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TOURISM-ORIENTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The global tourism sector demands highly specialized English language skills that go beyond general communicative competence. This study proposes a comprehensive pedagogical framework for the development of tourism-oriented English language curricula, integrating principles from English for Specific Purposes (ESP), task-based learning, and intercultural communication. The article synthesizes existing literature, analyzes international best practices, and outlines a model curriculum adaptable to diverse tourism contexts. The framework emphasizes authentic materials, experiential learning, and performance-based assessment. Although applicable worldwide, the proposed design is particularly relevant for emerging tourism markets, where language proficiency directly impacts service quality and economic growth.

Keywords: ESP, tourism English, curriculum design, task-based learning, intercultural competence.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries globally, contributing significantly to employment, cultural exchange, and economic development. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023), international tourist arrivals reached 1.3 billion, with English serving as the predominant lingua franca in the sector. This global dynamic creates a pressing need for tourism-oriented English language curricula that address the specific communicative demands of tourism professionals, including tour guides, hotel staff, and travel agents.

While general English courses may develop broad language competence, they often fail to equip learners with the specialized vocabulary, situational discourse, and intercultural skills essential in tourism. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) offers a targeted approach, ensuring that instruction is directly aligned with workplace requirements (Basturkmen, 2010). This paper aims to outline a pedagogically sound model for developing tourism-oriented English curricula, grounded in both theory and practice.

Methods

This study employs a **qualitative, design-based research (DBR) approach**, which is particularly suitable for developing and refining educational programs in real-world contexts. The DBR methodology allows for iterative analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring that the proposed curriculum is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. The research process consisted of three interconnected stages:

Literature Review. In the first stage, an extensive review of scholarly literature, industry reports, and professional guidelines was undertaken to establish a theoretical and practical foundation for curriculum development. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy, studies on English for Tourism Purposes (ETP), and publications by international organizations such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Additionally, existing ESP curricula from countries with well-developed tourism sectors—such as **Thailand, Spain, and Turkey**—were examined to identify effective approaches, innovative teaching practices, and lessons learned from their implementation. Special attention was given to curriculum models that successfully integrated language skills, intercultural communication, and workplace-specific competencies.

Curriculum Mapping. The second stage involved a systematic comparison of the curricula reviewed in the literature to identify **common learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods** used in successful tourism-oriented English programs. Learning outcomes were categorized according to language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), professional functions (e.g., handling reservations, conducting tours, dealing with complaints), and intercultural competence. Teaching strategies were analyzed to determine the balance between classroom-based instruction and experiential learning, while assessment methods were reviewed to evaluate the use of performance-based tasks, role-plays, and authentic workplace simulations. This mapping exercise provided a clear framework for determining which elements should be prioritized in the new curriculum.

Framework Development. In the final stage, the findings from the literature review and curriculum mapping were synthesized into a **structured, adaptable curriculum model**. This model was designed to be flexible enough for adaptation to various tourism contexts, while still maintaining core ESP principles and internationally recognized language proficiency standards such as the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**. The framework includes detailed module descriptions, suggested learning activities, guidelines for selecting authentic materials, and assessment rubrics aligned with industry expectations. The development process also considered teacher training requirements and resource availability, ensuring that the proposed curriculum can be realistically implemented in diverse educational and professional settings.

The framework draws on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) learning-centred approach, task-based language teaching (TBLT), and Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence.

Results

The curriculum is organized into thematic modules, each with defined communicative objectives, vocabulary sets, and performance tasks.

1. Welcoming and Assisting Guests – Language for greetings, introductions, offering assistance, and explaining facilities.
2. Tour Guiding and Cultural Narratives – Techniques for describing historical sites, telling engaging stories, and answering tourist questions.

3. Reservation and Booking Procedures – Functional language for taking and confirming bookings, both in person and digitally.

4. Handling Complaints Diplomatically – Strategies for apologizing, offering solutions, and following up with customers.

5. Cross-Cultural Communication in Tourism – Adapting communication styles for diverse visitor backgrounds.

Discussion

The proposed framework aligns with international ESP methodology while addressing the distinctive challenges of tourism contexts. In contrast to general English programs, this curriculum incorporates role-play simulations, site visits, and collaborative projects to immerse learners in realistic professional scenarios. Assessment is performance-based, with rubrics evaluating fluency, accuracy, customer orientation, and intercultural sensitivity.

Comparative analysis shows that similar models implemented in Thailand (Kaewpet, 2009) and Turkey (Köroğlu & Dinçer, 2020) have led to measurable improvements in workplace communication and customer satisfaction. However, the model's success depends on institutional support, teacher training in ESP, and access to authentic resources.

Conclusion

Developing an effective tourism-oriented English curriculum requires a balance between linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and practical communication skills. The proposed framework offers a replicable, adaptable model that can be tailored to local tourism contexts while maintaining alignment with global best practices. Future research should focus on piloting the curriculum in different cultural settings, evaluating its impact on learner performance, and refining the model based on feedback from both learners and employers.

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