



## Analysis of English Speaking Proficiency of Airline Operational Staff at Indonesia Airasia

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**Abstract.** This study aims to explore the use of English speaking skills by airline operational staff at Indonesia Air Asia at Juanda International Airport, Surabaya. English plays a crucial role in aviation operations, particularly in ensuring effective communication, maintaining service quality, and supporting operational safety in interactions with international passengers, flight crews, and airport stakeholders. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how English is used in real operational contexts and how staff perceive its importance in their daily responsibilities. The data were collected from ten airline operational staff members through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed thematically following the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. The findings indicate that speaking skills are the most frequently used English skills in daily airline operations, especially when handling passenger inquiries, boarding procedures, and operational coordination. However, several challenges were identified, including difficulties in understanding diverse accents, limited aviation-related vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and a lack of confidence in spontaneous communication. The study concludes that continuous and context-based English training programs are necessary to support airline operational staff in improving their communicative competence, particularly speaking skills relevant to aviation operations and international service standards.

**Keywords:** Airline Operational Staff; Airport Operations; Aviation Communication; Communicative Competence; English Speaking Skills.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant international language used across various professional sectors, including the aviation industry. As a global lingua franca, English enables communication among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 2023). In aviation, English plays a crucial role not only in customer service but also in operational communication and safety procedures, as emphasized by the (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2010).

Airline operational staff are required to communicate effectively with passengers, flight crews, and airport authorities in daily operations (Boakye et al., 2022). These interactions include providing flight information, managing boarding processes, handling passenger inquiries, and responding to operational situations. Effective communication, particularly in speaking, is essential to ensure service quality and operational efficiency. Poor English proficiency may lead to misunderstandings, decreased service quality, and potential safety risks.

Indonesia AirAsia, as one of the leading low-cost carriers in Indonesia, operates both domestic and international routes. At Juanda International Airport Surabaya, operational staff frequently interact with international passengers who primarily use English. Therefore, English

proficiency, especially speaking skills, is a critical requirement for staff to perform their duties effectively (Saar, 2024).

English proficiency consists of four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are interconnected in supporting effective communication (Luoma, 2016).

Among these skills, speaking is considered the most immediate and practical form of communication, as it enables real-time interaction (Wasiq & Helmand, 2021). Speaking skills involve several components, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. In the aviation industry, these components are essential because staff must communicate clearly, provide instructions, and handle operational situations effectively.

In aviation contexts, speaking proficiency also requires the use of appropriate vocabulary, particularly aviation-related terms, as well as confidence in communication. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emphasizes that language learning should be based on professional needs. In this case, English is used not only for general communication but also for specific operational purposes such as delivering flight information, assisting passengers, and handling service-related issues (Paltridge & Starfield, 2016).

Previous studies have shown that English proficiency plays an important role in aviation communication. Speaking and listening skills are reported as the most frequently used in airport operations. However, several challenges remain, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and lack of confidence, which may affect communication effectiveness (Dumdumaya, 2025).

Despite the importance of English in aviation, there is still limited research focusing specifically on the speaking proficiency of airline operational staff in real workplace contexts. Most studies focus on general English skills rather than context-specific communication in airline operations.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the English speaking proficiency of airline operational staff at Indonesia AirAsia, identify the challenges they face, and examine the role of speaking skills in supporting operational communication.

## **2. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

English plays a significant role in the aviation industry because it functions as the primary language for international communication and operational coordination. In airline operations, English proficiency is essential for maintaining effective communication, service quality, and operational safety. Among the four English language skills, speaking is considered the most important in aviation contexts because airline operational staff interact directly with

passengers, flight crews, and airport stakeholders in real-time situations (Satvinder Singh et al., 2021).

According to (Harmer, 2007), speaking is the ability to communicate fluently and accurately through spoken language. Speaking involves several important aspects, including fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In professional environments, particularly in service-oriented industries such as aviation, speaking skills are required to support clear communication and avoid misunderstandings during operational activities (Fitriani & Apriliawati, 2022).

In aviation settings, speaking skills are frequently used when airline staff provide flight information, respond to passenger inquiries, handle boarding procedures, and coordinate with other airport personnel. Therefore, effective speaking skills contribute not only to communication effectiveness but also to professionalism and passenger satisfaction. (Kartikawangi, 2021) further explain that speaking is an interactive process that requires individuals to produce, receive, and process information simultaneously. This indicates that speaking competence is closely related to the ability to respond appropriately in spontaneous communication.

Despite its importance, several challenges are still commonly experienced in English speaking communication. (Riadil, 2020) states that speaking problems generally originate from two major factors, namely knowledge factors and skill factors. In addition, speaking anxiety and lack of confidence often affect individuals' ability to communicate effectively in English, particularly in professional communication contexts (Alhamami, 2021). Knowledge factors are related to limited mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, while skill factors involve difficulties in applying language knowledge in real communication situations. In aviation contexts, these challenges may become more complex because operational staff frequently interact with international passengers who have different accents and communication styles (Hamzah et al., 2023).

To address these communication needs, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an important approach in aviation English training. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) explain that ESP is designed to meet learners' specific professional needs. In the aviation industry, ESP focuses on operational communication, aviation terminology, customer service interaction, and safety-related communication. ESP-based training is considered more effective than general English instruction because it emphasizes practical language use in workplace situations (Rochmawati & Fatmawati., 2025).

Several previous studies have discussed the role of English communication skills in aviation industries. (Rahmaniah et al., 2020) found that speaking and listening were the most frequently used English skills among airport ground handling staff in Indonesia. The study also revealed that limited vocabulary and low confidence often became obstacles in communication with passengers.

Similarly, (Sari & Widiati, 2021) reported that airline staff demonstrated stronger oral communication skills than reading and writing abilities. However, the study emphasized that operational staff still required improvement in aviation-related vocabulary and technical communication.

Furthermore, (Azhar & Masyi'ah, 2023) concluded that ESP-based English training significantly improved communicative competence in aviation contexts. The study highlighted that contextual English training helped aviation staff communicate more confidently and effectively in workplace situations.

Based on the previous studies above, it can be understood that speaking skills are highly important in airline operational activities. However, challenges related to pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, confidence, and spontaneous communication still frequently occur. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the use of English speaking skills by airline operational staff at Indonesia AirAsia Juanda International Airport, Surabaya, particularly in real operational communication contexts.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the use of English-speaking skills among airline operational staff in real workplace contexts. Qualitative research was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using English, particularly in operational communication.

The research was conducted at Juanda International Airport, Surabaya, involving operational staff of Indonesia AirAsia. This setting was selected due to its relevance as an international aviation environment where English is frequently used in daily communication with passengers and airport personnel.

The participants of this study consisted of 10 airline operational staff members who were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included staff who are directly involved in passenger services and those who regularly use English in their daily work activities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and challenges in using English speaking skills. Observations were carried out to examine real-time communication practices in operational settings, such as passenger interactions and boarding coordination. Documentation, including standard operating procedures (SOPs) and training materials, was used to support and validate the findings.

The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation of data sources and techniques, member checking, and consultation with the research advisor.

#### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

##### Respondent Background

This study involved 10 operational staff members from Indonesia AirAsia at Juanda International Airport, Surabaya. The respondents consisted of check-in, gate, and passenger service staff who interact directly with domestic and international passengers in their daily operational activities. Their work experience ranged from 1.5 to 5 years, indicating that the participants had sufficient exposure to airline operational communication and passenger handling.

The diversity of respondents' roles provides a broader perspective regarding the use of English-speaking skills in airline operations. Each operational position requires different communication demands and interaction patterns. Check-in staff are responsible for verifying travel documents and explaining baggage regulations, gate staff manage boarding procedures and announcements, while passenger service staff handle passenger inquiries, complaints, and operational disruptions.

**Table 1.** Respondent Background.

| Respondent | Position                | Work Experience |
|------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| R1         | Check-in Staff          | 3 years         |
| R2         | Gate Staff              | 2 years         |
| R3         | Passenger Service Staff | 4 years         |
| R4         | Check-in Staff          | 1.5 years       |
| R5         | Gate Staff              | 3 years         |
| R6         | Passenger Service Staff | 5 years         |
| R7         | Check-in Staff          | 2 years         |
| R8         | Gate Staff              | 3 years         |
| R9         | Passenger Service Staff | 4 years         |
| R10        | Check-in Staff          | 2.5 years       |

The findings indicate that all respondents regularly use English in workplace communication, particularly when interacting with international passengers. This reflects the importance of English proficiency in supporting operational effectiveness and service quality within the airline industry.

**The Use of English-Speaking Skills in Airline Operations**

The findings reveal that English speaking skills are consistently used in daily operational activities at Indonesia AirAsia, particularly in communication with international passengers. Based on the interview results, most respondents stated that English is used almost every day during operational hours, especially at check-in counters, boarding gates, and passenger service areas.

English is primarily used to provide flight information, explain baggage regulations, assist passengers during check-in and boarding procedures, and respond to passenger inquiries or complaints. In addition, operational staff also use English to coordinate with airport personnel and support smooth operational communication in international service environments.

One respondent stated:

*“I use English almost every day, especially when handling foreign passengers at the check-in counter.” (R1)*

Another respondent explained:

*“At the boarding gate, I often use English to give instructions for international flights.” (R2)*

These findings indicate that English is not merely an additional skill but has become an essential component of operational communication. The frequent use of English reflects the position of English as a lingua franca in international aviation communication.

**Table 2.** Use of English-Speaking Skills in Airline Operations.

| Operational Context  | English Usage  |
|----------------------|--|
| Check-in counter     | Explaining baggage rules, ticket information, and travel documents |
| Boarding gate        | Giving boarding instructions and announcements                     |
| Passenger service    | Handling passenger inquiries and complaints                        |
| Information services | Providing flight schedules and airport directions                  |

The findings also demonstrate that communication in airline operations requires spontaneous and real-time interaction. Staff are expected to respond quickly and accurately to passenger needs while maintaining professionalism and service quality. This finding supports

(Harmer, 2007) view that speaking requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to process information immediately during communication.

Furthermore, the findings are closely related to the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), language learning in professional contexts should focus on workplace needs. In this study, English is used specifically for operational communication, passenger assistance, and service delivery in aviation contexts.

The results also indicate that speaking skills are closely integrated with listening comprehension and interpersonal communication skills. Operational staff must understand passenger questions, interpret information accurately, and provide appropriate responses within limited time. Therefore, speaking competence in airline operations involves both linguistic ability and situational communication skills.

Overall, the findings confirm that English speaking skills play a significant role in supporting operational communication, service quality, and passenger satisfaction within airline services.

### **Challenges in Using English Speaking Skills**

Although English is frequently used in airline operations, the findings indicate that operational staff still experience several communication challenges. Based on the interview results, the major difficulties identified in this study include vocabulary limitation, pronunciation issues, accent differences, and lack of confidence.

**Table 3.** Challenges in Using English Speaking Skills.

| <b>Challenge</b>      | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Impact on Communication</b>  |
|-----------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Vocabulary limitation | Difficulty explaining technical or operational information | Misunderstanding and repetition |
| Pronunciation issues  | Difficulty pronouncing certain English words clearly       | Reduced communication clarity   |
| Accent differences    | Difficulty understanding various passenger accents         | Slower interaction process      |
| Lack of confidence    | Nervousness during spontaneous communication               | Reduced fluency and hesitation  |

Vocabulary limitation emerged as the most dominant challenge among respondents. Several participants explained that they sometimes struggled to explain technical information, such as flight delays, baggage regulations, or ticket rescheduling procedures.

One respondent stated:

*“Sometimes it is difficult to explain delays or technical problems because I do not know the exact words in English.” (R3)*

This finding indicates that general English proficiency alone is insufficient in aviation contexts. Operational staff also require adequate mastery of aviation-related terminology and

operational vocabulary. The finding supports the concept of ESP proposed by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) which emphasizes the importance of workplace-specific language competence.

Another challenge identified in this study relates to pronunciation. Several respondents admitted that they were sometimes unsure about their pronunciation when communicating with passengers.

*“Sometimes I am not sure about my pronunciation, so I repeat my explanation to make sure the passenger understands.” (R5)*

This finding demonstrates that pronunciation plays an important role in communication clarity. Mispronunciation may cause misunderstanding, particularly when staff provide important operational information. In aviation services, where communication must be delivered clearly and efficiently, pronunciation becomes a crucial component of communicative competence.

In addition, respondents also reported difficulties in understanding different English accents. Since Juanda International Airport serves international passengers from diverse countries, operational staff are exposed to various speaking styles and pronunciations.

*“Sometimes passengers have different accents, so I need to ask them to repeat.” (R2)*

This challenge highlights the importance of listening comprehension in airline communication. Operational staff are required not only to speak English but also to understand spoken communication accurately under real operational conditions. Background noise, time pressure, and fast speech often increase communication difficulty.

Another important finding concerns the lack of confidence during communication. Several respondents admitted feeling nervous when speaking English, particularly in high-pressure situations.

*“I feel nervous when speaking English, especially if the passenger speaks too fast.” (R4)*

This finding indicates that psychological factors significantly influence communication performance. Anxiety and fear of making mistakes may reduce fluency and communication effectiveness, even when staff possess adequate language knowledge. This finding is consistent with Brown’s theory regarding the influence of affective factors on second language performance (Brown, 2007).

The findings further demonstrate that communication challenges in airline operations are interconnected. Vocabulary limitation may reduce confidence, while difficulty understanding accents can increase communication anxiety. Therefore, improving English proficiency requires not only linguistic training but also continuous communication practice in real operational situations.

Overall, the findings indicate that effective communication in aviation contexts involves multiple competencies, including vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and communication confidence. Strengthening these aspects can help reduce miscommunication, improve operational efficiency, and enhance service quality within airline operations.

### **The Role of English-Speaking Skills in Operational Communication**

The findings of this study indicate that English speaking skills play a central role in supporting operational communication within airline services. Based on the interview results, the role of speaking skills can be categorized into three major functions: delivering information, assisting passengers, and handling operational situations.

**Table 4.** The Role of English-Speaking Skills in Airline Operations.

| <b>Role</b>                     | <b>Operational Function</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Delivering information          | Explaining flight schedules, baggage rules, and boarding procedures |
| Assisting passengers            | Helping international passengers during check-in and boarding       |
| Handling operational situations | Managing complaints, delays, and unexpected situations              |

The first role relates to delivering operational information clearly and accurately. Operational staff are responsible for explaining flight schedules, baggage policies, boarding procedures, and airport regulations to passengers.

One respondent stated:

*“We need to explain things clearly so passengers do not get confused.”* (R1)

This finding indicates that communication clarity directly affects operational effectiveness. Miscommunication may create confusion, delays, and dissatisfaction among passengers. Therefore, speaking skills become essential in ensuring that operational procedures are understood correctly.

The second role involves assisting passengers throughout their travel process. Operational staff frequently use English to provide guidance, answer passenger questions, and assist international travelers during check-in and boarding procedures.

*“English helps me assist passengers, like showing directions or helping them find their gate.”* (R6)

This finding demonstrates that speaking skills contribute significantly to service quality and passenger satisfaction. Effective communication allows staff to provide clear explanations and maintain positive interaction with passengers from different linguistic backgrounds.

The third role relates to handling operational situations such as delays, complaints, and unexpected disruptions.

*“When passengers complain, we need to explain calmly in English so they understand the situation.” (R9)*

This finding shows that speaking skills are closely related to professionalism and operational stability. In stressful situations, staff must communicate calmly, clearly, and confidently in order to manage passenger expectations and maintain service quality.

The findings also indicate that these communication roles often occur simultaneously. For example, during flight delays, staff must explain operational information, assist passengers, and handle complaints within the same interaction. This demonstrates that speaking skills in airline operations require flexibility, adaptability, and real-time communication competence.

These findings support the concept of communicative competence proposed by (Harmer, 2007), which emphasizes that effective communication involves not only language knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in professional situations. In addition, the findings reinforce the relevance of ESP in aviation contexts, where English proficiency is directly connected to workplace communication needs.

Overall, the findings confirm that English speaking skills are not merely a supporting ability but a critical professional competence in airline operations. Effective communication contributes significantly to operational efficiency, passenger satisfaction, service quality, and professionalism within the aviation industry.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that English speaking skills play an important role in supporting operational communication in the airline industry. The findings indicate that airline operational staff at Indonesia AirAsia frequently use English in daily operational activities, particularly when interacting with international passengers during check-in services, boarding procedures, passenger assistance, and information delivery. The frequent use of English demonstrates that speaking skills have become an essential professional competence in aviation service contexts.

The study also found that operational staff still experience several challenges in using English effectively. The major challenges identified include limited vocabulary mastery, pronunciation difficulties, problems in understanding different English accents, and lack of

confidence during spontaneous communication. These challenges influence communication effectiveness, especially in operational situations that require quick, accurate, and professional responses.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that English speaking skills contribute significantly to operational effectiveness and service quality. Effective communication helps staff deliver information clearly, assist passengers efficiently, and handle operational situations such as complaints and delays more professionally. Therefore, English proficiency, particularly speaking skills, is not only important for communication purposes but also for maintaining passenger satisfaction and supporting smooth airline operations.

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed. First, airline companies are encouraged to provide continuous English training programs specifically designed for operational communication in aviation contexts. The training should focus not only on general English proficiency but also on aviation-related vocabulary, pronunciation practice, listening comprehension, and real-life communication simulations.

Second, operational staff are encouraged to improve their confidence and communication skills through regular practice and greater exposure to English interactions in workplace situations. Practical communication activities may help staff develop better fluency and adaptability in handling international passengers.

Finally, future researchers are recommended to conduct further studies involving larger numbers of participants or different aviation sectors in order to provide broader insights into the use of English communication skills in the airline industry. Future studies may also explore the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)-based training programs in improving communicative competence among aviation personnel.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Praise and gratitude are addressed to Allah SWT for His blessings, mercy, and guidance, which have enabled the writer to complete this research article entitled "*An Analysis of English Speaking Skills of Airline Operational Staff at Indonesia AirAsia.*" This article was prepared as part of the requirements for obtaining the Bachelor of Education degree in the English Education Department, Faculty of Language Education and Arts, IKIP Widya Darma.

The writer would like to express sincere gratitude to all individuals who have provided valuable support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to Dr. Nur Sukri, M.Si., Rector of IKIP Widya Darma, for providing the opportunity to pursue higher education; Dyah Nugraheny Priastuti,

S.Pd., M.Pd., Dean of the Faculty of Language Education and Arts; and Amiatun Nuryana, S.Pd., M.Pd., as the research advisor, for her guidance, patience, valuable suggestions, and continuous support throughout the research process. The writer also expresses gratitude to all lecturers of the English Education Department for their knowledge, guidance, and support during the writer's academic journey.

Furthermore, the writer would like to thank her beloved parents and family for their endless prayers, love, motivation, and encouragement. Sincere appreciation is also extended to all respondents and operational staff of Indonesia AirAsia at Juanda International Airport, Surabaya, who willingly participated in this research. In addition, the writer acknowledges all parties who have contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this research article. The writer realizes that this article is still far from perfect; therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are highly appreciated for the improvement of future research.

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