



The Role of ESP-Based Training in Enhancing Speaking Fluency and Professional Confidence for Prospective Front Office Professionals

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history Received : April, 1st 2026 Revised : March, 23^d 2026 Accepted : May, 17th 2022 OPEN ACCESS	This study investigates the role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)-based training in enhancing speaking fluency and professional confidence among prospective Front Office professionals in the hospitality industry. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study first collected quantitative data through speaking assessments and professional confidence questionnaires, followed by qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews and workplace observations. The quantitative findings revealed improvements across all speaking dimensions, including fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and ESP-specific vocabulary, as well as increased confidence in communicating with guests, handling complaints, providing hotel information, and managing check-in/check-out procedures. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data identified four major themes: handling guest complaints as the most challenging communicative task, improved fluency through repeated workplace simulation, development of professional confidence, and remaining challenges related to unfamiliar accents and intercultural politeness. The findings indicate that ESP-based training enhances not only linguistic performance but also learners' psychological readiness for authentic workplace communication. The study contributes to ESP and hospitality education by demonstrating the interconnected development of speaking fluency and professional confidence through needs-based, task-oriented training. Practically, the findings suggest that hospitality curricula should integrate target-situation simulations, complaint-handling scenarios, pragmatic communication strategies, and technology-supported practice to better prepare students for professional Front Office communication in international hotel environments.
Keywords:	<i>English for Specific Purposes, speaking fluency, professional confidence, Front Office</i>

1. Introduction

The global hospitality industry increasingly relies on English as the primary medium of communication due to the growing mobility of international travelers across national borders (Zaki et al., 2025). Within hotel operations, Front Office personnel serve as the first point of

contact for guests, making their communicative performance a critical determinant of guests' first impressions, service satisfaction, and the overall reputation of the hotel (Putri & Wijaya, 2026; Zaki et al., 2025). Their responsibilities—including handling reservations, managing check-in and check-out procedures, providing information about hotel facilities, and responding to guest complaints—require considerably more than general English proficiency. These professional tasks demand context-specific communicative competence that enables staff to interact accurately, fluently, and appropriately in authentic service encounters (Chilingaryan, 2020; Zaki et al., 2025). Consequently, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an essential pedagogical approach because it emphasizes the development of language skills, specialized vocabulary, and functional communication strategies directly aligned with workplace requirements.

Despite the recognized importance of English proficiency in hospitality, a substantial gap remains between the theoretical language knowledge acquired in higher education and students' communicative performance during professional training or internships (Ulumuddin et al., 2026). Hospitality students frequently encounter multifaceted communication challenges, including difficulties in understanding diverse international accents, limited mastery of technical hospitality vocabulary, and unfamiliarity with colloquial expressions commonly used by foreign guests (Denok & Taslim, 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). Beyond linguistic limitations, psychological barriers also significantly constrain workplace communication. Foreign language anxiety often reduces students' willingness to communicate, undermines their speaking fluency, and weakens their confidence when interacting with hotel guests (Sukmawati et al., 2026). As a result, students tend to hesitate, respond less spontaneously, and become overly concerned about making grammatical or pronunciation errors, ultimately compromising service quality. These challenges are further intensified by the limited opportunities available in conventional classroom instruction to engage in authentic workplace communication, thereby widening the gap between linguistic competence and professional performance (Mulyawan et al., 2025; Ulumuddin et al., 2026).

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of ESP in hospitality education, existing research has primarily focused on developing instructional materials through needs analysis or investigating language challenges encountered by hospitality employees and interns (Denok & Taslim, 2025; Ulumuddin et al., 2026; Zaki et al., 2025).

Comparatively little empirical evidence has examined whether ESP-based training can simultaneously improve students' speaking fluency and strengthen their professional confidence before they enter the workplace. Moreover, these two outcomes are theoretically interconnected. Context-specific language practice not only enhances communicative fluency through repeated exposure to authentic interactions but also strengthens learners' confidence by increasing their perceived capability to perform professional communication tasks successfully. Investigating these dual outcomes therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of how ESP training prepares prospective Front Office professionals for real-world hospitality communication.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in evaluating an ESP-based training program that was systematically designed using a needs-analysis framework to address authentic communicative demands encountered by Front Office trainees. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized curriculum development, language needs analysis, or communication challenges among experienced hotel employees, this study focuses on prospective Front Office professionals and empirically examines the effectiveness of ESP-based training in simultaneously enhancing speaking fluency and professional confidence. By integrating linguistic and psychological dimensions of professional communication, this study contributes to the growing body of ESP research while offering practical implications for the design of hospitality curricula that better prepare students for authentic workplace communication. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the role of ESP-based training in improving speaking fluency and professional confidence among hospitality students preparing for Front Office careers.

2. Research Method

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and enrich the quantitative findings. This design was selected because it enables researchers to obtain both measurable evidence of learning outcomes and in-depth insights into participants' experiences, making it particularly appropriate for investigating speaking performance and professional confidence in ESP contexts.

The quantitative phase evaluated changes in students' speaking fluency and professional confidence following an ESP-based training program. Subsequently, the qualitative phase explored participants' perceptions, communication challenges, and learning experiences to provide a deeper interpretation of the quantitative results. To capture authentic workplace communication, the study also adopted a case study perspective focusing on hospitality students undertaking Front Office training in real hotel settings.

The participants were undergraduate hospitality students who were undertaking or had recently completed their Front Office internships in partner hotels. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants with direct experience communicating with international guests, ensuring that the collected data reflected authentic workplace communication.

To ensure the comparability of participants' language proficiency, only students who had achieved at least an intermediate level of English proficiency, as determined through institutional placement assessments, were included in the study. This criterion ensured that observed differences in speaking performance were more likely attributable to the ESP training rather than substantial differences in initial language proficiency.

The ESP-based training program was designed based on a needs analysis of communicative tasks commonly performed by Front Office personnel. The training emphasized authentic workplace communication through role plays, simulated guest interactions, problem-solving activities, and task-based speaking exercises. Learning materials covered essential Front Office functions, including handling reservations, welcoming guests, managing check-in and check-out procedures, providing hotel information, responding to guest requests, and handling complaints.

Throughout the training, participants received continuous feedback on pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and interactional strategies. The instructional activities were designed to improve not only communicative competence but also learners' confidence in performing professional communication tasks.

Data were collected using three complementary instruments to facilitate methodological triangulation. First, a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale was administered to measure participants' perceptions of speaking anxiety, linguistic challenges, and professional confidence before and after the training program. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their experiences during

workplace communication, coping strategies, and perceptions of the ESP training. Third, non-participant observations were carried out during Front Office practice sessions and internship activities to examine participants' communicative performance, interactional strategies, politeness, and speaking fluency in authentic service encounters.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to summarize participants' responses. Where appropriate, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine changes in speaking fluency and professional confidence following the ESP-based training.

Speaking performance was assessed using an analytic speaking rubric covering four dimensions: fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and ESP-specific vocabulary use. Questionnaire reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, while content validity was established through expert review.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns related to linguistic challenges, communication strategies, speaking confidence, and participants' perceptions of the ESP training. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled comprehensive interpretation through methodological triangulation.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

The quantitative findings demonstrate that the ESP-based training was associated with improvements in participants' speaking performance and professional confidence. As shown in **Table 1**, post-training scores increased across all speaking assessment criteria, indicating overall progress in participants' communicative competence within Front Office contexts.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Training Speaking Performance

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference
Speaking Fluency	62	78	16
Pronunciation	60	84	24
Grammar Accuracy	52	82	30
ESP Vocabulary	68	87	19

Among the four assessed dimensions, **Grammar Accuracy** showed the largest improvement, increasing by 30 points, followed by **Pronunciation** (+24), **ESP Vocabulary** (+19), and **Speaking Fluency** (+16). Although speaking fluency demonstrated the smallest numerical gain, participants exhibited noticeably greater ability to produce continuous speech with fewer hesitations during simulated Front Office interactions. The questionnaire findings similarly revealed improvements in participants' perceptions of professional confidence after completing the ESP-based training.

Table 2. Professional Confidence Questionnaire Results

Indicator	Pre-training Mean	Post-training Mean
Confidence communicating with guests	65	86
Confidence handling complaints	60	79
Confidence giving hotel information	67	83
Confidence managing check-in/check-out	61	82

As presented in Table 2, participants reported increased confidence across all professional communication tasks. The largest improvements were observed in confidence communicating with guests and confidence managing check-in/check-out, each increasing by 21 points. Although confidence handling guest complaints also improved substantially, it remained the lowest-rated dimension after the training, suggesting that complaint management continued to represent the most demanding communicative task for many participants.

Taken together, the quantitative findings indicate consistent improvements in both linguistic performance and self-perceived professional confidence following the ESP-based training.

1) 4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by providing deeper insights into participants' learning experiences and the communicative challenges encountered during workplace interactions. Thematic analysis generated four interrelated themes that explain how the ESP-based training influenced participants' speaking performance and professional confidence.

a) *Theme 1. Handling Guest Complaints as the Most Challenging Communicative Task*

Most participants identified handling guest complaints as the most demanding aspect of Front Office communication. Unlike routine interactions such as greeting guests or providing hotel information, complaint handling required participants to respond immediately while simultaneously maintaining politeness, empathy, and professionalism.

"When a guest is angry, my mind sometimes goes blank. I know the basic vocabulary, but finding the right words to stay extremely polite while thinking of an immediate solution is very hard. I'm always afraid of using the wrong phrase and making the guest even more upset." (Participant AGH)

This perception was consistent with classroom observations, which showed that participants frequently paused before responding, relied on memorized expressions, and occasionally switched to Indonesian when they were unable to formulate appropriate responses. These findings suggest that complaint handling places substantial linguistic, cognitive, and emotional demands on trainee Front Office staff.

b) *Theme 2. Improved Speaking Fluency through Repeated Workplace Simulation*

Participants consistently attributed their improvement in speaking fluency to repeated role-play activities and simulated hotel interactions conducted throughout the ESP training.

"In the beginning, I had to translate every sentence from Indonesian to English in my head before speaking. But after doing the hotel simulations over and over, the phrases just came out naturally. I don't pause as much as I used to when greeting or answering guests."

(Participant DTM)

Observational data supported these perceptions. Compared with the initial training sessions, participants responded more quickly, produced longer stretches of uninterrupted speech, and demonstrated smoother turn-taking during simulated guest interactions. They also relied less on memorized scripts and showed greater flexibility in adapting their responses to different communication scenarios.

c) Theme 3. Development of Professional Confidence

Interview data further revealed that repeated engagement in authentic communication tasks gradually strengthened participants' professional confidence. Many participants explained that they became less concerned about making grammatical mistakes and increasingly focused on communicating effectively with guests.

"I used to be terrified of making grammar mistakes in front of guests, which made me freeze. But after practicing real scenarios in the ESP training, I realized that communicating clearly is more important than being perfect. Now, I feel much more comfortable and don't hesitate to start a conversation first." (Participant SM)

Participants also emphasized the importance of immediate instructor feedback after each simulation. They perceived constructive feedback as instrumental in reducing speaking anxiety, improving communication strategies, and increasing confidence when interacting with hotel guests in professional settings.

d) Theme 4. Remaining Communication Challenges

Despite the overall improvements, participants acknowledged several challenges that persisted after the training. These included understanding unfamiliar English accents, responding to unpredictable guest requests, and selecting culturally appropriate politeness expressions during complex interactions.

"Even though I feel more confident now, I still get confused when guests speak with strong native or non-native accents, like Australian or European accents. Also, when they ask for something unusual that wasn't in our role-play scenarios, I hesitate because I'm not sure if my response sounds polite enough in their culture." (Participant AR)

Observational findings likewise indicated that participants remained more hesitant during unanticipated communication situations than during routine Front Office tasks. These remaining challenges suggest that while the ESP-based training substantially enhanced workplace communication skills, continuous exposure to authentic intercultural interactions is still necessary to develop higher levels of professional communicative competence.

Overall, the qualitative findings corroborate the quantitative results by demonstrating that improvements in speaking performance were accompanied by increased professional confidence. Nevertheless, the data also indicate that communicative competence in hospitality settings extends beyond linguistic knowledge, requiring learners to integrate language proficiency, pragmatic awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and confidence when responding to authentic workplace situations.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that ESP-based training contributes not only to the development of speaking fluency but also to the enhancement of professional confidence among prospective Front Office professionals. Rather than representing independent learning outcomes, these two constructs appear to reinforce one another. As participants became more fluent in performing workplace communication tasks, they also reported greater confidence in interacting with international guests. Conversely, increased confidence reduced hesitation and communication anxiety, enabling participants to respond more spontaneously during authentic service encounters. This reciprocal relationship suggests that linguistic competence and psychological readiness should be viewed as complementary dimensions of professional communication in hospitality settings.

These findings are consistent with the fundamental principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasize that language instruction should be designed around learners' occupational needs rather than general language proficiency. From the perspective of Needs Analysis, the communicative demands identified in this study—including handling

reservations, responding to guest inquiries, managing complaints, and maintaining polite interactions—represent authentic target tasks that should become the foundation of instructional design. The improvement observed after the ESP intervention indicates that learning activities aligned with workplace requirements facilitate the transfer of classroom knowledge to real professional contexts.

The findings also support the concept of Target Situation Analysis (TSA), which argues that language instruction should prepare learners for the communicative situations they are expected to encounter in their future professions. Participants consistently identified complaint handling as the most cognitively demanding communicative task because it requires simultaneous management of language production, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and customer service. This finding suggests that Front Office communication extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include pragmatic competence, interactional strategies, and rapid decision-making under pressure. Consequently, ESP curricula should prioritize high-frequency workplace scenarios rather than isolated language exercises.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between repeated task performance and professional confidence. From a self-efficacy perspective, repeated successful completion of authentic communication tasks provides mastery experiences that strengthen learners' beliefs in their ability to perform professional responsibilities effectively. As participants repeatedly engaged in role plays, simulations, and authentic service interactions, they gradually developed greater confidence in using English despite occasional linguistic errors. This finding supports the view that confidence develops through successful task performance rather than through explicit instruction alone. Accordingly, speaking fluency and professional confidence should be developed simultaneously through meaningful communicative practice.

The qualitative findings further reveal that linguistic challenges cannot be separated from affective factors. Difficulties in understanding diverse accents, selecting appropriate politeness expressions, and responding spontaneously frequently triggered communication anxiety, which subsequently disrupted speaking fluency. This finding extends previous hospitality ESP studies by demonstrating that workplace communication problems are multidimensional, involving linguistic, psychological, and pragmatic competencies simultaneously. Therefore, effective ESP instruction should integrate language knowledge with authentic communicative practice and confidence-building activities.

From a practical perspective, these findings have important implications for hospitality education. First, ESP curricula should be systematically developed through comprehensive needs analysis involving hotel practitioners, internship supervisors, alumni, and hospitality students to ensure alignment between classroom instruction and industry expectations. Second, learning activities should move beyond textbook-based grammar instruction toward task-based simulations that replicate authentic Front Office interactions, particularly complaint handling, guest inquiries, reservation management, and intercultural communication. Third, formative feedback should focus not only on grammatical accuracy but also on fluency, interactional effectiveness, politeness strategies, and professional demeanor.

Furthermore, digital learning technologies offer promising opportunities to strengthen workplace readiness. AI-powered conversational platforms, virtual hotel simulations, and interactive video-based role plays can provide students with repeated exposure to realistic communication scenarios before entering professional placements. Such technologies enable learners to practice independently, receive immediate feedback, and progressively build both communicative competence and professional confidence in low-risk learning environments.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of ESP literature by demonstrating that needs-based ESP training enhances not only linguistic performance but also learners' psychological readiness for professional communication. The findings reinforce the importance of integrating speaking fluency, pragmatic competence, and professional confidence within a unified pedagogical framework to better prepare hospitality students for authentic Front Office communication in international hotel environments.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the role of ESP-based training in improving speaking fluency and professional confidence among hospitality students preparing for Front Office careers. The findings demonstrate that the training contributed to measurable improvements in participants' communicative performance, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and ESP-specific vocabulary use. In addition, participants reported higher levels of confidence when interacting with international guests, managing check-in/check-out procedures, and responding to workplace communication demands.

The qualitative findings further revealed that repeated engagement in authentic workplace simulations enabled students to produce speech more spontaneously, reduce hesitation, and

develop greater confidence in professional interactions. However, handling guest complaints remained the most challenging communicative task because it required the simultaneous integration of linguistic competence, pragmatic politeness, emotional regulation, and real-time problem-solving. This indicates that communicative competence in hospitality settings extends beyond grammatical knowledge and involves the ability to perform effectively under pressure in culturally sensitive service encounters.

The study also highlights the close relationship between speaking fluency and professional confidence. Increased fluency was associated with reduced communication anxiety and greater willingness to interact with guests, while improved confidence facilitated more spontaneous and sustained speech production. These findings support the view that linguistic and psychological dimensions of communication should be developed simultaneously through task-based ESP instruction grounded in authentic workplace needs.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that hospitality education programs should adopt comprehensive needs analysis and target situation analysis when designing ESP curricula. Instructional activities should prioritize realistic Front Office simulations, complaint-handling practice, pragmatic communication strategies, intercultural awareness, and technology-supported speaking practice to bridge the gap between classroom learning and industry expectations.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focused on hospitality students within a specific educational context and relied on a relatively limited participant group. Future studies could involve larger samples across multiple institutions, incorporate longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of training effects, and compare different ESP instructional models to identify the most effective approaches for developing workplace communication competence in the hospitality industry.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that needs-based ESP training can simultaneously enhance speaking fluency and professional confidence, thereby strengthening students' readiness for authentic Front Office communication in international hotel environments.

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