

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN TOURISM EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL TRENDS AND CURRICULUM GAPS

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Abstract

This study examines the trends, gaps, and future directions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in tourism higher education. ESP in tourism is essential for preparing students to communicate professionally in global service contexts, yet many curricula still focus mainly on linguistic knowledge rather than authentic workplace communication. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design through a literature review of scholarly sources related to ESP, tourism education, hospitality communication, curriculum development, and professional communication. The findings show that tourism ESP instruction has shifted toward communicative, task-based, and scenario-based learning. However, gaps remain in students' psychological readiness, willingness to communicate, intercultural competence, and ability to respond spontaneously in real service encounters. The study highlights the need for a holistic ESP curriculum that integrates linguistic competence, emotional preparedness, intercultural awareness, digital communication skills, and authentic workplace practices. Such integration can better prepare tourism students to become confident, adaptive, and professional service practitioners in international contexts.

Keywords: *curriculum; English for Specific Purposes; pedagogical competence; tourism education; workplace communication*

INTRODUCTION

English is now a key language in the global tourism industry. It is used not only as a common language between people from different countries, but also as an important tool for providing services, interacting across cultures, and ensuring customer satisfaction. Tourism workers need to communicate effectively with guests from various language and cultural backgrounds in many situations, such as in hotels, travel services, tour guiding, and handling complaints. Therefore, being good at English in tourism is not just about using correct grammar, but also about speaking politely, appropriately, and in a way that fits real service situations (M. Bambang Purwanto, 2024; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017).

In this global situation, tourism higher education institutions have an important role in preparing students to become future service professionals, not just people who learn a language. Graduates are expected to be ready to communicate, feel confident, and understand different cultures when interacting with international guests. Because of this, English teaching in tourism programs should match real workplace needs and focus on practical communication skills that reflect real service situations (Handini et al., 2025). This professional focus makes tourism education different from general English programs, as it requires a curriculum that responds to industry needs and professional standards (Astawa et al., 2024; Fuentes, 2004).

To meet these needs, there has been a shift from General English to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational and professional education, including tourism higher education. ESP focuses on learning that is based on specific goals, students' needs, and the use of language in particular contexts, making it more suitable for students who are preparing for certain jobs (Fujita, 2019). In tourism education, ESP highlights the practical use of language in service situations, rather than only learning theory, and sees language as a tool to perform professional tasks (Cravotta, 1990; Purwanto et al., 2025).

Despite the implementation of ESP in many tourism education programs, the curricula still tend to focus heavily on linguistic aspects (Rahmani & Supardi, 2021). Teaching practices commonly emphasize vocabulary memorization, grammar drills, and scripted conversations that are not closely connected to the complex and unpredictable realities of tourism communication. Consequently, students may understand tourism-related language concepts but experience difficulties when applying them in genuine service interactions. This situation suggests that ESP tourism curricula have yet to shift completely from a language-based orientation toward communication training that reflects service industry demands (Jaisabai et al., 2019; Jannah, 2021).

Another significant concern is the inconsistency between classroom materials and the communicative needs of the tourism sector. Tourism professionals highlight the necessity of soft skills, professional attitudes, intercultural awareness, and the ability to respond spontaneously, while instructional activities often do not replicate such real-life conditions (Chen et al., 2011). As a result, graduates may possess adequate linguistic knowledge but remain inadequately prepared for workplace communication, especially in stressful service situations such as dealing with customer complaints or responding to guests from diverse cultural backgrounds (KK et al., 2025).

The disparity between tourism English instruction and actual workplace communication continues to be a major issue. Classroom interactions are generally structured and predictable, whereas communication in tourism settings is contextual, interactive, and strongly influenced by cultural factors. Therefore, students frequently lack confidence and willingness to communicate in authentic service encounters. This condition underlines the importance of redesigning ESP tourism curricula so that they function more effectively as a link between academic learning and professional communication practice (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

In reaction to these issues, this article seeks to offer a descriptive analysis of the present condition of English for Specific Purposes in tourism higher education by looking at current trends, highlighting key gaps, and investigating future paths in curriculum design. The study combines current knowledge rather than evaluating a particular pedagogical approach literature and customs to provide a thorough review of how ESP tourism courses have developed and where they need to go forward to satisfy current professional needs.

This article helps advance discussions on curriculum development in ESP tourism education by offering a conceptual framework for analyzing trends, gaps, and future directions. It offers a systematic framework that can assist educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in reconsidering the approach to teaching English in tourism higher education, placing greater importance on service-based communication, professional preparedness, and contextual significance. This article aims to establish ESP tourism as not just a language topic but as an essential element of professional training in tourism higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ESP Concept in Tourism Education

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is generally understood as a language teaching approach in which the content and teaching methods are determined by learners' specific purposes for learning the language (Broughton, 2000). According to Vodopija-Krstanović and Marinac (2019), ESP mainly focuses on particular disciplines, professional contexts, and communicative needs. In tourism education, ESP is strongly needs-oriented because it is designed to prepare students for the communication demands they will encounter in the tourism industry. It is also context-based, as language use is closely connected to workplace situations, customer service, and tourism-related interactions. Furthermore, ESP in tourism is goal-directed since it aims to develop practical communicative competence rather than only general language mastery.

Compared to General English, which emphasizes overall language ability for everyday communication, ESP in tourism concentrates more on professional communication and service-related interactions. It is also different from Business English, which mainly focuses on corporate and transactional communication. ESP tourism, on the other hand, highlights hospitality language, intercultural awareness, and guest-service communication that are essential in tourism and hospitality settings (Kaharuddin et al., 2019; Waluyo & Bakoko, 2022).

The Design of ESP Curriculum in Tourism Contexts

Previous studies on ESP curriculum design in tourism education have shown that skill-based, task-based, and functional-notional approaches are widely used in teaching and learning processes. Among these approaches, skill-based curricula mainly focus on developing students' speaking and listening abilities because these skills are considered essential in the tourism industry. This focus reflects the interactive nature of tourism services, where workers are required to communicate directly with guests, tourists, and customers in various situations. Therefore, tourism students need to develop effective communication skills to provide professional and high-quality service.

In addition, task-based approaches are commonly applied in tourism ESP programs because they allow students to practice English through meaningful and authentic activities. This approach emphasizes the use of real-world tasks that represent actual workplace situations in the tourism field. For example, students may practice handling hotel reservations, welcoming guests, giving travel information, responding to customer complaints, or guiding tourists. Through these activities, learners can improve their language skills while also gaining practical experience that is relevant to their future careers (Robertson, 2011; Syakur et al., 2020).

Another approach frequently used in tourism ESP programs is the functional-notional syllabus. This approach focuses on language functions that are closely related to communication in tourism settings. Students learn how to request and provide information, offer assistance, respond politely to guests' needs, and maintain effective communication with customers. As a result, learners become more prepared to use English appropriately in different tourism service situations.

Across these approaches, speaking and interaction remain the main focus because communication plays a central role in tourism services. Service discourse is also considered an important language domain since tourism workers are expected to communicate clearly, politely, and professionally with customers. Therefore, tourism ESP classes often include interactive activities such as role-plays, simulations, and scenario-based tasks that reflect real communication in tourism workplaces. These activities help students improve their confidence, fluency, and readiness to face real-world communication demands in the tourism industry (Stevens, 1988; Tarnopolsky, 2013).

KEY ISSUES IN TOURISM ESP LEARNING

Although research on tourism ESP pedagogy continues to develop, several key issues remain unresolved, particularly the gap between students' linguistic abilities and their communication skills in real-world situations. Many students possess adequate vocabulary and grammatical understanding yet still struggle to communicate effectively in authentic tourism service interactions. Research shows that this gap is largely influenced by non-linguistic factors, such as self-confidence, anxiety, and Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which determine students' readiness to use language spontaneously in communication (Boroujeni & Fard, 2013; Chen et al., 2011). Furthermore, existing tourism ESP curricula often fail to systematically integrate intercultural competence and professional identity development, despite the fact that communication in tourism is inherently intercultural and closely linked to professional identity (Afzali & Fakharzadeh, 2009; Tsao, 2011). As a result, although the literature on tourism ESP is quite extensive, the study remains fragmented because linguistic, psychological, and professional aspects are often discussed separately, rather than through a holistic curriculum framework.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with a literature review approach to examine trends, gaps, and future directions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum development in tourism higher education. The study focused on interpreting conceptual patterns, pedagogical orientations, and professional communication issues discussed in previous studies related to ESP tourism education. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to describe and interpret academic sources contextually (Creswell, 2013). The data were obtained from scholarly publications related to ESP, tourism education, hospitality communication, vocational English learning, and curriculum development, including journal articles, conference proceedings, academic books, and relevant research reports.

The data were collected through systematic literature documentation by using keywords such as ESP tourism, tourism English, hospitality communication, curriculum development, and professional communication. The selected literature was then reviewed and classified based on its thematic relevance to the objectives of the study. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing arguments and findings from various scholarly references. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, dominant pedagogical trends, and conceptual gaps. The analysis focused on themes such as communicative competence, task-based learning, intercultural communication, psychological readiness, and curriculum innovation, following the principle of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Evolution of Classroom Practices in Tourism ESP

A critical review of recent studies demonstrates that teaching English for tourism has pivoted away from traditional grammar mastery. The hospitality sector today demands graduates who can handle real-life scenarios such as welcoming international tourists or resolving sudden guest complaints. This industry pressure has forced

universities to rethink their instructional strategies. Consequently, educators are bringing the workplace directly into the classroom. By utilizing role-play methods and simulated service encounters, students now practice the language as an active tool to solve problems rather than a passive subject to memorize. This hands-on strategy often referred to as scenario-based learning, not only makes the learning process more enjoyable but also directly answers the industry's call for job-ready graduates. Because the focus is entirely on practical conversation, the way lecturers evaluate students has also evolved. Live demonstrations and interactive role-plays have largely replaced traditional paper-and-pencil exams, ensuring that students are graded on their actual ability to deliver professional services.

The "Knowing vs. Doing" Dilemma

However, possessing a rich vocabulary does not automatically create a confident speaker. The literature reveals a stark contrast between what students know on paper and how they perform during unscripted conversations. Many learners freeze or hesitate when faced with real-time, unexpected guest interactions. This specific gap proves that simply acquiring linguistic knowledge is insufficient for the dynamic nature of tourism work. This hesitation usually stems from neglected psychological needs within the curriculum. Factors like speech anxiety, self-esteem, and a student's Willingness to Communicate (WTC) are frequently ignored in lesson planning. If lecturers only teach tourism vocabulary and ignore the students' mental readiness, learners will remain passive. Furthermore, language is often taught in a vacuum, detached from its cultural roots. Tourism is an inherently diverse field. When students are not trained to understand different cultural norms, their polite English expressions might still come across as inappropriate or confusing to international guests.

Expanding the Scope: Digital and Global Demands

Looking ahead, the definition of a capable tourism professional is expanding. Modern curricula must address the digital transformation of hospitality. Customer service is increasingly happening through screens, via virtual tours, online bookings, and digital chats. Students now need to develop written and verbal agility tailored specifically for these technology-mediated platforms. Ultimately, current ESP teaching models remain too compartmentalized. Lecturers tend to teach grammar, cultural awareness, and psychological confidence as completely separate subjects. A truly effective ESP curriculum must weave these elements together. To survive in the tourism industry, graduates need a unified skill set where language proficiency, cultural empathy, and self-confidence support one another seamlessly.

Table 1. Mapping the Dynamics of Tourism English Education

Observation Area	Current Pedagogical Reality	Underlying Deficiencies	Strategic Action Needed
Primary Goal	Focus on oral exchanges	Struggle with unscripted chat	Boost learner courage and WTC
Teaching Style	Scenario-based practice	Ignores emotional barriers	Blend language with anxiety management
Evaluation	Live role-play scoring	Ignores the learning journey	Add self-reflection stages
Cultural Depth	Basic workplace settings	Low cross-cultural awareness	Teach global guest diversity
Curriculum Design	Task-specific functions	Disconnected learning modules	Build a unified teaching framework

The synthesis provided in Table 1 confirms that while universities are successfully moving towards interactive teaching, a massive gap remains in psychological and cultural preparation. Producing graduates who can merely memorize service dialogues is no longer sufficient. To truly bridge the gap between academic preparation and the chaotic reality of the tourism industry (as highlighted in the introduction of this study), future curriculum designs must stop treating language as a standalone mechanical skill. Assessment practices need to look beyond the final role-play output and start evaluating the students' confidence-building process. By fully integrating emotional resilience and intercultural adaptability into daily language practice, educators can produce tourism professionals who are genuinely ready for global service encounters.

Moreover, Table 1 indicates that although performance-based assessment and occupational communication have been broadly implemented, ESP tourism curriculum design still lacks integration across linguistic, psychological, and cultural aspects. Current assessment practices tend to emphasize measurable performance outcomes while giving less attention to the learning process, self-reflection, and intercultural awareness. The insufficient incorporation of intercultural competence and professional identity development implies that many ESP tourism programs continue to approach language learning primarily as a technical ability rather than as a process of professional socialization. This condition highlights the importance of developing a more comprehensive ESP tourism curriculum that combines language proficiency, emotional preparedness, and cultural understanding to equip students for the complex communication challenges within the tourism industry.

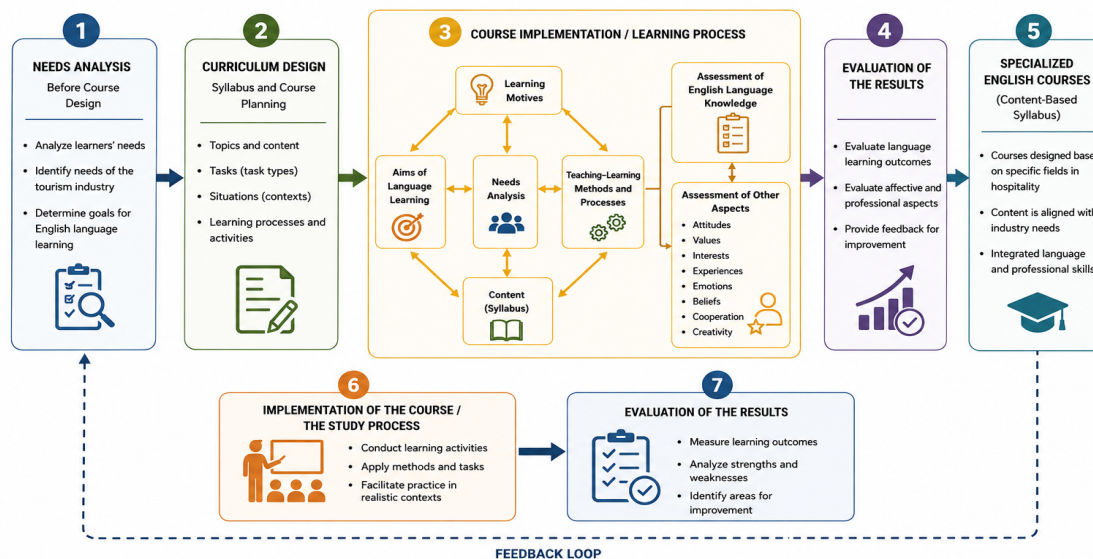


Figure 1. Hospitality Education Curriculum Design

Figure 1 presents ESP as an interconnected and continuous process that starts with a needs analysis before the course is designed and extends to the evaluation of learning outcomes. The first stage highlights needs analysis as the central basis for developing an English curriculum, which is later translated into an ESP syllabus covering topics, tasks, contexts, and learning processes. During the implementation stage, the diagram demonstrates that language learning objectives, needs analysis, syllabus content, and teaching methods are closely interconnected and continuously influence one another. Learning motivation is positioned at the center of the framework, emphasizing that motivation is not merely an outcome of learning, but an essential element that both shapes and is shaped by the objectives, materials, and instructional process in ESP learning.

In addition, the figure shows that ESP evaluation is not limited to assessing language proficiency alone, but also considers students' affective and professional aspects, including attitudes, values, interests, experiences, emotions, beliefs, cooperation, and creativity. This reflects a holistic perspective of ESP learning success, which involves both language competence and the development of professional identity and readiness. The evaluation results then function as feedback for improving the entire system, including the curriculum and instructional process, positioning ESP as a flexible and evolving curriculum. Within tourism education, this framework highlights that ESP learning must remain closely connected to workplace demands as well as students' personal and professional growth as future tourism service professionals.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a continuing gap between students' language proficiency and their preparedness to communicate professionally within the tourism industry. Although tourism ESP curricula increasingly prioritize speaking practice and service-related vocabulary, many students still experience difficulties when engaging in direct service interactions. A considerable number of learners lack confidence and struggle to respond effectively in real communication settings. These results are consistent with previous studies which argue that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for successful communication in highly interactive and demanding fields such as tourism and hospitality (Luka, 2023; Purwanto & Umar, 2024). Therefore, communicative competence

in tourism should not be limited to language mastery, but should also include the ability to interact appropriately and effectively in authentic professional situations.

To address this issue, the study underlines the importance of reorienting tourism ESP instruction toward a more service-based approach. Traditional ESP teaching commonly emphasizes grammatical accuracy, technical vocabulary, and memorized dialogues. However, such practices may restrict students' ability to manage spontaneous and unpredictable interactions with guests. In contrast, a service-oriented perspective focuses on responsiveness, politeness strategies, and meaningful interaction by treating language as a practical tool for carrying out professional responsibilities. This perspective supports the argument that ESP should be grounded not only in abstract linguistic theory, but also in workplace communication practices and professional realities (Novita & Refnaldi, 2020; Sagal, 2022).

The study also highlights the significant role of authentic tasks in connecting classroom learning with real-world communication. Activities based on realistic scenarios and task-based learning approaches make the learning process more meaningful because they expose students to situations similar to those they may encounter in the tourism workplace. Nevertheless, the success of these activities largely depends on careful task design and adequate instructional support. Without proper guidance and constructive feedback, authentic tasks may function merely as performance activities without substantially improving students' communicative abilities. Therefore, authentic learning activities should be implemented consistently in accordance with the principles of task-based language learning in order to gradually strengthen students' communication skills as well as their confidence (Haggag, 2008; Poznansky & Davis, 2021).

Furthermore, the discussion demonstrates that psychological readiness is an important factor influencing students' communicative performance. Elements such as self-confidence, communication anxiety, and willingness to communicate (WTC) strongly affect students' readiness to use English in service encounters. Even the most carefully designed curriculum may not produce competent graduates if these psychological dimensions are ignored. Studies on second-language communication have shown that WTC serves as a link between language competence and actual language use in both academic and professional environments (Mantra et al., 2020). Consequently, tourism ESP curricula should incorporate supportive teaching strategies and foster a positive learning atmosphere that helps students feel more comfortable and less anxious when communicating in English.

Overall, the findings suggest that ESP curricula for tourism education should be developed contextually and remain responsive to changes within the industry. Communication in modern tourism extends beyond face-to-face interaction and increasingly involves intercultural communication, digital communication platforms, and personalized customer service. As a result, curriculum design should remain flexible and adaptable to evolving professional needs. Curricula that focus exclusively on linguistic knowledge may become less relevant to the rapidly changing demands of the workplace. Therefore, tourism ESP should be understood as a dynamic educational framework that combines professional practice, psychological readiness, and communication skills suited to authentic professional contexts (Sienny Thio, 2001).

In conclusion, this discussion emphasizes that ESP in tourism higher education should not merely function as language instruction, but also as preparation for professional communication. The findings indicate that tourism ESP curricula need to integrate contextual relevance, linguistic competence, psychological preparedness, and authentic professional practice in a comprehensive manner. Through this approach, educators and curriculum developers can better equip students to meet the complex communication challenges of the contemporary tourism industry. In addition, the study offers a strong theoretical basis for further research in the field.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in tourism higher education should function not only as language instruction, but also as preparation for professional communication in real tourism workplaces. The findings reveal that although tourism ESP curricula have increasingly adopted communicative and task-based approaches, significant gaps still remain in students' confidence, intercultural competence, and psychological readiness when facing authentic service interactions. Therefore, tourism ESP curricula need to integrate linguistic competence, emotional preparedness, intercultural understanding, and authentic workplace practices in a more comprehensive and contextual manner. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of flexible and adaptive curriculum development that responds to the changing demands of the global tourism industry, including digital communication and customer-centered services. Through this approach, tourism education institutions can better prepare students to become competent, confident, and professional tourism service practitioners in international contexts.

Based on the discussion presented in this article, tourism higher education institutions are encouraged to design ESP curricula that are more closely connected to real tourism workplace communication and industry needs. Learning activities should emphasize practical and interactive communication through role-plays, simulations, and authentic tourism service tasks in order to improve students' speaking ability, confidence, and professional readiness. In addition, intercultural competence and professional identity development should be integrated more systematically into tourism ESP learning because communication in tourism involves interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. Future studies are also recommended to explore the relationship between linguistic competence, psychological factors, and professional communication skills in tourism ESP contexts to support more holistic and effective curriculum development.

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