

English Language and Communicative Proficiency of Saudi Tourism and Hospitality Students: A Present Situation Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the level of proficiency of Saudi tourism undergraduates in various language skills and sub-skills, grammar, and tourism vocabulary. It also evaluates the present teaching materials used at the colleges of Tourism and hospitality. A mixed-methods approach has been used in this study. A Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to two hundred nine (n=209) STU to gather quantitative data. The qualitative data was generated by interviewing one vice dean of academic affairs, one head of the English department, and 10 teachers. Both instruments were self-developed and standard procedures were followed to determine their content validity and reliability. The descriptive analyses were run to interpret the quantitative data whereas the qualitative data were presented through verbal responses of the participants. The results have informed that speaking and listening skills are the weakest followed by writing and reading skills respectively. They are also weak in English grammar, tourism-related vocabulary, and various language sub-skills. The teaching materials presently taught at the colleges of tourism and hospitality in Saudi Arabia do not suit their specific tourism needs. It is strongly recommended that indigenous teaching materials should be developed to meet the professional needs of Saudi tourism undergraduates taking into consideration their present proficiency in various language skills, sub-skills, tourism-related vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, the local and cultural requirements and preferences of Saudi tourism undergraduates should be considered while developing the teaching materials to ensure effective English language practices.

Keywords: communicative proficiency, ESP teaching materials, hospitality students, present situation analysis, tourism

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Introduction

Saudi Vision 2030 is a futuristic roadmap for economic development and one of the major areas is the promotion of the tourism industry. Saudi Ministry of Tourism (2022) states that KSA targets to “increase the contribution of the tourism sector in the GDP from its current rate of 3% to more than 10%, creating one million jobs, attract 100 million tourists and spend SR 115 billion to build 150,000 hotel rooms by 2030”. Alhowaish (2016) states that during the last few years, tourism has been given top priority by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) policymakers and they viewed “the tourism industry not only as a source of revenue but also, more importantly, as a way to diversify their economy and solve their unemployment problems” (p. 1). The Travel and Tourism Competitive Report (2017) reveals that Saudi Arabia outperformed the other countries of the region in upgrading the kingdom’s cultural resources significantly and Saudi Arabia has achieved an annual growth rate of 18% in the hospitality industry in 2014. It is stated that “nowadays, the role of English is important for the tourism industry as a means to communicate, negotiate, and execute transactions with tourists by tourism employees” (Prachanant, 2012, p. 117). English is the lingua-franca of the present century and is the most widely used official language which is frequently used in “international affairs, trade and commerce, tourism, and so on” (Rahman, 2016, p. 43). This emerging realization of the significance of the English language in the field of tourism has initiated teaching the English language to the tourism workforce. It has also been reported that ‘English for Tourism Marketing (ETM)’ remains one of the most sought-after domains of English for specific purposes courses in which the workforce is trained in promoting tourism and handling various real-life situations of tourists’ activities in the English language (Simon, 2012). It has been revealed that development of the human resource is of utmost importance in developing the tourism marketing industry. Rahman (2016) suggests that one of the most “vital aspects of the tourism sector is communication between the people associated with this business and the tourists” (p. 39). Therefore, effective communication skills in the English language of the workforce related to the tourism industry are an extremely important factor in attracting international tourists and promoting tourism.

Research reports that Needs Assessment (NA) is a key factor and an inevitable component of all English for specific purposes courses for syllabus designers, developers of appropriate and relevant teaching materials, classroom teachers, and evaluators (Wannapok, 2004; Dehnad, Bagherzadeh, Shoaleh, Hatami, & Hosseini, 2010). The role of NA has been acknowledged in all kinds of English language courses including ETM which aims at addressing learners’ specific needs (See for examples Al-Khatib, 2007; Jamil, 2014; Puspitasari, 2018; Salisna, Harahap, & Sofyan, 2019; Noor, 2019).

Saudi Arabia is spending huge resources to promote and execute English language teaching. English language centres and English language institutes have been established at all Saudi universities to provide English language facilities to Saudi EFL learners. It has been reported that “despite the enormous efforts of the Saudi government to improve English teaching and learning in the country, students’ English proficiency remains unsatisfactory and far below expectations” (Alrabai, 2016, p. 21). The same findings have been revealed by much research (see for example Alhawsawi, 2013; Al-Khairi, 2013; Alharbi, 2015; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Ismail, 2015; Alsamadani & Ibnian, 2015; Javid & Almalki, 2018). Saudi Vision 2030 has set ambitious targets in the field of tourism and hospitality which needs a skilled workforce proficient in the English language to effectively communicate with international tourists. Considering the low English language proficiency level of Saudi EFL learners, it seems inevitable to offer special ESP courses

to Saudi aspirants in the field of tourism and hospitality. Along with special courses offered in various fields of tourism and hospitality by some Saudi universities, exclusive colleges have also been established to train the Saudi tourism workforce. Much research has offered valuable insights into the fact that a systematic NA is inevitable to identify ESP learners' target needs as well as their Present Situation Analysis (PSA) so that appropriate teaching materials are developed, moderated, or selected to achieve the best results (Moattarian & Tahririan, 2014; Yundayani, 2018; Noor, 2019). It has been found that no such systematic process has been adopted in the colleges of tourism and hospitality situated in various regions of Saudi Arabia to develop tailor-made teaching materials. A comprehensive and all-encompassing NA procedure must be followed which should engage "the subject specialists, the language course designers and teachers and students" (Jordan, 1997, p. 22). This large-scale PSA investigation is an attempt to fill this research gap so that all the stakeholders are investigated thoroughly to forward reliable and authentic recommendations based on the empirical data to design suitable curricula and develop appropriate teaching materials to meet the ETM needs of the Saudi tourism workforce.

This large-scale study attempts to identify the following research objectives:

1. To establish the current level of proficiency of Saudi tourism undergraduates (STU) in various language skills
2. To determine the present level of proficiency of STU in various listening sub-skills
3. To ascertain the present level of proficiency of STU in various speaking sub-skills
4. To discover the current level of proficiency of STU in various sub-skills of vocabulary and grammar
5. To evaluate present ESP course materials used at CTH.

Literature Review

It has been reported that ESP courses are narrower in focus as they target to fulfil the specific needs of the learners. It is further reported that "ESP views learners in terms of their work or study roles and that ESP courses focus on work or study-related needs, not personal needs or general interest" (Indrasari, 2016, p. 63). All kinds of ESP courses follow the same procedure and are "tailored to the specific learning and language use needs and goals of identified groups of students" (Johns & Price-Machada, 2014, p. 472).

Wozniak (2010) states that NA is the first step in developing tailor-made teaching materials for any ESP course and this should include identifying current competence in various language skills and sub-skills as well as a target needs to successfully carry out language-related tasks in the target situations. West (1994) informs that broadly speaking NA is identifying "what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation, and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training" (p. 1). Much research has reported that NA is a broad term that embraces several aspects of ELT. Yundayani, Emzir, and Rafli (2017) state that NA is a major driving force and serves as an umbrella for various pedagogical processes of teaching and learning. This comprehensive process incorporates "students' goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, their reasons in taking the course, their teaching and learning preferences, and the situations they will need to communicate in future" (Yundayani, 2018, p. 119). A growing mass of research has offered valuable insights into the significance of NA as an ESP "course development process" (Basturkmen, 2010, p. 19). It has been identified as "a careful assessment of a particular group's specific language learning needs and target situation" (Johns & Price, 2014, p. 472), "the key defining feature of ESP (...), the first step for ESP"

(Dudley-Evans, 2001: p. 133) and “the corner stone of ESP” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 122). Since the inception of ESP, NA has been identified as “the irreducible minimum” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: p. 53) and “a key instrument” (West, 1994, p. 2) for all ESP courses. This leads to the conclusion that in “every genuine ESP course, needs assessment is obligatory, and in many programs, an ongoing needs assessment is integral to curriculum design and evaluation” (Johns & Price-Machada, 2001, p. 49).

ESP learners’ specific needs in terms of learner situation analyses (LSA), target situation analyses (TSA), and present situation analyses (PSA) form the basis of NA processes which then “are reflected in the development of specific approaches and materials, aiming to satisfy their present or future academic, vocational or professional purposes” (Liu & Zhang, 2020, p. 206). PSA has been identified as the starting point of any ESP course and it includes the learners’ “weakness and strength in a language, skills, and learning experience” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 125). Alharby (2005) suggests that TSA and PSA are two major NA models and “researchers continue to use one of these models as their theoretical base depending on the circumstances of the conducted research” (p. 20). Robinson (1991) reports that PSA is a systematic attempt to ascertain what the learners are like at the beginning of a course and what their strengths and weaknesses are in various English language skills.

A growing mass of research has offered valuable insights into various aspects of PSA. Gusti (1991) states that PSA is an attempt to analyse the present learning and teaching situation at an institution and it should encompass the learners’ proficiency, pedagogical expertise of the faculty members, teaching content, ESP syllabus as well as the previous results (cited in Yundayani, 2018). Hyland (2006) describes that ESP mainly concerns itself with the current proficiency level of the learners, their ambitions during and after an ESP course, what is their ability at the beginning of the course and what is their target level of proficiency, their knowledge about the ESP course and what are their expectations and demands related to the course. Dudley-Evans and John (2009) also consider PSA an instrument to determine the learners’ present proficiency in various skills and language use. It has been considered an important procedure to assess the learners’ ability to what they can do with the target language presently (Hossain, 2013). PSA is identified as an umbrella that covers the learners’ present lacks in various language skills and sub-skills and “can be seen as the process to find the students’ lacks which cover the discrepancy between necessity and what the students have already known concerning with the subject and related with their current skills and performance” (Yundayani, 2018, p. 120).

It is recommended that PSA should involve all stakeholders to gather data including the learners, the faculty members, and the administration (Jordan, 1997). Richterich and Chanceler (1980) have presented a comprehensive model for generating data for a systematic PSA. They have recommended that there should be three major sources of collection of information for this model including the learners themselves, institutions where these ESP courses are taught, and target organisations where ESP learners will serve. They have further elaborated that ESP practitioners should thoroughly investigate all these stakeholders related to the learners’ level of proficiency in various language skills and sub-skills, available resources, and their views about various aspects of ELT. A growing mass of research has reported the development of teaching materials and teaching practices based on the comprehensive NA of ETM to train the workforce in the field of tourism (Simion, 2013; Afzali & Rezapoorian, 2014; Puspitasari, 2018).

Method

This investigation employed a mixed-methods approach to generate rich data. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire and the qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews. A Likert-scale questionnaire has been used for collecting data from a large population of Saudi Tourism Undergraduates (STU) from the colleges of tourism and hospitality (CTH) at Taif and Madinah Munawara. It has been reported that questionnaires are quick and cheap tools to collect data from large cohorts (Dörnyei, 2007). Semi-structured interviews have been conducted to investigate CTH faculty members and administration to generating rich and in-depth data as Dörnyei (2007) has recommended that interviews help in probing respondents more deeply to collect comprehensive data.

Research Instruments

The researcher developed a Likert-scale questionnaire to elicit the participants' responses relate to the proficiency of STU in various English language skills, sub-skills as well as the effectiveness of present ESP teaching materials used at CTH located in Taif and Madinah Munawara. The survey questionnaire was sent to three experts in the field to determine the content validity of the instrument. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. It was translated into Arabic to avoid any linguistic challenges as it was meant to be administered to STU studying at Taif and Madinah Munawara. The Arabic version of the questionnaire was pilot tested with twenty-four ($n=24$) students from the same academic context. Inter-item consistency was calculated through the Pearson correlation matrix for all items of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficient remained at .990 which is a high value to generate reliable data. All questionnaire items were retained in the final instrument. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol to investigate CTH faculty members and administration of the relevant colleges related to the student's proficiency in various language skills, sub-skills as well as evaluation of teaching materials currently taught at CTH.

Participants

The population of this mixed-methods study was STU, the faculty members as well as the administration of CTH situated in Taif and Madinah Munawara, Saudi Arabia. Two hundred ninety ($n=290$) STU have responded to the questionnaire and recorded their responses. A convenience sampling technique is used to collect data for this study. Ten faculty members, the head of the English department at CTH Taif and the vice dean of academic affairs at CTH Madinah Munawara have been investigated through a semi-structured interview.

Ethical Considerations

The final versions of the instruments were submitted to Taif University's ethical committee and permission letter number 42-137 was issued on 17-3-2021. Furthermore, the Taif University vice president issued the request letters to the deans of CTH to facilitate the collection of data. The researchers have ensured all the participants the confidentiality of information and use of data for this investigation only.

Results

The results of the quantitative data generated through the questionnaire responses have been presented in tables and in-depth qualitative data results, produced through semi-structured

interviews, have been recorded in detail in this section as well. It has been reported that ESP researchers need to triangulate data from various sources to reach reliable findings (Cowling, 2007; Flowerdew, 2010) because “the students’ perceptions of their language needs and their language abilities were very often different from those of other stakeholders in an educational entity” (p. 36, Kusnawati, 2014). Therefore, the researchers triangulated the quantitative data with rich qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews with other stake holders.

Table 1. *The current level of proficiency in language skills*

No	Language skills proficiency	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Listening skills	290	1.00	5.00	2.7897	1.41197
2	Speaking skills	290	1.00	5.00	2.6931	1.34356
5	English for tourism vocabulary	290	1.00	5.00	2.2241	1.21472
6	English Grammar	290	1.00	5.00	2.3138	1.25949

The descriptive analyses of the responses of STU have indicated that they have low proficiency levels in all language skills as evidenced by the mean value of less than three. Furthermore, all items of this category have a high Standard Deviation (SD) of more than one indicating that there exist major differences in the perceptions of the participants regarding their proficiency level. Minimum and maximum values assigned to all these items ranged from one to five indicating a group that bears wider differences in their proficiency in various language skills. English for tourism vocabulary and grammar have been assigned minimum mean values suggesting their low proficiency in these skills. The participants reported the highest mean for their listening skills followed by writing skills. Speaking skills have been perceived as the weakest of all language skills.

The qualitative data generated through semi-structures interviews have partially verified the quantitative results. ‘English grammar’ and ‘listening skills’ have been identified as the weakest areas and STU have been reported to have medium low proficiency in other skills. P1 has stated that ‘*writing is the weakest and listening and speaking are also weak*’ and he has further reported that ‘*students are ok in vocabulary but very weak in grammar*’. It has also been stated that ‘*I find my students very weak in tourism vocabulary and grammar*’ (P6). P11 has reported that ‘*majority of students are weak in all language skills*’.

Table 2. *The current level of proficiency in various sub-skills of listening skills*

No	Sub-skills of listening	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Listening and understanding clients’ personal details	290	1.00	5.00	2.7310	1.43247
2	Listening and understanding	290	1.00	5.00	2.7759	1.49095

reservation details						
3	Listening and understanding clients' demands	290	1.00	5.00	2.8069	1.47081
4	Listening and understanding clients' instructions	290	1.00	5.00	2.7862	1.47029
5	Listening and understanding clients' complaints	290	1.00	5.00	2.8345	1.492
6	Listening and understanding feedback	290	1.00	5.00	2.8552	1.53834
7	Listening and understanding suggestions	290	1.00	5.00	2.8759	1.52435
8	Listening and understanding major accents	290	1.00	5.00	2.7448	1.48478

Table two details the results of descriptive analyses of various sub-skills of listening and it has been revealed that STU bears low proficiency in all sub-skills as evidenced by low mean values ranging from 2.73 to 2.88. Relevant higher proficiency has been reported in listening and understanding suggestions, feedback, and clients' complaints respectively. Results have indicated that STU is the least proficient in understanding the client's personal details as well as comprehending major accents of the English language used by international tourists. Extremely high SD suggests that STU differ significantly in their perceived proficiency in all sub-skills of listening.

The faculty members and STU have seen eye to eye as far as the weakest areas were concerned and understanding the client's personal details and major accents have been unanimously identified as the weakest listening sub-skills. It has been reported that '*students at tourism college are not good in dealing with different accent which is very important because we receive tourists from different countries*' (P1). The faculty have reported that STU bears low proficiency in understanding the clients' complaints, feedback, and suggestions whereas the quantitative data have reported medium low proficiency of STU in these sub-skills. P9 has stated that '*they have some problems with these actions.*' The comparative analyses show that STU has considered itself more proficient in all listening sub-skills as compared to the perceived proficiency as reported by the faculty members. For example, P11 has stated that '*many students are weak in all these listening activities but some students are good in these sub-skills*'.

Table 3. *The current level of proficiency in various sub-skills of speaking skills*

No	Sub-skills of speaking	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Greeting and bidding farewell	290	1.00	5.00	3.2621	1.57190

2	Apologizing & presenting excuses	290	1.00	5.00	3.1586	1.57917
3	providing directions	290	1.00	5.00	2.9069	1.45817
4	Providing information about social etiquettes	290	1.00	5.00	2.7517	1.48362
5	Offering help	290	1.00	5.00	2.9828	1.52137
6	Suggesting and advising	290	1.00	5.00	2.7724	1.49622
7	giving information about tourist destinations	290	1.00	5.00	2.7759	1.46520
8	Giving trip information	290	1.00	5.00	2.7310	1.46117
9	Asking about tourists' requirements	290	1.00	5.00	2.6966	1.42554
10	Requesting for feedback	290	1.00	5.00	2.6138	1.38047
11	Requesting for suggestions	290	1.00	5.00	2.7034	1.45343
12	Describing places	290	1.00	5.00	2.7793	1.46691
13	Speaking with comprehensible pronunciation	290	1.00	5.00	2.8172	1.46152

Table three presents the results of the data generated through the descriptive analyses of STU's proficiency in various sub-skills of speaking tasks they need during their professional life. 'Greeting and bidding farewell' and 'apologizing and presenting excuses' have been reported medium high mean of more than 3 indicating the participants' proficiency in these sub-skills respectively followed by 'offering help'. It has been revealed that the participants of the study were least proficient in 'asking about tourists' requirements' and requesting tourists for their feedback and suggestions. All other items of this category have been allocated medium-low mean values indicating that STU needs to be taught these speaking sub-skills to discharge their duties effectively in the field. High SD informs wider differences in the perceived proficiency level of the participants in the target sub-skills.

The comparative analyses of data of this category have revealed the same trend of reporting higher proficiency in speaking sub-skills by STU as compared to the faculty. Both the faculty members and STU have reported that the weakest speaking sub-skills are asking about tourists' requirements and requesting feedback. '*Students at tourism college face major problem in asking for feedback and requirements*' has been reported by P 5. Similarly, the data generated from both sources have exhibited similar findings about comparatively high proficiency of STU in 'greeting and bidding farewell', 'apologizing and presenting excuses', and 'proving directions'. STU has reported medium-low proficiency in the important sub-skill of 'describing places' whereas the faculty members have revealed that STU is very weak in this sub-skill.

Table 4. The current level of proficiency in various sub-skills of vocabulary and grammar

No	Sub-skills of vocabulary and grammar	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	Using appropriate tourism vocabulary	290	1.00	5.00	2.5517	1.44534
2	Using appropriate Tenses / structure	290	1.00	5.00	2.5448	1.45274
3	Using grammatically correct Statements	290	1.00	5.00	2.5448	1.37188
4	Using grammatically correct questions	290	1.00	5.00	2.5862	1.41708
5	Using grammatically correct conditional sentences	290	1.00	5.00	2.5069	1.38764
6	Using appropriate punctuation	290	1.00	5.00	2.5414	1.42397

Least proficiency has been recorded in vocabulary and grammar sub-skills as evidenced by extremely low mean values which ranged from 2.506 to 2.586. The highest mean remained at 2.586 for using ‘grammatically correct questions’ followed by ‘using appropriate tourism vocabulary’. Using appropriate tenses, grammatically correct statements, and appropriate punctuation were assigned the least mean values.

The faculty members have revealed that STU is the weakest in using appropriate tourism vocabulary and appropriate punctuation. It has been stated that ‘*they are at beginner level in tourism related vocabulary*’ and ‘*I believe that they are better in grammar than punctuation*’ (P1). The same finding has been asserted by P5 who said that ‘*my students are good in grammar and they can use right tenses*’. The majority of the faculty members have presented the same findings related to the items of this category.

Table 5. Present ESP course material evaluation

No	Present ESP course material effectively meet students:	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1	English for tourism needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8103	1.08556
2	Listening skills needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8862	1.03777

3	Speaking skills needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8759	1.05806
4	Reading skills needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8414	1.06648
5	Writing skills needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8103	1.08556
6	Vocabulary and grammar needs	290	1.00	5.00	3.8448	1.06861
7	Local and cultural requirements	290	1.00	5.00	3.8517	1.03674
8	Local course material should be developed based on students' needs	290	1.00	5.00	4.0414	1.02816

Table five presents descriptive analyses of the items related to the evaluation of present teaching materials taught at CTH situated in Taif and Madinah Munawara. The extremely high mean of 4.04 has been allocated to the item 'local course content should be developed based on students' needs' which highlights the need of developing tailor-made teaching materials based on STU's specific needs. All other items have been allotted medium mean values. It has been reported that the present teaching materials used at CTH do not fulfil the English for tourism needs of STU. The comparative analyses suggest that the listening and speaking skills of STU are being somewhat catered for through present teaching materials whereas it does not address 'English for tourism needs' and 'writing skills needs' as the lowest mean has been assigned to both these items. It has also been revealed that present teaching materials are not appropriate for fulfilling the reading skills, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammar needs of STU as well.

In contrast to the perceptions of STU, the qualitative data have revealed that present ESP teaching materials do not cater to the specific needs of STU. P1 has expressed that '*all needs of the students are not met and it is good to change teaching material*'. P5 has also stated that '*I strongly believe that present teaching material does not match with student needs and we teach them lot of general material*'. The vast majority of the faculty members have reported that the proficiency level of STU in listening and speaking skills is of medium level as teaching material cater to these skills but writing skill is not sufficiently covered in it. P8 has said that '*textbooks do not have much writing skill exercises and students do not like these activities and they are weak in writing*'. The qualitative data have indicated that present teaching materials do not cater to the local and cultural requirements of STU as well because tourism colleges have to use commercial textbooks available on the market. These textbooks have not been written for STU specifically. P1 has reported that '*our teachers have to delete some units which are not suitable to our culture as they deal with some subjects which are not appropriate. We must write textbooks in Saudi Arabia*'. All faculty members have strongly demanded that it is extremely important to conduct proper needs analyses of STU and develop indigenous material so that their specific needs are addressed properly to enable them to discharge their duties effectively in various fields of the Saudi tourism market. P1 has asserted that '*we need own material, for sure, especially when it is part of Saudi*

vision 2030 to entertain and attract international tourists’. It has also been stated that ‘*I hope that I teach my students with teaching material prepared in Saudi Arabia, especially after looking for their special tourism needs. I am really happy*’ (P 10).

Discussion

The results have revealed that STU is quite weak in all language skills. It has been reported that STU is the least proficient in ‘speaking skills’ followed by ‘listening skills’. The findings are in line with Moattarian and Tahririan (2014) who have investigated Iranian tourism management students and reported that they are unable to communicate in English and “students’ low level of proficiency compels the ESP teachers to focus their attention on general English rather than ESP..... the teachers have to suspend a variety of effective teaching activities” (p. 15). They have stated that teachers have to resort to L1 to ensure proper understanding. The findings have also disclosed that STU is extremely deficient in ‘English for tourism vocabulary’ and ‘English grammar’ respectively. A lot of research conducted in the Arab world, especially in Saudi Arabia has revealed that Saudi EFL learners face major challenges in coping with various language skills of English in continuing their respective studies effectively (Javid, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Ismail, 2015; Alrabai, 2016; Javid & Almalki, 2018).

The descriptive analyses have also indicated that STU faces problems with vocabulary and grammar sub-skills. They have issues with using appropriate tourism-related vocabulary during their studies at CTH. Similarly, they have been reported as the least proficient in using grammatically correct conditional sentences, using appropriate punctuation and tenses respectively. The results have revealed their weakness in using grammatically correct statements and questions as well. The same findings have been reported by Prachanant (2012) who investigated 40 tourism employees working in Thai tourism companies and their “usual problems are using inappropriate words and expressions in speaking” (p. 124). Noor (2019) also reveals that the tourism workforce in Perlis, Malaysia have serious issues with using appropriate vocabulary and language structure in their communication.

Results of this study indicate that STU is weak in all listening sub-skills, especially in understanding clients’ personal details as well as comprehending major accents used by international tourists. The findings are in line with Prachanant (2012) who has reported that the Thai tourism workforce is unable to comprehend the foreign accents of international tourists. The findings of Prachanant (2012) partially confirm the findings of the present study related to proficiency of STU in various speaking sub-skills as well. Jamil (2018) has investigated tourism students in a polytechnic institute who have acknowledged that they have an extremely low proficiency level in oral communication skills. Noor (2019) has also reported that the tourism workforce in Perlis, Malaysia is deficient in pronouncing words correctly, speaking coherently, and understanding the speakers who “speak too fast” and use “unfamiliar accents” (p. 77). Aldohon (2015) investigated 46 tourist police and revealed that “speaking too fast in English by foreign tourists is the most serious problem for Jordanian tourist police. The other difficulties they encountered included, using inappropriate English in speaking, lexis shortage and inability to use grammar for writing” (p. 56).

Coskun (2009) used a mixed-methods approach and investigated second-grade tourism students and reported that “the average level of English in the classroom is A2 according to Common European Framework standards and listening-speaking skills are perceived as the most needed skills at work” (p. 1). He has also reported that tourism students and hotel employees from

Taiwan have revealed that low proficiency in oral and written communication is significantly related to job acquisition in the field of hospitality.

Data generated through the quantitative and qualitative tools have revealed that both STU and the faculty members have strongly recommended that the present teaching materials are not appropriate and that in-house teaching materials should be developed after thoroughly investigating the ETN of STU. It has been reported that the present teaching materials do not cater to the specific needs of STU related to four English language skills, tourism-related vocabulary, and English grammar. Findings are in line with Puspitasari (2018) who has stated that teaching materials currently used at Banyumas tourism college do not sufficiently meet the specific needs of the tourism workforce and even after taking English for tourism courses, they do not have effective communication skills to interact with the target tourists. Similar findings have been published by Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar, and Saffari (2017) who have investigated employees of the tourism and hospitality industry of Malaysia and reported that existing teaching content does not fulfil their specific needs and “a curriculum relating to English for the international tourism and service industry need to be carefully designed and created to suit the specific learners’ needs and wants” (p. 91). They have used a mixed-methods approach to investigate all stakeholders of the Diploma in Tourism Management Programme at Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Perlis, Malaysia, and suggested that “it is highly recommended that the EHP course developer and stakeholders work together to improve the existing EHP courses, especially in terms of oral communication sub-skills” (p. ii).

It has also transpired that the present teaching materials do not meet the local and cultural requirements of STU as well and they have to do additional efforts to effectively deal with foreign-culture content. Furthermore, some content does not match local culture and traditions and the teachers have to quit those units or exercises which causes an additional challenge to compensate for the missed content. A host of studies conducted in various parts of the world have reinforced the finding that it is extremely important to develop indigenous teaching materials based on the specific needs identified through PSA and TSA of the workforce related to various tourism sectors. Puspitasari (2018) strongly recommends developing in-house EFT materials to teach tour agents, hospitality staff, and employees of the Culture and Tourism Office of the Banyumas Regency. The major finding of Moattarian and Tahririan (2014) “based on the results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews was that many teachers and students find current ESP courses unsatisfactory in addressing their specific needs” (P. 13). The same finding was reported by a growing mass of research in the field that commercial ESP teaching materials do not cater for the specific needs of the learners (Rasekh & Simin, 2012; Lin, Wu, & Huang, 2013). The highest mean has been allocated to the item which elicited the participants’ responses towards developing indigenous teaching materials based on STU needs. This finding is in line with the study of Salisna, Harahap, and Sofyan (2019) conducted at Tour and Travel Department at Vocational High School Negeri 1 and Vocational High School Negeri 7 in Bengkulu City and recommended that “course materials should be developed based on the existing syllabus and by taking into account the students’ academic and future occupational English needs” (p. 10). Onoor (2015) has also confirmed the findings of this study and concluded that it is a prerequisite for positive results to develop a tailor-made indigenous ESP syllabus for hotel and management students at the Technological College of port, Sudan based on their specific needs and lacks.

Recommendations

The results have disclosed that the speaking and listening skills of STU are the weakest. They are found quite weak in various English language sub-skills as well. Furthermore, the use of correct punctuation and suitable grammatical structure are serious problems faced by STU. They are also deficient in using appropriate tourism-related vocabulary as needed in various tourism marketing situations. The results of this large-scale study transpire that commercial teaching materials presently taught to STU at CTH located in Taif and Madinah do not suit their specific tourism needs. An important finding of this study is the execution of a comprehensive NA procedure to develop in-house teaching materials for STU. The participants of this study have exhibited their dissatisfaction with the present teaching materials in terms of addressing the specific needs of STU, consideration of the level of proficiency of STU and cultural appropriacy, etc. It has been strongly recommended by STU, the faculty members, and the college administration that indigenous teaching materials should be developed based on the students' professional needs taking into consideration their present proficiency in various language skills and sub-skills. The participants have also strongly recommended considering the local and cultural requirements and preferences of STU in developing teaching materials to facilitate the learning process. The findings have also revealed that the participants of the study are comprised of mixed-ability groups and bear significant differences in their proficiency in all language skills and sub-skills.

Based on the findings of this investigation, it is strongly recommended that indigenous teaching materials should be developed based on the TSA and PSA of STU. It is strongly suggested that the target teaching materials should emphasize more on oral communicative skills and sub-skills as STU have been found the least proficient in these areas. It is also recommended that sub-skills of various language skills as presented in the 'result section' of this study should be incorporated into the teaching materials as the participants have reported that STU has low or medium proficiency in all these areas. Furthermore, it is also extremely important to incorporate tourism-related vocabulary so that STU have sufficient practice in using appropriate lexical items according to the requirement of the target situations in their academic and professional life. A variety of exercises related to using appropriate grammatical structures and punctuation should be included in local teaching materials to enable STU to communicate accurately according to various target situations. It also seems unavoidable to take into consideration the local and cultural requirements and preferences of STU in developing teaching materials to maximize learning possibilities. This will relieve STU of the additional burden of coping with unfamiliar foreign cultures as well as avoiding any embarrassing situation during their studies caused by inappropriate cultural content. Furthermore, it will also ensure coverage of all activities related to grammar, vocabulary and language skills, and sub-skills as skipping culturally inappropriate content present in commercial textbooks cause comprehension issues because some important teaching content needs to be skipped. The material developers should incorporate activities of varied difficulty levels to engage high-proficiency students as well as to facilitate students with low proficiency.

Limitations and Future Study

A major limitation of this mixed-methods study is the inclusion of the students, the faculty members, and the administration from CTU situated in two cities in Saudi Arabia. An ideal situation is the inclusion of participants from more cities in the KSA. Future studies should include workforce serving in various sectors of the Saudi tourism industry as well so that crash courses

may be developed based on TSA and PSA to provide on-job training to the Saudi tourism workforce to augment their communicative competence in the English language.

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