

## The Expected Skills from Learning English: Perspective from Culinary Students at SMKN 1 Sukasada

Merry Amadea Siregar<sup>1</sup>, Ni Wayan Surya Mahayanti<sup>2</sup>, Luh Gd Rahayu Budiarta<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Email : [merry.amadea@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:merry.amadea@undiksha.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>; [surya.mahayanti@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:surya.mahayanti@undiksha.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>;  
[rahayu.budiarta@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:rahayu.budiarta@undiksha.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

The culinary industry demanded strong English communication skills, especially in speaking. This study aimed to identify the English language skills needed by tenth-grade culinary students at SMKN 1 Sukasada. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, involving 28 purposively selected students. Data were collected through closed and open questionnaires and analysed descriptively. The findings reveal that speaking skills are considered the most important aspect of English, yet students have limited exposure to English in their daily lives. Key challenges include a restricted vocabulary, difficulties with pronunciation, and low self-confidence. Therefore, the study recommends increasing English exposure outside the classroom, incorporating more speaking-focused activities, and providing targeted practice in vocabulary and pronunciation. A supportive learning environment is also essential to enhance students' English abilities. Although the sample size is small, this study offers valuable insights for developing an English curriculum that addresses the specific communicative needs of vocational culinary students.

**Keywords:** *Culinary Arts, English Language Skills, Vocational High School.*

### INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in daily life as a means to convey thoughts, emotions, and intentions (Awaliah & Rahmawati, 2024). Among various languages, English is widely taught from primary to tertiary education due to its global significance. It serves as the primary language for communication in the hospitality sector between staff and international guests (Prabhu & Wani, 2015). With the ongoing growth of tourism in Indonesia (Adijaya et al., 2023), students are expected to develop strong communication skills to interact professionally with both guests and colleagues (Yuliantini et al., 2024). A high proficiency in English is essential for students to communicate accurately in both spoken and written forms, which is critical for their future careers in tourism (A. U. Rahayu, 2015). Nevertheless, students often experience anxiety during virtual meetings, influenced by their language ability, test preparation, and the desire to create a positive impression in online learning environments (Santosa & Mali, 2024). Addressing this issue is vital because English not only facilitates the advancement of science, technology, and culture but also enhances intelligence and opens opportunities for higher education and careers.

In vocational high schools specializing in culinary arts, students often encounter significant challenges in developing their English language skills. This difficulty largely stems from the fact that many vocational schools in Indonesia continue to prioritize general English instruction rather than adopting English for Specific Purposes (ESP) tailored to students' future professional needs. General English courses typically focus on broad

language skills that may not adequately prepare students for the specialized communication demands of the culinary and hospitality industries. As a result, students graduate without the practical language competencies required to interact effectively in professional settings, such as communicating with international clients, understanding technical culinary terminology, or navigating workplace interactions (Khalida & Refnaldi, 2020). Mastering English in culinary classes is essential for students to achieve success in their future careers. Proficiency in English enables effective communication with international clients, accurate comprehension and execution of recipes, and efficient management of kitchen operations. The culinary arts programmed demands a higher level of English proficiency than general education, underscoring the critical importance of language mastery in this specialized field. Furthermore, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) plays a vital role in preparing students to meet the specific language expectations of their future employers. EOP equips students with the practical language skills necessary to navigate workplace interactions, understand industry terminology, and perform job-related tasks confidently, thereby enhancing their employability and professional competence in the global culinary industry (Yakir et al., 2023).

Previous studies consistently highlight speaking as the most challenging English skill for vocational students. This difficulty is often attributed to limited exposure to the language, anxiety during communication, and a restricted vocabulary, which collectively hinder students' ability to speak confidently and fluently in professional contexts (Ahmed, 2023) (Fauzi, 2024) (Ma'fiah & Sumardiono, 2023)(Mohammad et al., 2022). While these studies provide valuable general insights, few focus specifically on the needs and views of culinary students at the school level. There is a notable lack of research centered on students' lived experiences within specific educational settings like SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada, particularly regarding their English language requirements for future culinary roles. To fill this gap, the current study aims to identify the essential English language skills needed by tenth-grade culinary students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and gathering data through questionnaires, this research investigates students' perceptions of their strengths, difficulties, and expectations in learning English. Special emphasis is placed on spoken communication, including fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation, as these were frequently mentioned by students as important yet underdeveloped areas.

The study's findings offer valuable contributions for hospitality educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. Recommendations include enhancing English exposure through extracurricular activities, increasing speaking opportunities in class, and providing focused support for vocabulary and pronunciation development. Moreover, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment is crucial for boosting students' confidence and communication skills. While the relatively small sample size in this study may restrict the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts, the research nonetheless establishes a valuable foundation for future investigations. It offers practical guidance for curriculum refinement and pedagogical strategies aimed at improving English proficiency among vocational culinary students. Subsequent research could build on these findings by involving larger, more diverse samples and exploring additional instructional approaches to further strengthen English language education in vocational settings.

## METHOD

The study focuses on identifying and examining the specific English language skills that tenth-grade culinary students at SMKN 1 Sukasada expect to develop through their culinary education. Twenty-eight students were purposively selected as participants due to their backgrounds in culinary arts and their exposure to English instruction, which positions them well to provide valuable insights into the integration of English skills within their curriculum. This purposeful sampling enhances the study's reliability and validity by ensuring that participants are directly involved in relevant English learning and are willing to offer candid responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the school, and all participants gave informed consent. By exploring students' strengths, challenges, and expectations in learning English, the research aims to inform how English instruction can be better tailored to meet the needs of culinary students.

A descriptive qualitative methodology was employed in this study, as it is well-suited for obtaining an in-depth understanding of complex and nuanced experiences. This approach enabled the research to thoroughly explore students' learning experiences, challenges, and expectations concerning the use of English in hospitality contexts. Such a method aligns closely with the objectives of educational needs analysis, which seeks to identify learners' specific requirements and inform tailored instructional strategies in vocational education settings (Assingily, 2021; Sugiyono, n.d.).

Data were collected using a questionnaire containing both closed and open questions to gather quantitative and qualitative information. The questionnaire was designed to be accessible for students with varying English proficiency levels and was administered in Bahasa Indonesia for clarity. The questionnaire addressed several key topics related to English language learning in the culinary field. It covered students' daily use of English, the language skills they consider most important for their culinary studies, the difficulties they face in learning English, and their expectations from English language learning programs to support their career goals. The specific questions were:

1. Do you frequently communicate using English in culinary class?
2. Out of these six language skills (The six language skills: vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, writing, reading), which do you consider most important in culinary class?
3. What difficulties do you face when learning English in culinary classes?
4. What do you expect from English language learning programs in culinary class to help you achieve your career goals?

Question number one aims to determine the extent to which students actively use English in their practical culinary classes. It helps identify their current exposure to English in real-life learning environments, which is crucial for developing speaking fluency and communicative competence in the hospitality context. By asking students to prioritise among vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, writing, and reading, question number two seeks to understand their perceptions of which language skills are most relevant to their future culinary careers. This insight helps tailor English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula to focus on the skills that align with industry demands and students' practical needs. This open-ended question number three explores the specific challenges students encounter, such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, or anxiety. Understanding these obstacles allows educators to design targeted interventions that address learners' actual barriers to effective communication in culinary settings. Question number four captures students'

aspirations and preferences regarding English instruction, highlighting the types of support and learning approaches they believe will best prepare them for professional success. It informs curriculum developers and policymakers about how to align teaching methods with learners' goals and industry requirements.

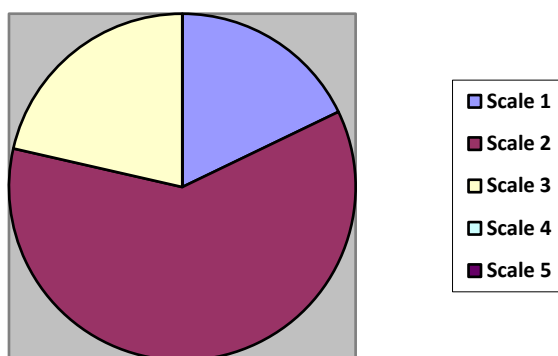
To ensure validity, the questionnaire was adapted from relevant literature and reviewed by language education experts before distribution. The questionnaires were distributed during a scheduled class session, with about 30 minutes allocated for completion. The researcher supervised the process, providing assistance as needed. Students completed the questionnaire independently and were encouraged to answer thoughtfully. Data collection occurred in a single session to maintain consistency and minimise external influences.

Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse closed-ended responses, identifying trends in students' views on English skills. Thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses to detect common patterns and themes regarding difficulties and instructional expectations. This mixed-methods approach enabled a comprehensive interpretation of students' language learning needs.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This questionnaire employed a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather data on the English language learning experiences and needs of culinary students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. The data in this study were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 28 tenth-grade culinary students at SMKN 1 Sukasada. The results are organized into four tables based on each research question. This questionnaire is designed specifically for students enrolled in the culinary program at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. The focus on students stems from the need to understand their current English language proficiency and the challenges they encounter within the context of culinary careers. By identifying their specific needs and learning preferences, the program can be tailored to better equip them with the necessary English language skills to thrive in the global culinary industry.

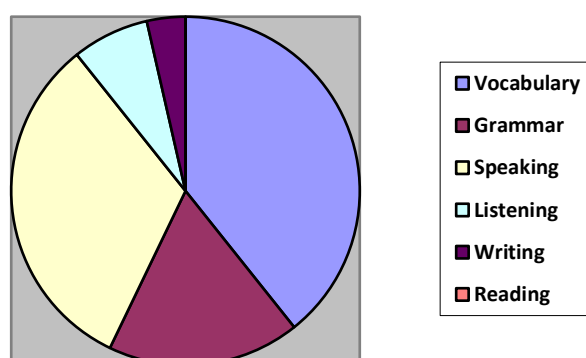
Based on the research question, the purpose of this study was to explore students' perceptions of their strengths, challenges, and expectations in learning English. The data presented here come from questionnaires distributed to tenth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. Question 1 asked how frequently students communicate using English during their culinary classes. Responses were recorded on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "very rarely or never" and 5 means "always." This question aims to gauge the extent of English use in the classroom setting, providing insight into students' practical exposure to the language in their field of study.



**Chart 1.** Question 1

Based on the results shown in the chart above, the majority of students selected option score 2 there are 17 students, followed by score 3 selected by 6 students, while the least chosen was score 1 only 5 students. Notably, no students selected options score 4 or score 5. This indicates that students rarely use English during their culinary classes. The first chart (Chart 1) explored how often students use English in their daily lives. Out of 28 students surveyed, there is no student reported frequent English communication. This suggests a limited exposure to English outside of the classroom setting also This suggests that most students lack consistent opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, a factor that could hinder speaking fluency development.

Question number 2 asked students to identify which of the six English language skills they consider most important in the culinary class. The skills listed were vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, writing, and reading, and students were asked to choose the one they deemed most essential.



**Chart 2.** Question 2

Chart 2 asked students to identify the most important English skills for culinary and focuses on the skills students consider most important for culinary careers. Interestingly, reading werenot chosen by a majority. Instead, vocabulary was selected by 11 students, while speaking selected by 9 students, grammar selected by 5 students, listening were each

selected by 2 students and only one student select writing. No students chose reading emphasizing the perceived importance of oral communication in culinary-related contexts.

Question number 3 asked students to describe the difficulties they faced when learning English in their culinary class. Students provided brief answers outlining the specific challenges they encountered during their English learning process.

**Table 1. Question 3**

No	Question	Students Response
3	What difficulties do you face when learning English in culinary classes?	<b>3 students:</b> Distinguishing words in English and lack of vocabulary in English. <b>10 students:</b> Hard to memorize vocabulary in English. <b>4 students:</b> Hard to speaking in English. <b>8 students:</b> Cannot understanding sentences in English. <b>1 student:</b> Not confidence use English. <b>1 student:</b> Hard to reading in English. <b>1 student:</b> Do not have any difficulties.

Table 1 focused on the challenges students encounter in learning English. The most common responses were difficulty with vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking. Several students also mentioned a lack of confidence, difficulty forming sentences, and limited comprehension. Here, vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties are prominent. Multiple students mentioned lacking vocabulary and not knowing how to pronounce words correctly. Additionally, several students reported feeling a lack of confidence and difficulty understanding explanations in English. These findings highlight the multifaceted barriers students face, particularly in active communication skills.

Question 4 asked students about their expectations from the English language learning programmes in their culinary class to support their career goals. Students provided brief responses outlining what they hoped to gain from the English instruction to better prepare them for their future professions.

**Table 2. Question 4**

No	Question	Students Response
4	What do you expect from English language learning programs in culinary class to help you achieve your career goals?	<b>16 students:</b> I hope for more practice using English than mostly theory. It is easier to understand when practiced rather than just explained through theory. <b>4 students:</b> I can achieve my dream career. <b>7 students:</b> To become fluent in English. <b>1 student:</b> Do not have any expectation.

Table 2 addressed student expectations from their English language program. The overwhelming desire is for more speaking practice. Some students wished for fluent in English while others expressed a preference for a practical approach over theory-heavy lessons. Interestingly, only one do not have any expectations. Overall, the responses reflect a strong emphasis on spoken communication and a need for increased practical application in the English language program for culinary students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada.

The findings in chart 1 showed that most students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. This aligns with studies that highlight the vocational students often lack authentic language exposure, reducing their ability to apply classroom knowledge in real-life contexts (Efrizah et al., 2024) (Huang et al., 2022) (Setyowati et al., 2025) (Xiangyu, 2023). Such limited exposure negatively impacts fluency and confidence—key skills for hospitality professionals who regularly interact with diverse guests. The prioritisation of vocabulary and speaking as the most important skill reinforces earlier research emphasising oral communication's vital role in service industries (Annisa et al., 2023). This reflects the practical nature of culinary education, where mastering specific culinary terms and effective oral communication are essential for success in culinary field.

The findings highlight the importance of tailoring English for Specific Purpose (ESP) materials to meet culinary students' need, with a strong emphasis on culinary terminology and effective communication in professional kitchen settings. In current English curricula, especially in vocabulary related to food presentation and customer interaction, and stressed the need for materials that develop speaking skills relevant to the culinary industry (Simanjuntak & Ratmanida, 2024). Students not selected reading as their priority in culinary class, it align with the research before that state reading competence is a complex construct, requiring not only the ability to decode and comprehend texts but also the integration of contextual knowledge and motivation, which can be enhanced through culturally relevant and engaging materials (Ratminingsih et al., 2020). The value of varied and engaging literacy activities such as reading non-subject books, writing response journals, spelling and storytelling can foster students' confidence, motivation, and language proficiency (Prawira et al., 2023). These insight reinforce the need for English instruction in culinary education to prioritize not only technical vocabulary and speaking skills, but also the broader literacy practices that enable students to thrive in global and professional context.

Students in vocational culinary education reported several challenges in learning English, notably limited vocabulary, difficulties with pronunciation, and low self-confidence [1]. These issues hinder their ability to communicate effectively in professional settings and impact their overall language proficiency development. Many emphasised vocabulary and pronunciation as major obstacles, who stress these as fundamental for effective communication (Annisa et al., 2023)(Ma'fiah & Sumardiono, 2023). Difficulties with vocabulary hinder understanding instructions, clear expression, and engaging in meaningful hospitality conversations, while pronunciation problems can cause misunderstandings and affect service quality. Lack of confidence, noted by several students, echoes findings that underline confidence's role in overcoming language anxiety (Indrianty, 2016)(Rahmawati & Rizqiya, 2023). Students with low confidence may hesitate to participate actively, limiting their progress. These challenges suggest that the current programme may insufficiently address core language skills and confidence building. Teacher can adopting interactive and engaging learning tools to support culinary students in developing self-directed learning strategies, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills to help their academic and professional success in a global culinary environment. Digital games can enhance motivation and engagement, ultimately fostering independent learning skills (Kusuma, 2020).

Regarding student expectations in table 2, there is a clear and strong demand for increased opportunities to practice speaking and for more practical, real-world learning experiences. Many students expressed a desire to achieve fluency and indicated a preference

for hands-on, communicative approaches rather than theory-heavy lessons. This highlights a significant gap between the students' needs and the current instructional methods. Research indicates that many vocational teachers in Indonesia lack specialized training in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is necessary to deliver communicative, context-specific lessons tailored to vocational learners' real-world language requirements[1]. Addressing this gap by enhancing teacher training and adopting more practical, interactive teaching strategies could better align English instruction with students' career goals and improve their language proficiency in vocational settings (N. Rahayu et al., 2020). The findings emphasize the importance of integrating more interactive activities and real-world simulations into English language instruction. Such approaches can effectively enhance students' communication skills by providing practical contexts for language use, while also boosting their confidence through active participation and meaningful engagement. This strategy aligns with the need to move beyond traditional, theory-heavy lessons toward more dynamic, student-centered learning experiences that better prepare vocational students for real-life professional interactions.

Overall, the results clearly indicate the need for a more focused and practice-oriented English language program tailored to vocational culinary students. The students themselves recognise that developing specific skills—particularly speaking—is essential for their success. They also identify significant barriers such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and low self-confidence that impede their progress. However, these challenges are often not adequately addressed due to insufficient instructional support. To effectively meet these needs, a shift towards communicative and task-based learning approaches is necessary. Such approaches prioritise practical application through activities like vocabulary enrichment, targeted pronunciation practice, and interactive speaking exercises, which can better prepare students for real-world communication demands in their future careers (Handayani & Titania, 2025)(Purwati et al., 2023). These findings reinforce and build upon existing research in the field of English language learning within vocational education, with a particular focus on the hospitality sector. This study consistently confirms the critical role of spoken communication skills in hospitality careers, highlighting that learners continue to face persistent challenges in mastering these skills. The results align with prior research emphasizing the necessity of effective oral communication for professional success in hospitality, while also underscoring ongoing difficulties such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and low confidence that learners commonly experience (Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021)(Prabowo & Saptiany, 2024). It also stresses the need to tackle foundational challenges—such as linguistic gaps, fear of errors, and lack of practice opportunities—that hinder fluency.

Therefore, this study recommends that culinary English programmes be enhanced by continuing to prioritise speaking skills while adopting a more holistic instructional model. This model should comprehensively incorporate vocabulary development, targeted pronunciation training, and activities designed to build students' confidence. By aligning the curriculum with the actual needs of students, SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada can foster a more effective and supportive learning environment. Such an environment will better equip students with the practical communication skills essential for success in the global culinary industry, addressing both linguistic competence and the affective factors that influence language use in professional settings.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the essential English language skills required by tenth-grade culinary students at SMK Negeri 1 Sukasada. Employing a qualitative descriptive method and a student-centered questionnaire, the research identified speaking as the most crucial skill for culinary careers. The findings clearly showed that speaking was prioritized far above other language areas such as grammar, listening, and writing. This preference reflects the practical demands of culinary professions, where effective verbal communication is vital for guest interaction, service quality, and professional confidence.

Despite acknowledging the importance of speaking, students faced notable challenges in learning English. These included limited daily exposure to English, inadequate vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and low self-confidence. Many students also expressed dissatisfaction with theory-heavy teaching methods and preferred more practical, interactive learning experiences. These results reveal a gap between the current English curriculum and the real communicative needs of students preparing for culinary careers.

The study offers valuable insights for English educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in vocational education. It provides evidence that students understand their learning needs and career goals but are hindered by instructional approaches that do not adequately address them. By redesigning English programs around English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and task-based learning principles, educators can better equip students to meet the linguistic demands of the culinary industry with confidence and competence.

However, the study has limitations. The small sample size of 28 students from one school restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, relying solely on questionnaires without complementary data from interviews or classroom observations limits the depth of qualitative understanding. Future research should involve larger samples across multiple schools and use mixed methods, including interviews with teachers and students, to gain a more comprehensive view of language needs in vocational education.

In conclusion, the study highlights the urgent need to align English language teaching with the practical realities of the culinary sector. Through targeted, communicative teaching strategies, vocational schools like SMKN 1 Sukasada can empower students to develop the critical language skills necessary for success in a globally connected industry.

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