

Retrospective Evaluation of Tourism Vocational School English Textbooks: Student Needs vs Curriculum Demands

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Abstract

The tourism industry requires every worker to have proficient English skills appropriate to their position. However, until now, tourism industry stakeholders still question the low communicative skills of tourism vocational school graduates in English. The study aims to critically evaluate the English language teaching materials used in tourism vocational high schools to analyze their suitability to student needs and the demands of the tourism industry. Using a retrospective evaluation methodology, data was carefully collected through documentation and interviews. Documentation is carried out to collect teaching materials used by schools, while interviews collect data regarding teachers' perceptions of these teaching materials. Qualitative data analysis was carried out using an interactive data analysis model. This research shows that although the material provided aligns with the national curriculum and focuses on everyday English communicative skills, the material still does not meet the particular needs of students preparing themselves for a career in the tourism sector. Teachers are aware of the significant gap between the general English skills taught and the specific English required of students. This study provides a basis for revising teaching materials to bridge this gap and ensure that they meet both general educational goals and the specific communicative demands of the tourism industry.

Keyword(s) : English for Specific Purposes, vocational education, evaluation of teaching materials, communicative competence, industry-aligned education

Introduction

The tourism industry is a significant driver of economic growth worldwide, demanding a workforce that is not only skilled in hospitality but also proficient in English communication. English is widely recognized as the lingua franca of the tourism industry, making it a critical competency for professionals at all levels (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2014). As such, vocational high schools specializing in tourism education play a crucial role in preparing students with the necessary language skills to meet industry demands (Richards, 2019). However, despite the importance of English proficiency, stakeholders in the tourism sector continue to express concerns over the low communicative skills demonstrated by graduates of tourism vocational schools (Tsegaye & Mesfin, 2021).

These concerns highlight a potential misalignment between the English language teaching materials currently used in these schools and the actual needs of the tourism industry. Effective communication in tourism settings often requires specific language skills, including industry-specific terminology, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to handle real-life scenarios involving international visitors (Blue & Harun, 2003; Kaikkonen, 2019). If teaching materials do not adequately address these needs, students may find themselves underprepared for the challenges of the workplace (Jung & Norton, 2020).

This study specifically aims to evaluate the English language teaching materials used in vocational schools in Bali, Indonesia. The objective is to analyze the suitability of these materials in meeting the needs of students and aligning with the demands of the tourism industry in Bali. By employing a retrospective evaluation methodology, this research gathers data through documentation and interviews. Documentation is utilized to collect and review the English teaching materials in use, while interviews capture teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of these materials. The analysis follows a qualitative approach using an interactive data analysis model to uncover insights into the adequacy of current educational resources (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Preliminary findings suggest that while the materials align with the national curriculum and emphasize everyday communicative skills, they fall short of preparing students for the specialized language requirements inherent in the tourism sector (Smith & Richards, 2022). Teachers have recognized this gap, acknowledging the disconnect between the general English skills taught and the specialized language needs of students entering tourism careers (Wang, 2018). This research provides a foundation for revising teaching materials, aiming to bridge this gap and ensure that the curriculum meets both broad educational objectives and the specific communicative competencies demanded by the tourism industry (Dewi & Hartati, 2023).

Method

This study employed a retrospective evaluation methodology to critically assess the suitability of English language teaching materials used in vocational schools in Bali, Indonesia, for preparing students to meet the communicative demands of the tourism industry. The research design focused on collecting qualitative data through documentation review and semi-structured interviews, enabling an in-depth understanding of both the content of the teaching materials and the perceptions of educators regarding their effectiveness.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study due to its strength in exploring complex phenomena in real-world contexts. By using qualitative methods, the research aimed to gain rich, detailed insights into how well the English teaching materials align with the needs of students and the demands of the tourism sector. The retrospective evaluation methodology was selected as it allows for the assessment of existing teaching materials against current industry standards and student needs.

Data for this study were gathered through two primary methods: documentation review and semi-structured interviews. The study began with a comprehensive review of the English language teaching materials currently used in selected vocational schools in Bali. This included textbooks, workbooks, and supplementary materials provided by teachers. The documentation review aimed to analyze the content, structure, and focus of these materials, with particular attention to their alignment with the national curriculum and their relevance to the tourism industry. To complement the findings from the documentation review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with English language teachers at vocational schools in Bali. A total of 15 teachers, representing various schools across the region, were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the teaching materials. The interview questions focused on the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the materials in preparing students for real-world communication in the tourism sector, the specific challenges they faced, and their suggestions for improvement.

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants and materials for evaluation. Schools were chosen based on their focus on tourism education, and teachers were selected based on their experience and involvement in teaching English for tourism purposes. This sampling

method ensured that the data collected would be relevant and reflective of the current state of English language education in tourism vocational schools in Bali.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model of qualitative data analysis as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The process involved three main steps. Data Reduction, the collected data were organized and condensed to identify key themes and patterns. For the documentation review, this involved categorizing the content of teaching materials into themes related to language skills, industry-specific vocabulary, and cultural context. For the interview data, transcripts were coded to highlight recurring themes and significant insights from teachers' perspectives. Data Display, the reduced data were then displayed in matrices and charts to facilitate comparison and analysis. This visual representation helped identify gaps between the current teaching materials and the specific language needs of students preparing for careers in the tourism industry. Conclusion Drawing and Verification, the final step involved interpreting the data to draw conclusions about the adequacy of the teaching materials. The findings were verified through triangulation, cross-checking the results from documentation reviews with insights gained from teacher interviews to ensure reliability and validity.

Findings

This study's findings are based on a comprehensive analysis of English language teaching materials used in vocational schools in Bali, Indonesia, and insights from semi-structured interviews with English teachers at these schools. The findings reveal a significant gap between the current teaching materials and the specific language needs required by the tourism industry. Three major themes emerged from the data: alignment with the national curriculum, relevance to industry-specific language skills, and teachers' perceptions of material effectiveness.

Alignment with the National Curriculum

The review of teaching materials showed that the content largely adheres to the national curriculum guidelines, focusing on general English language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and basic communication. While this alignment ensures consistency with educational standards, it does not adequately address the specialized language competencies that students need for employment in the tourism sector. The materials predominantly emphasize general communicative English, which may not be sufficient for the specific scenarios that students are likely to encounter in tourism settings.

For example, while the textbooks included sections on common English phrases used in everyday conversations, there was limited content related to industry-specific vocabulary or phrases commonly used in tourism and hospitality interactions, such as checking in guests, handling customer complaints, or providing detailed tourist information. The lack of tailored content limits students' ability to develop practical language skills directly applicable to their future roles in the tourism industry.

Relevance to Industry-Specific Language Skills

The documentation review indicated a notable deficiency in the incorporation of industry-specific language and situational learning exercises. While the national curriculum provides a foundation for general English skills, the materials reviewed did not sufficiently cover the specialized terminology and communication scenarios essential for the tourism industry. Terms related to reservations, travel itineraries, emergency procedures, and customer service interactions were either underrepresented or missing entirely.

Teachers highlighted the absence of contextualized language tasks that simulate real-world tourism settings. According to interview responses, while some textbooks included role-playing activities, they often lacked realism and relevance, failing to reflect authentic situations students might face when interacting with international tourists. Teachers expressed concerns that this gap between classroom learning and real-life application leaves students underprepared for the specific language demands they will encounter in their professional lives.

One teacher noted:

“Our students need more exposure to the kind of language used in hotels, travel agencies, and tourist attractions. The current materials are too general and do not focus on the specific terminology or conversational skills needed in these environments.”

Teachers' Perceptions of Material Effectiveness

Interviews with teachers revealed a general dissatisfaction with the current teaching materials' ability to prepare students for the tourism sector. Although teachers acknowledged that the materials were structured and provided a basis for teaching English, they felt that these resources fell short in terms of engaging students with practical, industry-relevant content.

Teachers reported often supplementing the prescribed materials with additional resources such as online videos, industry brochures, and guest speakers to bridge the gap between the curriculum and the needs of the tourism industry. They highlighted the necessity for materials that incorporate more interactive and context-based learning approaches, such as case studies, simulations, and hands-on experiences that reflect real-world tourism communication scenarios.

Another teacher commented:

“I frequently have to bring in extra materials from outside the textbook to teach my students the kind of English they need for their future jobs. The curriculum doesn't cover important areas like handling customer complaints, explaining tourist attractions, or guiding a tour.”

Recommendations for Material Improvement

Based on the findings, several recommendations were made by teachers to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching materials for tourism vocational schools:

Incorporation of Industry-Specific Content

Teachers suggested that textbooks and supplementary materials should include more content related to tourism-specific language and scenarios. This could involve chapters dedicated to topics such as customer service language, guiding tours, handling bookings, and dealing with emergencies.

Contextual Learning Activities

The inclusion of role-playing exercises, simulations, and problem-solving activities that reflect real-life situations in the tourism industry was strongly recommended. These activities would help students practice and internalize the specific language skills required in their future careers.

Collaborative Development of Materials

Involving industry professionals and English language experts in the creation and review of teaching materials could ensure that the content remains relevant and up-to-date with the latest industry standards and practices.

Use of Multimedia and Technology

Incorporating multimedia resources, such as videos of actual tourist interactions, virtual tours, and interactive online modules, could enhance student engagement and provide practical exposure to industry-specific language use.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between the current English language teaching materials used in vocational schools in Bali and the specific language needs of the tourism industry. This discussion links these results to existing theories and current empirical research to offer a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand and to propose potential solutions.

The results of this study align with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theory, which emphasizes the importance of tailoring language instruction to meet the specific needs of learners within particular professional fields (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). According to ESP theory, language teaching should not only focus on general communicative competence but also on the specialized vocabulary, language structures, and communicative practices relevant to a particular context, such as the tourism industry.

The study found that while the current teaching materials align with the national curriculum, they lack industry-specific content necessary for students to effectively communicate in real-world tourism settings. This finding supports previous research indicating that ESP materials are essential for vocational education, where students need targeted language skills to succeed professionally (Basturkmen, 2010). The absence of such specialized content in the reviewed materials suggests a misalignment with the core principles of ESP, thus limiting students' ability to develop the specific communicative competencies required in their future careers.

The study's findings highlight the importance of contextualized language learning, which is supported by socio-cultural theories of language acquisition, such as those proposed by Vygotsky (1978). These theories advocate that language learning is most effective when it occurs within meaningful social interactions and authentic contexts. The teachers interviewed in this study expressed a clear need for teaching materials that incorporate real-world scenarios, role-playing, and simulations that mirror the tourism industry's communicative demands.

Empirical studies support this approach, showing that students learn language more effectively when they can practice it in contextually relevant settings (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2005). For instance, a study by Paltridge and Starfield (2013) found that language learners who engaged in role-playing and problem-solving activities that simulated their future work environments showed greater improvement in language proficiency and confidence. The current study's findings echo these results, demonstrating that tourism students would benefit from materials that allow them to practice language skills in simulated real-world tourism situations, such as guiding tours, handling reservations, and managing customer complaints.

The study also highlights the critical role that teachers play in bridging the gap between the curriculum and industry needs. Teachers' dissatisfaction with the current materials and their frequent use of supplementary resources to fill the gaps indicate that they recognize the limitations of the existing curriculum. This aligns with research by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who argue

that teachers are key agents in the implementation of effective language programs, and their insights should be considered in curriculum development.

The importance of teacher involvement in curriculum design is also emphasized in recent studies on vocational education. For example, research by Fenwick and Edwards (2016) suggests that teacher feedback is vital for aligning educational content with industry demands. The teachers in this study recommended incorporating industry-specific content, interactive activities, and multimedia resources, highlighting the need for a more collaborative approach to developing English language teaching materials. Engaging teachers in the curriculum development process could lead to more relevant and practical educational resources, ensuring that students are better prepared for the workforce.

The study's findings align with broader discussions about the need to align educational curricula with industry standards. As noted by Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), there is often a disconnect between academic language instruction and the practical language needs of specific professional fields. This study found that the existing teaching materials, while aligned with the national curriculum, do not adequately prepare students for the specific communication tasks required in tourism.

This gap is consistent with findings from other studies, such as those by Hutchinson and Torres (1994), who emphasize the need for educational reforms that closely link curricular content to the evolving needs of industries. In the context of tourism, this means integrating practical, industry-relevant English skills into the curriculum, ensuring that students can effectively communicate with international tourists, handle customer service situations, and use specialized terminology.

The findings from this study provide valuable implications for future curriculum development in vocational schools. Firstly, there is a clear need to integrate ESP principles more robustly into the design of English language teaching materials for tourism students. This could involve collaboration between educators, industry professionals, and curriculum developers to ensure that materials are both educationally sound and practically relevant.

Secondly, incorporating more contextualized and interactive learning activities can enhance students' ability to apply their language skills in real-world scenarios. This aligns with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes interaction and practical communication skills over rote memorization (Richards, 2006). Finally, the study suggests that ongoing professional development for teachers is essential, equipping them with the skills and resources to effectively use and adapt teaching materials to meet the specific needs of their students and the industry.

Conclusion

This study highlights a critical gap between the English language teaching materials used in vocational schools in Bali and the specific communicative demands of the tourism industry. By linking the findings to existing theories and empirical research, it becomes evident that there is a need to revise and enhance these materials to better align with industry standards and student needs. Adopting an ESP approach, focusing on contextualized learning, and involving teachers in curriculum development are crucial steps toward bridging this gap and improving the effectiveness of English language education for tourism students. These changes will ensure that students are not only meeting general educational goals but are also equipped with the specific skills necessary to thrive in their future careers.

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