

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

English has become an essential component in global communication, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries, where the quality of service delivery depends largely on employees' communication abilities. The hospitality industry demands individuals who can effectively engage with international guests and adapt to a variety cultural and linguistic situations. As Indonesia's tourist industry expands so does the demand for qualified hospitality personnel with excellent English skills (Nabila Zayanti et al., 2023). English is therefore not only considered an academic requirement but a crucial employability skill that determines workplace readiness. Despite the importance it holds, English teaching and learning in vocational schools frequently emphasizes grammar and academic knowledge above actual conversational abilities (Lin & Tseng, 2020). This situation limits students' ability to use English confidently in authentic professional environments.

In response to the increased need for practical English skills, vocational schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) offering hospitality programs have integrated industry-based learning into their curriculum through internship programs. These internships are designed to connect classroom learning with real world applications and to prepare students for genuine work situations. At SMKN 1 Bintan Timur, one of the leading vocational schools in the Riau Islands Province, students majoring in

hospitality are required to complete an internship in hotels located across Bintan and Batam. During the internship, students are expected to use English to perform tasks such as greeting and assisting guests, handling reservations, providing information, and resolve issues with customers. This experience provides them with an opportunity to apply their English knowledge in real workplace contexts while enhancing their communication abilities. Nevertheless, some students encounter difficulties in using English effectively during their internship due to a lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and insufficient exposure to real conversation (Ananta et al., 2024; Cahyono et al., 2025).

Although hotel internship programs are intended to improve students' practical language abilities, previous research has shown that many vocational students still struggle to use English appropriately in professional contexts. Indrastana et al., (2023) reported that students often experience challenges in adapting their classroom acquired language skills to real conversation with foreign guests. Similarly, Lin and Tseng (2020) discovered that internship overseas provided significant experience while also revealing gaps between academic preparation and workplace linguistic demands. These data imply that while internships are advantageous, it do not ensure improved English ability. Some students perceive their internships as challenging rather than empowering, which has an impact on their overall learning motivation and language proficiency.

Several studies have explored the relationship between internship experiences and English skill development, although most have focused on quantitative outcomes

such as improvement in speaking or listening proficiency (Bozkur & Alkis, 2020; Nabila Zayanti et al., 2023). Only a few qualitative studies have examined how students themselves perceive and interpret their usage of English during internships, particularly within the Indonesian vocational education context. Sitepu et al., (2022) emphasized that students' personal reflections can provide valuable insights into how experiential learning supports language acquisition, yet this area remains underexplored in Indonesia. Therefore, there is a need for qualitative research that captures students' voices and experiences to understand how they perceive English usage during their hotel internship, what challenges they face, and how they deal with communication demands in real hospitality contexts.

Preliminary observations at The Residence Bintan suggest that vocational students may face challenges in using English during their hotel internship activities. English is not consistently used when students interact with foreign guests, and communication often relies on familiar expressions or assistance from others. Some students may also struggle in situations requiring for spontaneous English responses. These indications imply that although English is included in the vocational curriculum, students may experience difficulties in applying their English knowledge effectively in real workplace communication.

Based on the implementation of hotel internship programs as an essential of the vocational school curriculum, students are expected to apply their English skills in real workplace settings. In reality, a lot of hospitality students still struggle to use English effectively during their internships, especially in spontaneous communication

with guests and in handling authentic service situations. This gap between curricular expectations and students' actual English usage highlights the need for a deeper investigation into students' experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to explore hospitality students' perspectives on their English usage and identify the challenges they encounter during their hotel internship experience.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, several problems can be identified as follows:

1. Students still face difficulties using English in real hotel interactions, particularly when engaging with foreign guests, due to limited vocabulary, low confidence, and lack of fluency.
2. There is a gap between classroom English learning and workplace communication demands.
3. The challenges students encounter during internship have not been explored deeply from a qualitative perspective, particularly within the context of vocational hospitality programs in Indonesia.

1.3 Limitation of the Research

This study seeks to explore how hospitality students view their usage of English during their hotel internship experiences and to better understand the challenges they encounter while communicating in professional contexts. The research aims to describe students' perspectives on English usage as they engage in authentic

interactions with guests, colleagues, and supervisors in the workplace. It also intends to identify the difficulties they encounter when applying English in real hospitality contexts, including issues related to confidence, fluency, and situational appropriateness. Through these objectives, the study aims to give a thorough knowledge of how internship experiences impact students' English communication abilities, as well as to emphasize the aspects that shape their capacity to employ this language successfully in actual hotel settings.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the elaboration above, the researcher formulated the problem in the following questions:

1. What are the students' perspectives on the Use of English through hotel internship experience?
2. What challenges do students face when using English during their hotel internship?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the problem formulation above, the aims of this study are as follows:

1. To explore hospitality students' perspectives on the Use of English during their hotel internship experience.
2. To identify the challenges faced by hospitality students in using English during the hotel internship.

1.6 Significances of the Research

It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to:

1. Schools

This study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how English is used by hospitality students during their hotel internship experience. The findings might help schools, particularly SMKN 1 Bintan Timur, evaluate and improve the alignment of English learning in the classroom with the communication demands of the hotel industry.

2. English Teachers

The results are expected to provide insights for English teachers regarding students' real world language experiences, allowing them to identify areas where additional support is needed. This may encourage teachers to develop instructional practices that better prepare students for authentic communication in hotel environments and increase students' confidence in using English in professional settings.

3. Students

This study is expected to benefit hospitality students by increasing awareness of the importance of English in actual workplace communication. By learning about common challenges and successful strategies, future interns may be better prepared to communicate effectively and gain more meaningful learning experiences throughout their internships.

4. Future Research

The findings of this study could serve as a reference for future research in similar fields, especially those focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), vocational education, and work based language learning. It might also inspire further qualitative research into students' lived experiences in the hospitality industry.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Students' Perspectives

Research indicates that students' perspectives refer to their personal opinion, experiences, and interpretations of a phenomenon, which offering insight into how they make meaning of their learning and context (Esmaeil et al., 2024). In this study, students' perspectives refer to how hospitality students perceive and interpret their usage of English throughout their hotel internship experience.

2. English Communication

Within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English communication refers to the use of English in professional contexts for tasks such as interaction, negotiation, and information exchange (Wijayati & Safitri, 2025). It focuses on the ability to deliver meaning effectively in real communication situations. In this study, the term use of English is understood as part of English communication, focusing on interaction and the process of

conveying meaning in workplace contexts. How they experience and respond to communication situations when interacting with guests, supervisors, and colleagues.

3. Hotel Internship Experience

Internship experience is defined as a structured work-based learning period in which students apply their theoretical knowledge in genuine workplace contexts, developing professional and communication competence through real tasks and interactions (Sitepu et al., 2022). In this study, hotel internship experience refers specifically to the period during which hospitality students from SMKN 1 Bintan Timur engage in hotel service roles and use English in authentic workplace communication.

