



Mapping the English Language Needs of Indonesian Hotel Staff: A Systematic Literature Review

Indra Bagus Satrio¹, Hustarna², Yanto³

^{1,2,3}Master program of English Education, Universitas Jambi, Jambi

Corresponding E-Mail: indrabagust@gmail.com

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Abstract

Indonesia's hospitality industry has grown over the past decade, increasing demand for English proficiency among hotel staff serving international guests. This systematic literature review synthesizes 7 empirical studies conducted across multiple Indonesian regions (Padang, Sikka, Bandung, Kebumen, and Bali) to examine English language needs of hotel employees from 2018 to early 2025. Using Cooper's seven-stage review framework, studies were selected for relevance to front-office roles, empirical rigor, and alignment with Indonesian hospitality contexts. Results indicate front-line staff prioritize speaking and listening for managing check-in and check-out, explaining services, and resolving complaints, while writing supports email correspondence, reservation forms, and guest documentation. Challenges include limited industry-specific vocabulary, difficulty understanding diverse accents, grammatical inaccuracies in complex exchanges, and low confidence. To mitigate these, employees use reactive strategies like translation apps, code-switching to Indonesian, speech simplification, and contextual inference. Proactive measures include scenario-based role-play exercises, digital ESP modules designed for hospitality contexts, and targeted vocabulary workshops. By systematically consolidating previously fragmented research, this review identifies consistent patterns across geographic contexts and workplace settings, revealing a significant gap between general English instruction and the specialized communicative demands of hotel work. Findings advocate for ESP curricula that integrate authentic hotel materials, simulated guest interactions, and focused vocabulary development. These insights inform educators, ESP curriculum developers, hotel managers, and human resource professionals aiming to enhance service quality and guest satisfaction in Indonesia's tourism sector.

Keywords: English for specific purposes (ESP); hospitality industry; needs analysis; hotel staff; Indonesian tourism

Introduction

The hospitality industry in Indonesia has experienced remarkable growth over the past decade, with the hotel sector playing a pivotal role in supporting the country's tourism economy. Indonesia welcomed approximately 13.9 million international visitors in 2024 (Xinhua, 2025), representing a significant recovery and growth in the tourism sector. As Indonesia continues to attract international visitors, hotels across the archipelago increasingly serve guests from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making English proficiency a critical competency for hotel staff. In this multilingual service environment, English functions as the primary lingua franca, enabling effective communication between Indonesian hotel employees and international guests (Putri et al., 2018). The ability to communicate effectively in English has become particularly crucial for front office staff, including receptionists, who serve as the primary point of contact for guests and are responsible for creating positive first impressions of Indonesian hospitality services.

Despite the recognized importance of English in hotel operations, Indonesian hotel employees face significant challenges in meeting the communicative demands of their professional roles. Research has consistently identified substantial gaps between the English proficiency levels of hotel staff and the linguistic requirements of their positions. Al-Jufri et al. (2024) found that hotel receptionists in Sikka frequently rely on translation tools when interacting with foreign guests, indicating inadequate preparation for real-time communication situations.

Similarly, Firharmawan and Andika (2019) documented serious problems among hotel employees at Meotel Hotel Kebumen, including limited vocabulary, insufficient grammar knowledge, and reduced confidence when speaking English with guests. Yamin (2021) identified that hotel employees in Bandung experience significant anxiety and reduced confidence when communicating in English, particularly during unexpected or challenging guest interactions such as complaint handling and emergency situations. These communication difficulties directly impact service quality and can diminish the overall guest experience, potentially affecting hotel reputation and competitiveness in the international tourism market.

The root of these challenges lies in a fundamental mismatch between English language education and workplace demands. Kusuma et al. (2023) revealed that general English instruction provided in educational institutions does not align with the specific language requirements demanded by various hotel positions, including food and beverage service, housekeeping operations, and front office management. This educational gap suggests that current English teaching approaches fail to adequately prepare future hospitality professionals for the communicative realities of hotel work environments, where specialized vocabulary, service-oriented communication functions, and real-time problem-solving in English are essential. Current research on English language needs in Indonesian hotels remains

fragmented and geographically limited, creating significant deficiencies in our understanding of this critical professional communication context. While studies such as those conducted by Putri et al. (2018), Ratmanida et al. (2020), and others have provided valuable insights into specific aspects of hospitality English needs, these investigations have typically focused on individual hotels or limited geographic regions. The lack of comprehensive, systematic analysis across multiple contexts prevents the development of a unified understanding of English language requirements in Indonesian hotels.

Moreover, existing studies have not been systematically synthesized to identify common patterns, persistent challenges, or effective solutions that could inform broader educational and training initiatives. This fragmentation limits the ability of English educators, curriculum developers, and hotel managers to develop evidence-based approaches to addressing English communication needs in the hospitality sector. Without a consolidated understanding of what English skills are most needed, which workplace tasks require English proficiency, what challenges staff encounter, and what strategies prove effective, stakeholders lack the foundation necessary to design targeted interventions.

This systematic literature review addresses these evidence deficiencies by providing a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on English language needs in Indonesian hotels, with particular relevance for multiple stakeholder groups. For English language educators and ESP practitioners, this review offers insights into the specific communicative competencies required in hotel contexts, enabling the development of more targeted and effective curriculum designs. Hotel managers and human resource professionals can utilize these findings to better understand the English language requirements for different positions and develop more informed recruitment and training strategies.

Educational institutions offering hospitality programs can align their English instruction with industry needs, while curriculum developers can create materials that bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace application. Additionally, this research contributes to the broader field of English for Specific Purposes by providing contextual understanding of English use in the Indonesian hospitality industry, supporting the continued growth and professionalization of Indonesia's tourism sector. The systematic synthesis of existing evidence will ultimately inform more effective approaches to English language development among Indonesian hotel employees, contributing to enhanced service quality and the country's competitiveness in international tourism markets.

To achieve these objectives, this review addresses the following research questions:

1. What English language skills are most needed by hotel staff in Indonesia?
2. What workplace communication tasks require the use of English in Indonesian hotels?
3. What challenges do Indonesian hotel staff face in using English?

4. What strategies do hotel employees employ to overcome English language difficulties in the workplace?

Method

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by Cooper's (2010) seven -stage review process: problem formulation, literature collection, evaluation of studies, analysis and interpretation, presentation of results, drawing conclusions and suggesting future research. The review aimed to synthesize existing empirical studies on English language needs within Indonesia's hospitality industry.

Review process

To collect relevant literature, academic databases including Google Scholar, SAGE Publications, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and ScienceDirect were systematically searched. The search was conducted in March 2025 and covered publications from 2018 to early 2025. This seven-year timeframe was selected to capture recent developments in Indonesia's hospitality sector following the peak growth period of tourism infrastructure and to ensure relevance to current English language training practices and industry demands. The following Boolean search strings were used across all databases: ("ESP" OR "English needs" OR "needs analysis") AND ("hospitality" OR "hotel" OR "front office") AND ("Indonesia" OR "Indonesian"); ("English for Specific Purposes") AND ("hotel staff" OR "hotel employees") AND "Indonesia"; and ("English language" OR "communication skills") AND "hospitality" AND "Indonesia".

Studies were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality. Inclusion criteria required that studies focus on English language needs or use in Indonesian hotels, involve hotel employees particularly front office staff such as receptionists and guest service agents, be published between 2018 and early 2025, represent empirical studies using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches, be peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings, and be published in English or Indonesian with English abstracts.

Exclusion criteria eliminated conceptual or theoretical papers without empirical data, studies conducted outside the Indonesian hospitality context, studies focused on industries other than hotels such as airlines or tour operators only, unpublished theses or dissertations, and duplicate publications of the same study. These criteria ensured that only rigorous, relevant, and context-specific research was included in the final review.

Study Selection Process

The initial search yielded a total of 40 records: 39 from Google Scholar, 1 from SAGE Publications, 0 from Garuda, 0 from ScienceDirect, and 0 from ERIC. The study selection followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), as illustrated in Figure 1.

First, all 40 records were screened for duplicates, resulting in the removal of 0 duplicates. Next, the remaining 40 abstracts were screened for relevance to English use by hotel employees in Indonesia. This process eliminated 25 studies that were conceptual in nature, focused on non-Indonesian contexts, addressed other industries (e.g., general tourism without hotel specificity), or did not focus on English language needs.

Following abstract screening, 15 full-text articles were retrieved and assessed against the complete inclusion criteria. During this stage, 8 papers were excluded for the following reasons: lack of empirical data ($n=4$), insufficient focus on front office staff ($n=2$), methodological limitations that prevented data extraction ($n=1$), and focus on English teaching methods rather than needs analysis ($n=1$). This resulted in 7 studies being included in the final systematic review.

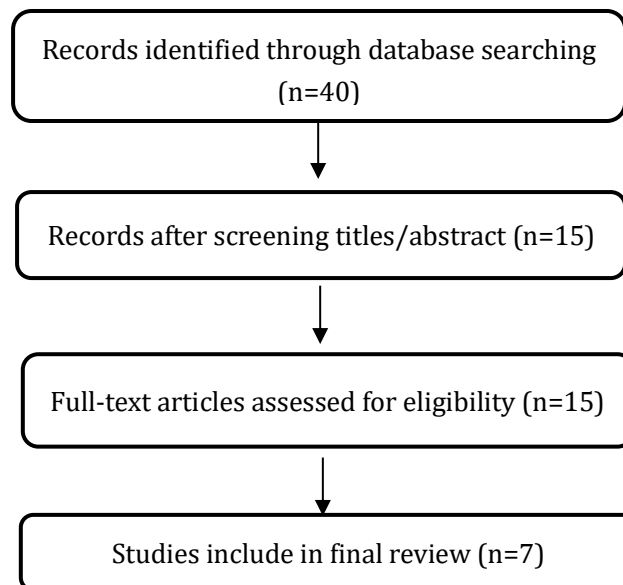


Figure 1. The study selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram

To enhance transparency and assess the reliability of findings, each included study was assigned an evidence level based on methodological rigor, data triangulation, sample size, and generalizability. The quality assessment framework utilized three evidence levels: A (high), B (moderate), and C (low), as defined in Table 1.

Table 1. Evidence level code

Code	Evidence Level	Description
A	High	Mixed-method study, data triangulation, and cross-source confirmation.
B	Medium	Qualitative or quantitative studies with strong designs, but limitations in generalizability or sample size.
C	Low	Exploratory, purely descriptive, or perception-based studies without triangulation validation.

Quality assessment was conducted independently by two researchers (the first and second authors). Each study was evaluated against the criteria outlined in Table 1, and evidence levels were assigned through consensus discussion. In cases of disagreement, the third author served as an arbitrator. Inter-rater reliability before discussion was substantial (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.78$), indicating strong initial agreement. The quality ratings were used to contextualize findings in the discussion section, with higher weight given to studies with stronger methodological rigor.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Following study selection and quality assessment, qualitative content analysis was employed to extract and synthesize data. A structured data extraction form was developed to capture key information from each study, including: author(s) and year, research location, participant characteristics, research focus, methodology, English skills identified as needed, workplace communication tasks, challenges faced, and strategies employed.

The analysis followed a systematic coding procedure aligned with the four research questions. First, all eight studies were read in full by the research team to gain familiarity with the content. Second, deductive codes were developed based on the research questions: (1) English skills needed, (2) workplace tasks requiring English, (3) communication challenges, and (4) coping strategies. Third, relevant text segments from each study were coded and organized under these thematic categories using a qualitative data management matrix.

Fourth, within each major theme, inductive sub-codes emerged through iterative reading and comparison across studies. For example, under "challenges," sub-codes included "limited vocabulary," "accent comprehension," "grammar difficulties," and "affective factors." Fifth, patterns and differences across studies were systematically compared, with attention to geographic location, participant roles, and methodological approaches. Finally, findings were synthesized and organized into summary tables (Tables 3-6) that display evidence across all included studies, enabling transparent comparison and identification of convergent themes.

To ensure analytical validity, two researchers independently coded three randomly selected studies, achieving strong inter-coder agreement (90% agreement on thematic assignment). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. This systematic and transparent approach enables a rigorous synthesis of current research, offering practical implications for English language curriculum development, staff training, and future ESP studies in Indonesia's hospitality sector.

Results

This section presents the findings of the systematic review, organized to address the four research questions guiding this study. Before examining specific themes, Table 2 provides an overview of all included studies with their key characteristics, methodological approaches, and evidence quality ratings.

Table 2. Overview of Reviewed Studies and Their Key Characteristics

Author (Year)	Location	Participants	Sample Size	Focus	Methodology	Evidence Level
Putri et al. (2018)	Padang	Hotel employees	45	English needs in hospital ity	Survey-based	B
Al-Jufri et al. (2024)	Sikka	Receptionist s	12	Needs & strategy use	Survey & interviews	B
Yamin (2021)	Bandung	Receptionist s	38	Use & challeng es	Mixed methods	A
Ratmanida et al. (2020)	Padang	Tourism students	52	ESP curricul um	Questionnaire /doc analysis	C
Firharmawa n & Andika (2019)	Kebumen	Hotel employees	15	Needs & proble ms	Case study & interviews	B
Ariyati (2022)	Bali	Front office staff	8	Usage & difficulti es	Qualitative interviews	C
Maharani et al. (2023)	Bali	Hotel & restaurant employees	42	English needs	Mixed methods	A

The synthesis reveals patterns across 7 empirical studies conducted in diverse Indonesian regions (Padang, Sikka, Bandung, Kebumen, and Bali), involving a total of 212 participants, predominantly front office staff. Two studies achieved high evidence levels (A) through mixed-methods triangulation, four demonstrated moderate quality (B) with sound single-method designs, and two provided exploratory insights (C) despite limited generalizability.

RQ1: English Language Skills Needed by Hotel Staff

Analysis of all seven studies reveals strong consensus that speaking and listening constitute the most critical English language skills for Indonesian hotel staff. Six of the seven studies (Putri et al., 2018; Al-Jufri et al., 2024; Yamin, 2021; Firharmawan & Andika, 2019; Ariyati, 2022; Maharani et al., 2023) ranked speaking as the highest priority skill, followed by listening as the second priority. For instance, Yamin (2021), a high-evidence study (A), found that hotel receptionists in Bandung rated speaking as the most needed skill at 35%, with listening following at 33%. Similarly, Maharani et al. (2023), another high-evidence study, confirmed that among small hotel employees in Bali, speaking was considered the top skill, followed by listening, then reading and writing.

One notable exception emerged: Ratmanida et al. (2020) ranked listening as the first priority and speaking second among tourism students in Padang. This divergence may be attributed to the study's focus on students rather than practicing hotel employees, and its lower evidence level (C) due to reliance on self-reported perceptions without workplace observation. Students may prioritize listening because they perceive comprehension as foundational before production, whereas actual employees recognize that speaking is immediately required in guest-facing interactions regardless of complete comprehension.

Reading and writing consistently ranked third and fourth across all studies, indicating their supporting rather than primary role in hotel operations. Writing is primarily used for email correspondence, reservation documentation, and guest records, while reading supports understanding of guest requests, booking information, and internal communications. Table 3 synthesizes the skill priorities identified across all studies.

Table 3. English Skills Priority Rankings Across Studies

Study (Year)	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Putri et al. (2018)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Al-Jufri et al. (2024)	Top priority	Top priority	Important	Important
Yamin (2021)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Ratmanida et al. (2020)	2nd	1st	3rd	4th
Firharmawan & Andika (2019)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th

Study (Year)	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Ariyati (2022)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Maharani et al. (2023)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th

The strength of this finding is reinforced by the two high-evidence studies (Yamin, 2021; Maharani et al., 2023), which employed mixed methods with data triangulation, confirming that oral communication skills are essential for effective service delivery in Indonesian hotels.

RQ2: Workplace Communication Tasks Requiring English

Indonesian hotel staff regularly employ English across a range of customer-service functions. Analysis across studies reveals three hierarchical levels of communication tasks based on frequency and criticality: primary interactive tasks, secondary support tasks, and tertiary documentation tasks.

Primary interactive tasks, identified in all seven studies, include welcoming and greeting guests, managing check-in and check-out procedures, and responding to guest inquiries. Ariyati (2022) documented that Bali hotel receptionists use English extensively for greeting and welcoming, registering arrivals, and explaining hotel services or resolving issues. Similarly, Al-Jufri et al. (2024) noted that receptionists use English to serve guests effectively, such as answering questions about room facilities and fulfilling special requests. Yamin (2021), a high-evidence study, found the most common English tasks were explaining hotel facilities and responding to guest complaints, functions requiring immediate verbal communication.

Secondary support tasks include providing detailed information about hotel amenities, assisting with reservations and itinerary planning, and handling guest complaints or special requests. Putri et al. (2018) reported that Jakarta hotel employees need English primarily for providing services, giving information, and offering assistance to guests. Maharani et al. (2023) similarly identified providing information, delivering services, and offering help as core functions requiring English proficiency. Tertiary documentation tasks, while less frequently mentioned, include written correspondence via email, completing reservation forms, and maintaining guest records. These tasks emerged in moderate-evidence studies (B-level) but received less emphasis than oral communication functions.

The findings suggest that English in Indonesian hotels is used predominantly in direct guest-facing roles requiring real-time interactive communication rather than back-office administrative duties. However, none of the reviewed studies systematically examined whether communication tasks differ by hotel classification (budget versus luxury), hotel size (small independent versus large chain), or guest demographics (Asian versus Western tourists). This represents a significant gap in understanding contextual variations in English language demands.

Table 4. Workplace Communication Tasks by Frequency and Function

Task Category	Specific Functions	Studies Reporting
Primary Interactive Tasks	Greeting/welcoming; Check-in/check-out; Answering inquiries	All 7 studies
Secondary Support Tasks	Explaining facilities/services; Handling complaints; Processing special requests	6 studies
Tertiary Documentation Tasks	Email correspondence; Reservation forms; Guest documentation	3 studies

RQ3: Challenges in Using English

Hotel staff in Indonesia face multiple interconnected challenges in English communication, which can be categorized into linguistic, cognitive, and affective barriers. Analysis reveals that vocabulary limitations represent the most frequently reported challenge, appearing in six of seven studies. Al-Jufri et al. (2024) reported receptionists struggling with lack of technical vocabulary, while Firharmawan and Andika (2019) noted staff frequently have to guess unknown words due to limited vocabulary. Maharani et al. (2023) similarly identified insufficient vocabulary as a primary barrier. The consistency of this finding across high-evidence (A), moderate-evidence (B), and low-evidence (C) studies suggests vocabulary deficiency is a pervasive issue regardless of geographic location or hotel type.

Accent comprehension difficulties emerged as the second most common challenge, reported in four studies. Both Al-Jufri et al. (2024) and Yamin (2021) observed that staff find it difficult to understand diverse foreign accents from various English-speaking regions. This challenge reflects Indonesia's position as a destination for tourists from multiple countries with varying English varieties, requiring staff to navigate Australian, British, American, and Asian-accented English. Grammatical inadequacy was identified in four studies as hindering effective communication. Both Maharani et al. (2023) and Firharmawan and Andika (2019) found that workers' inadequate grammar knowledge interferes with constructing accurate responses, particularly in complex service exchanges requiring conditional structures, polite requests, or detailed explanations.

Affective barriers, particularly anxiety and low confidence, appeared in three studies. Yamin (2021), a high-evidence study, documented that receptionists often feel nervous and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English with guests. Firharmawan and Andika (2019) added that lack of confidence compounds linguistic difficulties, especially when staff must respond to fast-paced native speaker speech.

Limited English proficiency more broadly was noted in three studies (Ariyati, 2022; Putri et al., 2018; Ratmanida et al., 2020), manifesting as general communication breakdowns with foreign guests. Ariyati (2022) found Bali receptionists often experience problems communicating with foreign guests because

of limited English skills, making it difficult to explain complex information about services, policies, or local attractions.

The persistence of these challenges can be attributed to systemic educational gaps in Indonesia's English instruction system. None of the reviewed studies examined the quality or content of English courses provided during hospitality vocational training or university programs, leaving unclear why graduates enter the workforce with inadequate English proficiency. Additionally, no studies investigated the availability, frequency, or quality of in-service English training programs provided by hotels themselves. The challenges appear more severe in smaller, independent hotels (as suggested by Maharani et al., 2023) compared to larger chain hotels, though this contextual variation requires further investigation.

Table 5. Communication Challenges by Frequency and Category

Challenge Category	Specific Barriers	Frequency (# of Studies)	Evidence Level
Linguistic - Vocabulary	Limited technical/hospitality-specific vocabulary	6/7 studies	Mixed (A, B, C)
Linguistic - Accent	Difficulty understanding diverse foreign accents	4/7 studies	Mixed (A, B)
Linguistic - Grammar	Inadequate grammar knowledge for complex exchanges	4/7 studies	Mixed (A, B)
Affective	Anxiety, fear of mistakes, low confidence	3/7 studies	High (A), Moderate (B)
General Proficiency	Overall limited English ability causing breakdowns	3/7 studies	Mixed (B, C)

RQ4: Strategies Employed to Overcome English Language Difficulties

Hotel employees employ both reactive (in-the-moment) and proactive (preparatory) strategies to manage English communication challenges. Analysis reveals significant variation in strategy effectiveness and adoption rates.

Reactive strategies are widely reported across studies but show limited long-term effectiveness. Translation technology use, particularly mobile apps like Google Translate, appeared in two studies (Al-Jufri et al., 2024; implied in Firharmawan & Andika, 2019). While these tools enable staff to respond to immediate vocabulary gaps, they disrupt conversational flow and may not capture nuanced service language or guest emotions. Contextual inference and guessing meaning from situational cues was reported by Firharmawan and Andika (2019), allowing staff to maintain interaction continuity when encountering unfamiliar terms. Code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia emerged in two studies (Ariyati, 2022; Putri et al., 2018) as a practical technique for clarifying guest needs, though this strategy requires guests to have some Indonesian language knowledge or relies

on bilingual intermediaries. Speech simplification, including using short formulaic expressions (e.g., "This way please," "One moment"), speaking slowly, and employing nonverbal communication (gestures, pointing, smiling), was documented by Ariyati (2022) as effective for basic transactions but insufficient for complex service interactions.

Proactive strategies, though less frequently implemented, demonstrate greater potential for sustainable improvement. Scenario-based role-play training appeared in two high-evidence studies (Yamin, 2021; Maharani et al., 2023), showing effectiveness in building confidence and fluency through repeated practice of common guest interactions. This approach aligns with communicative language teaching theory and provides authentic practice contexts. Digital ESP modules and blended learning, mentioned by Al-Jufri et al. (2024), offer flexible, self-paced learning opportunities for hospitality-specific vocabulary and situational English, though their actual adoption and completion rates were not reported. Continuous in-house English support programs were referenced in one study (Yamin, 2021), suggesting some hotels provide ongoing language development opportunities.

Critical gaps in strategy adoption emerged from the analysis. Despite strong evidence supporting communicative and task-based learning approaches in ESP literature, none of the reviewed studies reported widespread implementation of sustained, systematic English training programs in Indonesian hotels. Furthermore, no studies examined collaborative strategies such as peer learning, mentoring systems where stronger English speakers support colleagues, or team-based approaches to handling complex guest interactions. The reasons for limited proactive strategy adoption remain unclear but likely involve resource constraints (time, budget, trainer availability), management priorities, and high staff turnover in hospitality sectors.

Notably absent from all studies was discussion of strategies targeting the root causes of challenges. For example, no studies described vocabulary-building programs using authentic hotel materials (menus, booking systems, complaint forms), pronunciation training to improve both production and comprehension of diverse accents, or grammar instruction contextualized within service transactions. This suggests a reactive rather than preventive orientation in addressing English communication needs.

Table 6. Strategies by Type, Frequency, and Effectiveness

Strategy Type	Specific Techniques	Frequency (# of Studies)	Effectiveness	Theoretical Basis
Reactive - Technology	Mobile translator apps	2 studies	Limited (disrupts flow)	Compensatory strategies
Reactive - Cognitive	Contextual inference/guessing	1 study	Moderate (maintains flow)	Communication strategies
Reactive - Linguistic	Code-switching to Indonesian	2 studies	Moderate (requires bilingual guests)	Translanguaging
Reactive - Simplification	Short phrases, slow speech, gestures	1 study	Basic transactions only	Strategic competence
Proactive - Training	Scenario-based role-play	2 studies (A-level)	High (builds confidence, fluency)	Task-based learning
Proactive - Technology	Digital ESP modules, blended learning	1 study	Potentially high (needs validation)	Self-directed learning
Proactive - Institutional	Continuous in-house English support	1 study	Unknown effectiveness	Professional development

Discussion

Synthesis Across Themes: Interconnections and Patterns

The four themes examined in this review—skills needed, workplace tasks, challenges faced, and strategies employed—reveal a coherent narrative of language needs in Indonesian hospitality contexts. The prioritization of speaking and listening skills directly corresponds to the predominance of interactive, real-time communication tasks (greeting, explaining, problem-solving) required in front office roles. These tasks demand immediate verbal response capabilities, explaining why oral proficiency ranks highest despite reading and writing also being necessary for documentation.

The challenges identified—particularly limited vocabulary, accent comprehension difficulties, and grammatical inadequacies—directly impede staff ability to perform priority tasks effectively. For instance, vocabulary gaps prevent

detailed explanations of hotel facilities, accent comprehension problems hinder understanding of guest requests, and grammatical limitations reduce accuracy in handling complex service transactions or complaints. The anxiety and low confidence reported in multiple studies may result from repeated experiences of communication breakdown when attempting these high-stakes guest interactions.

The strategy landscape reveals a mismatch between challenges and solutions. While linguistic and cognitive challenges dominate (vocabulary, grammar, accents), the most commonly employed reactive strategies (translation apps, code-switching, simplification) provide only temporary workarounds rather than skill development. The limited adoption of proactive strategies (role-play training, ESP modules) that could address root causes suggests systemic barriers in Indonesia's hospitality training infrastructure. This pattern indicates that Indonesian hotel staff operate in a compensatory mode, managing communication difficulties through improvisation rather than through systematic skill enhancement.

Critical Analysis of Evidence Quality and Gaps

The evidence base for this review shows both strengths and significant limitations. The two high-evidence studies (Yamin, 2021; Maharani et al., 2023) provide robust findings through mixed-methods triangulation, lending strong support to the primacy of oral communication skills and the effectiveness of scenario-based training. The four moderate-evidence studies (Putri et al., 2018; Al-Jufri et al., 2024; Firharmawan & Andika, 2019; Ariyati, 2022) offer valuable insights but with limitations in generalizability due to small sample sizes (8-45 participants) or single-method designs. The two low-evidence studies (Ratmanida et al., 2020; Ariyati, 2022) provide exploratory insights but lack methodological rigor for strong conclusions.

Several contradictions warrant discussion. The exception of Ratmanida et al. (2020) ranking listening over speaking suggests that needs perceptions may differ between students and practicing employees, or that needs assessment methods (questionnaires versus workplace observation) yield different priorities. This methodological variation highlights the importance of multi-source needs analysis combining self-reports, supervisor evaluations, and direct observation of workplace language use.

Significant evidence gaps emerged across all themes. First, no study systematically examined how English needs vary by hotel classification (budget, mid-range, luxury), size (small independent, large chain), or guest demographics (predominantly Asian versus Western tourists). Second, the relationship between staff educational background, years of experience, and English proficiency challenges remains unexplored. Third, none of the studies employed longitudinal designs to track whether challenges diminish with experience or training interventions. Fourth, the effectiveness of different training strategies was asserted rather than empirically demonstrated through pre-post assessments or control group comparisons. Finally, management perspectives on English proficiency requirements, training investment decisions, and recruitment priorities were absent

from all studies, limiting understanding of institutional factors shaping staff language development opportunities.

Comparison with Regional Contexts

Although not systematically examined in the reviewed studies, Indonesian hospitality English needs appear to align with patterns documented in other Southeast Asian contexts (Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia) where oral communication skills dominate due to direct guest service roles. However, Indonesia's linguistic diversity and the prevalence of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language may create unique challenges not present in countries with greater historical English exposure. Future research should explicitly compare Indonesian findings with neighboring hospitality markets to identify shared versus country-specific needs.

Implications for Stakeholder Groups

The findings have distinct implications for multiple stakeholders. For English language educators and ESP curriculum developers, the evidence strongly supports designing hospitality English programs that prioritize oral communication development through task-based, scenario-driven instruction using authentic hotel materials. The curriculum should integrate targeted vocabulary development focused on hospitality-specific terminology (room types, amenities, services, complaint resolution), pronunciation training addressing diverse English accent recognition, and contextualized grammar instruction for service language functions (polite requests, offering assistance, explaining policies).

For hotel managers and human resources professionals, the findings suggest current recruitment and training practices inadequately prepare staff for English communication demands. Hotels should implement systematic needs assessment procedures to identify specific language gaps in their workforce, develop in-house or contracted ESP training programs with measurable outcomes, create mentoring systems pairing strong and developing English speakers, and establish realistic English proficiency standards in job descriptions linked to actual task requirements rather than generic TOEFL scores.

For hospitality education institutions, the evidence reveals a critical gap between general English instruction and workplace language demands. Programs should embed ESP components throughout hospitality curricula rather than treating English as a standalone general education requirement, incorporate authentic workplace materials and simulated service interactions into English courses, and establish industry partnerships for internships emphasizing language use in realistic service contexts.

For policymakers in Indonesia's tourism and education sectors, the systematic persistence of English communication challenges across multiple regions and hotel types indicates need for national-level interventions, including government-sponsored ESP upskilling programs for current hospitality workers, mandatory standards for English instruction in vocational hospitality programs, and

investment in training ESP instructors with hospitality industry knowledge.

Theoretical Contributions to ESP Research

This systematic review contributes to English for Specific Purposes theory by demonstrating the critical importance of discourse community analysis in ESP curriculum design. The Indonesian hotel context exemplifies how workplace communication demands (real-time, interactive, service-oriented) fundamentally shape language skill priorities, with oral proficiency superseding written skills despite both being necessary. The findings support Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) target situation analysis framework, confirming that needs assessment must examine actual workplace tasks, not just generic language competencies.

Additionally, the limited effectiveness of reactive strategies and persistent communication challenges despite staff efforts highlights the insufficiency of strategic competence alone. Indonesian hotel workers demonstrate adaptive communication strategies (code-switching, simplification, contextual inference), yet these compensatory techniques cannot substitute for systematic language instruction addressing fundamental proficiency gaps. This underscores the ESP principle that learner strategies must be complemented by targeted linguistic knowledge development.

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