



English Communication Barriers Faced by Mataram Tourism College Students During Field Work Practice

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history Received : March, 30th 2026 Revised : April, 25th 2026 Accepted : June, 20th 2026 OPEN ACCESS	This study investigates the English communication barriers experienced by hospitality students of Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata (STP) Mataram during their internship program. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving 21 hospitality students who had completed Practical Work Experience (Praktik Kerja Lapangan). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three major categories of communication barriers: linguistic, psychological, and operational-cultural. Linguistic barriers include limited hospitality-related vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, and challenges in understanding different English accents. Psychological barriers are characterized by English Language Anxiety (ELA), lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes when interacting with guests. Operational and cultural barriers arise from differences in communication norms, workplace culture, and the fast-paced hospitality environment. These findings indicate a gap between classroom instruction and workplace communication demands. The study recommends strengthening English for Specific Purposes (ESP) through authentic communication activities, task-based learning, and greater exposure to real-world hospitality communication to better prepare students for the tourism industry.
Keywords:	<i>English, Communication Barriers, Field Work Practice</i>

1. Introduction

The tourism industry continues to grow and become a crucial sector in the global economy. In Indonesia, Lombok Island, particularly Mataram City, has become known as an international tourist destination attracting many international tourists (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Basalamah et al., 2021). This situation demands that tourism service providers deliver quality services. One determining factor is the ability to communicate in English as a lingua franca when serving guests from various countries (Wulandari & Rahmawati, 2020).

Tourism college students undergoing Field Work Internships (PKL) are at the forefront of this service. They are required to communicate effectively to ensure smooth service processes and a satisfying guest experience (Ningsih, 2025). In the hospitality industry, English language skills are no longer seen as an added value but have become a core competency required by prospective professionals (Wahyuningsih et al., 2021).

On the other hand, student preparedness is not fully aligned with industry demands. The Mataram Tourism College (STP) has implemented an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum designed to meet the needs of the workplace. However, various studies show that students still experience difficulties when having to use English directly during internships (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Saragih et al., 2026). This situation indicates that classroom learning still emphasizes linguistic aspects over communication skills in real-world work situations.

This gap becomes apparent when students must respond spontaneously to guest inquiries or handle unpredictable service situations. The resulting communication barriers not only impact students' performance during their internships but can also impact the quality of service provided by their employers (Ningsih, 2025).

Various studies have shown that communication barriers among students are multidimensional. Linguistically, students often experience limited technical hospitality vocabulary, difficulty understanding foreign accents, and weaknesses in spontaneous grammar use when speaking (Denok & Taslim, 2025). Psychologically, many students experience English Language Anxiety, characterized by nervousness, fear of making mistakes, worry about being judged by guests and superiors, and low self-confidence when communicating (Putra, 2024; Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Darmawan et al., 2025). Furthermore, cultural differences, norms of politeness, and the use of body language also pose challenges when interacting in a multicultural work environment (Basalamah et al., 2021; Denok & Taslim, 2025).

This study aims to identify and analyze the English communication barriers experienced by students at the Mataram Tourism College (STP) during their internship. The results are expected to provide input for developing more contextual and applicable ESP learning, thus better preparing students for entering the workforce in the international tourism industry.

2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to in-depth examine the English communication barriers experienced by students in the context of tourism services (Ali & Prayuda, 2025). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on students' experiences and the meanings they construct during interactions in real-life communication situations in the work environment (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Darmawan et al., 2025).

The research subjects involved 21 students of the Hospitality Study Program at the Mataram Tourism College (STP) who had undergone Field Work Practice (PKL). The participants were selected because they had direct experience in providing service to guests in the operational department, thus facing communication situations that require English skills in their daily practice (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Ningsih, 2025).

Data were collected through three techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies (Ali & Prayuda, 2025). Interviews were used to explore students' experiences related to linguistic and psychological barriers when communicating with guests. Observations were conducted to directly observe communication behavior, nonverbal language use, and the application of service ethics when students interact in the work environment (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Denok & Taslim, 2025). Meanwhile, documentation studies were used to complement and strengthen the data obtained from the interviews and observations. Data analysis used thematic analysis techniques carried out in several stages. The analysis process began with data reduction to select information relevant to the research focus. Next, the data was coded, grouped into themes that describe various communication barriers, and then interpreted to find dominant patterns. The final stage was drawing conclusions based on the relationships between the identified themes (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Saragih et al., 2026).

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

The research results show that students at the Mataram Tourism College (STP Mataram) still face various barriers when using English during their Field Work Practice (PKL). These barriers are not only related to language skills but also influenced by psychological conditions and the work environment. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, the research findings are grouped into three categories: linguistic barriers, psychological barriers, and operational and cultural barriers.

Linguistic Barriers

Linguistic barriers were the most common obstacle students encountered when interacting with guests. Most respondents reported difficulty using technical hospitality vocabulary when explaining menu items, providing information, or responding to guests' spontaneous requests. These limitations were often accompanied by hesitation in using grammatical structures, resulting in less fluent communication.

Furthermore, students also experience difficulty understanding the various accents of foreign speakers. This is exacerbated when the guest speaks at a fast pace, making the information conveyed difficult to fully understand. As a result, students must ask the guest to repeat the question or provide clarification before they can respond appropriately.

Some students expressed their experiences as follows.

"It's very difficult at first to understand what guests mean, especially if they have a strong accent or speak too fast. Sometimes, this makes it difficult for me to understand what they mean clearly."

Another student also said that,

"I find it difficult to explain menu items using professional terms that are often outside my general vocabulary."

The findings indicate that limited technical vocabulary and the ability to understand accent variations remain major barriers to communication in the hospitality workplace.

Psychological Barriers

Besides language barriers, psychological factors also influence students' ability to communicate in English. Nearly all respondents admitted to experiencing nervousness when serving foreign guests, especially at the beginning of their internship. This condition is linked to the emergence of English Language Anxiety (ELA), which makes students hesitant to initiate conversations or provide direct explanations.

This anxiety is generally triggered by a fear of making mistakes, worrying about not understanding the guest, or feeling judged by supervisors or coworkers. As a result, some students choose to give very brief answers or use body language more than verbal explanations.

One respondent stated that,

"I feel awkward and nervous when I have to communicate in English, especially because I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood by the guests."

Another respondent said,

"There is a fear of making mistakes and feeling embarrassed if friends make fun of me or if guests don't understand what I'm saying."

This statement shows that self-confidence plays an important role in determining the success of student communication during work practice.

Operational and Cultural Barriers

This study also identified barriers related to the work environment. Students not only face language differences but also must adapt to diverse norms of politeness, communication styles, and guest cultures. Furthermore, the use of slang and rapid communication patterns in the hotel environment often lead to misunderstandings when students interact with staff and guests. This situation indicates that communication competence in the hospitality industry depends not only on English language skills but also on the ability to understand the social and cultural context in which they work.

Discussion

The research results show that the English communication barriers experienced by STP Mataram students during their internship are not caused by a single factor. These barriers arise from a combination of limited language skills, psychological factors, and the communication demands of the hospitality work environment. These findings demonstrate a persistent gap between on-campus learning and the communication needs students face in the industry.

From a linguistic perspective, limited technical vocabulary and the ability to understand various accents were the most dominant obstacles. Students admitted to having studied English for tourism in class, but still struggled to respond to spontaneous conversations. This finding aligns with research by Saragih et al. (2026), which states that ESP learning still tends to emphasize linguistic aspects rather than authentic communication competencies. Research by Denok and Taslim (2025) also showed that students often experience difficulty understanding the variety of accents of foreign speakers during internships in the hospitality industry.

In addition to language skills, this study found that English language anxiety is a significant factor affecting students' communication performance. Nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and worry about the judgment of guests and supervisors tend to make students avoid more complex conversations. This finding supports the research of

Darmawan et al. (2025), which states that English language anxiety is a major barrier to communication in the workplace. In other words, good linguistic skills do not necessarily result in effective communication if students lack the confidence to use them.

The research findings also show that the hospitality work environment has different communication characteristics than classroom learning situations. Students must adapt to a fast-paced work pace, the use of professional terminology, and cultural differences in communication. These conditions require more flexible communication skills than simply mastering grammar. These results support the research of Basalamah et al. (2021), which emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural communication competencies in a multicultural hospitality work environment.

The research findings provide several implications for the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning at STP Mataram. Learning needs to utilize the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach more effectively through simulated work situations that mimic real-life situations, such as handling guest complaints, providing menu recommendations, or serving guests with various characteristics (Ali & Prayuda, 2025; Ningsih, 2025). Furthermore, lecturers need to create a supportive learning environment so that students feel more confident using English without fear of making mistakes. This approach is expected to reduce English Language Anxiety and increase students' readiness to face the communication demands of the tourism industry.

Overall, the research findings confirm that students' readiness to enter the workforce is not solely based on linguistic mastery. Developing communication competencies requires integrating authentic speaking practice, improving the ability to understand various accents, and strengthening psychological skills to enable students to communicate effectively in a multicultural hospitality workplace.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that students at the Mataram Tourism College (STP Mataram) still face various obstacles in using English during their Field Work Practice (PKL). These obstacles include linguistic and psychological aspects, as well as communication demands in the workplace. From a linguistic perspective, students experience difficulties using technical hospitality vocabulary, constructing sentences spontaneously, and understanding various foreign accents. From a psychological perspective, English Language Anxiety is the factor that most affects students' self-confidence, causing them to hesitate or avoid communicating

with guests. These findings indicate that there is still a gap between English language learning in the classroom and the actual communication needs in the hospitality industry.

The results of this study have implications for the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning in tourism universities. Learning needs to present more authentic communication situations through the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach, service simulations, and practice understanding various English accent variations commonly encountered in the industry. Furthermore, lecturers need to create a learning environment that encourages students to communicate boldly without fear of making mistakes so that their confidence can develop before entering the workforce. For students, readiness for internships depends not only on mastery of grammar but also on the habit of using English in real situations. Therefore, students need to increase their exposure to English through various authentic sources, such as hotel service videos, conversations with foreign speakers, and regular speaking practice. Thus, they are expected to be better prepared to face the dynamics of communication in the multicultural tourism workplace.

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