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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON USING ENGLISH WITH CoE FOR HOSPITALITY: A CASE STUDY IN UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH MALANG

by

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Abstract:

This study examines students' perceptions of English language use in the Hospitality Center of Excellence (CoE) program at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, highlighting how these perceptions shape their professional development. Many students view English language proficiency as crucial for improving customer service skills, adapting to multicultural environments, and enhancing self-confidence. This study explores how English language skills impact students' internship experiences and career aspirations. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. The participants consisted of three students from the English Language Education Department who participated in hospitality internships in different hotel divisions, namely front office and housekeeping. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three students who participated in hospitality internships in different hotel divisions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings revealed positive perceptions. Students recognized English as a valuable skill for facilitating communication with international guests, boosting self-confidence, and enhancing career readiness. However, challenges included difficulty understanding diverse accents and initial anxiety in a professional environment. Despite these obstacles, students demonstrated resilience, using tools such as Google Translate to aid communication. The results suggest that real-world experiences through internships complement classroom learning, enhancing students' adaptability and competitiveness in a global workforce.

Keywords: Perceptions, ESP, hospitality

Abstrak :

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa tentang penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam program Pusat Keunggulan (CoE) Perhotelan di Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, menyoroti bagaimana persepsi ini membentuk pengembangan profesional mereka. Banyak mahasiswa memandang kemampuan berbahasa Inggris sebagai aspek penting untuk meningkatkan keterampilan layanan pelanggan, beradaptasi dengan lingkungan multikultural, dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana keterampilan berbahasa Inggris memengaruhi pengalaman magang mahasiswa dan aspirasi karir mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan mahasiswa yang magang di berbagai divisi perhotelan, seperti bagian depan (front office) dan tata kelola rumah tangga (housekeeping). Temuan menunjukkan persepsi positif. Mahasiswa mengakui bahasa Inggris sebagai keterampilan berharga untuk memfasilitasi komunikasi dengan tamu internasional, meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, dan

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meningkatkan kesiapan karir. Namun, tantangan yang dihadapi meliputi kesulitan memahami aksen yang beragam dan kecemasan awal dalam lingkungan profesional. Terlepas dari hambatan-hambatan ini, mahasiswa menunjukkan ketahanan. Mereka menggunakan alat seperti Google Translate untuk membantu komunikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman dunia nyata melalui magang melengkapi pembelajaran di kelas, meningkatkan kemampuan adaptasi dan daya saing siswa dalam angkatan kerja global.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi, ESP, keramahan

INTRODUCTION

English is vital in the hospitality sector since it is the dominant language in which hotel workers and overseas visitors communicate with each other. In global hospitality settings, professionals are expected not just to deliver professional services but also to communicate well with guests from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Therefore, the ability to speak English has been recognised as one of the key competencies among hospitality workers, particularly in areas where they are directly dealing with the guests such as front office, reservations and customer assistance (Widiastuti, 2021). In Indonesia, many hospitality professionals and internship students still find it challenging to use English effectively in working communication. Communication performance with international guests is sometimes affected by problems such as inadequate vocabulary, difficulties in comprehending different foreign accents and lack of confidence (Arifin, 2026). These challenges indicate that classroom-based English learning alone may not fully prepare students for authentic workplace communication demands (Eka & Rahmanu, 2026). As a result, internship programs become important in providing students with real communication experiences in professional hospitality settings.

To overcome these issues, the English Language Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang has implemented the Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Hospitality programme. This programme offers an internship opportunity for the students in the hotel environment. Within this programme, students are actively involved in hospitality workplace communication and connect with international customers in real service settings. These experiences allow students to practice their English abilities beyond classroom learning and to acquire professional communication competence in authentic working scenarios.

In addition to linguistic competence, students' perceptions toward the use of English in workplace settings play a significant role in shaping their learning motivation, confidence, and professional identity (Yoestara et al., 2021). Perception is important because it influences

how students interpret their experiences, evaluate the relevance of classroom knowledge, and respond to communicative demands in real situations. When students perceive English as meaningful and useful for their future careers, they are more likely to engage actively in communication and develop a positive attitude toward language use in professional contexts (Pinhal & Estima, 2025). Conversely, if students perceive English as difficult or intimidating, they may experience anxiety and hesitation even when they possess adequate language knowledge. Therefore, examining students' perceptions is essential to understand the psychological and educational factors that support or hinder their readiness to function effectively in the hospitality industry (Giotis, 2026)

This issue is closely related to the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes the teaching and learning of English based on learners' academic and occupational needs. In hospitality contexts, English is not learned merely as a general subject but as a practical communication tool used in highly specific situations such as welcoming guests, handling complaints, explaining hotel facilities, giving directions, taking reservations, and responding politely to service requests (Oktarin., 2019). These communicative tasks require not only grammatical knowledge but also fluency, appropriateness, hospitality expressions, intercultural awareness, and the ability to respond spontaneously in real-time interactions (U. Yu. Abduvakhabova, 2020). As a result, students in hospitality-related learning environments need opportunities to use English in authentic and profession-oriented situations. By understanding how students perceive the usefulness and challenges of English in such settings, educators can better evaluate whether existing ESP instruction has successfully prepared learners for the demands of workplace communication (Namtapi, 2022).

Furthermore, internship programs provide an important bridge between academic learning and professional practice, particularly in fields that involve direct service interaction such as hospitality (Pantaruk et al., 2025). Through internships, students are exposed to authentic communication demands that cannot always be fully simulated in the classroom. They encounter real guests, unpredictable service situations, varied accents, time pressure, and workplace expectations that require both linguistic and interpersonal competence (Muktahiri, 2025). These experiences often become a critical turning point in students' understanding of how English functions in actual professional environments (Khuadthong et

al., 2025). For many students, internship participation may strengthen their awareness of the practical value of English while at the same time revealing gaps between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Avleeva et al., 2025). Therefore, investigating students' perceptions after or during internship experiences can provide deeper insight into how workplace exposure contributes to language development, confidence building, and career preparation in hospitality-related contexts (Civelek & Ključnikov, 2019).

The CoE for Hospitality programme, which places students with a foundation in language education in a service-oriented industry setting, also offers a distinctive educational setting within the English Language Education Department. These students may have stronger foundations in English pedagogy and language abilities than students from hotel management or tourism programmes, but they still need to adjust to the operational routines, service culture, and communicative conventions of the hospitality industry (Dele et al., 2024). This provides a useful framework for analysing how they manage their position as English-speaking interns in non-teaching professional contexts. Their experiences may demonstrate the value of English in the hospitality industry as well as how academic preparation in English education may be converted into meaningful job competency (Hole, 2019). For this reason, exploring students' perceptions in the CoE for Hospitality program can contribute meaningful insights into the intersection between language education, ESP implementation, and employability in the hospitality industry.

This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives related to perception, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and internship-based learning. First, this study adopts (Fredrickson, 2004) theory of positive perception, which explains how positive experiences influence individuals' confidence, motivation, and professional development. Positive perceptions toward English use may encourage students to communicate more actively and confidently in workplace settings. Second, the idea of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), specifically hospitality English, which stresses context-based communication skills necessary in professional hospitality settings, is applied in this study. ESP emphasises how crucial it is to match language acquisition with professional requirements and real-world workplace communication. Third, the philosophy of internship-based learning, which stresses experiential learning through hands-on professional experience, is closely related to this study. Through real-world interactions, internships help students apply what they learn in the

classroom to real-world employment scenarios, enhance their communication skills, and prepare for the workforce..

Previous studies have examined the role of English and internship experiences in hospitality contexts. Pratiwi et al. (2023) emphasized that English plays an essential role in hospitality communication and service quality. (Dele et al., 2024) found that hospitality internship programs enhance students' speaking skills, confidence, and workplace interaction abilities. Similarly, (Zhu et al., 2023) reported that hospitality internship experiences contribute significantly to students' professional development, communication competence, and career readiness through adaptation and reflection processes. However, most previous studies focus on hospitality students or speaking skill development, while limited studies explore English Education students' perceptions in CoE hospitality internship programs. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this empirical and practical gap by examining students' perceptions of English use in authentic hospitality workplace communication. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on English Education students participating in a hospitality-oriented CoE internship program, which combines ESP learning, workplace communication, and experiential learning in real hotel settings. This study investigates how students perceive the importance of using English during their participation in the Center of Excellence (CoE) for Hospitality internship program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. For that reasons two research questions are created to lead the investigation

1. How do students perceive the use of English during their hospitality internship experiences in the CoE program?
2. What benefits and challenges do students experience when using English in hospitality workplace communication?

METHOD

Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design to explore students' perceptions of English use during hospitality internships in the CoE program. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to obtain in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, attitudes, and communication challenges in authentic workplace

contexts. Through this research design, the researcher was able to examine how students perceived their experiences of using English in the hospitality industry and articulate participants' responses during their internship experiences.

Participant

The participants of this study were students of the English Language Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang who participated in the CoE for Hospitality internship program. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they met specific criteria, namely students who had direct interaction with international guests during their internships. Although the number of participants was limited, qualitative research prioritizes depth of information rather than statistical generalization.

The first participant was a 22-year-old female student who interned at Aston Inn Batu in the Front Office division. The second participant was a 22-year-old male student who interned at Aston Inn Denpasar in the Front Office division. The third participant was a 22-year-old male student who completed his internship at Onsen Resort Batu in the Housekeeping division.

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using respondent codes (R1, R2, and R3) instead of real names.

Instrument

The data in this study were qualitative data in the form of verbal responses, opinions, experiences, and perceptions expressed by the participants. The primary data focused on participants' perceptions of the use of English in the hospitality industry, including its role, challenges, benefits, and impact on their professional performance during internships. The source of data was primary data obtained directly from the participants through semi-structured interviews. The interview data included recorded audio responses and interview transcripts.

The interview questions were developed based on the research objectives and relevant theories related to perception and ESP in hospitality contexts. The interview guide was reviewed by the research supervisor to ensure content relevance and clarity. These data sources were considered appropriate because they provided rich, detailed, and contextual

information relevant to the research questions.

Data Collection

The process of obtaining the information needed to address the study questions is referred to as data collecting. The primary method of data gathering in this study was interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they allow for flexibility while still keeping the focus on pre-planned questions. Although participants were encouraged to freely expand on their responses, the interviewer produced an interview guide with important questions. Three people participated in the interviews: two were done offline, and one was done online using a WhatsApp call. The duration of each interview was roughly thirty to forty-five minutes. The researcher recorded participant responses using WhatsApp's voice note and call features. For analysis, every interview was audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. This technique enabled the researcher to capture authentic data while accommodating participants' availability and preferences.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a qualitative descriptive approach based on the interactive model proposed by (Miles., 2014). The analysis began with data condensation, in which the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed to select, focus, and simplify data relevant to the research questions. Irrelevant information was excluded, while meaningful statements related to students' perceptions of the use of English in the hospitality context were coded and categorized into emerging themes. The researcher conducted open coding to identify meaningful statements from the interview transcripts. Similar codes were grouped into categories and then developed into broader themes representing students' perceptions, benefits, challenges, and emotional responses.

After data condensation, the organized data were presented in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. This data display enabled the researcher to compare participants' responses and identify similarities and differences in their experiences. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the displayed data, identifying recurring patterns, and linking the findings to the research objectives.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher conducted member checking by confirming interview interpretations with participants and used peer discussion with the supervisor during

data analysis. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher continuously reviewed the data to ensure consistency, credibility, and alignment with the research questions, resulting in findings that accurately represent participants' perceptions of English use in the hospitality industry.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this research were taken from semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of the research subjects clearly. The students have two perceptions, positive and negative. The analysis revealed two major themes, namely positive perceptions and negative perceptions regarding the use of English in hospitality workplace communication. These themes were generated through thematic coding and categorization of participants' responses during the data analysis process.

Table 1. Thematic Findings of Students' Perceptions on English Use in Hospitality Internships

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<i>Positive Perception</i>	<i>Communication Benefits</i>	<i>English helps students communicate with international guests</i>
<i>Positive Perception</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>English helps students communicate with international guests</i>
<i>Negative Perception</i>	<i>Accent Difficulty</i>	<i>Students experience difficulty understanding foreign accents</i>
<i>Negative Perception</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>	<i>Students feel nervous during initial workplace communication</i>

Positive Perception

Positive perception is a person's perception of something in a positive form. Based on Fredrickson's (2004) theory, positive perception includes indicators such as positive benefits and satisfaction. In this study, two dominant indicators emerged from the participants' responses. However, this study found only two indicators of positive emotion and satisfaction. Positive

A. Communication benefits

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R1 stated that English has significant advantages because it opens up many opportunities to connect with international guests. English skills provide the opportunity to communicate more effectively with foreigners from different countries. Mastery of English is key to expand relationships, build trust, and provide a better experience. This, is supported by R1. *“English is definitely a huge asset for us. Because It opens so many opportunities to connect with international guests”*. In addition, R2 explained that English facilitated workplace communication and improved work efficiency. R2 stated *“with English, I can understand easily, so it makes it easier for me to work”*. In addition, Respondent 3 mentioned that working in a hotel environment allowed him to improve his English communication skills through direct interaction with guests. *“In my opinion, it is really important, especially in the hospitality industry, and I can practice better communication in English.”* These findings indicate that students perceived English as an essential communication tool that supports workplace interaction, improves confidence, and facilitates professional performance in hospitality contexts.

B. Satisfaction

Another positive perception identified in this study was students' satisfaction with their internship experiences. Respondents expressed feelings of pride, achievement, and personal development after participating in the internship program. From the data above, it is stated Based on the interview from R1, R2, and R3, it can be analyzed that the respondents have strong positive satisfaction with their internship experience at the hotel. Respondent 1 stated *“after interning at the hotel, My English has improved a lot with the internship at the hotel because I could practice directly with foreigners and feel how the work environment is”*. Respondent 2 considered the internship as one of the most valuable experiences in his life *“this is the most expensive experience of my life because I was able to work in a famous hotel while still a student”*. Meanwhile, Respondent 3 explained that the internship increased his self-confidence and sense of accomplishment *“I am proud of myself for being able to go through it all, it is a new achievement to be able to work in a large scope”*. These responses demonstrate that internship experiences not only improved students' English competence but also contributed positively to their emotional satisfaction and professional identity development.

Negative Perception

Besides the positive perception, there is a negative perception that is expressed by respondents. The subjects feel there are some challenges when using English in hospitality. Two major sub-themes emerged, namely communication challenges and anxiety.

A. Accent difficulty

According to the data above, most common challenges experienced by participants was difficulty understanding various foreign accents. Respondents 1 explained *“the biggest challenge is probably understanding different accents, sometimes it's hard to catch every word when guests speak quickly.”* Moreover, respondent 2 also experienced similar difficulties and occasionally relied on Google Translate to support communication *“it is difficult to understand the accent of some guests, sometimes I use google translate”*. Respondent 3 mentioned *“I don't understand the accents of some countries”*. The participants further identified several accents that were difficult to understand, including Thai, Chinese, Japanese, British, Indian, and Australian accents. These accent differences often caused misunderstandings during conversations because students were not familiar with variations in pronunciation, speaking speed, and vocabulary use in authentic workplace communication. Some participants explained that they needed extra concentration and sometimes repeated conversations to fully understand guests' requests and responses. These findings suggest that accent variation remains a significant communication barrier in hospitality settings, particularly for internship students with limited exposure to multicultural communication environments. The findings also indicate that students still need greater exposure to diverse English accents commonly used in real workplace communication.

C. Anxiety

During the internship process at the hotel, the participants also experienced anxiety when using English during workplace communication, especially at the beginning of the internship program. Based on the data from the interviews R1 states *“I still can be nervous sometimes”*. Similarly, R2 admitted *“In the first month I was not confident when using English”*. R3 also stated *“I feel worried about my English but still can handle it”*. Although students initially experienced nervousness and lack of confidence, continuous interaction with international guests gradually helped them adapt to workplace communication demands. These findings indicate that authentic communication exposure during internships contributes to the development of students' confidence and communication competence.

Discussion

This study investigated students' perceptions of the use of English during hospitality internship experiences in the CoE for Hospitality program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. The findings revealed that students developed both positive and negative perceptions regarding English use in workplace communication. Overall, students perceived English as an important professional communication tool that supported interaction with international guests, improved confidence, and enhanced workplace readiness. This finding is in line with (Pratiwi et al., 2023), who emphasized that English plays an essential role in hospitality communication and service quality. In the context of ESP, these findings indicate that English learning becomes more meaningful when students apply language skills directly in professional workplace situations.

Another important finding was students' satisfaction with their internship experiences. Students reported that the internship program improved their confidence, communication ability, and professional awareness. This finding is consistent with (Dele et al., 2024), who found that hospitality internship experiences enhance students' communication competence, confidence, and workplace interaction skills. Through authentic workplace exposure, students gained practical communication experience that could not be fully achieved in classroom learning. These positive perceptions can also be explained through Fredrickson's (2004) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which suggests that positive experiences contribute to the development of confidence, motivation, and professional growth.

Despite these positive experiences, students also experienced communication challenges during their internships. The most common difficulty involved understanding various foreign accents from international guests. This finding aligns with Ananta et al. (2024), who also identified communication and interaction challenges in hospitality internship contexts. The findings suggest that students had limited exposure to global English varieties during classroom learning, which caused difficulties in real communication settings. In addition, students experienced anxiety when using English in professional situations, especially at the beginning of the internship. However, continuous interaction with guests gradually reduced their anxiety and improved their confidence. This is also supported by Ananta et al. (2024), who noted that internship environments help students adapt to real communication demands and improve confidence over time. This study contributes to

previous research by focusing specifically on English Education students in a hospitality-oriented CoE internship program. Unlike previous studies that mainly focus on hospitality students or speaking skills development, this study highlights students' perceptions of English use in real workplace communication contexts. Therefore, the novelty lies in the integration of ESP learning, internship experience, and English Education perspective in authentic hospitality settings.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of the use of English during hospitality internship experiences in the CoE for Hospitality program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. Based on the findings, students generally perceived English positively because it supported communication with international guests, increased workplace confidence, and enhanced professional competence. Students considered English an essential skill for hospitality workplace communication and future career preparation.

The study also discovered some advantage and challenge faced by the students in workplace communication. The benefits were better communication skills, higher self-confidence, proper language practice and more professional awareness. Meanwhile, the main problems were the difficulty of comprehending diverse foreign accents and nervousness in the first conversations with guests.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on English Education students participating in a hospitality-oriented CoE internship program that integrates ESP learning, workplace communication, and experiential learning in authentic hotel settings. This study demonstrates that internship experiences play an important role in developing students' communicative competence, professional identity, and career readiness in the hospitality industry.

Limitation

First, the study only included three individuals from a particular institutional setting, which restricts how broadly the results may be applied to other hospitality education contexts. Second, the study did not measure actual English competence or workplace performance; instead, it concentrated on students' views. To get more thorough results about English use in

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hospitality workplace communication, future research is advised to employ mixed-method techniques, include classroom observation or long-term internship studies, and include larger participant groups from several universities. This study emphasize how crucial English is to improving students' professional competency and preparedness for careers in the hospitality sector. The results indicate that internship-based education, like the CoE programme, successfully closes the knowledge gap between classroom instruction and practical communication. As a result, experiential learning and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should be incorporated into English language instruction, with a stronger focus on listening comprehension and exposure to a variety of dialects. In order to give students genuine communication chances, cooperation between academic institutions and business partners is very crucial.

Implication

This study highlights the important role of English in enhancing students' professional competence and career readiness in the hospitality industry. The findings suggest that internship-based learning, such as the CoE program, effectively bridges the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world communication. Therefore, English language teaching should incorporate experiential learning and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), with greater emphasis on listening skills and exposure to diverse accents. Additionally, collaboration between universities and industry partners is essential to provide authentic communication opportunities for students.

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.BIO-PROFILE:

Meta Nordiana is a graduate student (Master's level) in English Language Education. She completed her undergraduate study in English Education and has been actively involved in academic research related to English language use in educational and professional contexts.

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Her research experience includes studies on English for Specific Purposes, particularly English for Hospitality, students' perceptions of English use in internship programs, and the application of English in workplace-based learning. Through her research, she aims to contribute to the development of English education that is relevant to industry needs and professional preparation.

Masyhud is a lecturer in the English Language Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia. He has extensive experience in teaching and supervising undergraduate and graduate students in the field of English education. As an academic staff member, he has been involved in various educational and research activities related to English language teaching and learning. He has supervised numerous student research projects and has contributed to academic publications, particularly those focusing on English education and its application in academic and professional settings.

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