English for Tourism: Enhancing Communication Skills for Hospitality Professionals and Vocational Students

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| ***Article Info*** | **Abstract** |
| ***Article History***  *Received:*  *Revised:*  *Published:* | *This study examined the challenges faced by students and tourism professionals in Banyuwangi in mastering English communication skills for engaging with international tourists. Banyuwangi is well known as a tourist destination which offers the beauty of natural wonder and rich cultural attraction. It has been successful in attracting international tourist visitors from around the world. Effective English communication has become critical to enhance tourist experiences and supporting regional economic growth.* *The study aimed to explore the essential competencies of hospitality professional and the vocational students in communication skills needed to effectively interact with tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds and enhance their overall travel experience. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, with tourism student, professional industry worker, and practitioner tourism industry in Banyuwangi, participatory observations which conducted across tourist spots and documentation. A comprehensive analysis of relevant educational resources and industry-specific documents were employed in this study. Findings reveal a significant gap between theoretical instruction and practical application in English real tourism industry workforce setting, which affects confidence and communication skills among tourism workers. It emphasizes the necessity of collaborative frameworks between educational institutions and tourism enterprises to align training with dynamic industry demands. The study was highlights the importance of experience-based learning methods and stronger collaboration between educational institutions and the tourism industry to develop professional communication skills. These findings provide valuable insights for curriculum improvement and training initiatives to enhance the global competitiveness of tourism professionals, especially in communication skills.* |
| ***Keywords***  *Communication skills, Tourism, Hospitality professionals* |
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**INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is an economic sector that heavily relies on effective cross-cultural communication, particularly through English as the global lingua franca. In Banyuwangi, a rapidly growing tourist destination in Indonesia, English communication skills play a crucial role for hospitality professionals and vocational students (Yusra et al., 2021). However, challenges persist among industry professionals and students in developing adequate English proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening skills, as well as confidence in interacting with international visitors (Winnie et al., 2023).

Existing literature indicates that English proficiency in the tourism industry extends beyond linguistic competence, encompassing intercultural skills that facilitate effective communication between tourists and local service providers (Miao, 2022). Previous studies have identified barriers to English learning among vocational students and hospitality professionals, including limited integration of communication-focused curricula in vocational education (Fonseca et al., 2024). Although initiatives such as the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Indonesian vocational education have been introduced, gaps in execution continue to impact workforce readiness in the tourism sector (Yusra, 2023).

Communication skills are fundamental in the tourism and hospitality industry. They can enable effective interactions between service providers and tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, these skills include interpersonal dimensions such as cultural awareness and empathy which are essential in managing guest expectations (Čuić Tanković et al., 2022). Furthermore, in the tourism and hospitality industry, digital communication skills have become increasingly important in the modern era that allow tourism professionals to engage in online marketing, virtual customer service, and social media interactions (Carlisle et al., 2021). In the context of globalization, tourism facilitates cultural exchange and significantly impacts the economies of host destinations (Navío-Marco et al., 2019). The manifestations of tourism can be categorized based on travel purposes and the experiences offered. Hospitality professionals must possess strong interpersonal skills to build positive guest relationships and manage complex service situations (Koç & Boz, 2020). Additionally, with technological advancements, hospitality professionals are now expected to develop digital competencies and manage online customer interactions (Huang et al., 2021).

This study aims to equip students with the essential competencies needed to effectively interact with tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds by enhancing the overall tourism experience. Through an empirical analysis of students' and professionals' perceptions and experiences in the hospitality and tourism sector of Banyuwangi, this study seeks to identify factors affecting English communication effectiveness and propose strategies for improvement (Borges-Tiago et al., 2021). This research also explores how the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of tourism professionals and students in the industry impact their ability to effectively communicate in English. This study seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform curriculum improvements, training initiatives, and industry-level strategies to enhance the global competitiveness and intercultural communication abilities of aspiring and practicing tourism professionals.

The urgency of this study stems from the continuous growth and development of Banyuwangi's thriving tourism industry, which has experienced a steady influx of international visitors arriving each year to explore the region's diverse array of cultural, natural, and recreational attractions. This rapid expansion of the local tourism sector underscores the critical need to address the communication challenges faced by hospitality professionals and aspiring tourism students in effectively engaging with these international guests and providing them with exceptional service and experiences. As a result, it is imperative for both hospitality professionals and vocational students to develop communication skills that go beyond linguistic proficiency to include intercultural aspects, such as cultural sensitivity, adaptability in cross-cultural interactions, and the ability to build meaningful connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This expanded set of communication competencies will enable tourism and hospitality vocational students to engage more effectively, enhancing customer experiences and strengthening the overall competitiveness of the tourism industry. The findings of this study are expected to generate recommendations that can be implemented by educational institutions and policymakers to enhance the quality of English language instruction in tourism and hospitality, ultimately producing a more competitive workforce for the global job market (Upadhyay et al., 2023).

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study examines the essential competencies of hospitality professional and the vocational students in communication skills needed to effectively interact with tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds and enhance their overall travel experience which focuses on identifying communication barriers and exploring potential improvements to enhance interactions with international tourists and support tourism development (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Additionally, this study investigates the role of educational and industry environments in facilitating the enhancement of communication skills among tourism workers.

**Research Design**

The qualitative phenomenological approach was particularly suitable for this research as it allowed for an in-depth examination of the complex dynamics and processes involved in the essential competency that was used by professionals to interact with tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by tourism professionals and students in developing and applying effective English communication skills to engage with international visitors. This research adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach, aiming to understand the meaning of participants’ experiences in tourism and hospitality communication. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including students, industry practitioners, and academics, to explore the essential competencies required for effective communication with international tourists (Williams, 2021). Secondary data were gathered from relevant literature on communication skills, tourism, and hospitality professionals (Lodhi et al., 2022). By employing this methodology, the researcher could investigate the diverse experiences, perspectives, and understandings that tourism professionals and students possess regarding communication skills. The qualitative phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the significance of comprehending the contexts in which professionals operated and interacted between these contexts. This theoretical framework provided a comprehensive foundation for examining the various factors that influence the communication skill performance of learners within the tourism and hospitality industry.

**Research Participants**

The participants of this study comprised three main groups: student from Banyuwangi State Polytechnic majoring in tourism, tourism industry practitioner with direct experience serving international tourist, and academic specializing in English language education for tourism (Patton, 2020). The participants of this research were purposively chosen using a criterion-based sampling technique. The primary criterion for participant selection was being hospitality professional, tourism student, tourism industry practitioner, and academician. The researcher had selected this particular range to represent key stakeholders in the tourism industry in Banyuwangi, as they were directly involved in and impacted by English communication skills. The study included a total of 4 participants, consisting of one student, one professional, one tourist industry practitioner and one English academician. The researchers did not restrict the subjects' gender, as the goal was to gather perspectives from diverse backgrounds that could offer significant insights into the subject being studied. They did gather information about the participants' gender to provide context for the study and better understand the factors that may influence English communication skills within the tourism industry. By gathering data from a diverse group of participants, including both genders, the researchers aimed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the real-world factors affecting English communication skills and competencies in the tourism sector.

**Instruments**

The research process involved data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into participants' perspectives on English communication challenges and strategies used to overcome them (Land, 2024). Additionally, direct observations were conducted to analyze real-time interactions between students, professionals, and international tourists. Documentation was used as a supplementary data source to validate findings and strengthen the research conclusions.

The researcher collected data to address the research questions by conducting online interviews and administering open-ended questionnaires with tourism professionals. This approach was chosen to obtain adequate information without disrupting the participants' primary work responsibilities, as professionals in this field often have demanding daily schedules. The online interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allowed for flexibility in exploring the participants' experiences and perspectives while ensuring that key topics were covered. The interview guide for professionals focused on their observations of the oral communication abilities of tourism students and employees, including their experiences in facilitating communication, their views on their role in the instructional process, and their assessments of proficiency levels in relation to the participants' level of involvement.t

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis of this study used the Miles and Huberman approach, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The collected data were analyzed reductively to identify recurring patterns in participants’ experiences, phenomenologically to extract the underlying meanings of their communication challenges, and through an editing approach to refine data accuracy (McGinley et al., 2020). To enhance data credibility, this study applied triangulation by evaluating the credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability of the findings. This methodological approach ensures that the study accurately reflects the lived experiences of participants in navigating English communication challenges in the tourism sector.

To analyze the patterns of communication skills, the researcher develops and describes each code interview data transcription. It accompanied by representative examples from the data. The researcher documents their reflections and contemplations, cultivating theoretical insights by composing detailed notes in a sheet. Throughout the analysis, the researcher establishes and refines thematic categories, continuously comparing data within and across these categories to enhance the emerging theoretical framework.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings and discussion section of this study provides a comprehensive examination of the key themes and insights that emerged from the research. This section delved into the underlying factors affecting English communication effectiveness and proposes strategies for improvement based on the experiences, perceptions, and challenges shared by the tourism students, industry practitioners, and academics who participated in the study. By integrating the qualitative interview findings, it offers a holistic understanding of the role of English communication skills in the tourism sector and provides evidence-based recommendations to enhance the communication competencies of the local tourism workforce.

**Research Findings**

Regarding the research problems, according to the results of the interviews with the tourism student, professional, tourism industry practitioners, and academics. Several keywords were determined to be relevant to the research problems, such as learning experience, communication skills, and challenges. The themes were derived and further analysed to identify the key factors affecting English communication effectiveness within the tourism industry. This thematic analysis provided insights that informed the development of strategies to enhance communication skills for hospitality professionals and tourism students. The analysis of the interviews reveals recurring themes on the effects of English language proficiency, the challenges faced in communication, and the strategies for improving communication skills among tourism professionals and students. Table 1 presents the themes of learning experience, professional perception, and challenges faced in developing effective English communication skills for tourism and hospitality professionals and students.

**Table 1**

**Theme of Learning Experiences, Professional Perceptions, and Challenges**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Competency aspect** | **Description** |
| 1. | Speaking Skills | Tourism students and professionals struggle with confidence in speaking English, particularly in direct interactions with international tourists. |
| 2. | Cultural Awareness | Difficulties in understanding cultural differences often lead to miscommunication in service delivery. |
| 3. | Theory-Practice Gap | Educational curricula focus more on theoretical knowledge, with limited practical experience |

Theme of learning experiences, professional perceptions, and challenge in Table 1 shows that the learning experience students and professional got the better struggling to improve the students’ communication skills confidently. Most of them got difficulties in understanding and navigating diverse cultural norms, values, and communication styles often lead to miscommunications, breakdowns in effective service delivery, and challenges in meeting the unique needs and expectations of international tourists and visitors. They need to develop cross-cultural awareness, empathy, and the ability to adapt one's approach to different cultural contexts was critical for hospitality professionals to provide seamless, personalized experiences that exceed customer satisfaction. This argument was substantiated by the professionals' perceptions of in English learning before and after they become actively engaged. Educational curricula tend to focus more on imparting theoretical knowledge and academic concepts, with limited opportunities for tourism and hospitality students to gain practical, real-world experience through internships, field trips, or project-based learning. This overemphasis on theoretical instruction, rather than providing students with chances to apply their knowledge in authentic tourism settings

**Table 2**

**The theme of tourism Workforce Competency Development**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Competency aspect** | **Description** |
| 4. | Technology Utilization | Some professionals still rely on translation applications during critical communication situations. |
| 5. | Learning Methods | A lack of experience-based learning, such as role-play activities and project-based internships |
| 6. | Impact on Tourism | Inadequate communication skills affect tourist satisfaction and the overall image of Banyuwangi as a travel destination. |
| 7. | Recommendations | Strengthening collaborations between educational institutions and the industry to implement practice-based communication training programs |

Next, in Table 2. The Themes of tourism Workforce Competency Development A lack of experience-based learning, such as role-play activities, project-based internships, and other hands-on, immersive learning opportunities that allow tourism students and professionals to apply their English communication skills in simulated or real-world tourism settings. These types of practical, contextual learning experiences are crucial for developing the confidence, fluency, and intercultural competence required for effective English communication in the dynamic and diverse tourism industry. In relation to the study of Inadequate communication skills among tourism professionals and hospitality workers can significantly affect tourist satisfaction and the overall image of Banyuwangi as a premier travel destination.

Strengthening collaborations between educational institutions and the tourism industry to implement comprehensive, practice-based communication training programs is crucial for enhancing the English communication skills of hospitality professionals and tourism students. By fostering closer partnerships between academic institutions and the diverse sectors of the tourism industry, such as hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and travel agencies, tailored communication training programs can be developed and delivered. These programs should go beyond just linguistic proficiency, also addressing intercultural competencies, conflict resolution, and customer service skills required in the dynamic tourism context.

**Discussion**

In findings of this study reveal a striking reality: despite recognizing the importance of English communication, both students and tourism professionals in Banyuwangi still struggle significantly in practical application. The gap between theoretical learning and practical use remains a major obstacle to effective communication skills development. Students lack confidence when interacting with international tourists, while industry professionals encounter challenges in understanding cultural differences and specific tourist needs. In critical situations, some tourism staff still rely on translation applications, indicating that current educational and training programs do not sufficiently prepare them for real-world interactions.

This study aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of cross-cultural communication skills in the hospitality and tourism industry. Jin (2023) emphasizes that digital platforms, such as social media, can be leveraged to enhance intercultural communication competence (Jin, 2023). Similarly, Čuić Tanković et al. (2022) found that Generation Z entering the tourism workforce must develop various communication skills, including verbal, non-verbal, and digital communication (Čuić Tanković et al., 2022). The strength of this study lies in its phenomenological approach, which provides an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of tourism professionals in a specific regional context.

Reflecting on these findings, it is evident that there is an urgent need to create more immersive and experience-based learning environments. This study suggests that educational institutions must revise their curricula to incorporate more practical activities, such as role-playing, simulated tourist interactions, and on-site training in real tourism settings. Additionally, the tourism industry should implement more rigorous English training programs, integrating real-world scenarios and digital tools to enhance communication skills (Huang & Fisher, 2021).

A deeper analysis reveals that the primary reason for the communication gap is the limited exposure of students and tourism professionals to direct interactions with international tourists. This lack of exposure contributes to their low confidence in using English effectively. Furthermore, the predominant focus on theoretical learning rather than practical application exacerbates this issue (Yusra et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to develop more interactive, hands-on learning strategies to bridge this gap.

Based on these findings, several key actions should be taken. Strengthening collaborations between educational institutions and the tourism industry is essential to provide more internship and project-based training opportunities. Additionally, local government initiatives could support language certification programs for tourism workers to enhance their global competitiveness (Upadhyay et al., 2023). By adopting a more structured and practice-oriented approach, the tourism sector in Banyuwangi can better prepare its workforce to meet the growing communication demands of the global tourism industry.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study uncover the significance of English communication skills is widely recognized, both students and professionals within Banyuwangi's tourism industry continue in encountering substantial obstacles in their practical implementation. The gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice remains a major barrier to effective communication skill development. Students often lack confidence in engaging with international tourists, while industry professionals struggle to navigate cultural differences. In critical situations, some professionals still rely on translation applications, highlighting the inadequacy of current education and training programs in preparing them for actual work environments.

This study contributes significantly to both theoretical and practical aspects of tourism education. Theoretically, it reinforces the relationship between vocational education and workforce readiness, particularly in cross-cultural communication. It emphasizes the necessity of experience-based learning in English education for tourism professionals. Practically, the research provides insights for educational institutions and industry stakeholders to develop more effective training strategies, such as project-based internships, role-play integration into curricula, and immersive language training tailored to real-world situations.

While this study offers valuable insights, there is room for further research expansion. One limitation is its geographical focus on Banyuwangi, meaning the findings may not fully represent conditions in other regions with different tourism characteristics. Future studies should explore a broader geographic scope to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Additionally, further research could investigate the effectiveness of various English communication training methods in the tourism industry to identify the most optimal approaches for improving workforce competency on a global scale.

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