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Needs Analysis of English-Language Use of Tourism Personnel in Xi'an, China

Boyu Pang
Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Malaysia
Department of Public Courses, Shaanxi Polytechnic University, Shaanxi, China
Email: pangboyu3995@gmail.com

Faizah Binti Abd Majid
Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Malaysia
Corresponding Author**:** faiza404@uitm.edu.my

Geethanjali A/P Narayanan
Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Malaysia
Email: geetha@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract
This study investigated the English language needs and self-perceived proficiency of tourism personnel in Xi'an to improve the design of ESP courses for vocational education. It makes a significant contribution to bridging the gap between the current Tourism English course and the real-world work demands of China's tourism industry. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Quantitative data were gathered from 104 tour guides and office staff using a structured questionnaire, and qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with five experienced practitioners. Both instruments were self-developed and validated through standard procedures to ensure content reliability and validity. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the survey results, and thematic analysis was applied to interpret the interview transcripts. The results reported that listening and speaking are the most commonly used and valued skills, while reading and writing were considered secondary. Participants expressed confidence in performing template-based tasks; nevertheless, they reported difficulties with spontaneous communication situations, professional reading, and creative writing. It is recommended that future Tourism English courses should emphasize oral communication training, such as scenario-based practice, real-world simulations, and role-play activities. Instructors are encouraged to provide timely feedback and facilitate students to communicate more spontaneously. These findings provide practical guidance for designing more targeted and workplace-oriented English instruction for tourism professionals in similar contexts.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), listening and speaking skills, scenario-based instruction, social needs analysis, Tourism English, tourism personnel
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Introduction

English, as the world's lingua franca, has become increasingly prominent in the tourism sector (Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). It has emerged as an essential tool for improving service quality and enhancing the international visitors' experiences. The significance of English in tourism has become even greater over recent years due to the growing demand for global mobility in the post-pandemic era. As one of the world's leading tourist destinations, China has welcomed a large number of international visitors after the pandemic, and the slogan 'China Travel' has attracted much attention and become an international buzzword (Chinese Tourism Academy., 2025). Notably, China adopted a 240-hour visa-free transit policy for visitors of 54 nations and completed reciprocal visa exemption agreements with countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the UK (National Immigration Administration., 2024), which significantly boosts inbound tourism. According to data released by the State Council of China, the country welcomed 131.9 million inbound visitors in 2024, representing a 61% year-on-year increase. Cities like Xi'an, known for its historical and cultural attractions such as the Terracotta Warriors and the ancient city wall, have particularly benefited from the policy. These shifts have further highlighted the significant role of English proficiency in delivering high-quality service in the tourism industry.

Tourism personnel, especially English tour guides, are important links between people from different cultures. Their proficiency in English directly impacts the delivery of high-quality tourism services and the overall satisfaction of international visitors (Ren & Wong, 2021). With the development of tourism, tourism personnel who welcome foreign guests are required to communicate with tourists in English in various situations, such as clarifying cultural distinctions, providing instructions and information, and handling emergencies (Munusamy & Kaliappen, 2023).

However, studies have shown that the English proficiency of many tourism personnel in China remains insufficient to meet the growing needs of diverse and changing work conditions (Hong et al., 2022). Tourism personnel, in fact, have difficulty dealing with tourists from foreign countries and encounter unexpected situations. The reason is that the existing English courses currently offered in Tourism Management Programs do not meet the actual needs of the industry (Bo, 2023). Many courses have failed to adjust to the dynamics of the post-pandemic world of international tourism and do not adequately meet the communication needs of actual situations of tourism (Fan, 2022). This disconnection has led to deficiencies in the practical application of English among tourism personnel.

To address this gap, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are designed to meet the communication needs of tourism professionals. In common sense, the first step to developing an effective ESP course is conducting a systematic needs analysis (Long, 2005). This analysis identifies the specific language needs of target learners and helps design instructional content that is relevant to their context (Alshabeb et al., 2017; Richards, 2001). Over the past few decades, several theoretical models for needs analysis have been proposed. The models designed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans (1998) are the most widely used. Building on these previous foundations and considering the Chinese educational system, Chen (2010) proposed a needs analysis model that includes both personal learning needs and broader societal expectations.

Given that most tourism personnel in Xi'an have received local vocational English education and accumulated practical work experience, this study adopts Chen's (2010) social needs model to systematically investigate their English language needs in real-world contexts. The objective of

this study is to explore the English language needs of tourism personnel in Xi'an by examining their workplace use of English, their self-perceived language proficiency, and their recommendations for future ESP course design, in order to inform more context-relevant and needs-based Tourism English instruction. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What English language skills are required by tourism personnel in their daily workplace? (2) How do tourism personnel evaluate their English language proficiency in terms of workplace demands? (3) What are their recommendations for the future Tourism English course?

Literature Review

Needs Analysis and Needs Analysis Models

As defined by Nunan and Carter (2001), "Needs analysis is fundamental to an EAP approach to course design and teaching" (p. 127), and it "should be the starting point for devising syllabuses, courses, materials and the kind of teaching and learning that takes place" (Jordan, 1997, p. 22). It refers to techniques and methods, such as introspection, interviews, observation, and questionnaires, which are used to identify learners' actual learning needs (Hyland, 2014). As Long (2005) proposed, "Just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without a thorough needs analysis" (p. 1). It can be concluded that needs analysis is an essential step in developing a language course. As mentioned above, to achieve more effective needs analysis, numerous scholars have continually refined analytical models, resulting in a relatively mature and well-developed system (Chen, 2010). From the perspective of the entire development of foreign language needs analysis models, there are mainly four types, each representing a different stage of development: such as Munby's Target Situation Analysis model (1981); Allwright's Present Situation Analysis model (1982); Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Needs Analysis model and Dudley-Evans & St. John's (1998) Needs Analysis model. In the Chinese context, Chen (2010) adapted these well-designed models and proposed a localized needs analysis framework that classifies learners' needs into two sub-models: a personal needs analysis model and a social needs analysis model, which is based on Shu's (2004) classification. This study adopts Chen's social needs model, which includes three key parts to examine the English needs of tourism personnel in Xi'an: employees' English use at the workplace, employees' self-evaluation of English proficiency at the workplace, and their recommendations for future ESP courses.

Needs Analysis Studies in Tourism English

Unlike previous studies that examine tourism professionals as a general group, this study focuses on two specific roles—tour guides and office staff who regularly interact with international visitors. This targeted approach enables a more detailed analysis of English language needs in frontline tourism services that are tailored to their specific job roles.

Numerous studies across Southeast and West Asia have emphasized the importance of oral communication skills in tourism contexts. For example, Prachanant (2012) found that speaking and listening were the most important skills for employees of international travel agencies in Thailand. Chumphong and Chuai-in (2020) also found that frontline staff in hotels and tourism agencies put more value on listening and speaking than on reading and writing. Namtapi (2022) further identified that it was challenging to understand different accents and keep up with fast-paced speech, as well as that vocabulary and grammar were limited.

Similar trends have been observed in other places. In Malaysia, Kholidi et al. (2022) reported that tourism staff found it difficult to listen and speak, while they thought written skills were less frequently required in work. In Indonesia, Farida (2022) emphasized the value of speaking and writing among certified tour guides and agency managers. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Malki et al. (2022) found that oral skills were necessary for giving information about tourist spots and answering tourists' questions, while grammar and vocabulary were not that essential. Mohammed (2024) reaffirmed this finding by pointing out that key speaking skills, such as giving directions, apologizing, and offering advice, are viewed as fundamental in guiding work. In the study by Aysu and Özcan (2021), which investigated Turkish tourism graduates and employers, the importance of oral communication clarity and efficiency was also highlighted.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on tourism contexts outside mainland China. There is a clear knowledge gap regarding the practical language requirements of tourism personnel in China, as most research has focused on English instruction for tourism students rather than working professionals (Sun, 2019; Wu, 2020). Given the growth of inbound tourism and Xi'an's ongoing popularity as a heritage destination, it is both appropriate and necessary to look into the specific English communication needs of Chinese tourism personnel who interact directly with tourists.

At the same time, few studies have applied Chen's (2010) social needs analysis model to this context. To address this gap, the present study applies Chen's social needs model to conduct a detailed analysis of the English language needs of tourism personnel in Xi'an. The aim is to provide both theoretical perspectives and practical suggestions that can help improve ESP courses for future tourism management students and tourism personnel training in China's vocational colleges, ensuring that these programs are more closely aligned with industry requirements.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to investigate the English language needs of tourism personnel in Xi'an, a major tourist destination in China. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to get a wide range of patterns and in-depth insights. The quantitative part used a structured questionnaire, and the qualitative part consisted of semi-structured interviews. This design can offer a comprehensive understanding of the language challenges and work demands faced by tourism personnel.

Instruments

The questionnaire was developed based on Chen's (2010) social needs model and followed China's national competency standards for English-speaking tour guides. It has three parts: the participants' demographic background, their perceived importance of English language skills in the workplace, and their self-assessed proficiency in those skills. A pilot study was conducted to verify that the instrument was clear, reliable, and valid in content. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview protocol was used. Twenty open-ended questions explore participants' workplace English use, perceived strengths and challenges, and suggestions for future course improvement. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin using WeChat or Tencent Meeting and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Participants

A total of 104 tourism personnel participated in the quantitative part. This included 79 frontline English-speaking tour guides and 25 office-based staff who interacted with international visitors. All participants held valid tour guide licenses and had at least one year of working experience with foreign tourists. The demographic information of participants is listed in Table 1 as demonstrated below:

Table 1. *Demographic Information*

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Workplace	Private company	79	76.0%
	State-owned company	25	24.0%
Working year	Less than 3 years	17	16.4%
	More than 3 years	87	83.7%
Job position	Office staff	25	24.0%
	Tour guide	79	76.0%

In the qualitative phase, five participants were purposively selected. This group included two office staff, two scenic site guides, and one local guide. To ensure confidentiality, the names of T1 to T5 were used during the data analysis and reporting process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. For quantitative data, SPSS v28 was used. Prior to analysis, all data were screened and cleaned, resulting in 67 valid responses. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, were used to analyze participants' perceptions of the importance of English skills and their self-evaluated proficiency. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted, and it followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure. Interview transcripts were translated into English, coded by the first author using NVivo 15, and reviewed by co-authors and domain experts. Discrepancies in coding were discussed until consensus was reached to ensure trustworthiness and consistency. The research procedure is demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

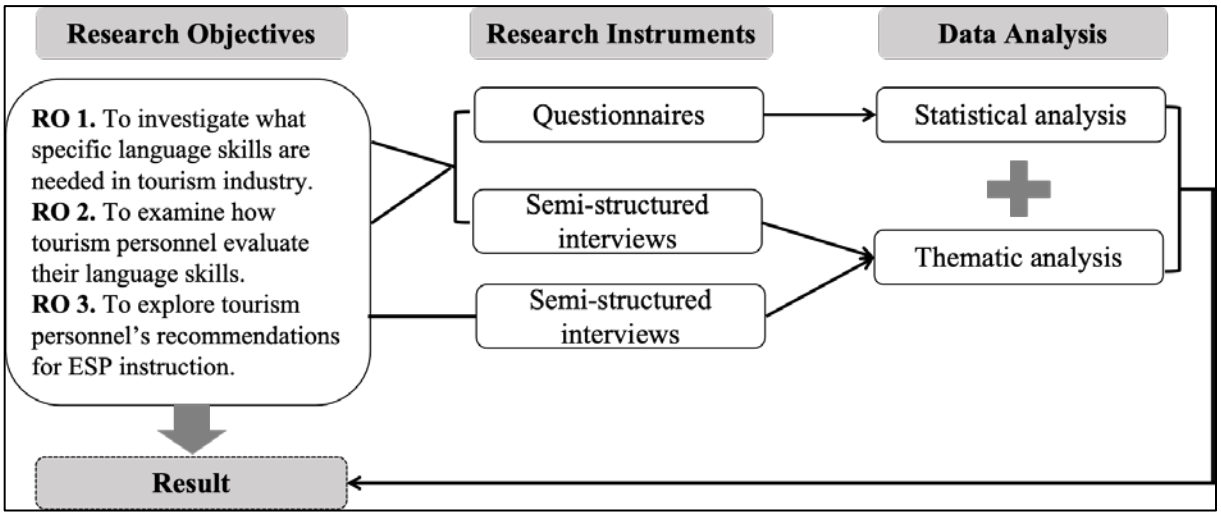


Figure 1. Research Design

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Ethic Consideration

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the university in which the present study was registered. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and participants could quit at any time without consequence.

Results

This section reports the main findings of the study, focusing on three aspects: the specific English language skills required in tourism work, the self-evaluated proficiency of tourism personnel, and their recommendations for future ESP instruction.

Specific Language Skills Needed in The Tourism Industry

To start with, the first research objective explores participants' perceptions of the importance of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in their daily professional work. The questionnaire results show that listening and speaking were rated as the most important English skills in daily tourism work (M = 3.24), followed by reading (M = 3.21), with writing receiving the lowest rating (M = 2.17) (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Mean score of four English skills*

Skills	*M*
Listening	3.24
Speaking	3.24
Reading	3.21
Writing	2.17

M mean

Subskill-level data are presented in Table 3. For listening, the most important tasks identified were understanding announcements and promotional videos, identifying keywords, and recognizing emotions or attitudes. In the interviews, participants reported that capturing keywords and the emotions of tourists are essential for resolving complaints and managing on-site situations. For example:

> *'Sometimes tourists are emotional and speak quickly. If I can pick up on keywords like 'late' or 'wrong place,' I can quickly understand what has happened.'* (T1)
>
> *'I have to focus on the main words; otherwise, a misunderstanding could affect the arrangements. We don't need to catch every detail, but we must grasp the key emotions and meanings.'*(T2)

For speaking skills, participants place high importance on frequently used expressions and spontaneous communication, such as self-introduction, giving unscripted explanations, and responding to tourists' questions. Interviews reconfirm the practical need for adaptability and flexible expression, which shows that communication skills have a direct impact on service quality and work efficiency. For instance, T5 remarked, *Self-introduction is the most basic skill, and it sets the first impression every time I meet a new group of foreign tourists.* T3 shared, *'When we explain attractions in English, we normally have prepared scripts, but more often we have to adjust based on tourists' reactions, so fast reactions are really important.'* T4 added, *'Sometimes tourists ask unexpected questions during explanations, and if I can't answer clearly in English, it affects their impression of the service.'*

Regarding reading, the participants placed high emphasis on handling work-related practical texts, such as attraction descriptions, itineraries, and tickets, as well as emails and instant messages.

Interviews further corroborate the quantitative data signified in Table 3 below. T1 explained, *'It's crucial to accurately understand the key information in English itineraries and tickets—like time and place—otherwise, mistakes can easily happen.'* T5 noted, *'The most important content is directly related to the foreign group's itineraries. If you miss any detail, it can disrupt the whole trip.'* T3 highlighted the use of English signs inside attractions: *'Even though there are Chinese versions, I often check the English ones in advance to help explain things to foreign tourists.'* Regarding the importance of understanding emails and instant messages, all interviewees mentioned it during the interviews.

As summarized in Table 3, writing received a relatively lower overall rating. However, practical tasks, such as responding to tourists' inquiries, preparing itineraries, and filling out forms all in English, are recognized as core skills in improving the participants' efficiency and professionalism. As T1 shared, *'We often have to reply to tourists' questions about schedules, timings, or costs by email.'* T3 mentioned, *'Besides giving explanations, I also frequently answer questions via WeChat or email.'* In addition, T5, who works as a tour guide, emphasized the value of making itineraries and giving important notices to the guests.

Table 3. *Important Skills at Work*

Skills	Subskills	*M*	*SD*
Listening	Understand English announcements and videos	3.30	0.78
	Identify keywords	3.28	0.71
	Recognize attitudes and emotions	3.16	0.79
Speaking	Give self-instructions	3.36	0.60
	Give unscripted explanations	3.30	0.76
	Respond to tourists' questions	3.25	0.73
Reading	Understand attraction descriptions	3.31	0.78
	Read itineraries and tickets	3.30	0.84
	Read email and instant messages	3.21	0.77
Writing	Write responses to tourists' inquiries in English	3.30	0.80
	Prepare travel itineraries	3.18	0.76
	Fill in English forms	3.15	0.70

M mean *SD* Standard Deviation

Tourism Personnel's English Language Proficiency at Work

The second research objective focuses on the participants' self-assessment of their English language proficiency in daily work. Based on the data from questionnaires and interviews, the findings reveal that participants are generally confident when handling structured and routine tasks; however, they face challenges in more complex and unpredictable communication situations. The quantitative data are demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. *Performance of skills at work*

Skill	Best-performing subskills	*M*	*SD*	Lowest-performing subskills	*M*	*SD*
Listening	Identify keywords	2.79	0.99	Identify different accents	2.51	0.99
	Understand announcements /videos	2.76	0.96	Recognize attitudes and emotions	2.69	0.99
Speaking	Give self-introductions	2.96	1.01	Give unscripted explanations	2.58	0.99
	Give scripted explanations	2.78	0.95	Participate in discussions	2.64	0.83
Reading	Read itineraries and tickets	2.85	1.03	Read tourism-related articles	2.57	0.82
	Read forms and invoices	2.82	0.91			

Writing	Write responses	2.79	0.91	Design travel brochures	2.55	0.99
	Fill out forms	2.79	0.98			

In terms of listening, participants reported the highest mean score for identifying keywords. Nevertheless, they struggled with different English accents, and interview data further support this trend. It showed that participants frequently mentioned unfamiliar accents are a primary barrier to listening comprehension. T1 stated, 'When the accent is quite strong, I sometimes get lost.' Similarly, T5 explained, 'If a tourist has a heavy accent, I really have to listen several times to understand.' In fast-paced conversations, several participants reported relying on keywords to guess the whole meaning.

For speaking, participants showed more confidence in prepared content and through regular practice, such as self-introductions and giving scripted explanations in descriptive analysis. However, their confidence drops in unscripted, spontaneous expression—for example, giving unscripted explanations or participating in discussions. T3 expressed that, although he is proficient in giving prepared explanations of tourism spots, he often encounters difficulties during unexpected Q&A sessions due to his limited vocabulary and grammar. T4 added, *'If tourists simply ask for directions or ticket information, I can respond quickly. But when it comes to complex topics like the history of a site or itinerary suggestions, I usually need to organize my thoughts first, and look for the proper words.'*

In reading, participants rated themselves as more capable when handling structured texts such as itineraries, tickets, forms, and invoices. In contrast, reading tourism-related articles received the lowest score in this skill area. Interviewees similarly emphasized their familiarity with simple documents. As T1 mentioned, *'Sometimes, I receive formal notices from travel agencies in English. I just don't understand the professional terms.'* T2 echoed this, stating, *'Legal documents or official tourism articles can be challenging, mostly because of the professional vocabulary.'*

In writing, the tasks that were performed with the most confidence were writing responses to tourists and filling out forms. Designing promotional materials, such as brochures, received the lowest mean score. Interviewees confirmed this pattern. For example, T5 reported, *'Replying to daily emails and completing English forms is basically no problem—even if my language isn't perfect, the communication is still clear.'* T2 added that most complaints or inquiries can be handled smoothly thanks to the established templates that the company offers. However, when it comes to less familiar writing tasks, such as preparing the brochures, as T1 stated, *'I haven't had systematic training in promotional writing, and my vocabulary isn't idiomatic. Usually, the marketing or external communications staff handle those tasks.'*

Tourism Personnel's Recommendations for ESP Instruction

Interview participants provided several suggestions regarding the content and delivery of future ESP courses for tourism professionals.

First, all participants emphasized the importance of prioritizing listening and speaking skills. They highlighted challenges in responding spontaneously to tourists' questions and their desire to improve both fluency and pronunciation. As T2 explained, *'Understanding tourists' questions is just the starting point; you also need to be able to answer right away, even if it's not a complicated response, as long as you can say it clearly and quickly.'* T3 added, *'Sometimes I know how to say something in my mind, but when I speak, I hesitate, especially when tourists ask unusual questions or express themselves in unexpected ways. I want to learn how to respond quickly in English.*

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Pronunciation is also an issue—I often feel that my pronunciation isn't accurate enough and hope to improve it.'

Secondly, participants recommended that course content be closely linked to real workplace situations. Many suggested that typical tasks, such as simulated tourism attraction explanations, complaint handling, and route guidance, can help improve practical language skills, and they can be reinforced through scenario-based training, like role-plays. In terms of course design, they proposed including specific exercises in site interpretation and practical response techniques, so that students could master commonly used expressions and apply them immediately on the job after completing the course. Selected interview excerpts include:

> *'The course could include more practical listening and speaking exercises, like simulating the tourists asking questions and we can respond.'* (T1)
>
> *'It would be best to have practical simulations, such as airport reception, site explanations, or handling complaints handling—specific situations where we need to use English.'* (T5)

Additionally, participants prefer a more interactive classroom and more engaging learning experiences. In this way, they can have opportunities for sharing practical insights. They viewed group work and role-plays as more engaging and effective than traditional exercises. T2 mentioned, *'It would be very useful if some experienced guides could share how they deal with real issues. The course should be more interactive—not just filling in blanks or translating sentences. After starting work, you realize that on-the-spot problem-solving is most important.'* T4 agreed, *'Role-play activities during practical training are very interesting. I think these kinds of exercises really helpful.'*

Finally, several participants emphasize the importance of teacher feedback and encouragement and which can enhance effective communication. T3 said, *'Teachers could encourage us to speak more, for example, through group exercises and role-plays.'* T5 added, *'Sometimes we don't realize when our English is unnatural. If teachers can correct us, we can improve next time.'*

Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm the widely recognized importance of listening and speaking skills in tourism-related communication. This trend is consistent with previous research (Aysu & Özcan, 2021; Farida, 2022; Ijabah & Amrullah, 2023; Prachanant, 2012; Sermsook et al., 2021), which emphasizes the centrality of oral interaction in tasks such as handling inquiries, providing explanations, and managing complaints. In the present study, however, the significance of oral skills extends beyond general fluency to include more specific subskills. Participants placed particular emphasis on identifying key information and interpreting emotional cues during conversations—subskills that are often overlooked in previous studies, which have focused primarily on broad communicative competence. This suggests a shift in emphasis from generic speaking proficiency to situational responsiveness in real-time interaction.

Although participants rated reading and writing as relatively less important than oral skills, their role in everyday tourism tasks remains clear. Practical literacy activities—such as understanding itineraries, processing instant messages, and preparing short written documents—were frequently cited. Challenges arose primarily about longer, professional, or creative texts, for example, formal reports or promotional brochures. These observations align with Chumphong and Chuai-in (2020), Namtapi (2022), and Wahyuningtyas et al. (2022), who found that while tourism workers are capable of navigating functional texts, they often lack confidence in handling complex

written genres. The distinction between transactional literacy and extended writing ability highlights the need for differentiated support across reading and writing tasks in course design.

Another notable pattern concerns the participants' greater confidence in structured, predictable tasks, and they lack confidence in spontaneous and unfamiliar communication. Participants have confidence in high-frequency tasks, such as self-introductions, email replies, and scripted explanations. In contrast, they found it more difficult to respond to questions, adapt to varying accents, or engage in open-ended discussion. These findings are consistent with Ka-kan-dee and Nonthapot (2020), Oktavinanda et al. (2022), and Giri and Boonrattanakittibhumi (2022), who also noted challenges in flexible oral communication among tourism professionals. The present study also found that the "template-based approach" is mostly applied in language teaching, as language is built on repeated, predefined patterns. This approach is actually rooted in both education and workplace practice. It may reflect a broader trend in vocational English education in China. As suggested by Bo (2023), this approach can prioritize accuracy and structural control over spontaneity. However, while templates facilitate clarity and reduce error in routine contexts, they may also hinder adaptability in dynamic interactions.

Beyond skill assessment, this study also offers insight into participants' expectations for course design. Interviewees expressed a strong preference for training that focuses on real-world communication tasks, especially those involving quick responses and accurate pronunciation. These perspectives reinforce the need to move beyond general teaching practice to a more scenario-based training and on-the-spot responsiveness, as also emphasized by Farida (2022) and Namtapi (2022). In terms of instructional methods, participants favored scenario-based activities such as role-plays and simulations. These preferences resonate with pedagogical models proposed by Aysu and Özcan (2021) and Al-Malki (2023), which emphasize contextually grounded, interaction-rich learning.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of teacher feedback and guided correction, which supports a more dynamic and responsive classroom environment. This aligns with the learner-centered approaches advocated by Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021). They recommend a reduced reliance on the grammar-translation method and an increased use of interactive strategies.

Pedagogical Implication

Based on the findings and existing literature, several implications for designing tourism English courses are proposed and stated below.

First, ongoing and context-specific needs analysis is essential for effective ESP course development (Graves & Xu, 2000; Hyland, 2014). As the tourism context evolves, particularly with recent policy changes such as China's expanded visa-free entry and the rebound of inbound travel, language demands on frontline staff continue to shift. Regular updates based on dynamic needs assessments can ensure that course content remains aligned with actual workplace communication tasks.

Second, course content should be relevant and closely aligned with the actual language needs of the learners. The present findings from tourism-related professionals in Xi'an indicate a clear emphasis on oral communication skills, and they show more focus on the ability to use the language more flexibly. In terms of teaching methods, practical activities such as role-plays and real-scenario simulations are recommended to help students gain more experience in language use. Additionally, the use of digital tools and multimedia resources can further enhance engagement

and practicality, particularly for those digital-native learners. Finally, it indicates that instructors play a pivotal role in the success of the ESP course. Effective instructions should motivate students to communicate confidently in realistic settings and offer timely, constructive feedback. Based on interview insights, inviting experienced tour guides to share workplace language experiences and strategies can boost course relevance and foster students' professional identity.

To summarize, these strategies may promote meaningful learning and better prepare students to meet the high communication standards of the post-pandemic tourism industry.

Conclusions and Limitations

This study examined the English-language needs and proficiency of tourism personnel in the Xi'an area through a mixed-methods approach. Results show that oral communication skills are considered essential by practitioners, particularly in understanding the keywords of conversation, interpreting emotions, and responding spontaneously. While literacy received less emphasis, the participants still valued the ability to handle workplace texts, for example, itineraries and inquiries. Overall, practitioners expressed confidence in routine, template-based communication but were less prepared for dynamic, unpredictable ones. Furthermore, the participants strongly recommended that tourism English courses prioritize listening and speaking and be grounded in real-world situations, such as free communication. They showed a preference for role-plays, simulations, and real-time feedback in class to gain practical communication skills. These insights highlight that course design should be closely aligned with industry demands in order to improve the relevance and impact of ESP training.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample is geographically confined to tourism personnel in Xi'an. Future studies could expand to include other regions to explore regional variations in English language needs. Second, the research focuses solely on practitioners' perspectives, and lacks input from tourists in terms of service quality. Finally, while this study focused on general language competencies, it did not examine micro-level skills, such as accuracy in specialized vocabulary (e.g., historical, culinary, or transportation terms) or grammatical precision. Future research could address these dimensions to inform more targeted and professionally aligned ESP curriculum design.

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About the Authors:

Boyu Pang is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. She holds a MA. from the University of Edinburgh and currently teaches in a vocational university in China. Her research interests include English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and English language instruction in higher education. https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7175-6782

Prof. Dr. Faizah Binti Abd Majid is a Professor in Adult and Higher Education at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. She has vast experiences in research and publication in the areas of TESL, teaching and learning.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9642-6342

Dr. Geethanjali A/P Narayanan is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Her research interests are ESP teaching and teaching English as a foreign language. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4118-5622

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