

General English as the Foundation of Workplace Communication: Perspectives of Culinary Study Program Students at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO

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ABSTRACT

English communication competence has become an important requirement for vocational students, particularly in culinary and hospitality fields where interaction with guests, colleagues, and international stakeholders is frequently required. Although previous studies have widely discussed workplace English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), limited attention has been given to students' perceptions of the role of General English as a foundation before entering professional communication contexts. This study aims to explore how Culinary Study Program students perceive the contribution of General English instruction to their workplace communication readiness. A qualitative research approach was employed through semi-structured interviews involving 14 students from the Culinary Study Program at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences and perceptions. The findings revealed four main themes: (1) General English as the foundation of language understanding, (2) grammar knowledge supporting communication accuracy, (3) the development of question formation and appropriate responses, and (4) increased confidence in using English during workplace interactions. The students perceived that General English provided essential linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, and communication strategies that supported their readiness to communicate during workplace practice. However, students also indicated that foundational English learning should be complemented with workplace-related communication activities to address specific industry demands. This study highlights the importance of maintaining General English as a fundamental component of vocational education, as it provides students with the necessary linguistic and psychological preparation before developing more specialized workplace English skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency has become an essential competence in various professional fields, particularly in the hospitality and culinary industries where communication with guests, colleagues, and international stakeholders is frequently required. In vocational higher education, English learning is not only intended to improve students' linguistic knowledge but also to prepare them to communicate effectively in authentic workplace situations. Therefore, understanding how English instruction contributes to students' communication readiness is an important concern in vocational language education.

General English is commonly introduced as a foundation for language learning before students develop more specialized communication skills. McDonough (1984) explains that English for General Purposes focuses on developing overall language proficiency, whereas English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

emphasizes the use of language within particular academic or professional contexts. Therefore, General English can be considered a foundation that provides learners with fundamental language competence to support their transition into more specialized English learning. Through General English instruction, students are introduced to fundamental language components, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, pronunciation, and basic communication patterns. Celce-Murcia et al. (2014) explain that language competence involves knowledge of linguistic components, including grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation, which support learners in developing effective language use. These linguistic components provide learners with essential resources to construct meaningful messages and participate effectively in communication. Richards and Rodgers (2014) explain that effective language learning involves the relationship between language knowledge and meaningful language use. Harmer (2015) emphasizes that successful language learning involves the development of both language knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge appropriately in communication contexts.

From a communicative perspective, language competence involves more than mastering grammatical rules. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, explaining that effective language users require the ability to apply linguistic knowledge appropriately according to social situations. Similarly, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that communicative competence consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. These perspectives indicate that foundational language knowledge supports learners not only in producing accurate language forms but also in developing meaningful communication in various social contexts.

For culinary students, English communication skills are particularly important because workplace environments require interaction with various individuals, including guests, supervisors, and colleagues. Adequate vocabulary knowledge enables students to understand culinary information, express ideas, and participate in workplace communication more effectively (Utomo et al., 2017; Andres & Holguín, 2022). Furthermore, English competence supports communication with international stakeholders in professional environments (Motaal, 2023). Culinary professionals may need to respond to guest requests, provide information, clarify instructions, and maintain professional interactions. Therefore, foundational English competence developed through General English learning may influence students' confidence and readiness when communicating in professional environments.

Previous studies have investigated English learning in vocational culinary and hospitality contexts from different perspectives, including English learning needs, ESP development, and instructional material development. Fadilah and Anggraini (2025) examined the development of English materials for culinary students in a vocational high school and found that students required culinary-related vocabulary, grammar, and communication activities to support their preparation for workplace situations. Similarly, Siregar et al. (2025) explored culinary students' English learning experiences and needs and reported that students expected English skills that were relevant to their future culinary careers. In addition, Ota et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of culinary vocabulary training in improving learners' understanding of English terms related to culinary activities. From a theoretical perspective, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) and Basturkmen (2010) explain that English instruction for professional purposes should be developed based on learners' specific communication needs in academic and workplace contexts. Furthermore, Rohmah (2015) emphasizes that General English provides an important foundation that supports learners before they develop more specialized English competencies.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into culinary English needs, ESP development, and professional language preparation, previous research has mainly focused on identifying students' needs, developing learning materials, or improving specific language components. However, limited attention has been given to students' perspectives, particularly in vocational higher education contexts, regarding how General English functions as a foundation that supports workplace communication readiness before learners encounter more specialized professional English demands. Therefore, this study contributes a different perspective by exploring culinary students' perceptions regarding how General English knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, question formation, response strategies, and speaking confidence, supports their readiness to communicate in workplace environments.

Speaking ability is also an important aspect of workplace communication because students need not only linguistic knowledge but also confidence to use English in real-time interactions. Thornbury (2005) explains that speaking competence requires not only knowledge of accurate language forms but also the ability to communicate meaning effectively in real-time situations. Therefore, exploring students' experiences provides valuable insight into whether classroom-based General English learning supports their transition from academic learning to workplace communication.

This study aims to explore the perspectives of students in the Culinary Study Program at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO regarding the role of General English instruction in preparing them for workplace

communication. Specifically, this study investigates how students perceive the contribution of grammar knowledge, sentence construction, question formation, response strategies, and speaking confidence developed through General English learning. A qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured interviews to gain deeper understanding of students' experiences and interpretations. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to vocational English education by highlighting the importance of foundational English learning in supporting students' communication readiness before entering professional environments.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore students' perceptions of the contribution of General English instruction to workplace communication readiness. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and perspectives regarding a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conducted at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO, specifically in the Culinary Study Program, where students are expected to develop English communication skills to support professional interactions in hospitality-related workplaces.

The participants were 14 students from the Culinary Study Program at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO. Total sampling was employed because all students in the program participated in the study. All participants had completed General English courses and workplace practice, enabling them to reflect on the contribution of General English learning to workplace communication. The unit of analysis was students' perceptions and experiences regarding the role of General English in preparing them for workplace communication.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it allowed participants to describe their experiences while providing comparable information across interviews. The interview questions explored students' perceptions of how General English learning, particularly grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, question formation, response strategies, and speaking practice, contributed to workplace communication. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized using participant codes (P1–P14) to ensure confidentiality.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The analysis involved familiarizing the researcher with the data, generating initial codes, identifying recurring patterns, developing themes, and interpreting the findings in relation to the research objectives. Four themes emerged from the analysis: General English as the foundation of language understanding, grammar knowledge supporting communication accuracy, developing question formation and appropriate responses, and building confidence in English workplace communication. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly, and participants' responses were compared to identify consistent patterns. The emerging themes were interpreted in relation to relevant theories and previous studies to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data from 14 students in the Culinary Study Program at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO revealed students' perceptions regarding the contribution of General English instruction to their workplace communication readiness. The findings indicate that students perceived General English as an essential foundation that supported their understanding of English language structures, communication accuracy, interaction ability, and confidence in using English during workplace practice.

Through thematic analysis, the interview data were categorized into four main themes: (1) General English as the foundation of language understanding, (2) grammar knowledge supporting communication accuracy, (3) developing question formation and appropriate responses, and (4) building confidence in English workplace communication. Each theme consisted of several sub-themes representing students' experiences and perceptions.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes Identified from Students' Perceptions of General English Learning.

No	Main Themes	Sub-themes	Students' Perceptions
1	General English as the Foundation of Language Understanding	Basic grammar knowledge, vocabulary development, understanding sentence patterns	Students perceived General English as providing fundamental knowledge needed to understand and construct English sentences.
2	Grammar Knowledge Supporting Communication	Sentence construction, grammatical awareness,	Students considered grammar as a guideline that helped them

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	Accuracy	organizing ideas clearly	communicate messages more accurately.
3	Developing Question Formation and Appropriate Responses	Asking questions, responding appropriately, understanding communication patterns	Students felt more prepared to interact because they understood basic structures for asking and responding.
4	Building Confidence in English Workplace Communication	Speaking confidence, reducing fear of mistakes, willingness to communicate	Students reported that General English increased their confidence when using English in workplace situations.

General English as the Foundation of Language Understanding

The first theme demonstrates that students perceived General English as an important foundation before applying English in workplace environments. Participants explained that their initial difficulties were related to understanding sentence structures, arranging words, and expressing ideas in English. Through General English instruction, students gradually developed awareness of basic language patterns that supported their communication.

Participant 1 stated:

“Before learning General English, I did not understand how to arrange English sentences correctly. After learning the basic patterns, I became more aware of how to make simple sentences.”

Similarly, Participant 2 explained:

“General English helped me understand basic vocabulary and expressions that I can use when communicating with other people.”

Participant 3 added:

“For me, General English is the basic knowledge before learning more difficult English. It helps me understand grammar and sentence structures.”

These responses indicate that students viewed General English as the initial stage of language development. The knowledge gained from General English provided students with basic linguistic resources that supported their ability to understand and produce English communication.

Grammar Knowledge Supporting Communication Accuracy

The second theme highlights students' perceptions regarding the role of grammar knowledge in improving communication accuracy. Participants explained that grammar helped them understand how sentences should be organized and reduced confusion when expressing ideas in English.

Participant 4 stated:

“Learning grammar helps me know the correct way to make sentences. Without grammar knowledge, I feel confused when I want to speak English.”

Participant 5 explained:

“Sometimes I do not know many vocabulary words, but grammar helps me arrange the words so other people can understand my meaning.”

Participant 6 mentioned:

“Grammar is important because when we speak with guests, we need to deliver information clearly and correctly.”

The students' responses show that grammar was perceived not only as a theoretical component of English learning but also as practical knowledge that supported clearer communication. Students believed that understanding basic grammatical structures helped them organize messages more effectively.

Developing Question Formation and Appropriate Responses

The third theme relates to students' ability to form questions and provide appropriate responses. Participants explained that General English learning helped them understand communication patterns required during interactions with others.

Participant 7 stated:

“Before learning English, I did not know how to ask questions correctly. After learning question patterns, I became more confident when asking something.”

Participant 8 explained:

“General English taught me how to respond to simple questions. This is useful when communicating with guests or friends.”

Participant 9 mentioned:

“When I know the sentence structure, it is easier for me to ask for clarification or confirm information.”

These findings demonstrate that students perceived question formation and response strategies as important outcomes of General English learning. The ability to ask questions and respond appropriately helped students feel more prepared when facing communication situations during workplace practice.

Building Confidence in English Workplace Communication

The fourth theme reveals that General English contributed to students' confidence in using English during workplace practice. Participants explained that their basic understanding of English reduced hesitation and encouraged them to communicate despite limitations in vocabulary.

Participant 10 stated:

“I was afraid to speak English because I worried about making mistakes. After learning General English, I became more confident to try speaking.”

Participant 11 explained:

“General English helps me become brave to communicate even though my English is not perfect.”

Participant 12 mentioned:

“When I practice English in class, I feel more prepared to communicate during workplace activities.”

Participant 13 stated:

“I still need more vocabulary, but the basic English knowledge helps me communicate with other people.”

Participant 14 added:

“General English gives me confidence because I know the basic rules of English communication.”

These responses indicate that General English influenced students' confidence and willingness to participate in English communication. Although students recognized that they still needed further vocabulary development, they considered their General English foundation helpful in reducing communication barriers.

4. CONCLUSION

Papers not prepared in accordance with these guidelines and manuscripts with a number of mistakes will have to be pre-rejected by the Editor. Received articles will be reviewed by our peer reviewer and will be edited by the Editor. This journal applies online submission. Authors must submit by registering and uploading the manuscript on the website. This study aimed to explore the perspectives of Culinary Study Program students at Akademi Komunitas MAPINDO regarding the contribution of General English instruction to workplace communication readiness. The findings revealed that students perceived General English as an important foundation for developing language understanding, communication accuracy, interaction skills, and confidence in using English during workplace practice. These findings suggest that foundational English learning plays an essential role before students develop more specialized workplace communication skills.

The first finding showed that students viewed General English as the foundation of language understanding. Students reported that learning grammar, vocabulary, and sentence patterns helped them understand how English sentences are constructed and how ideas can be expressed effectively. This finding supports Harmer (2015), who argues that language learning involves developing language knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in communication. It is also consistent with Rohmah (2015), who emphasizes that effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning is supported by a strong foundation in General English before learners develop more specialized language competencies. Similarly, Fadilah and Anggraini (2025) found that English materials for culinary students should integrate grammar, vocabulary, and communication activities to prepare learners for workplace situations. Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers (2014) explain that effective language learning connects language forms with meaningful language use. Together, these findings indicate that General English provides the linguistic foundation required for vocational students before they engage in profession-specific communication.

The second finding revealed that grammar knowledge supported students' communication accuracy. Students explained that understanding grammatical structures helped them organize ideas and express messages more clearly. Although some students initially perceived grammar as difficult, they gradually recognized its importance during workplace practice. This finding is consistent with Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which emphasizes that effective communication requires not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. Likewise, Canale and Swain (1980) identify grammatical competence as a key component of communicative competence. The present finding also aligns with Siregar et al. (2025), who reported that culinary students expected English learning to support their future communication needs in culinary careers. These findings suggest that grammar instruction contributes not only to language accuracy but also to students' readiness for workplace communication.

The third finding indicated that General English supported students in developing question formation and appropriate responses. Students perceived that learning sentence patterns and question structures enabled them to participate more effectively in workplace interactions, such as asking for clarification, confirming information, and responding to requests. Thornbury (2005) argues that speaking competence involves communicating meaning effectively in real-time situations rather than merely understanding language rules. This finding is also supported by Fadilah and Anggraini (2025), whose English materials for culinary students emphasize communication activities that prepare learners for authentic workplace interactions. These findings indicate that General English equips students with essential interactional skills before they encounter more specialized workplace communication demands.

The fourth finding showed that General English contributed to students' confidence in using English during workplace practice. Students explained that having a basic understanding of English reduced their fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to communicate despite their limited vocabulary. This finding supports Goh and Burns (2012), who explain that speaking development requires meaningful opportunities to use language and gradually build learners' confidence. Similarly, Ota et al. (2024) found that culinary vocabulary training improved learners' understanding of English culinary terms and increased their confidence in using English during learning activities. In addition, Motaal (2023) reported that English competence enables culinary professionals to communicate more effectively with international stakeholders, highlighting the importance of language confidence in professional communication. Therefore, General English contributes not only to students' linguistic competence but also to their confidence and readiness to communicate in workplace settings.

Overall, this study extends previous research by focusing on students' perceptions of the contribution of General English to workplace communication readiness. Previous studies have primarily examined English learning needs (Siregar et al., 2025), the role of General English in supporting ESP (Rohmah, 2015), the development of English materials for culinary students (Fadilah & Anggraini, 2025), and culinary vocabulary development (Ota et al., 2024). In contrast, the present study demonstrates how students perceive General English as the foundation for developing communication skills before they encounter more specialized professional English. This perspective contributes to vocational English education by highlighting the continuing importance of General English in preparing students for workplace communication.

The findings also have practical implications for vocational higher education, particularly culinary programs. General English courses should remain a fundamental component of the curriculum while incorporating contextualized communication activities related to workplace situations. Classroom activities such as role plays, service conversations, and problem-solving tasks may help students transfer their foundational language knowledge into authentic professional communication.

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