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# English for tour operators and tour guides: Learning needs from stakeholders' voices

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## Abstract

Tourism has been one of the fastest-growing industries in the 21st century, with considerable sources of income and job providing. As the most popular communication tool in tourism, English for tourism (EFT) has also gained its vitality. Consequently, EFT teaching and learning have been getting more attention with the aim of training highly qualified human resources. The crucial role of needs analysis in ESP and EFT program development is undeniable. Therefore, the researcher attempted to investigate learners' needs through a survey to develop a course English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides. Fifteen staff from tourism companies, five EFT teachers of a public university, and 70 undergraduate students aiming to work in tourism sectors after graduating were involved in this study. The findings indicated the learners' needs from the stakeholders' perspectives as follows: (1) speaking was paramount, followed by listening, reading, and writing, and (2) the needed abilities and skills for tour operators and tour guides. In addition, students' preferred learning activities, expectations, and difficulties were also explored. Consequently, the research results can critically contribute to the course design process and be a reference for further research.

**Keywords:** needs analysis, English for tourism, course design, stakeholders.

**JEL Classification Code:** D02, I21, I23, M31

## 1. Introduction

As one of the fastest-growing industries, tourism is by far considered one of the great leading contributors to the world economy as well as a huge source of income and benefits for residents and the whole country (Jucan & Jucan, 2013; Wu & Pearce, 2012). Moreover, with 330 million jobs, representing one in ten jobs in the world belonging to this sector, travel and tourism are worth the role of the world economy and job creation (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020).

Aligned with the growth of tourism, English for Tourism (EFT) has gained importance. It should be appropriately learned because tourism plays an essential role in the world economy and job creation (Reswari, 2019). This

importance is revealed since English is a widely used communication tool providing qualified service in tourism. As a result, EFT conveys various purposes uses, such as English for the employees working in the tourism industry (tour guides, hotel receptionists, flight attendants, tour marketers, tour operators, travel agents, waiters/waitresses or chambermaids) and English for tourists who wants to travel to foreign countries, especially, English speaking countries. According to (Cho, 2005), EFT could be considered a combination of Business English and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) thanks to the commonality between workplace communication and classroom use, which could offer more job competition opportunities in the international tourism industry. However, for English language major students who aim to work in the tourism

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sector s in their future careers, EFT should focus on the first group purpose. Moreover, it could be divided into sub-categories such as English for travel agents and tour guides, English for hotel staff, English for aviation, and English for food and beverage sectors to help learners have an overview of tourism sectors, their relationships, and the skills to obtain (Huang, 2008). Besides, the core of EFT was not teaching English separately but integrating English with the subject and the real world to equip students with essential knowledge and skills for functioning effectively in the workplace (Simion, 2012). The learning style for EFT was also distinct from other English programs because students tended to be engaged in practical tasks and activities than just theory and reflection (Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Dale & McCarthy, 2006).

EFT plays a paramount role to those who seek employment in the tourism sectors because they need to maintain highly motivated to achieve a high professional level of service language – EFT. Therefore, with the influences of globalization, EFT courses and curricula should be considered seriously and systematically about the background knowledge, professional skills, and cultural contexts. With those regards, this research paper was conducted to investigate learners' needs from the perspective of stakeholders for designing a course of English for Tour Operators and Guides to be useful, practical, and attractive to learners, as follows:

1. To explore the learners' needs from the perspectives of the stakeholders to the course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides for English major students at An Giang University;
2. To explore the learners' preferences of learning activities and expectations to the course;
3. To explore the most crucial learners' needs to the course.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Needs Analysis in ESP

Needs analysis is the backbone of the ESP-course-design cycle and refers to the systematic analysis of the learners' needs to achieve the target communication situations. This target contrasted with the learners' current communication ability; therefore, the ESP course design was usually based on the gap between them (Woodrow, 2018). The present-situation analysis could help determine the learners' immediate needs; however, these needs differed from the target needs. In the early year, needs analysis was perceived as a fairly simple pre-course investigation of the target situation; however, it was no longer appropriate (Mayo, 2000; Tajino et al., 2005). According to (Chambers,

1980), a needs analysis should be involved in establishing communicative needs and their realizations, resulting from an analysis of the communication in the target situations. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) argued that what made ESP distinct from General English was not the existence of needs but the awareness of the needs. This awareness greatly influences choosing appropriate course contents and what potentials could be exploited. Any ESP course design should be based on analyzing the learners' needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Woodrow, 2018). (Brown, 2016) defined needs analysis in ESP as "the systematic collection and analysis of all information necessary for defining and validating a defensible curriculum." According to (Basturkmen, 2010), ESP courses were designed to teach specific groups of learners about language and communication skills needed or would need to perform effectively in their professions, disciplines of study, or workplaces. Therefore, ESP course designing always included identifying which specific language and communication skills the learners would need. This identification also helped to determine and refine the ESP course contents and evaluate learners and learning at the end of the course. This process is termed 'needs analysis'.

### 2.2 Identifying Needs

Despite the agreement about the crucial role of needs analysis, identifying needs is still controversial. Hutchinson and Water (1987) categorized the umbrella term – target needs – into more useful and understandable terms: necessities, lacks, and wants. The first term – *necessities* identified by the requirements of the target situation, was what the learners needed to obtain to perform effectively in those working or studying environments. Second, because necessities were inadequate concerning learners' particular needs in ESP courses, the gap between the students' current proficiency and the target proficiency - the students' *lacks* – needed to be investigated to decide what should be included in the course content. The final term – *wants* – referred to students' desires or feelings about what they needed to know. Because of playing an important role in stimulating students in their learning process, so *wants* to be perceived by students should not be ignored.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) offered a more updated concept of needs analysis with the environmental situation. It included (A) professional information about the learners (situation analysis and objective needs), (B) personal information about the learners (wants, means, and subjective needs), (C) English language information about the learners (present situation analysis), (D) learners' lacks, (E) language learning needs, (F) professional communication information of target situation, (G) learners' needs from the course, and (F) Information about the environment (means analysis).

In addition, Basturkmen (2010) stated that needs analysis was one stage in the ESP course development process, in which the language and skills used in learners' target professional or vocational workplaces were identified and related to the learners' current proficiency, their perceptions of their needs and practical possibilities and constraints of teaching context. The data obtained in this stage were the foundation of determining and refining the content and teaching method of the ESP courses. According to her, the needs analysis process included target situation analysis, discourse analysis, present situation analysis, learner factor analysis, and teaching context analysis.

According to Brown (2016), needs in needs analysis represented various things according to the opinions of different people and contexts, which caused problems in conducting a needs analysis. Therefore, he categorized them into four groups: democratic view, discrepancy view, analytic view, and diagnostic view. The first view – the democratic view of learners' needs – could not be understood narrowly by defining them as the ESP features which most of the students wanted but by expanding to what most of the stakeholders (teachers, recruiters, or administrators) wanted, expected, required, and desired. This broadened view of learners' needs led to three apparent advantages, including (1) engaging vital stakeholder groups in the process of identifying learners' needs in developing an ESP course or program, (2) designing the ESP course or program to be more effective, practical, and applicable, (3) contributing a successful defensible ESP course or program. The second view – the discrepancy view of learner needs – referred to the gaps, lacks, and deficiencies between what students were required to achieve in the ESP courses and what they were currently able to do. Thus, this view also led to three primary benefits such as (1) helping the course designers or developers come up with constructing the course objectives or targets and the learning outcomes at an early stage, (2) generally providing the progress that students must obtain to reach the course targets, (3) encouraging the course designers to think about the ESP course thoroughly from the beginning to the end with all the stages. The third one – the analytic view of learners' needs – indicated what students should learn next in the hierarchy of the learning process. However, Brown (2016) found some problems with this kind of view because there were doubts about no appropriate hierarchy among various groups of learners as well as various individuals in those groups. The last view – the diagnostic view of learners' needs – focused on the ESP components that would trigger the most harm if they were missing, considered as learners' prerequisites, necessities, and essentials. This view encouraged course designers to investigate the ESP circumstances the learners were about to confront and identify students' crucial needs based on their understanding. Those needs were prioritized

based on the most to least obstructive consequences if lacked; then, they were included in the ESP course based on the course time allowance.

## 2.3 Related Studies

Several attempts of investigating learners' needs in English for tourism from the perspectives of various stakeholders, including tourism staff, EFT teachers, and students, were conducted (Bach, 2015; Chumphong & Chuai-in, 2020; Prachanant, 2012; Salisna et al., 2019).

Prachanant (2012) examined the need for English language use by employees in tourism sectors through a survey. The study involved 40 employees at five international tour companies in popular tourism cities around Thailand. The research findings claimed that the most critical skill was speaking, followed by listening, reading, and writing. In addition, the three most common purposes of English use were to give information, provide services, and offer help.

In her study, Bach (2015) examined tourism employees' needs and problems with English language use at international travel companies by using a survey with 144 employees. The findings indicated that, in their daily routine tasks, speaking was the most needed skill, followed by listening, writing, and reading, respectively. However, the employees encountered problems related to reading more than writing, listening, and speaking, respectively.

Salisna et al. (2019), in their research paper, investigated the needs of English for Tour and Travel Department at two vocational high schools by mixed method (questionnaire and interview) and convergent parallel design. Three groups of participants were involved in the study, including students (28 students and four alumni), two English teachers, and other stakeholders (two heads of the Tour and Travel Department and two assistances of curriculum, hotel, and tour staff). The research findings indicated that listening and speaking were dominantly important to Tour and Travel Department than reading and writing. Besides, the most concerning topics for each skill were also explored.

In a mixed-method study, Chumphong and Chuai-in (2020) employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to investigate the most frequently used English skills as well as the interests and needs of English improvement of the front office staff. The study purposely involved 40 front office staff of hotels, resorts, and travel agencies. The research findings revealed that listening was the most frequently used skill, followed by speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, they desired to improve their English, especially listening, speaking, and terminologies, for accommodation booking, tourist attraction information, hotel and tour services information, price, and general

conversation.

Although the mentioned studies investigated the needs of English language use in tourism industry at certain levels and from different stakeholders, most of them focused on the current tourism employees, while only the study of Salisna et al. (2019) investigated the opinions of teachers and students. Besides, the investigation in the Vietnam tourism context is still limited. Therefore, in this paper, the researcher attempts to employ Brown's perspective to investigate learners' needs from the perspectives of stakeholders, including tourism staff, EFT teachers, and students to design a course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides.

### 3. Research Methodologies

#### 3.1 Population and Sample

The population of this research consists of three groups: students, teachers, and tourism staff. The first group of the population was 723 English Language major students at AGU, who were aiming to work in the tourism sector in their future careers. They could work as receptionists, food and beverage managers, tour guides, tour operators, waiters/waitresses, etc. The second group is five teachers in charge of EFT courses for English Language major students at AGU. The final group was around 300 staff from tourism companies, such as tour guides, tour operators, salespersons, etc., in An Giang province.

Three groups of participants were involved with the convenience sampling method. The first group was 70 first-year English language major students at An Giang University, including 44 female and 26 male students aging from 18 to 22. There were 44 female and 26 male students whose age range was from 18 to 22. The second group was five teachers (four female and one male) who were in charge of the EFT courses at AGU. They have had rich experience teaching English in general and English for Tourism in particular. All of them obtain master's degrees or above and at least ten-year experience teaching English as well as five-year experience teaching EFT. The final group was 15 staff from tourism companies in An Giang province. Among the participants in the last group, nine were AGU alumni who used to have their study and training from AGU.

The three groups of participants were involved to investigate learners' needs from different dimensions and identified the needs: necessities, lacks, and wants. According to Brown (2016), engaging various stakeholders in learners' needs investigation was beneficial in practical and effective course designing as well as in curriculum defense. Besides, the first-year students were involved in the

process as they were potential students joining the course designed based on the investigated needs.

#### 3.2 Research Instruments

The three versions of the questionnaires were designed, based on Brown's perspectives, to explore the learners' needs from the stakeholders' perspectives (tourism staff, teachers, and students) to the course English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides for English major students at the university level. The statements in the questionnaires were developed mainly based on Vietnam Tourism Occupational Standards – Tour Guiding and Tour Operators (Vietnam Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism, 2015a, 2015b) and other research on needs analysis of the labor force in tourism industry (Bach, 2015; Chumphong & Chuai-in, 2020; Prachanant, 2012; Salisna et al., 2019). As Vietnam is a member of the ASEAN Economic Community, these qualifications were proposed to be aligned with the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) so that the employees from Vietnam are qualified enough to work not only in Vietnam but also in other countries of ASEAN group.

Each version of the questionnaire consisted of two parts, general information and questions. Part A, following the title and purposes of the questionnaires, aimed to gather demographic data of the participant. Part B aimed to explore the participant's perspectives about learners' needs in the course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides for English major students at the university level. In the early part B, participants were asked about the importance of English and English language skills for jobs in the tourism sectors. Then, a question followed by 36 statements about language and professional skills with a 5-Likert scale was included to explore the participants' perspectives about learners' needs in the course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides, in which the first 18 statements investigated about abilities and skills for tour guides while the rest of 18 statements were about abilities and skills for tour operators. The later part B was open-ended questions which were different according to the subjects of the questionnaires. Specifically, as for the tourism staff, an open-ended question was raised to elicit more participants' suggestions on the most important things about English language and professional skills that students need to prepare for their future jobs in tourism companies. As for EFT teachers, two open-ended questions were used to elicit more participants' opinions about the most important things that the course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides needs to prepare for students and their suggestions on the teaching methods and learner's assessments. As for students, three open-ended questions were offered to explore their difficulties in studying, their



expectations toward the course, and their suggestions for its effectiveness. Besides, students were required to express opinions about their learning activities preferences by ten statements with a 5-Likert scale.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Descriptive analysis, mean scores, average mean scores, and one-way ANOVA were employed to analyze the quantitative data from multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale items. How mean scores and average mean scores were interpreted is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Interpretation of Mean Scores or Average Mean Scores

Mean score/ Average mean score	Level of Importance	Level of Interest
4.50 – 5.00	Very important	Very interested
3.50 – 4.49	Important	Interested
2.50 – 3.49	Moderately important	Moderately interested
1.50 – 2.49	Minimally important	Little interested
1.00 – 1.49	Unimportant	Uninterested

Content analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data (e.g., the participants' responses to open-ended questions). The findings, then, were presented with extracts from the responses to interpret the investigated issues in detail. Notably, the participants' names are not mentioned in the excerpts, but they are encoded by 'TS' for tourism staff, 'T' for EFT teachers, and 'S' for students with the numbers in square brackets, instead. Besides, coded qualitative data were quantified to infer participants' most concerns toward each issue.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Learners' Needs from the Perspectives of the Stakeholders

#### 4.1.1 Importance of English to Careers in Tourism

The majority of the participants viewed English language as 'very important' to the careers in tourism. As can be seen in Table 1, English is essential to the careers in tourism sectors as 100% of the participants agreed that it was important. Specifically, 93% of the tourism staff and 91% of the students thought English was very important, while the rest thought it was important.

#### 4.1.2 Prioritized Order of English Skills Needed by Tourism Staff

According to the three groups of participants' opinions, the prioritized order of English skills needed for tourism

staff included Speaking – Listening – Reading – Writing. Figure 1 presents the average mean score of the three groups. Speaking, with the highest average mean score of 3.46, was considered the most important English skill needed by tourism staff. Listening was claimed as the second highest important with an average mean score of 3.23, while Reading and Writing were considered less important than the other two skills with average mean scores of 1.73 and 1.58, respectively.



**Figure 1:** Prioritized Order of English Skills Needed by Tourism Staff

### 4.1.3 Abilities and Skills Needed for Tour Guides and Tour Operators

To interpret the important levels of the skills and abilities, the mean score of each item, according to three groups of participants (tourism staff, EFT teachers, and students), was calculated. Due to the participants' different opinions, average mean scores were calculated to prioritize the objectives in course design. It is noticed that the opinions of the three participant groups were equally taken into account.

As for the abilities and skills needed for the tour guides, all the professional skills needed by tour guides, according to three groups of participants, were considered important or above despite the differences between the mean scores and standard deviations (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Abilities and Skills Needed by Tour Guides

Items	Aver. M	Interpret -ation	ANOVA	
			F	Sig.
1. Give proper spoken instructions	4.71	Very important	1.583	.211
2. Converse properly in face-to-face conversation	4.68	Very important	.222	.801
3. Respond to what customers/clients request and questions	4.58	Very important	1.248	.292
4. Describe tourism destinations	4.58	Very important	.533	.589
5. Share Vietnamese and regional traditions, customs, events, holidays, etc.	4.58	Very important	1.284	.282
6. Present in detail the travel plans (itineraries, activities, mealtimes, bus pick-up location, etc.)	4.57	Very important	.747	.477
7. Present specialized information on Vietnamese and/or regional cultural and heritage environments	4.54	Very important	.149	.862
8. Explain what is included and excluded in the tour packages (accommodations, meals, insurance, transportation, water, entrance fees, etc.)	4.53	Very important	.541	.584

Items	Aver. M	Interpret -ation	ANOVA	
			F	Sig.
9. Deal with customers' complaints	4.48	Important	.950	.391
10. Give directions	4.43	Important	2.096	.129
11. Negotiate with customers	4.38	Important	3.557	.033
12. Present specialized tour commentary to customers	4.38	Important	1.164	.317
13. Describe and explain check-in and check-out procedures (transportation company, lodging establishment, etc.)	4.38	Important	1.898	.156
14. Advise customers courteously and sensitively about unavoidable changes to itinerary	4.34	Important	.859	.427
15. Conduct telephone conversations with customers/clients	4.27	Important	.748	.476
16. Provide customers with information on responsible and appropriate tourism behaviors before entering tourism destinations	4.26	Important	.894	.413
17. Organize and facilitate on-site entertainment (Gala dinner, team building, games, etc.)	4.18	Important	.364	.696
18. Collect customers' personal details	3.93	Important	.276	.760

On the one hand, *giving proper spoken instructions* (AM = 4.71) was considered the most important skill for Tour Guides by most participants. The next four very important skills that Tour Guides should obtain, according to the participants, were *Conversing properly in face-to-face conversation* (AM = 4.68), *Responding to what customers/clients request and questions* (AM = 4.58), *Describing tourism destinations* (AM = 4.58), and *Sharing Vietnamese and regional traditions, customs, events, holidays, etc.* (AM = 4.58). On the other hand, the lowest-five important ones included *Advising customers courteously and sensitively about unavoidable changes to itinerary* (AM = 4.34), *Conducting telephone conversations with customers/clients* (AM = 4.27), *Providing customers with information on responsible and appropriate tourism behaviors before entering tourism destinations* (AM = 4.26), *Organizing and facilitating on-site entertainment (Gala dinner, team building, games, etc.)* (AM = 4.18), and *Collecting customers' personal details* (AM = 3.93).

As for the abilities and skills needed for the tour operators, despite the differences between the mean scores and standard deviations, all the professional skills needed by Tour Operators were considered important or higher (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Abilities and Skills Needed by Tour Operators

Items	Aver. M	Interpret -ation	ANOVA	
			F	Sig.
1. Conduct telephone conversations with customers/clients	4.77	Very important	4.482	.014
2. Explain what is included and excluded in the tour packages (accommodation, meals, insurance, transportation, water, entrance fees, etc.)	4.72	Very important	.915	.404

Items	Aver. M	Interpret -ation	ANOVA	
			F	Sig.
3. Receive and process reservations (tours, flights, tickets, etc.)	4.69	Very important	6.273	.003
4. Respond to what customers/clients request and questions	4.69	Very important	1.607	.206
5. Produce tourism brochures and attraction descriptions	4.64	Very important	1.638	.200
6. Explain the price of tours	4.57	Very important	1.953	.148
7. Take notes for telephone messages	4.56	Very important	1.468	.236
8. Collect customers' personal details	4.54	Very important	2.116	.127
9. Negotiate with customers	4.46	Important	2.591	.081
10. Suggest appropriate tours for customers	4.45	Important	1.747	.180
11. Advise customers before and after traveling (e.g., types of clothes, must-try restaurants or activities, etc.)	4.43	Important	1.494	.230
12. Converse properly in face-to-face conversation	4.41	Important	2.089	.130
13. Produce tailored tour program for specific groups of customers	4.4	Important	.253	.777
14. Deal with customers' complaints	4.38	Important	2.402	.097
15. Obtain and respond to customers' feedback and information	4.3	Important	.508	.604
16. Contact customers by email or written forms	4.29	Important	.813	.447
17. Give proper spoken instructions	4.28	Important	.546	.581
18. Produce proper business documents (emails, faxes, business letters, etc.)	4.21	Important	.355	.702

All the skills' average mean scores were from 4.21 – 4.77, which indicated that they all were important for Tour Operators to master to function well in their career. On the one hand, the most and the second highest important skills in the list were believed to be *Conducting telephone conversations with customers/clients* (AM = 4.77) and *Explaining what is included and excluded in the tour packages (accommodation, meals, insurance, transportation, water, entrance fees, etc.)* (AM = 4.72). The third place belonged to the two skills *Receiving and processing reservations (tours, flights, tickets, etc.)* (AM = 4.69) and *Responding to what customers/clients request and questions* (AM = 4.69). The next important one was *Producing tourism brochures and attraction descriptions* (AM = 4.64). On the other hand, the lowest-five important skills included *Dealing with customers' complaints* (AM = 4.38), *Obtaining and responding to customers' feedback and information* (AM = 4.3), *Contacting customers by email or written forms* (AM = 4.29), *Giving proper spoken instructions* (AM = 4.28), and *Producing proper business documents (emails, faxes, business letters, etc.)* (AM = 4.21).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to figure out the differences among three participants' groups perspectives towards the abilities and skills needed for tour guides and tour operators. The results indicated that there was no significant difference in the perspectives among the groups. Most of the items were highly congruent by the participants

with  $p$  value  $> .05$  except *Negotiate with customers* ( $F(2, 87) = [3.557]$ ,  $p = .033$ ) for tour guides and *Conduct telephone conversations with customers/clients* ( $F(2, 87) = [4.482]$ ,  $p = .014$ ) and *Receive and process reservations (tours, flights, tickets, etc.)* ( $F(2, 87) = [6.273]$ ,  $p = .003$ ) for tour operators. It was noticeable that despite the differences, the interpretation of the mean scores and average mean scores indicated that the participants reached a consensus on reporting the importance of these abilities and skills for tour guides and tour operators.

## 4.2 Students' Preferences of Learning Activities and Their Expectations

As for the students' preferences of learning activities, the mean scores of students' responses were calculated to figure out the students' levels of interest in the activities (see Table 4). Regarding the interest of working partners, most students admitted that they preferred working with partners to working alone. Students expressed their interest in *working with another student* ( $M = 4.43$ ;  $SD = 0.791$ ), *working in small groups* ( $M = 4.24$ ;  $SD = 0.892$ ), or *working as a class* ( $M = 4.20$ ;  $SD = 0.809$ ) rather than *working alone* ( $M = 2.74$ ;  $SD = 1.401$ ). Regarding students' preferences of activity types, students responded to be interested in activities related to creation, critical thinking, and real-life context as the activities perceived high interest from the students. The top three reported to be the activities they were most interested in included *Completing imaginative and creative activities – project work (e.g., making a video clip, designing a poster, etc.)* ( $M = 4.41$ ;  $SD = 0.691$ ); *Completing a task through a problem-solving activity* ( $M = 4.30$ ;  $SD = 0.645$ ); and *Acting out a role-play exercise – example: booking a tour* ( $M = 4.24$ ;  $SD = 0.751$ ).

**Table 4:** Students' Preferences of Learning Activities

Learning activities	M	SD	Interpretation
1. Working alone	2.74	1.401	Moderately interested
2. Working with another student	4.43	0.791	Interested
3. Working in small groups	4.24	0.892	Interested
4. Working as a class	4.20	0.809	Interested
5. Completing a task through a problem-solving activity	4.30	0.645	Interested
6. Following teacher-directed lessons with explanations	4.17	0.680	Interested
7. Acting out a role-play exercise – for example: booking a tour	4.24	0.751	Interested
8. Completing imaginative and creative activities – project work (e.g. making a video clip, designing a poster, etc.)	4.41	0.691	Interested
9. Discussing, offering suggestions, debating, and making decisions	4.19	0.839	Interested
10. Listening to course lectures conducted in English	4.21	0.915	Interested

Regarding students' preferences of classroom activities and tasks, students' responses counted were related to four main themes such as (1) in-class and out-class activities, (2) working style, (3) extra curriculum activities, and (4) tourism knowledge. Firstly, the most mentioned theme counted 29 codes (42.65%) was in-class/ out-class activities. Students recommended activities and tasks, including video making, problem-solving, presentations, communication, tour designing, games, quizzes/ stories, discussion, etc. Secondly, the students' next concern was their working style which was counted 25 codes (36.76%). From the responses, it was inferred that most of the students prefer working in a group (23 codes) to working alone (2 codes). Thirdly, students were interested in extra-curriculum activities (12 codes, 17.65%), such as joining a tour with a tour guide, visiting a tourism company, and guiding people to tourist destinations. Finally, some students also wanted to learn about tourism knowledge (2 codes), for example tourist destinations and tourism sectors. Consequently, joining a tour with a tour guide, making videos, and working in groups were the most interesting activities for the students.

Regarding what students expected to learn most from the course, three main themes arose: tourism background knowledge, tourism professional skills, and English language skills. Language skills were perceived as students' most expected to learn, which were counted 52 codes (54.17%). Students' expectations of mastering listening (16 codes) and speaking (26 codes) were dominant compared to reading, writing, and vocabulary. Besides, professional skills were counted 37 codes (38.54%), including communicative skill, problem-solving skill, tour operating skill, tour guiding skill, presentation skill, master of ceremony skill, etc. Among them, communication skill was the most expected skill to learn with 15 related codes. In addition, students also expected to obtain tourism knowledge (7 codes) related to culture, cuisine, destinations, and local specialties.

The following extracts were withdrawn from students' responses about their favorite activities, and expectations to the designed course (see Table 5).

**Table 5:** Students' Preferences of Learning Activities and Expectations

Extracts	Related themes
Visit an actual Tourism Company and learn how they work. – [S2]	Students' Preferences of Learning Activities
Second, I hope teacher can originate tours that have a tour guide so as to students can learn better from him/her. – [S45]	
An introduction to the field of study and the skills needed for the subject. A knowledge of the tourist destinations we know. – [S4]	
Work in a group. – [S15]	
Self-study – [S6]	
Organize games to practice communication and	

Extracts	Related themes
behavioral skills. – [S18]	Students' Expectations to Learn from the Course
Video making. – [25]	
Giving a speech in front of the crowd. – [S66]	
I hope I have enough knowledge and skills to become a tour guide and.... – [S1]	
Solving problems skill by English in difficult situations, master of ceremony skill, speaking skill, organizing tours skill – [S67]	
Learn good English to communicate with tourists, talk face-to-face with the crowds. – [S68]	

### 4.3 Crucial Learners' Needs to the Course

Crucial learners' needs to the course was investigated by open-ended questions and the interpretation of the two previous research findings.

As for students' difficulties when learning English, students responded about facing problems related to listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. The first and foremost difficulty was related to listening as most of the responses mentioned it (37 codes; 42.53%), for example, listening without understanding or taking notes and remembering information. Besides, problems related to speaking were also mentioned by many students (27 codes; 31.03%), such as mispronunciation, anxiety when speaking in front of crowds, idea arrangement, and unconfident communication. The next difficulty was related to vocabulary (22 codes; 22.99%) as students lacked vocabulary or found it hard to memorize them. In addition, a few students mentioned having difficulties with grammar and writing.

Regarding students' suggestions for the effective course, students' recommendations were about extra curriculum activities, classroom activities, teachers' manners, and advanced classes. Firstly, the extra-curriculum activities were suggested most by students (28 codes; 50.91%). Joining a tour for authentic experiences perceived the most suggestions (26 codes) while internship and observation were mentioned once. Secondly, different types of classroom activities counted 20 (36.36%) were also suggested for the course's effectiveness. Among the activities, practicing/role-playing the target situations was recommended most (12 codes) beside to problem-solving activity, games, creative activities, and teamwork skills. Thirdly, the teacher was expected to speak slowly and be friendly, humorous, creative, sociable, and conscientious, which was counted six codes (10.91%). The final suggestion was about opening an advanced class which was for students with high competence to join.

The following extracts were withdrawn from students' responses about their difficulties in learning English and suggestions for the course effectiveness (see Table 6).

**Table 6:** Students' Responses of Open-ended Questions

Extracts	Related themes
I can not fully understand – [S50]	Students' Difficulties in Learning English
Can't hear what the teacher said, the pronunciation is still wrong. – [S47]	
I have a difficult time sorting out my thoughts and how to speak in front of the crowd – [S2]	
I'm nervous when I talk in front of people – [S20]	
Lack of vocabulary – [S34]	Students' Suggestions for the Course Effectiveness
As I said, teacher should originate tours and teach how to solve problems for us - [S45]	
I think we should do internships with more tourists. – [S9]	
Make many activities for students to practice real situations – [S52]	
Sense of humor, Creative, Sociable – [S58]	
The teachers can speak slowly so that we can catch up and understand more. [ S3]	

Regarding the EFT teachers' opinions about open-ended questions, among English language skills, listening and speaking were considered the most important skills. It was aligned with the findings from the question for prioritizing the importance of the English language skill. Besides, they also mentioned the most professional skills such as communication, problem-solving, and negotiating skill. Moreover, tourism background knowledge related to culture and tradition was also considered important. In addition, they also suggested utilizing a communicative approach and presentation for the course to be more effective. Finally, formative and summative assessments were suggested to assess students' proficiency. Extracts of EFT teachers' responses are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** EFT Teachers' Responses about Skills, Teaching Methods, and Assessments

Extracts	Participant
Listening, Speaking, negotiation skills	[T4]
language, culture, tradition, communication skill, problem-solving skill	[T2]
Interact effectively with tourists	[T5]
Presenting about students' understanding of the work sector and content language terminology use check	[T1]
Communicative language teaching method; summative and formative assessment	[T3]

Regarding the tourism staff's responses to open-ended questions, they suggested some other abilities and skills needed by tour operators and tour guides, such as translation, sales, huge workload endurance, and a broad social network. Besides, they also believed that all English language skills were important for students' future jobs in tourism sectors, especially listening and speaking. In addition, the professional skills considered most important for students to obtain were communication, problem-solving, public speaking, and note-taking. Extracts of tourism staff's responses are presented in Table 8.



**Table 8:** Tourism Staff's Responses about the Most Important Skills Needed

Extracts	Participant
Translate information during the itinerary (if any) and conversation between the local people and customers.	[TS3]
Sales	[TS11]
Endure big workload during peak season	[TS14]
Listening, speaking, writing, translating	[TS3]
In addition to the knowledge learned at the school, students need to have more communication skills, public presentation skills, improvisation/situation handling skills, foreign language skills ...	[TS8]
Communicate fluently and confidently	[TS10]
Speaking and Listening	[TS4]

As the whole picture, the crucial learners' needs from the perspectives of the stakeholders were: (1) enhancing speaking, listening, and vocabulary (2) providing professional abilities and skills, especially those related to communication, presentation, and problem solving, (3) tourism knowledge (e.g., culture, customs, typical food, etc.), (4) including creative activities and projects (e.g., video making), role playing target situations, team work, and field trip, and (5) including teacher with friendly manners, humor, sociability, creation, and conscientiousness.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 The Importance of English and the Prioritized Order of the English Skills

The research findings revealed that English was significantly important for those working in tourism sectors as more than 90% of the participants considered it very important. It might originate from the rapid growth of Vietnamese tourism with a steadily increasing number of inbound tourists (i.e., 4 million in 2008, 6.7 million in 2012, 10 million in 2016, 13 million in 2017, 15 million in 2018, 18 million in 2019) (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2022). Therefore, mastering English is crucial for well-functioning in their workplaces. This finding was aligned with those in the previous studies. Regarding the prioritized order of importance, speaking was considered the most critical skill, followed by listening, reading, and writing. The finding was congruent with Bach's (2015) and Salisna et al. (2019); however, it was different from Chumphong and Chuai-in (2020) and Prachanant (2012), which resulted in listening being the most important one. Despite the difference in the most crucial English skill, it was noticed that the findings from this study and the other four were consistent about the dominant role of speaking and listening compared to reading and writing. It can be explained as tourism staff, especially tour guides, tour

operators, or sales, interacting directly with customers and dealing with them daily. Specifically, tourism staff needs to explain the price and tour services, introduce tourist attractions, deal with tourists' inquiries, etc.

### 5.2 The Abilities and Skills Needed for Tour Guides and Tour Operators

The findings of this study indicated that tour guides and tour operators crucially needed the abilities and skills related to communication and problem-solving. Besides, tourism knowledge, such as culture, customs, typical food, etc., was also vital for them. These findings were supported by previous studies (Bach, 2015; Chumphong & Chuai-in, 2020; Prachanant, 2012; Salisna et al., 2019). Specifically, tourism staff need to interact with customers, for example, giving proper spoken instruction and conversing face-to-face about tour and hotel services, information about tourist attractions, and processing reservations. Besides, they also need to deal with customers' inquiries, including tour price, tour includes and excludes, or complaints. In addition, tourism staff, especially tour guides and tour operators, must master tourism knowledge to describe tourist attractions, share and respond to tourist questions about the diversity and specialties related to regional culture, customs, typical food, etc., and produce tour brochures and attraction descriptions. The findings also clarified why speaking and listening were paramount for tourism staff.

### 5.3 Students' Preferences of Learning Activities

The finding about students' preferences of learning activities parallels with (Md Aris & Md Zawawi, 2016). In particular, students felt uncomfortable working alone but were interested in working in groups with problem-solving activities, role-play, or creative projects. The students also suggested specific activities when responding to open-ended questions, such as video making, presentations, role-playing, and field trips with tour guides. It was also aligned with EFT teachers' suggestions about communicative activities for encouraging learners' engagement.

### 5.4 Students' problems in learning English

Students' apparent problems were related to listening, speaking, and vocabulary. They admitted facing lots of obstacles, such as listening without understanding, taking notes and remembering information, mispronunciation, anxiety, unconfident communication, and lack of vocabulary. These findings supported Prachanant (2012) who indicated problems of tourism staff in using words and expressions, understanding foreigners, and lacking vocabulary. Besides, tourism staff also wanted to improve

their vocabulary related to tourism and speaking skills for giving information about services and tourist attractions (Chumphong & Chuai-in, 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

All the data from the Likert-scale and open-ended questions for three groups of participants were equally considered for withdrawing the conclusion on learners' needs toward the course of English for Tour Operators and Tour Guides as follows. Firstly, good competence in English was essential for tourism staff while Speaking and Listening were considered paramount important to function well in tourism sectors. Secondly, the abilities and skills listed were necessary for tour operators and tour guides, especially skills that helped learners communicate well with the customers and deal with problems. Besides, some skills were added by the tourism staff, such as translation, sales, and working endurance. Thirdly, tourism knowledge, for example, culture, tradition, customs, typical food, tour brochures, attractions, etc., was also essential for learners to obtain. It was withdrawn from the teachers' suggestions and students' expectations to learn from the course. Fourthly, students' preferences of learning activities were also clarified; for example, they preferred to work in groups with problem-solving activities, role-play, or creative projects. The students also suggested some specific activities when responding to open-ended questions, such as video making, presentations, role-playing, field trips with tour guides, etc. These activities were also aligned with the suggested teaching method by the EFT teachers, which was the communicative approach. Fifthly, what students expected from the teacher was also figured out, including being friendly, humorous, creative, speaking slowly, etc.

Although this study cannot represent the opinions of all tourism staff, EFT teachers, and students, it is hoped to be a sample and baseline for those sharing the same research interests. Regarding the implications for course and program developers in English for tourism, the findings from the study shed light on them as they contributed a critical proportion in identifying the objectives, contents, and appropriate teaching approach for designing the course of Tour Operators and Tour Guides. Regarding the implications for further research in ESP, the step to develop the survey, identify who should be involved in needs analysis, and analyze the data, can be a reference for further research.

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