

Bridging the Gap between English Lessons and Tourism Workplace Communication: Students' Perceptions from Tourism Service Vocational Schools

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry offers hope that it will continue to underpin the economy. Data from the Central Statistics Agency indicates that in April 2026 the number of tourists increased by 5.19% (year-on-year). English, as an International language, is expected to enable a more detailed description of tourism, thereby increasing the number of both domestic and international tourists. This forms the basis for honing the skills of vocational school students majoring in Tourism Services so that they can communicate fluently in English as part of their service to tourists. However, English lessons in vocational schools are often considered not to be fully aligned with the real communication needs of the tourism industry. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of English lessons at Vocational High Schools majoring in Tourism Services in Jakarta, focusing on students' views regarding the relevance of English materials, speaking practice, tourism-related vocabulary, customer service communication, and the use of English in real professional situations. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected via a questionnaire distributed to students at vocational secondary schools majoring Tourism Services. The findings indicate that 94% of 36 students require English language learning activities that are more contextual, practical, and industry-based, particularly those relating to speaking, role-play, tour guiding, communication in hotels and travel, and dealing with tourists.

Keywords: English, Tourism, Vocational School, Tourism Services, English language learning

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a strategic industry that contributes significantly to Indonesia's economic development. The Central Statistics Agency recorded that the number of tourists increased by 5.19% year-on-year in April 2026. This has resulted in a growing demand for tourism professionals with strong communication skills using a lingua franca, particularly English.

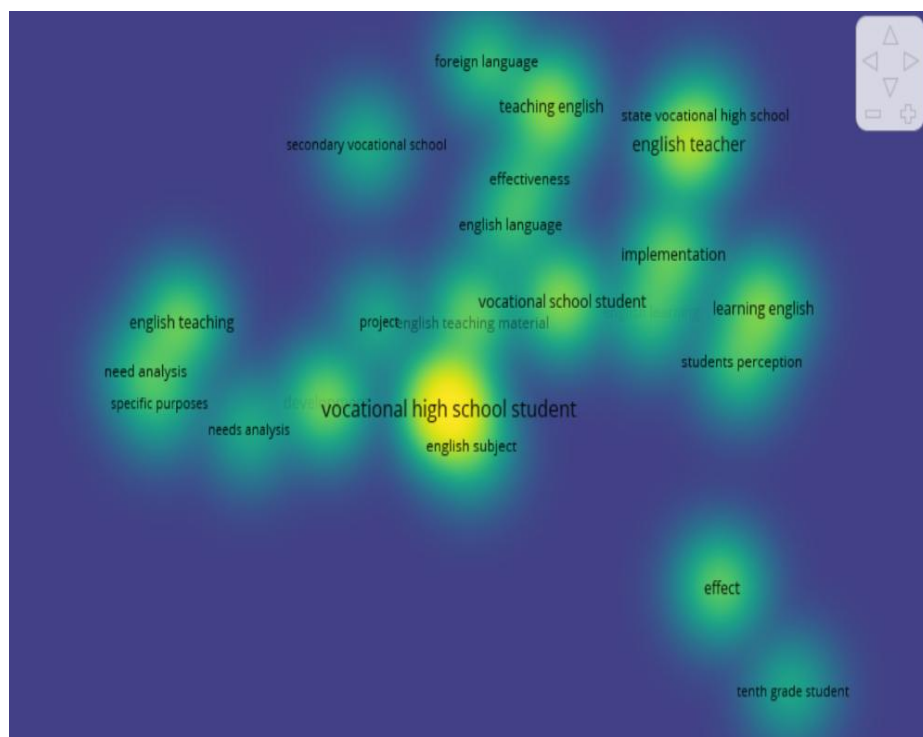
English has a significant role in the tourism industry as an effective means of communication with international tourists (Maricar et al., 2024). The statement is in line with Joseph, Munghate, Arts, & College (n.d.) in Sri Damayanti (2019) which explain six important roles of English in the world of tourism. First, the Communicative/Interactive Role emphasizes English as a medium of communication between tourism operators and tourists, as well as between tourists. Second, the Integrative Role, which states that English serves as a medium of communication and a unifying force. Third, the Lingua-Franca Role, which serves as a bridge for tourists and tourism operators to communicate, using a language of instruction or interaction among people living in diverse linguistic environments. Fourth, the Relational-Fostering Role, which serves as a communication bridge to strengthen global human relations. Fifth, the Economic/Business Role, which aims to facilitate foreign workers to come and work outside their country. Sixth, the Functional Role, contributes to making it easier for tourists or local communities to obtain specific information, request assistance, and perform other functions necessary for tourism activities. From this statement, it can be concluded that English, as a tourism support tool, is mandatory for tourism business actors to master. The goal is to improve the tourism sector, which will impact economic progress.

Students majoring in Tourism Service Business at vocational high schools are expected to become tourism entrepreneurs capable of serving tourists. Therefore, students in this major need to be guided to study and practice English in depth in the tourism sector. This bring into line with the guidelines outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2022 concerning the Revitalization of Vocational Education and Training, which emphasizes vocational training to improve access, quality, and relevance of vocational education and training to meet job market needs. The synthesis of these statements suggests the need to encourage students majoring in Tourism Services to hone their English skills so they can enter the Business and Industrial World.

To support students' need for English language skills, learning materials that meet their needs in the workplace are needed. Textbooks commonly used in vocational high schools majoring in Tourism Business Services are similar to those used in senior high schools. This raises the question of whether the material in these textbooks is sufficient to equip students with English and hone their skills as tourism entrepreneurs. This question then becomes a potential research topic. The purpose of this study was to explore students' perceptions of English lessons at vocational high schools majoring in Tourism Services in Jakarta. In their opinion, whether the English material, speaking practice, tourism-related vocabulary, and customer service communication are relevant to the use of English in real-life professional situations. The research topic was analyzed using VOSviewer (Effendy et al., 2021) The results are as follows:

Picture 1:

Density Visualization VOSViewer



The density visualization results from data processing using VOSviewer indicate that the topics of student perception, English teaching materials, effectiveness, and needs analysis have not been extensively researched. This is evident from the dark color of the visual image above. Therefore, the researchers conducted a study to

identify gaps that must be filled so that students will not experience English language barriers in the workplace. The results of this study are expected to provide insights to educators and education providers so they can adapt teaching materials to meet the demands of the business world and the tourism industry.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative method. Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire used a Likert scale of 1-4: strongly agree (SS), agree (S), disagree (TS), and strongly disagree (STS) and used 41 questions. The data used were primary data, namely original data collected and processed by an institution or individual directly from the subject (Wirawan in (Fedora Aditya & Dewi Ekawati, (2024). Data were collected from 36 vocational high school students majoring in Travel and Tourism Business. Data was processed using SPSS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study used 41 questions with response options for each category; strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. For each question, no one chose the strongly disagree option, and the disagree option had a frequency of between one and seven. The agree option outnumbered the other answer options, with a frequency of 29-36, and no one chose the strongly agree option. The response scale in the questionnaire data indicates that the importance of English language learning in vocational high schools majoring in Tourism Business is deeply embedded in workplace-like situations.

Student responses to this questionnaire provide empirical evidence regarding training challenges and needs. Students desired an emphasis on learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is key to learning in the Tourism Business major because the tourism industry increasingly demands competent graduates who can communicate well and fluently, possess professional self-confidence in their work, and are aware of cultural differences (Leofaragusta K & Bambang Purwanto, 2026).

ESP learning by combining basic linguistic skills with professional communication skills (Yao et al., 2025) and a multisensory approach (Mukadimah & Sahayu, 2021) is expected to provide maximum results in English learning for vocational high school students majoring in Tourism Services Business. However, it is also necessary to pay attention to several factors for applying ESP in the classroom (Wen, 2022). Learning readiness for teachers and students must also be taken into consideration

CONCLUSION

English language learning for vocational high school students majoring in Tourism Business is crucial due to the demands of the future career as tourism entrepreneurs. Tourism entrepreneurs are expected to serve as ambassadors for tourism, explaining each destination and culture communicatively. It is hoped that the advancement of tourism businesses will lead to economic growth. Students' perceptions of English learning are essential for evaluating their support needs to achieve the goal of fluent English communication. Furthermore, other factors such as teacher preparedness and the curriculum are also important considerations for learning.

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