative performance, recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and identify strategies to overcome challenges. This self-awareness is especially important for hospitality interns, whose language use occurs in unpredictable and high-pressure situations.

Reflective activities, such as journals, self-reports, and guided interviews, provide students with opportunities to articulate their experiences beyond what can be observed in real time. By documenting their interactions with guests, students can identify recurring difficulties (e.g., accents, vocabulary gaps, or confidence issues) and track their progress over the course of the internship. For example, an intern may realize that while they struggled initially with telephone communication, repeated exposure gradually improved their listening skills and clarity of speech. Such reflections help students develop a growth mindset, recognizing mistakes not as failures but as learning opportunities (Farrell, 2022; Moon, 2013; Thu, 2020).

Moreover, reflective practice contributes to metacognitive development in language learning. According to (Thu, 2020), learners who actively reflect on their emotional responses, such as nervousness, embarrassment, or confidence, are better equipped to regulate these emotions in future interactions. In hospitality contexts, where communication often involves stressful encounters like complaint handling or managing demanding guests, this kind of emotional regulation is just as critical as linguistic proficiency. Reflection thus serves as a bridge between cognitive (linguistic) and affective (emotional) domains, helping students improve both competence and confidence.

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From an instructional perspective, encouraging students to reflect on their language use also provides valuable feedback for educators. Student narratives can reveal the gaps between classroom instruction and workplace reality, offering insights that might otherwise remain invisible. For instance, if multiple students report difficulties in handling guest complaints, this signals a need for more role-plays or simulations in that area of ESP instruction. As a result, reflective practice benefits not only learners but also curriculum designers, who can adapt teaching content to better meet workplace demands (Thu, 2020).

Furthermore, reflection helps to highlight the individual differences in how students perceive and experience language use. While some may feel highly confident due to prior exposure, others may feel anxious and overwhelmed despite having similar training. By giving voice to these personal perspectives, reflective practice captures the diversity of learner experiences, making it a powerful tool for qualitative research. In case studies such as this, reflections gathered through journals and interviews provide rich, authentic data that reveal how students negotiate the complex realities of using English in professional contexts.

2.5. Research Gap

Although the importance of English in the hospitality sector is well-documented, relatively few studies have examined the first-hand experiences and reflections of internship students who use English in real hospitality work environments. Many of the existing literature focuses either on curriculum design or employer expectations, with less attention paid to students' own voices. Moreover, most research tends to rely on surveys or assessments rather than in-depth qualitative methods such as interviews and journal analysis. As such, there is a need for studies that explore the lived experiences, coping strategies, and personal evaluations of vocational students using English in international hospitality settings.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how internship students perceive and experience English usage as front officers. By combining data from interviews and journal reports, it provides a more nuanced understanding of the challenges which students face and the extent to which their education has prepared them for English communication in the workplace.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach in exploring the real experiences and perspectives of internship students in using English as front-liner staff in international

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resort settings. A case study design is appropriate for investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Hancock et al., 2021). This method enables the researcher to gain a rich, holistic understanding of the participants' use of English, the challenges they faced, and how they reflected on their preparation during the internship.

Two internship students from a vocational higher education institution in Indonesia were chosen as the samples. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they met the specific criteria of being vocational students with direct experience in using English in high-pressure, service-oriented environments. Their positions required regular communication with international guests, making them suitable informants for the focus of the study. By focusing on two specific individuals, this research presents a bounded case involving vocational students majoring in tourism and hospitality who completed internships in different departments of international resorts. Both participants had recently completed six-month internships in international resort settings where English was routinely used in guest-facing roles. One intern served in the Recreation Department of Montigo Resort Nongsa Batam, while the other worked as a Front Office operator at Golden Tulip Holland Resort Batu.

There were two sources of data utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case, namely interview and journal reports. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia (as preferred by the participants), recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis. The interviews included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives about the types of English language tasks performed when they had internship, the challenges encountered during guest interactions, and strategies used for overcoming language barriers. The interview also asked their view regarding the reflections on classroom preparation and suggestions for curriculum improvement. Participants also provided their internship journal reports, which had been written during and after their internship period. These reports offered additional insight into their day-to-day communication, emotional responses, and self-assessment of English use in workplace contexts. Throughout the process, ethical considerations were upheld. Participants gave informed consent, were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation and were assured of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings to protect their identity.

Then, the data from interviews and journals were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase model proposed by Braun & Clarke (2023). The steps involved:

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1. Familiarization: Thoroughly reading the transcripts of interview and journal reports to develop a general understanding of the data.
2. Generating initial codes: Coding notable features of the data systematically across the entire dataset.
3. Searching for themes: Organizing codes into potential themes that reflected patterns in the participants' experiences.
4. Reviewing themes: Checking whether the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the overall data.
5. Defining and naming themes: Refining the specifics of each theme and generating clear definitions.
6. Producing the report: Integrating data excerpts with interpretation and linking findings to the research objectives and literature.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was achieved by comparing and contrasting the interview responses with journal reports.

4. Findings and discussion

The analysis of interview responses and journal excerpts revealed several themes related to students' experiences using English during their internship programs in international resorts. These themes include: (1) real-life English use in front-liners tasks, (2) communication challenges and strategies, (3) gaps between classroom instruction and workplace realities, and (4) suggested improvements in English instruction.

4.1. Real-life English Use in Front-liner Roles

The data from both participants show that English was an essential tool for carrying out their responsibilities as front-liner staff during their internship. Despite differences in departments, recreation and front office, both roles required regular, and in one case, exclusive use of English to interact with guests. These experiences underscore the importance of English not merely as a skill, but as an operational requirement in international hospitality contexts.

In the case of the intern from Montigo Resort Nongsa Batam, English was the mandatory medium of communication throughout the workday. The resort applied a strict language policy where even internal communication among staff was conducted in English, except when dealing with local guests. This immersive language environment placed the intern in a linguistically demanding context that required consistent use of English across various functions.

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> "We were not allowed to use any other language other than English, even with the staff."

The intern's duties, guiding guest activities, giving directions, performing for children, promoting tour packages, and public speaking, reflect the wide spectrum of spoken communicative events in frontline hospitality work. These tasks required not only accurate English but also situational fluency, audience awareness, and appropriate tone. For example, performing in front of children or managing a city tour involved elements of informal speech, storytelling, and cultural references, all of which demand flexibility in language use and intercultural competence (Rinda et al., 2022b; Worawong et al., 2017).

Similarly, the intern from Golden Tulip Holland Resort Batu, though primarily communicating over the phone, frequently used English to explain services, assist guests, and resolve basic problems. This student highlighted the importance of clear pronunciation and customer-friendly communication patterns while answering calls, illustrating the importance of service tone and telephone etiquette in English, which are sometimes overlooked in classroom settings.

> *"Saya menggunakan bahasa Inggris biasanya ketika menjelaskan fasilitas kepada turis luar."* ("I usually used English to explain the facilities to international guests")

As an information stated by the students, the front-liner role in both resorts thus required a complex mix of interpersonal, functional, and transactional English. These included:

- Welcoming and addressing guests formally;
- Giving directions clearly and politely;
- Providing activity-related explanations or safety instructions;
- Handling guest concerns in real-time; and
- Promoting services in a persuasive yet respectful manner.

In this regard, the findings affirm Jenkins' view (2015)of English as a "lingua franca of mobility", a fluid, flexible tool used across cultures for practical goals. The findings also support (Basturkmen, 2025). He argued that ESP in hospitality should prepare students for language use that is embedded in tasks, not isolated from them.

Another crucial insight is the multi-skill nature of English use in these roles. Both interns indicated that speaking and listening were used most frequently. However, one

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also noted the use of reading and writing in handling online guest requests, reading schedules, or following SOPs in English. This suggests that vocational learners must be trained in integrated language skills, where all four macro-skills are contextually tied to real tasks (Ismail et al., 2021; Putra & Mulyawan, 2024).

Moreover, the data illustrate that these communicative demands often go beyond scripted service phrases. Real-time interaction with guests, especially in activities like guiding, giving impromptu directions, or handling ad hoc requests, required adaptability and autonomy in language use, something that cannot be fully taught through textbooks or static role-play. This aligns with the call for authentic, task-based language learning in hospitality ESP, where students are trained to make spontaneous, contextually appropriate linguistic decisions (Putra & Mulyawan, 2024).

In summary, the real-life use of English among the two interns highlights the multifunctional role of language in hospitality: as a medium for delivering service, building rapport, managing guest expectations, and resolving issues. These findings emphasize the need for ESP instruction that prepares students for fluid, guest-centered communication, blending linguistic accuracy with situational responsiveness.

4.2.Communication Challenges and Coping Strategies

While both interns used English regularly during their internships, they also reported encountering various linguistic and communicative challenges, reflecting a gap between classroom learning and real-life language use in the hospitality setting. These challenges involved not only linguistic limitations, such as unfamiliar vocabulary and accents, but also affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, and the pressure to perform professionally in front of guests.

The intern at Montigo Resort Nongsa admitted to a lack of confidence when speaking English, especially due to limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding guest accents. These issues occasionally led to misunderstandings or incomplete instructions during guest activities. The student described a situation in which they struggled to remember the English terms for archery equipment and resorted to using body language instead of verbal explanations.

> "Sometimes I forget how to pronounce the names of the tools and their functions so I immediately showed it with body language."

This strategy reflects a compensatory communication behavior, which is common among second-language speakers in high-stakes environments. Rahmat et al. (2023) noted that hospitality interns often rely on non-verbal cues such as gestures, demonstrations, or facial expressions to overcome breakdowns in communication. These

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coping strategies are effective in maintaining interaction flow but highlight the need for stronger lexical training and real-world vocabulary exposure in ESP courses.

In contrast, the intern at Golden Tulip Holland Resort Batu expressed high confidence in using English, attributing it to frequent practice and exposure to everyday English conversations. However, this intern also encountered a language barrier when assisting Chinese guests who did not speak English. In such cases, the guest would use Google Translate, and the intern adapted by reciprocating with the same tool. This scenario presents a unique challenge: it shifts the communicative burden not only to the speaker but also to digital mediation tools.

> "*Biasanya mereka menggunakan Google Translate… dan saya juga menggunakan Google Translate untuk membalas*." ("I usually used Google Translate … and I also used it to reply the messages")

This reliance on translation technology reflects the realities of multilingual tourism environments, where frontline staff must quickly adapt to guests' varying language backgrounds. According to Shieh (2019), such tools can be helpful but may also oversimplify complex service interactions and cannot fully replace human empathy, nuance, and hospitality language tone. Moreover, they can create delays and misinterpretations, especially if cultural expressions are mistranslated.

In both cases, the interns employed a variety of practical strategies to address linguistic limitations, including:

- Simplifying sentence structures;
- Using key English phrases confidently;
- Relying on non-verbal communication (gestures, visuals); and
- Utilizing translation apps when necessary.

These adaptive responses demonstrate a degree of linguistic resilience and problem-solving ability that is not always emphasized in classroom environments. They also reinforce (Seyitoglu & Yuzbasioglu, 2015) argument that effective hospitality communication training should go beyond grammar and vocabulary, incorporating realistic communication breakdown scenarios and emergency response language drills.

Another important insight from the data is the emotional component of using English under pressure. The Montigo intern shared an incident in which they had to lead a team-building activity in English, an experience that triggered physical symptoms of nervousness:

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> "My body felt hot and cold with a trembling voice, but I was able to handle the team building activity well."

This highlights the psychological challenge faced by students during performance-based tasks in a foreign language. As supported by Islam et al. (2022), emotional readiness and self-efficacy are crucial for language performance in professional settings, especially in front of an audience. Therefore, ESP programs should not only focus on language input, but also on building confidence, self-regulation, and stress management techniques for live service interactions.

In summary, while both interns encountered language barriers during their internships, their ability to adapt and cope with these challenges shows the importance of equipping students with both linguistic and strategic competencies. Their reflections underscore the need for ESP courses that prioritize practical, problem-solving communication tasks, real-time simulations, and training that builds both verbal fluency and emotional resilience.

4.3. Gaps Between English Instruction and Workplace Needs

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the interview data was the disconnect between academic English instruction and the actual linguistic and operational demands faced by the interns during their placement in international resorts. While both participants acknowledged the value of their classroom learning, they simultaneously expressed that their formal education did not fully prepare them for the dynamic and sometimes unpredictable realities of workplace communication.

The intern from Montigo Resort, for example, noted that the English instruction received on campus was too general and did not reflect the high expectations or nuanced communication required in a five-star resort environment.

> "Preparation is still inadequate… the material from the campus is still very general. It needs adjustment with real situations."

This reflection suggests a lack of situational alignment between classroom content and workplace scenarios. In hospitality contexts, employees are expected to not only provide information in English but also interpret guest needs, resolve complaints diplomatically, and maintain a welcoming tone under pressure. Traditional ESP instruction often emphasizes textbook expressions, formal grammar, and controlled practice, which may not provide sufficient exposure to the fluid, task-based language use required in authentic service encounters (Basturkmen, 2025; Ismail et al., 2021).

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
IJOSSH, Vol 2(2) 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25047/ijossh.v2i2.6677

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Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia

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The second participant, placed in the front office department at Golden Tulip Holland Resort Batu, shared a slightly more positive view, highlighting that some modules, especially English for Hotel and Restaurant, were indeed helpful in preparing for specific tasks like welcoming guests or receiving phone calls. However, the intern pointed out a significant instructional gap related to hotel systems and digital tools, which had not been covered during their coursework:

> "*Saya sendiri belajar sistem hotel secara mandiri saat magang… saya berharap angkatan selanjutnya dapat dipersiapkan terlebih dahulu*." ("I did study about the system on my own when I was in an internship program… I do hope the next generation students will be trained earlier".)

This comment reflects a broader issue in vocational English instruction, where the integration of technology, system-specific terminology, and procedural training is often overlooked. In modern hospitality environments, front-liners are expected to navigate reservation software, internal communication platforms, online review systems, and email correspondence, all of which involve reading and writing in English. As Putra and Mulyawan (2024) argue, effective internship preparation should include exposure to the operational and digital literacy aspects of hospitality work, not just spoken interaction.

Another crucial gap mentioned by both interns relates to soft skills and interactional strategies. While they may have learned fixed expressions or polite phrases, they felt underprepared for situational improvisation, such as explaining procedures to frustrated guests, calming temperamental clients, or managing simultaneous service tasks while maintaining professionalism in English.

> "The briefing material is still far from expectations when at a star resort… soft skills and problem solving need to be improved."

These findings resonate with Ismail et al., (2021; Seyitoglu & Yuzbasioglu, 2015), who emphasize that workplace communication is shaped not just by linguistic ability, but by emotional intelligence, intercultural awareness, and contextual appropriateness. These components are often underdeveloped in conventional classroom settings but are critical for front-liner roles in international resorts.

In addition, both participants highlighted the speed and intensity of real-world hospitality work. They reported that guest interactions often required rapid responses and the ability to think on their feet, something that static, scripted classroom practice did not fully simulate. This confirms the need for performance-based pedagogy in ESP: real-time simulations, crisis scenario role-plays, and multi-tasking drills that mirror the actual pace of hospitality jobs(Basturkmen, 2025; Putra & Mulyawan, 2024)

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In summary, the findings from this subchapter demonstrate a clear and consistent gap between English instruction in vocational classrooms and the real-life communicative and operational demands encountered during internships. While foundational skills were in place, both interns had to learn, adapt, and improvise on the job, especially when it came to using hotel systems, managing unpredictable guest needs, and responding under pressure. These insights call for curriculum reform that includes system-based English, integrated soft skills, and practical immersion through work-based simulations.

4.4.Reflections and Suggestions for Improvement

In reflecting on their internship experience, both participants recognized that the opportunity to use English in real-world hospitality settings significantly contributed to their language development, confidence, and workplace awareness. Their reflections not only highlighted the progress they made, but also offered constructive suggestions for improving the English instruction provided at their institution, particularly in preparation for future internships.

The intern from Montigo Resort Nongsa described how the immersive English environment of the resort, where communication in English was mandatory, had a strong impact on his linguistic performance. Although he initially struggled with vocabulary and guest accents, the constant exposure pushed him to adapt quickly, make use of strategies such as paraphrasing and body language, and become more aware of real-time service expectations. He noted a particular improvement in vocabulary mastery and general language awareness.

> "It is very influential that mastery of English is really needed because there is no gap that requires us not to use English."

Meanwhile, the intern from Golden Tulip Holland Resort Batu emphasized how the internship experience gave her direct contact with native and international guests, which contributed positively to her pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. She highlighted that frequent communication in English helped bridge the transition from classroom practice to professional fluency.

> "*Saya dapat meningkatkan vocabulary dan pelafalan saya dalam berbahasa Inggris*." ("I can improve my English vocabulary and pronunciation mastery.")

These reflections align with Farrell (2022) and Moon (2013) emphasis on the value of experiential and reflective learning in language education. When students are

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
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given authentic, high-stakes communication tasks, they are more likely to internalize language use, develop autonomy, and reflect critically on their performance.

In terms of suggestions, both students strongly advocated for curriculum improvements that would better align English education with real-world hospitality demands. First, they recommended an increase in practical training, including public speaking practice, handling complaints, and guest problem-solving simulations. These are essential components of front-liner communication that cannot be fully mastered through textbook learning alone.

> "Soft skills and hard skills are further enhanced… focus on public speaking, listening, and problem-solving courses."

They also identified a need for system-specific training, such as using hotel management systems, internal communication tools, and responding to digital guest interactions. These are often absent from ESP syllabi but constitute a major part of real front-liner responsibilities (Ismail et al., 2021; Putra & Mulyawan, 2024).

> "*Saya berharap angkatan selanjutnya dapat dipersiapkan terlebih dahulu sehingga tidak terlalu terkejut ketika memegang sistem hotel nantinya*." (I hope the next generation students will be trained earlier, so that they will not be surprised when facing hotel's system.")

Another key recommendation from both participants was to incorporate role-plays, simulations, and mock service encounters as part of classroom practice. They believed that engaging in structured yet realistic scenarios would better prepare them for authentic workplace communication.

> "*Sangat membantu karena saya dapat secara langsung berperan sebagai front office."* ("It helped me significantly, because I could be a real front office staff during internship")

This recommendation echoes Basturkmen (2025), Lestari et al. (2025), and Widodo (2016), who argue for task-based, performance-oriented instruction in ESP for tourism and hospitality. Through such training, students can become familiar with the language, flow, and complexity of actual service interactions before entering the workplace.

In conclusion, the students' reflections provide valuable insights into the role of the internship as both a learning experience and a diagnostic tool for assessing the effectiveness of vocational English education. Their suggestions indicate a clear demand for practice-driven, context-sensitive, and system-integrated instruction that mirrors the

IJOSSH, Vol 2(2) 2025
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complexity of communication in hospitality settings. If implemented, these improvements could significantly enhance students' preparedness and confidence in future internships and employment.

5. Conclusion

This study explored internship students' perceptions of English usage during their placements as front office staff in international resorts. By analyzing interview data and internship journal reports, the research revealed that English functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a professional necessity for ensuring guest satisfaction and effective service delivery. The findings highlighted four major themes. First, English was indispensable for carrying out daily responsibilities, ranging from welcoming guests to managing inquiries and promoting services. Second, students encountered multiple communication challenges, such as accent comprehension, limited vocabulary, and performance anxiety, which often hindered their fluency and confidence. Third, there existed a clear gap between classroom instruction and workplace demands, with students emphasizing that ESP courses tended to be too general and insufficiently aligned with authentic hospitality contexts. Finally, students suggested several improvements for vocational English education, including more practical role-plays, exposure to real service scenarios, integration of hotel management systems, and enhanced training in soft skills such as public speaking and problem-solving.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of designing context-driven ESP curricula that better reflect the realities of hospitality work. By incorporating authentic materials, task-based learning, and reflective practice, educational institutions can bridge the gap between academic preparation and workplace communication. These improvements will not only increase students' readiness for internships but also enhance their long-term employability in international hospitality sectors. Future research may expand this inquiry by involving a larger pool of participants across different hospitality departments, or by including perspectives from supervisors and guests, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of English communication in global service encounters.

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IJOSSH, Vol 2(2) 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25047/ijossh.v2i2.6677

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