



## REVIEW ARTICLE

# The Importance of Teaching English to Students in the Tourism Industry

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### Abstract

English is considered to be the lingua franca in the modern world and has been elevated to the position of a global language which connects the world. Hence it is important that individuals need to have a good knowledge of the language when embarking on their careers – and the tourism industry is no exception. It is therefore imperative that English courses designed to meet the needs of students specializing in the field of tourism, be comprehensive, and tailor-made to suit the needs of those who require it. English plays a pivotal role in the travel industry and competency in English will be of tremendous benefit to students pursuing a course of study in the field of tourism. Tourism entails communication with people to promote cultural interactions, and the ability to communicate with people from countries worldwide, will act as a catalyst in uniting peoples through language, to appreciate the cultures that each country has to offer. In order to achieve this objective, it is important that students following / intending to follow a career in tourism be proficient in English, prior to embarking on their careers. This paper aims at providing an outline of the broad area of teaching English to students who are hoping to pursue the field of tourism. This paper discusses the importance of English to the target population and offers introductions to the importance of English for Specific Purposes and the importance of English for tourism purposes.

**Key words:** English, Tourism Industry, Students

### Introduction

In today's tourism world, institutions that provide a platform for developing and producing newly emerging globalized skills (management and language) can evaluate its potentials in the name of tourism [1]. In the European Hospitality and Tourism Management Education (HTME), management and language skills are the bases in communication in the tourism market [2]. The future hotel and tourism industry needs educational establishments that provide hospitality management courses and language training [1].

In the present postindustrial society, services have the greatest importance in meeting human needs, and this includes tourism, which plays an important role in many economies. In order to ensure the quality of hospitality services, it is necessary to find a common language between supply and demand. Since English has become an international language, it has become increasingly necessary for employees working in tourism to develop the language skills to be able to fulfill the requirements of tourists [1].

English is considered to be one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and could be termed as the most spoken official language. It is the most used language in the field of

international affairs worldwide and is officially accepted even in countries where it is not considered as the primary language [3]. An increasing number of people world-wide, who are familiar with the English language, use it as a language of wider communication for a variety of purposes thereby, contributing to its status as a global lingua franca [4].

The English language is widely used by international travel and tourism departments, agencies and companies, as a common language, as it is necessary to communicate with foreign tourists. Hence international travel agencies aim at recruiting staff who can communicate well with international tourists in English [5]. Especially in the area of tourism, countries worldwide interact with tourists in English as it is the language that is extensively used as a communicative tool among human societies [3] and plays a crucial role as the predominant tool for communication in the global community [6]. It could therefore be said that English for tourism and hospitality is used for the international tourism and service

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industry which is considered under the category of English for Specific Purposes, and its practical application needs to be understood [7] by students hoping to pursue a career in this sector. Endorsing this viewpoint, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) agree that one approach to the language teaching is ESP. They believe that all decisions as to the different methods and content are constructed based on the learners' intention and purpose for learning. According to [8], ESP is designed and aimed at meeting the definite needs of the learners.

### **Focusing on English for Specific Purposes**

English language teaching has been transformed over the past two decades in the arena of business, and communication technology has developed by leaps and bounds, thus creating a revolution in the field of English language teaching. This has greatly impacted course designers who have diverted their attention to a more specialized teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), from the traditional teaching of English for Academic Purposes. ESP incorporates many components, some of which can be identified as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Tourism Purposes (ETP). Several studies of ESP have provided evidence of the importance of teaching English for Specific Purposes [9] [10] [11] [12].

ESP refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career. ESP is a form of ELT (English Language Teaching) which is "goal-oriented language learning" where students are expected to achieve a specific goal in the process of their learning, and students study ESP not because they are interested in the English language as such but because they have to perform a task in English [13]. An ESP programme adopts a positive step towards enhancing the English required for a specific need as it is built on an assessment of the needs for which the learning of the language is required [3] ESP courses intend to prepare learners with a certain English ability for a situation where the language will be used such as target need, and this is no different in tourism [14].

The teaching process of any kind of language for specific purposes should take as a starting point, the analysis of the four traditional skills within an appropriate context, that being, as far as possible, the conditions given in the workplace [15]. Therefore, within the educational environment, students need to study the language whilst paying attention to those skills which are most relevant within the workplace.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) focuses on specific job disciplines and encompasses the four English skills, namely, reading writing listening and speaking. When teaching a language for occupational purposes, it is necessary to analyze the four traditional skills of a language within the suitable context – the conditions in the work place [15]

In English for Specific Purposes, the learning of English

becomes relevant and meaningful because students are able to put into practice what they have learnt in the ESP classroom, in their fields of work and study. This approach builds up and supports the relevance of what students learn, and assists them in learning more English and widening their language horizons. Thereby students are motivated to interact with other speakers. Thus ESP successfully weaves together subject matter and English language teaching, and this combination spurs on motivation among students, as students are able to use the vocabulary and language structures learnt in the English language classroom, in a meaningful context in their workplaces. This is further endorsed by [16] who stress on a 'learning-centred approach' where the learner's reason for learning the language takes precedence over other factors – whereby content and method are fashioned according to the learner's needs.

Needs analysis has been one of the key factors and an integral part of ESP practitioners [17]. Needs can be considered as the learner's study or job requirements; that is, what they have to be able to demonstrate at the end of their language course [6&18] emphasizes that English language skills are needed in the tourism industry to support socio-economic development and that the mastery of the four English language skills is vital in the tourism sector. The primary use of English in the tourism industry is to provide information and services [18] and the tourism industry is seen as a service industry that demands service languages to be used frequently [19].

### **The Importance of English for Tourism**

The English language plays a predominant role in local and global travel and tourism, as the common language for communication [5] Within the periphery of the gamut of contents of ESP, English for Tourism stands out for the reason that every human being is a tourist in this world at some point in time [3] Tourism is a multidisciplinary industry and therefore involves many different stakeholders for its operational activities. An essential element for sustainable tourism development in any tourist destination is the participation of active stakeholders and their collaborations [20].

Employees who work in the tourism and hospitality industry need to have a good command of English in their workplace, as English is considered the lingua franca of the twenty-first century. Lingua franca is a language that is used to communicate among different people all over the world.

According to [5] "English is a contact language between people who share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication". [21] States that, "As a global language, it is obvious that English plays an important role in international interaction. English is used as the lingua franca in these international interactions."

Thus knowing English has a positive impact on all activities of the tourism sector [21]. Within the requirements to provide an excellent service in the tourism industry, English appears as a mandatory requirement to communicate with customers. For this reason, the development of language skills is essential for a good communication process [1] the focal point of teaching English for tourism is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners [23]. As such, it is important to examine the communicative needs of tourism personnel by shedding light on their perceptions of needs, wants, lacks, and attitudes toward English in order to include what is needed and exclude what is deemed less important to them [24].

Most of the human mobility both locally and globally is attributed to tourism [25]. International tourism indicated continuous growth for the tenth consecutive year reporting 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals in 2019 and estimated 1.8 billion of international tourist arrivals [26]. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, termed as the most challenging tragedy that occurred in the world since World War II has caused disruptions to the global economy, and global travel and tourism have suffered immeasurable and severe setbacks [25]. The tourism industry is an umbrella industry networked with many other sectors in the economy including hotel, community level operations, education, financial, agriculture, medical, travel and transportation, construction, real estate, retail etc. [25]. It is important to study how the reliance on English in the tourism industry might shape the recovery of its main sub sectors once the pandemic subsides [25]. Hence, preparing students to achieve competency in English would lend a helping hand in the healing process along the long and arduous process of recovery of the tourism sector in the future, worldwide. Tourism is a vital economic sector and is seeing gradual improvement and development post COVID-19. Therefore it is important for those with an aspiration to join the tourism industry, to improve their English language skills. Efficient communication in English is essential to improve professional profiles [27].

With special reference to English for Tourism, English cannot be taught as a separate subject divorced from the student's real world. Instead, in keeping with the concept of needs-analysis where the needs of the learner are the main focus, English must be integrated into a subject matter area which is important to a student. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the world is moving towards a global village, the need for English skills is an imperative in the tourism sector, to realize sustainable tourism to support socio-economic development [18]. The focal point of teaching English for tourism is that, English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world; instead it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners [23].

English plays a pivotal role in the tourism industry, as it enhances the service provided to foreign visitors to a country, who do not know the local language. There is a lack of professionals with enough English skills to function as required in the tourism industry. Furthermore, tourism professionals need to speak English to foreigners to make their visit more enjoyable [28]. People who are required to use English at work for tourism and hospitality purposes need to improve their communicative abilities, language fluency, and accuracy [29]. This language is taught as a second language in educational institutions at various levels since it is a significant element to establish communication with others worldwide [30]. In addition to placing emphasis on the English language skills, focus needs to be directed towards encompassing techniques to improve linguistic skills for students of tourism such as role plays [31], video recordings [32] and self-video recordings [33], working collectively by using technological means [31] using the virtual social network for professional training [34]

It is certain that English represents a real asset both for employment and for career advancement in the field. Furthermore, it is a fact beyond doubt that good competences of this language represent the basis for achieving customer satisfaction, given that outbound tourist flows within the travel and tourism industry have constantly increased at global level lately [35-36].

Globalization has increased competition in tourism markets, and human resource development plays a pivotal role in the success of tourism in many markets. There is a growing acknowledgement that economies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be knowledge-based rather than commodity based and be driven by knowledge development innovation and commercialization [1] Thus students need to be exposed to knowledge and theories in addition to vocational training.

## Conclusion

Many countries earn their much needed revenue by attracting tourists. A satisfied tourist who enjoys the facilities and attractions that a country has to offer, will recommend a particular destination to others. Therefore, the human resource factor plays a significant role in promoting the image of a country as a prime tourist destination. Education in the tourism and hospitality spheres needs to connect with the development of the knowledge that will provide a contribution to the successful development of the tourism and hospitality industry as a whole [1].

Tourism is all about journeying to see new places, experiencing a variety of cultures and gathering knowledge about the world [3]. Thus students of tourism need to join in this journey to attain the final goal. Tourism is an eye-opening experience and becoming proficient at ETP will provide students the opportunity of exploring and enjoying the world in addition to

being successful in their workplaces. A good knowledge of ETP will better equip students who desire to pursue their futures in the ever-widening ambit of tourism with suitable linguistic tools required to travel or for work-related activities. Providing learners with every opportunity to achieve their desired goals is one of the prime responsibilities of an educator and thus further research into this ever-widening field of English for tourism purposes, will undoubtedly benefit learners, increase their motivation and provide a platform for improving their language skills in English [3]. The tourism industry has aided in the development of countries on a large scale and continues to do so [25]. Thus it is important to provide protection to all the service providers of the tourism sector and better equip students of tourism with suitable English language competencies in order to safeguard the tourism industry and focus on future developments of economies through the tourism sector. Students of tourism should be aware of the importance of English in their education and be motivated to learn English, as it is an essential tool in their field of employment, and will aide in producing satisfied customers in addition to providing professional fulfillment in their careers [23].

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