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Hospitality Students' ESP Target and Learning Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the target needs and learning needs of D3 Hospitality students in learning English for Specific Purpo ses (ESP). The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design involving 20 students from a hospitality management program in Medan. Data were collected through a 13-item Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework was used to analyze target needs, induding necessities, lacks, and wants, while Nunan's (1989) framework was applied to examine learning needs, induding goals, input, activities, teach er roles, learner roles, and learning settings. The data were analyzed using Creswell's qualitative data analysis procedures. The findings revealed that students perceived speaking, listening, vocabulary mastery, and writing as essential competencies for hospitality work, with speaking identified as the most important skill. The analysis of lacks showed that many students still experienced difficulties in understanding foreign guests, using polite expressions appropriately, speaking fluently, an d communicating confidently in English. In terms of wants, students strongly desired more opportunities to use English actively in the dassroom, improve pronunciation, and participate in hospitality-related simulations and communicative activities. The findings on learning needs demonstrated that students preferred authentic and practical learning experiences. Real-life videos, role-plays, pair work, and workplace simulations were considered the most effective learning inputs and dassroom activities. Students also expected lecturers to provide supportive guidance, constructive feedback, and learning activities connected to real hospitality situations. Overall, the study indicates that ESP instruction for hospitality students should emphasize communicative competence, authentic workplace interacti on, and student-centered learning approaches. Therefore, ESP curriculum design should integrate practical communication tasks and industry- related materials to better prepare students for professional hospitality environments .

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), hospitality students, target needs, learning needs, needs analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

English for specific purposes (ESP) has become a major concern in higher and vocational education, especially in areas where professionals must communicate in English (Ulyani, 2025). In the hotel and catering business, it is very important for staff to be able to speak English well with international guests, and this is not just something that is wanted in the job, it is essential. It is clear that teachers of English for specific purposes (ESP) need to understand exactly what their students need to be able to do in their chosen job (Kaharuddin, et al., 2019; Wahyuni, 2022; Orang'i, 2021). According to Hutchinson and Waters, there are aspects to ESP course design. The first one being is target needs. By this, they mean what students need to be able to perform in a professional context.

In other words, what skills must they acquire? The second aspect is learning needs. Here, the focus is on what students need from the teaching process itself. In other words, how will the students develop the necessary skills? (Tahang et al., 2021). In fact, this dual-needs model is now used a lot as a theoretical basis for ESP course development, syllabus design, and material selection (Irawan et al., 2022; Santika, Wirza, & Emilia, 2022).

As per the given framework, a target needs encompasses three things: necessities, lacks, and wants. To clarify, these are things that learners must know to function in the target situation, what gaps exist between their current proficiency and those demands, and what learners themselves believe they need to acquire (Tahang et al., 2021). On the other hand, learning needs are understood through the different components of a task, using David Nunan's framework which consists of the input, the procedure, the setting, the roles of the learner and the teacher (Nunan, 2004). All of these should be carefully planned to match the professional context (Irawan et al., 2022). In theory, this means that an ESP course for hospitality students should be built from evidence about what students need to be able to do at work, what they think they need to improve, and how they like to learn. It is exactly through analysing people's needs that this evidence is collected. So, this is the most important starting point for all decisions about how to design a course (Azami et al., 2026).

When it comes to hospitality, the most important skills are speaking and listening, especially when dealing with international guests (Khoirunnisa, Suparno & Supriyadi, 2018). Furthermore, learners in this field tend to prefer activities that allow them to experience and simulate real-life situations, such as role-play, paired practice, and real-situation video materials, over abstract grammatical instruction (Dieu& Dan, 2023; Wahyuni, 2022). All of these preferences show that there is a demand for teaching that links classroom learning to the realities of working in professional service environments. But there is still a big difference between what needs analysis theory is supposed to imply and what actually happens in many ESP classrooms. Although it is often thought that teaching should be adapted to suit specific professional needs, many schools still teach general English instead of English for specific jobs (Santika et al., 2022). This problem is not just a teaching mistake, it actually has real-life consequences for how ready learners are and how confident they feel in the workplace (Kardijan, 2017). Initial data gathered from 20 hospitality students at [Institution Name] clearly shows this contradiction. In a questionnaire on target and learning needs, all 20 respondents (100%) agreed strongly that speaking ability is very important for hospitality work, and 18 out of 20 (90%) agreed strongly that vocabulary specific to the hospitality industry is essential for the workplace. At the same time, 60% of respondents said they found it quite easy or sometimes difficult to understand English conversations from foreign guests. However, a large number of respondents also said they were not very confident when speaking English. These results show that there is a big difference between the way students think about learning English and the way they actually use it.

Furthermore, this difference is made clearer by interviews, where students clearly said that they liked practical lessons that are part of the real world. The majority preferred real-situation video materials as a way to learn and said that role-play or paired simulation activities were the best ways to do this in the classroom. In fact, one student said, " IMPLEMENTASI BUKAN TEORI " ("Implementation, not theory"). On the other hand, another student said they liked to speak through games rather than formal classroom activities, because they felt safer when they didn't have to worry about grammar. so when it comes to learning, students were split between classroom-based learning and independent home study. However, almost all of them said they wanted lecturers to give them quick, helpful feedback. They liked it when lecturers corrected them a lot, but in a way that was not too critical. It is important to note that people who took part in the study said that the most useful ESP topics were dealing with complaints from guests, talking about reservations and using polite language. These topics require specific knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, rather than general English skills.

In short, learners know exactly what they need to improve their English skills for their future jobs, and they like the idea of learning through hands-on, practical experience. But the way they're currently taught doesn't seem to match these needs. Therefore, this study looks at: What are the target needs of Hospitality students in Learning English? and How do students prefers to learn English in

an ESP class? The aim is to provide a solid foundation for creating an ESP curriculum that is suitable for these students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is broadly defined as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions about content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Unlike General English, ESP places the learner's professional or academic goal at the center of instructional design, making it particularly relevant for vocational education contexts where communicative competence in a specific field is professionally imperative. In the hospitality industry, English proficiency is not merely desirable but essential. Hospitality workers in international settings are regularly required to perform complex communicative tasks handling guest check-in and check-out, managing complaints, explaining services, and coordinating across departments all of which demand a distinct repertoire of English language skills (Cheng, 2000; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021). Designing effective ESP courses for such contexts requires a systematic needs analysis: a process of identifying the gap between learners' current competence and the language demands of their target situation (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Two complementary frameworks guide this study. Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs framework identifies what learners must know and be able to do in their target situation through three components: necessities (what the job demands), lacks (gaps between current and required competence), and wants (learners' own perceived needs and goals). Nunan's (1989) Learning Needs framework complements this by addressing how learners prefer to acquire language, encompassing six components: goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role, and settings. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive basis for both the content and delivery of ESP instruction.

Empirical studies in hospitality and tourism ESP consistently support the relevance of these frameworks. Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021) found that speaking and listening were the most problematic and most critically needed skills among tourism and hospitality students, particularly for guest interaction and service communication. Cheng (2000) similarly identified professional oral communication and written correspondence as core necessities among hotel management students in Taiwan, while noting that learners tended to undervalue writing relative to industry expectations underscoring the importance of triangulating wants with necessities and lacks. In the Iranian context, Eslami (2010) found that oral communication was the most frequently identified necessity and most strongly expressed want, while academic writing remained a common lack. Within Indonesia, Lengkanawati (2004) found strong learner preferences for communicative, task-based, and pair/group activities preferences closely aligned with Nunan's (1989) learning needs components.

Despite this growing body of research, studies that simultaneously apply both the Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Nunan (1989) frameworks to investigate the target and learning needs of D3 Hospitality students in Indonesia remain limited. This gap highlights the need for an integrated needs analysis that addresses both what students must learn and how they prefer to learn it, providing an empirical foundation for contextually relevant ESP curriculum development.

METHOD

A descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study. The study involved 20 students enrolled in the D3 hospitality management industry program located in Medan. The data collected by using 2 research instruments: A 13-item Likert scale questionnaire (which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree) and 11 semi-structured interview questions were used in the data collection process. Both research instrument were related to Target Needs (Goals, Necessities, Lacks, and Wants) as described by Hutchinson, Waters, and Nunan and Learning Needs (Input, Procedures, Setting, Learners' Roles, and Teachers' Roles) as proposed by Nunan. The data analyzed by using

Creswell's framework (2018), which included data preparation and organization, thorough data review, in-depth description, and narrative analysis to interpret the results.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The Target Needs

This section presents the target needs of D3 Hospitality students in learning English. The data were gathered from 20 valid respondents using a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed through Google Form. Three submissions were excluded from the analysis because they contained no responses. To examine the target needs systematically, this study adopts the framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which categorizes target needs into three distinct yet interconnected components: necessities, lacks, and wants.

The necessities indicator in this study refers to the English language competencies that students perceive as professionally indispensable in the hospitality workplace. Four questionnaire items probed students' assessments of speaking, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and writing as professional requirements.

The questionnaire results show a strikingly consistent pattern: all students agreed across every item, with no neutral or negative responses recorded for any of the four necessities. The most emphatic response was recorded for Q1, where all 20 respondents (100%) strongly agreed that speaking English is a fundamental requirement in hospitality work.

A comparably strong response was obtained for vocabulary and listening comprehension indicators, where 18 respondents (90%) strongly agreed and 2 respondents (10%) agreed in each case. Students associated domain-specific vocabulary with their ability to navigate daily guest interactions from explaining hotel services to managing requests while listening comprehension was directly linked to understanding what international guests communicate in real-world encounters.

For writing skill indicators, which addressed the ability to produce short written documents such as emails, memos, and reports, 15 respondents (75%) strongly agreed and the remaining 5 respondents (25%) agreed. Taken together, these findings confirm that D3 Hospitality students possess a clear and practically grounded understanding of the English demands of their target profession, with speaking occupying the most prominent position.

The lacks indicator captures the gap between what learners currently know and what has been established as professionally necessary. Four items in the questionnaire addressed students' self-perceived difficulties in English communication within hospitality contexts.

Unlike the Necessities section, the Lacks data show considerably more variation in responses, which is consistent with the expectation that individual students enter the program with different levels of English proficiency and prior exposure to hospitality-related language use.

Among the four items, the question examining students' difficulty in using polite expressions and language etiquette appropriate to hospitality service standards attracted the highest combined agreement rate: 5 respondents (25%) strongly agreed and 6 respondents (30%) agreed, amounting to 55% of the cohort.

A substantial gap was also identified in relation to comprehension of spoken English from foreign guests (Q7), where 3 respondents (15%) strongly agreed and 7 respondents (35%) agreed that this presents a current challenge, a combined 50%. Four respondents (20%) remained neutral, and five respondents (25%) disagreed.

The item addressing communicative confidence produced the most dispersed response distribution of any item in the study: 5 respondents (25%) strongly agreed and 4 respondents (20%) agreed that they lack confidence in using English, while 5 respondents (25%) were neutral and 6 respondents (30%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. During the interviews, several students explained that they felt comparatively more comfortable using English in informal or game-based contexts, where the pressure of grammatical accuracy was reduced.

The item on speaking fluency yielded a notably nuanced finding. The 40% Neutral rate the highest recorded across all 12 questionnaire items suggests that many students consider themselves

to be at an intermediate level of fluency: capable of basic communication but not yet able to speak with ease or accuracy in authentic hospitality situations. Combined with the 40% who agreed they faced difficulty, this pattern reveals that speaking fluency remains a work in progress for most students in this study.

The wants indicator reflects students' own views on what they wish to learn in ESP. Four items were designed to capture students' preferences regarding skill emphasis, learning activity format, pronunciation development, and the frequency of English use in the classroom. The clearest and most decisive responses in the entire questionnaire were recorded for pronunciation improvement and increased English use in classroom activities. All 20 respondents (100%) agreed that they want to improve their English pronunciation and that they want to use English more frequently in class, with 15 respondents (75%) strongly agreeing and 5 respondents (25%) agreeing for both items, and no neutral or negative responses recorded.

The item exploring students' interest in learning English through hospitality work simulations also received strong support: 9 respondents (45%) strongly agreed and 9 respondents (45%) agreed, amounting to 90% overall agreement, with only 2 respondents (10%) remaining neutral, and no one disagreed.

The last item, asking whether students prefer to concentrate on speaking above all other skills, produced a more varied set of responses: 8 respondents (40%) strongly agreed and 3 respondents (15%) agreed, while 6 respondents (30%) were neutral and 3 respondents (15%) disagreed.

In summary, with regard to necessities, students across the board recognize that speaking, vocabulary, listening, and writing are all essential competencies for the hospitality workplace, with speaking identified as the most critical skill by unanimous agreement. With regard to lacks, the most prominent self-perceived gaps lie in the areas of politeness and service-oriented language (55%), comprehension of foreign guests (50%), and confidence in oral communication (45%), while many students appear to occupy an intermediate level of speaking fluency. With regard to wants, all students desire to improve their pronunciation and increase their in-class use of English (100% each), and the substantial majority (90%) express a clear preference for simulation-based learning.

The Learning Needs

The goal indicator in this study refers to the identification of ESP materials or topics deemed most relevant and needed by students as preparation for employment in the hospitality industry. The questionnaire results indicated that there were four main topic groups raised by respondents: handling guest complaints, reservation and check-in/check-out conversations, welcoming guests, and explaining hotel menus and facilities.

The topic of handling guest complaints was the most frequently mentioned need by respondents, with 10 out of 20 respondents (50%). As one respondent expressed, "handling guest complaints is the most useful, because different guests have different handling needs." The topics of reservation conversations and check-in/check-out procedures were mentioned by six respondents (30%). The topic of welcoming guests (greeting) was mentioned by 4 respondents (20%), and explanations of the hotel menu or facilities by 2 respondents (10%).

The input indicator refers to the types of learning materials or resources that students perceive as most effective in aiding their understanding of ESP material. The analysis shows that the majority of respondents strongly prefer authentic and visual input. Thirteen respondents (65%) stated that real- life videos were the learning resources that best facilitated their understanding. Respondents considered that the video format allowed them to directly observe how communication occurs in a hospitality context, including nonverbal aspects such as intonation, expression, and professional demeanor.

Learning resources in the form of materials from the internet or platforms like YouTube were chosen by five respondents (25%), often used independently outside of class hours. Four respondents (20%) emphasized the importance of direct practice or implementation as the most meaningful form of input, particularly through practical work experience in the field. Audio recordings and written text were each chosen by two respondents (10%), generally used as supplements to independent learning.

The activities indicator refers to the types of classroom activities that students perceive as most beneficial in improving their English skills. Role-play was the most frequently chosen activity,

with 13 respondents (65%) stating it was the most helpful. As one respondent stated, this activity "made me more confident speaking and practicing communication directly." Pair work was chosen by 5 respondents (25%), real-life situation simulations or phone simulations were chosen by 3 respondents (15%), and group discussions by 3 respondents (15%).

In the teacher role indicator, most students expect ESP lecturers to be actively involved in guiding the English language learning process. The most frequently requested roles for lecturers include providing examples, acting as motivators, error correctors, and learning facilitators. Lecturers are expected to not only deliver theoretical material but also demonstrate how English is used in professional interactions, such as when handling reservations, welcoming guests, and dealing with customer complaints.

Several respondents also stated that lecturers need to act as mentors, able to gradually guide students in developing their English language skills. The majority of students desire direct feedback from lecturers when they make language errors. They believe that direct correction can help them correct pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary errors more quickly. However, some students emphasized that feedback should be given in a positive and non-judgmental manner to maintain their comfort and confidence when speaking.

The learner role data show that the majority of students positioned themselves as active listeners and note-takers during the ESP learning process. However, many students also expressed active involvement in various practical activities, such as role-plays, telephone simulations, and conversation exercises. Students also recognized that English language skills cannot be developed solely through classroom learning. Therefore, they engaged in various independent learning efforts outside of class, such as watching English videos, studying on YouTube, listening to music, playing games, using learning apps, and practicing conversations with friends and family.

However, some students still choose relatively passive roles, such as listeners or supporting actors in simulations, due to a lack of confidence in using English. This indicates that self-confidence remains a major challenge in ESP learning.

Results show that students have diverse preferences regarding English learning settings. Some students feel more comfortable studying in class because the atmosphere encourages concentration and allows direct interaction with lecturers and classmates. On the other hand, quite a number of students prefer independent study at home because they perceive it as quieter, more flexible, and allows them to learn at their own pace.

Several students stated that internships are an effective setting for learning English because they can directly observe and practice language use in real hospitality contexts. Regarding study grouping, the majority of students prefer studying in pairs or small groups. They feel that this setting facilitates discussion, helps them understand the material, and increases their confidence when speaking English. However, some students prefer studying individually because they feel more focused and free to study without social pressure.

Discussion

Target Needs of D3 Hospitality Students

The findings show that speaking English is considered the most important skill for hospitality students, with all respondents (100%) strongly agreeing that it is essential in the workplace. This supports previous ESP studies which identified oral communication as the primary skill needed in hospitality and tourism industries (Kaharuddin et al., 2019; Khoirunnisa et al., 2018; Orang'i, 2021). Since hospitality work involves direct interaction with guests, effective spoken communication becomes professionally indispensable.

Vocabulary and listening comprehension were also identified as highly important skills, with 90% of students strongly agreeing on both aspects. Students believed that hospitality-related vocabulary helps them explain services and respond to guest requests, while listening skills are necessary for understanding international guests. These findings reflect Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) concept of necessities, where learners recognize the language skills required in their future profession.

However, the results also revealed a gap between students' needs and their current abilities. While listening comprehension was considered essential, 50% of students admitted difficulties in understanding foreign guests. Similarly, 55% of respondents reported difficulties in using polite expressions and service-related language appropriately. This finding is important because politeness and professional language are central components of hospitality communication (Cheng, 2000).

Students also showed varied levels of confidence in speaking English. Some students felt comfortable communicating in informal or game-based situations, but less confident in formal communication contexts. This suggests that communicative confidence is influenced by the learning environment, and interactive activities may help reduce students' anxiety and improve participation.

The Wants analysis indicates that students are highly motivated to improve their English skills. All respondents wanted to improve their pronunciation and use English more frequently in classroom activities. In addition, 90% preferred learning through hospitality simulations and role-play activities because these activities reflect real workplace situations. These findings support previous studies emphasizing the importance of authentic and task-based learning in ESP classrooms (Khoirunnisa et al., 2018; Wahyuni, 2022). However, some students still preferred a balanced approach that includes other skills such as writing and vocabulary development alongside speaking practice.

Learning Needs of D3 Hospitality Student

. The findings show that handling guest complaints was identified as the most important ESP topic by 50% of respondents. Students considered complaint handling to be one of the most difficult communication situations in hospitality because it requires politeness, empathy, problem-solving skills, and appropriate language use. This finding supports Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) view that ESP learning goals should be based on real workplace communication needs. Reservation procedures, check-in/check-out conversations (30%), and welcoming guests (20%) were also identified as important topics because they represent the first interaction between staff and guests in hospitality settings.

Regarding learning input, most students preferred authentic and visual materials. Real-life videos were chosen by 65% of respondents because they help students observe authentic communication, pronunciation, intonation, facial expressions, and professional behavior in hospitality contexts. In addition, 25% of students preferred learning independently through YouTube and internet-based materials, indicating that students are already familiar with autonomous learning practices. These findings support Tomlinson's (2011) argument that authentic materials are effective in connecting classroom learning with real workplace situations.

For classroom activities, role-play emerged as the most preferred activity, selected by 65% of students. Students believed that role-play improves speaking skills, builds confidence, and allows them to practice real hospitality communication directly. Pair work was also preferred because it creates opportunities for interaction and reduces anxiety when speaking English. These findings are consistent with task-based language teaching principles proposed by Nunan (2004), which emphasize communicative and contextualized learning activities.

The findings also revealed that students expect lecturers to function as facilitators, motivators, language models, and supportive feedback providers. Students preferred direct correction of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary mistakes, but they wanted feedback to be delivered positively and without excessive criticism. This indicates the importance of creating a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable practicing English.

In terms of learner roles, students generally viewed themselves as active and collaborative learners. Besides participating in classroom activities, many students also learned English independently through videos, music, games, social media, and conversations with friends or family. However, some students still preferred passive roles because of low confidence in speaking English. Therefore, gradual practice and supportive activities are needed to increase students' communicative confidence.

Finally, students showed different preferences regarding learning settings. Some preferred classroom learning because it allows direct interaction with lecturers and classmates, while others preferred studying independently at home. Many students also considered internships and workplace practice as the most meaningful learning settings because they provide direct exposure to authentic

hospitality communication. Overall, the findings suggest that ESP learning for hospitality students should combine authentic materials, role-play activities, collaborative learning, and practical workplace experiences to better prepare students for professional communication in the hospitality industry.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the target needs and learning needs of D3 Hospitality students in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings reveal that students possess a strong awareness of the importance of English proficiency in the hospitality industry, particularly for professional communication with international guests. Based on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework, the target needs analysis showed that speaking, vocabulary mastery, listening comprehension, and writing are perceived as essential competencies for future hospitality careers. Among these, speaking emerged as the most critical skill, reflecting the communicative nature of hospitality work.

The analysis of students' lacks further demonstrated that many learners still experience difficulties in using polite expressions, understanding foreign guests, speaking fluently, and communicating confidently in English. These findings indicate a clear gap between the students' current abilities and the linguistic demands of the hospitality workplace. At the same time, the wants analysis revealed that students strongly desire more opportunities to practice English actively in class, improve their pronunciation, and learn through simulation-based activities connected to real hospitality situations.

In terms of learning needs, students showed a strong preference for authentic, practical, and interactive learning experiences. Real-life videos, role-plays, pair work, and workplace simulations were identified as the most effective learning inputs and activities. Students also expected lecturers to act not only as instructors but also as facilitators, motivators, and supportive mentors who provide constructive feedback in a non-threatening manner. Furthermore, the findings indicate that students tend to adopt active and collaborative learner roles, while also engaging in autonomous learning outside the classroom through digital media, games, videos, and online resources.

Overall, the study confirms that hospitality students require an ESP curriculum that is highly contextualized, communication-oriented, and closely aligned with the realities of the hospitality industry. Therefore, ESP instruction for hospitality students should prioritize authentic communicative tasks, practical simulations, pronunciation development, and supportive classroom interaction. By aligning instructional materials, teaching methods, and classroom activities with students' target and learning needs, ESP programs can better prepare hospitality students to communicate effectively and confidently in their future professional environments.

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