

# Exploring English Language Needs for Tour Guides in Heritage Tourism : A Case Study at Mangkunegaran Palace in Indonesia

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## Abstract

*Purpose:* This study aims to examine the English language requirements of tour guides at Mangkunegaran Palace to support the preparation of tourism students in meeting the practical demands of the guiding profession. English proficiency is essential in traditional tourism contexts such as Mangkunegaran Palace, which receives a considerable number of foreign visitors.

*Methodology:* An exploratory qualitative approach was employed to investigate the English needs of professional tour guides. Data were collected through interviews with five selected tour guides based on their experience and length of service. The interviews focused on the English tasks they perform and the specific language demands of their roles.

*Results:* The findings indicate that most tour guides have an educational background in tourism or a related field. They frequently utilize their speaking and listening skills when guiding tourists, and the English training they received in school has been beneficial. A notable challenge they face is understanding the diverse accents of international tourists, which can hinder effective communication.

*Applications/Originality/Value:* The study suggests that well-designed English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are essential to support tour guide professionals. These courses should emphasize the development of practical communication skills tailored to real-world tourism contexts, particularly in handling cross-cultural and multilingual interactions.

## Introduction

The concept of tourism, deeply embedded in linguistic roots, finds its etymological origins in Old English, specifically the term "turian". Sofronov (2018) delves into a comprehensive definition, characterizing tourism as a planned travel activity lasting at least 24 hours and subsequently returning. This definition broadens the scope, categorizing any form of travel as tourism, be it recreational tourism; adventure and sport tourism; cultural tourism; incentive tourism; conference and convention tourism; and health tourism (Olowookere et al., 2022).

Tourism has become a pivotal sector prioritized and focused on by governments for development, given its extraordinary and rapid growth. The contemporary landscape sees tourism encompassing various facets of travel, expanding beyond mere leisure to include diverse purposes such as business, education, family visits, relaxation, and health recovery. According to Ratkowski & Ratkowska (2018), the essence of tourism lies in the utilization of leisure time for planned journeys, reflecting a broad spectrum of travel activities.

The evolving nature of tourism underscores its significance as a dynamic and multifaceted industry. Governments recognize the potential economic and cultural contributions of tourism and are consequently investing resources to foster its growth. This inclusive definition of tourism, encapsulating a diverse range of travel purposes, serves as a testament to the evolving nature of this sector. Consequently, the current emphasis on tourism development is reflective of the industry's remarkable and rapid progress.

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) records indicate that the cumulative foreign tourist visits (wisman) in the first quarter of 2023 reached 2.5 million, marking a significant surge of 508.87% compared to the same period in 2022. In alignment with this robust growth, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) anticipates that foreign tourist visits by the end of this year could potentially reach approximately 9 million (Purwawidhu, 2023).

The tourism sector serves as a vital pillar of Indonesia's economy, playing a pivotal role as a primary contributor to foreign exchange reserves. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) report on Tourism Trends and Policies 2022, in 2019, the tourism sector contributed 5.0% to Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP). However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a significant decline in the tourism sector's contribution to the GDP, plummeting by 56% to just 2.2% of the total economy (Purwawidhu, 2023).

This surge in foreign tourist visits, as noted by the BPS, not only signifies a remarkable recovery from the adverse effects of the pandemic but also highlights the resilience and potential of the tourism sector in contributing to Indonesia's economic revival. The projections by Kemenparekraf further underscore the optimistic outlook for the tourism industry, emphasizing its crucial role in bolstering economic growth and foreign exchange earnings for the nation.

Developing the tourism sector effectively can serve as a key instrument in enhancing local revenue by strategically managing destinations and exploring the abundant tourism potentials inherent in a region. Additionally, promotion stands out as a pivotal factor supporting progress and fostering increased tourist visits. The provision and improvement of supporting infrastructure are also imperative. In the modern era, particularly in Industry 4.0, promotional activities are facilitated by technological advancements. The progress in technology significantly aids both local residents and foreign tourists in accessing information about captivating tourist destinations for travel. However, this technological advancement also intensifies competition on a global scale. Failure to adapt to these changes may lead to being overshadowed by such advancements. Furthermore, to confront global competition, individuals involved in the tourism industry are required to master international languages, particularly English (Suppachai Chanwanakul, 2021). This is because each country has its official language, serving as a unifying tool unique to that nation. Language functions as a medium of communication, facilitating interaction among people.

The English language is advantageous in the era of information and communication technology within the tourism sector, serving as a medium and framework for promoting tourism, referred to as digital marketing (Bozinovic & Sindik, 2013). In the pursuit of advancing tourism, effective communication is crucial, and proficiency in English, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is increasingly important for tour guides in international historical tourism settings (et al., 2021). Proficiency in English is deemed essential for tour guides and is ideally developed throughout their educational experience, whether in secondary school, vocational school, or further education (Amankulova & Seisembieva, 2011). A high level of English proficiency empowers tour guides to employ diverse communication strategies, akin to reading English books to refine reading skills. Furthermore, honing listening and speaking skills can be achieved by watching films without subtitles. This linguistic competence plays a pivotal role in the tourism industry, contributing significantly to effective communication with a diverse global audience (Fox, 2008).

Focusing on a specific cultural and historical gem within this tourism-centric context, the researcher expresses a keen interest in conducting research at Mangkunegaran Palace in Solo city. Established in 1757 by Raden Mas Said, who submitted his army to Pakubuwono III and swore allegiance to the rulers of Surakarta, the palace stands as a prominent historical and cultural tourism destination. During the bustling period from July to September, the palace welcomes 300-400 visitors per month, necessitating the provision of tour guides to accompany visitors.

The researchers' choice of tour guides from Mangkunegaran Palace is underpinned by their wealth of experience in the tourism industry. Proficient in various foreign languages, including English, Japanese, German, Dutch, Spanish, and others, these tour guides hold licenses for their roles and boast specializations tailored to the needs of tourists exploring Mangkunegaran Palace. This aligns seamlessly with the broader efforts of the government to enhance the tourism sector, emphasizing the crucial role language proficiency plays in delivering a rich and immersive experience for visitors. The primary objective of the research is to explore the impact of English language proficiency among tour guides on the overall tourist experience at Mangkunegaran Palace, with the goal of contributing insights that can further inform strategies for the advancement of the tourism sector.

In Indonesia, the need for English is important because Indonesia has many potential tourist attractions to explore, especially in Central Java. Tourism is an important contributor to the country's foreign exchange and employment opportunities. Indonesia has an archipelago to offer, starting with natural beauty, historical heritage, and cultural diversity (Ulfa, 2015). One of them is Mangkunegaran Palace, where local and foreign tourists come to see the historical building and learn about its history. Even though it has many potential tourist attractions on offer, tour guides also need to improve their communication skills, especially when meeting foreign tourists.

The government needs to grow the tourism industry and human resources in order to fund tourism development programs. One way to develop human resources is to improve the English language skills of prospective tour guides. There are many tourism academies in Indonesia that focus on tourism education and training. Educational institutions, such as vocational high schools and universities, play an important role in preparing professionals to enter the world of work through content knowledge and skills development. Unfortunately, the quality of students in learning English develops slowly. Due to the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia. As a result of the differences in accents between countries, the majority of tour guides still have difficulty comprehending what tourist visitors are saying. By considering this gap, researchers generate research inquiries in the following manner: (1) What English language abilities are required in the tour guide industries for communication purposes? (2) What English language skills are frequently used in guiding fields?

According to Rahman (2015), since the 1960s, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has operated separately within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The identification of the golden age of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was influenced by several factors, including the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, the rapid advancements in science and technology, the increasing adoption of English as the global language for science, technology, and business, the economic prosperity in oil-rich regions, and the rise in the number of international students studying in English-speaking countries. The primary emphasis of ESP is in the examination of requirements.

ESP is an intensive English learning and teaching setting that employs distinct teaching methodologies and fosters a unique learning atmosphere compared to General English. The key differentiating factors between ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and GE (General English) are the student and their learning objectives. ESP learners are generally adult individuals who possess a high level of proficiency in English and are acquiring the language in order to perform job-related tasks and effectively express a specific set of professional skills. Consequently, ESP courses are developed based on an assessment of requirements, objectives, and English-language-focused tasks. In ESP, the emphasis is placed more on language usage in context rather than on grammar and language structure education (Saleh, 2018). It provides a diverse selection of subjects, encompassing tourism and hospitality administration, business sciences, and medical studies.

The key aspect of ESP is the integration of English language instruction into relevant academic domains that hold significance for the student, rather than treating it as a distinct subject detached from real-world learning. General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vary not only in the characteristics of their students but also in their instructional goals. Indeed, in the context of General English instruction, there is equal focus placed on all four language abilities, namely hearing, reading, speaking, and writing. However, in the context of English for certain Purposes (ESP), the identification of the learner's needs through a needs analysis is what dictates the prioritization of certain language abilities, and subsequently, the syllabus is tailored to address those needs. Specifically, the ESP program prioritizes the cultivation of oral communication abilities in students who are getting ready for employment in the tourism industry. Moreover, the ESP program fosters the cultivation of writing proficiency among students aspiring to pursue careers in administration.

Needs analysis, commonly referred to as a needs assessment, is a methodical procedure employed to detect and assess discrepancies between existing conditions or performance and desired conditions or performance. This analysis is frequently performed across multiple disciplines, such as education, business, healthcare, and social services, with the aim of identifying the necessary steps to accomplish certain objectives or tackle particular issues. The objective of needs analysis is to collect data and perspectives that can facilitate decision-making and direct the creation of efficient solutions (Haryono, 2020). Inside the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis is an essential procedure that enables educators and curriculum designers to comprehend the linguistic demands of a distinct cohort of students in a certain professional or academic setting.

Needs analysis, as defined by Brown, involves gathering information to develop a curriculum tailored to meet the learning needs of a specific group of learners (Hossain, 2013). Ellis and Johnson share a similar perspective, viewing needs analysis as a method to describe a learner's or group of learners' needs. The primary goals include determining the language usage preferences of learners, assessing their current language competencies, and collecting data on course materials. Richards emphasizes that needs analysis is essential for fact-finding and data collection from diverse sources, including information about learners and materials.

## **Method**

The objective of this study was to ascertain the linguistic requirements of tour guides with regards to the English language. The necessary measures were taken to obtain the requisite data. The key tasks include selecting the sites, adapting the data collection methods, reaching out to the data providers, and assembling the data. The subsequent headings delineate other methods considered in the data collection process.

### ***Research Design an Approach***

The research approach was exploratory as its primary aim was to determine the English language requirements of the tour guides. By employing this methodology, the researcher acquired data on the essential requirements for language competency in different industries. The design has demonstrated its efficacy in effectively guiding the necessary data through the data collection tools. The utilization of qualitative research methodology is employed.

### ***Participants***

This study examines the English language proficiency criteria of five tour guides in Mangkunegaran using purposeful selection methods. The chosen criteria for the interview are tour guides with a minimum of 10 years of professional experience, who frequently guide foreign guests, their role and responsibilities, and their ability or proficiency to communicate in English. Erna Mayasari, Endang Widiastuti, Maryati, Susi, and Agung have been chosen based on their expertise and experience. These seasoned professionals, with over a decade of experience assisting travelers, offer a unique perspective on utilizing the English language in day-to-day scenarios. The chosen participants supplied data via interviews.

The researcher employed the purposive sample technique to gather information from a total of five tour guides in Mangkunegaran Palace. The purposive sampling strategy is employed to obtain the essential data from the tour guides.

### ***Instruments***

Interviews were conducted to acquire the requisite data. The interview consisted of five members who were tour guides in Mangkunegaran Palace. The interview questions were developed as open-ended inquiries in order to gather the required data. The questions were formulated in Indonesian to enhance their comprehensibility. The inquiry pertains to the respondents' educational qualifications, their routine tasks as tour guides, their proficiency in English, and the particular English language proficiencies necessary for this position.

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method used to interpret narratives, including those of tour guides in the tourism industry. The process began with the exact transcription of the interview, followed by careful reading to acclimate ourselves with the data. Key themes were identified, thereafter categorized and analyzed to draw conclusions regarding the specific language needs of tour guides and their connection to English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Finding**

#### **Data Participants**

This comprehensive examination focuses on a range of data participants as we delve into the different and valuable experiences of five individuals who have provided invaluable insights for our study. Introducing Erna Mayasari, Endang Widiastuti, Maryati, Susi, and Agung who has more than 10 years of work experience. Their educational background encompasses a diverse range of institutions, including Vocational High School of Tourism, University of Tourism, and Teacher Training and Education of English as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Data participants

No	Name	Length of Work	Educational Background
1.	Erna Mayasari	15 years	SMK Pariwisata Yogyakarta
2.	Endang Widiastuti	25 years	D3 FKIP UMS
3.	Maryati	21 years	D3 Pariwisata Aparda Surakarta
4.	Susi	18 years	SMK Pariwisata
5.	Agung	23 years	Tourism High School

#### **Educational Background of the Tour Guide**

Based on the interviews conducted with five tour guides at Mangkunegaran Palace, it can be inferred that the two most common educational backgrounds among the tour guides are the top choices. The educational background of these five tour guides is partially related to tourism and partially unrelated to it.

*“My educational background is Senior Vocational Tourism High School in Yogyakarta. I think, what I learned in the old school was very helpful to get into the world of working as a tour guide.” – Erna Mayasari*

As previously said, 80% of tour guides possess a background in education from a dedicated tourism institution or university. They expressed their desire to pursue a career in the tourist sector. Consequently, they took steps to enhance their knowledge and skills by enrolling in a specialized school for tourism.

*“Diploma 3 Faculty of Teacher Training and Education FKIP at UMS. I took Diploma 3, because back then there is no program for undergraduate or bachelor in Faculty of Teacher Training and Education..” – Endang Widiastuti*

However, one out of the five tour guides have a distinct educational background. Endang Widiastuti holds a D3 degree from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at UMS. Her field of study is unrelated to the tourism sector. He explicitly declared that she completely neglected the study of tourism during her educational journey. Although she had no basic knowledge in tourism, she asserted that the lessons she picked while in college are beneficial.

#### **The Use of English in Guiding the Tourist**

English has 4 basic skills namely Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. Tour guides are required to interact with tourist to explain about Mangkunegaran Palace and they are also required to listen to what the tourists want to say and what they want. So Listening and Speaking are very much needed and most often used in guiding fields. Based on the

interviewees, the use of English in guiding the tourist is the most needed and most frequently used skills are speaking and listening.

*“Not only speaking, but listening is also important to master, so if a tourist speaks, then we as a tour guide should be able to capture what he is asking and what he talks about. If our listening skills are not understood and learned, then tourists will have difficulty understanding tourism in Pura Mangkunegaran.”* – Erna Mayasari.

The respondents said that proficiency in Reading and Writing is not truly essential for doing this job. Occasionally, individuals must employ their Reading and Writing abilities when encountering a non-English-speaking tourist or someone with limited English proficiency. In such instances, they may find it necessary to jot down explanations on notes or utilise translation applications to facilitate effective communication.

*“I think that skill is needed because, yes, there are a few guests whose mother tongue is not English, so sometimes we have to write an explanation with notes on the phone or paper.”* – Erna Mayasari

### **Challenges in Using English**

Mangkunegaran Palace, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Surakarta, is visited by many foreign tourists from various country with various differences. The Guides required to speak English to the foreigner to explain the places there. However, due to the various accents and types of English each country are different, some difficulties can't be avoid.

*For speaking skill more or less the same as listening. If people who don't speak English, for example, Chinese people speak Chinese English so it's quite different. Most foreigners visiting Pura Mangkunegaran is basically average English, but basically English is very different from each other, then that in terms of speaking is also very different and difficult to understand.”* – Endang Widiastuti.

Due to the diverse range of languages and their distinct characteristics, several tour guides face challenges in comprehending tourists, particularly when they possess an accent that is particularly challenging to decipher. Endang Widiastuti asserts that Chinese English is the most challenging variant of the English language to comprehend.

*“It's usually difficult to communicate with people who are not native speakers or whose primary language is not English. Especially the accents of British, American, and Australian English are somewhat difficult, in my opinion. So sometimes it's hard to understand what a guest wants or means.”* – Agung

Agung expressed that he faced challenges comprehending the speech of non-English-speaking tourists. Similar to Indians, Koreans, and other nationalities. He is encountering difficulty in understanding different accents, particularly those of British, American, and Australian origin.

### **English at School vs English as Tour Guide**

When it comes to language, English plays two distinct roles: it is used as a scholarly instrument in academic settings and as a lively, dynamic tool when a tour guide is telling stories about interesting places. The rigorous yet stimulating environment of academic English emerges as soon as one steps through the door; here, accuracy, reasoning, and well-chosen language are valued above all else..

*“Very helpful in my opinion. The English education I attended at the tourism school was very helpful in my work as a Tour Guide. The program not only enriched my vocabulary with terms related to tourism, but also taught me d listen well to interact with guests from a variety of backgrounds.”* – Agung

On the other hand, a tour guide's English is a woven fabric of colorful descriptions, cultural tales, and a hint of theatricality, all intended to take listeners to the very center of a place. The tour guide's use of English invites the audience to experience a multisensory trip through a skillful blend of storytelling and interaction, in contrast to the formal and organized language taught in schools. Although they are different, these two aspects of English demonstrate how adaptable the language is to many situations and serve a variety of communicative functions.

### **English Development for Tour Guide**

Despite the expertise in the field, the pursuit of knowledge remains an unyielding necessity. The realization that there is always room for improvement and the continuous quest for learning are pivotal aspects of one's journey, transcending the boundaries of age and experience. Some of them claimed that they still need to improve their skill. They want more advanced or higher level of language training.

*“It’s still necessary, because we’re going to have to keep learning. If for the course I want the TOEFL level to be a higher level than the one I master now” – Agung*

While some other claimed that because of their educational background is not related to tourism, if they have a chance to learn more, they want to learn more about tourism in more depth.

*“If it’s like me, I’m going to need it because I used to major in Faculty Training and Education and now I’m working in tourism fields. If there’s a course for the Tour Guide, I want to learn about tourism. For English, I think it’s enough for me because I used to study English and I’ve been dealing with English stuff every day. However, for basic or tourism material a little bit of minimum knowledge, and maybe not as much as those of my colleague who have already attended school at Tourism School.” – Endang Widiastuti*

Although the academic background does not perfectly match the subject, her drive to enhance her understanding indicates a strong enthusiasm for personal and professional growth. She believed that his present level of English proficiency was adequate for her role as a tour guide. Based on her recent educational background, she has extensively pursued the study of English. Instead of pursuing English studies, she opted to go deeper into the field of tourism.

## **Discussion**

In examining the research findings, a prominent theme emerged as a substantial majority of the tour guides showcased an educational foundation from Tourism High Schools. Specialized education in tourism provides practitioners with a unique skill set and knowledge base tailored to the industry's demands. The prevalence of such educational backgrounds among our participants underscores the industry's reliance on specialized training for its workforce.

The research also delved into the language proficiency of tour guides, revealing a focus on basic English skills, primarily in speaking and listening. This echoes the work of Angga Prima (2022) to work in hospitality and tourism industry, employees perceive that listening is the most important skill, followed by speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, written grammar, then spoken grammar. Also the work of Namtapi (2022), in particular, they involve the speaking and listening skills, which are at the core of the hospitality and tourism industry. The emphasis on these skills suggests that tour guides prioritize clear and engaging communication with their diverse clientele, emphasizing the practical application of language in their daily roles.

Furthermore, the study unveiled challenges faced by tour guides, with the notable issue being the diversity of accents encountered from tourists of different nationalities. This finding resonates with research by Bobanovic (2011), in understanding English the biggest obstacle for students and employees are ‘slang’, abbreviations, idiomatic phrases and the accents of people. The challenges posed by varying accents point to the need for adaptability and heightened intercultural competence within the profession.

As the research explored the relationship between formal English education and its application in tour guiding, an interesting revelation surfaced—English learned at school and English as a tour guide were found to be relatively similar and adaptable to various situations. Formal English education also beneficial for students to pursue careers in tourism industries. This finding aligns with the work of Rahman (2023), one of the key benefits of learning English for Hotel & Tourism is that it can provide students with the language skills necessary to pursue careers in the hospitality and tourism industries, which are both growing sectors in the global economy. The adaptability of English skills learned in an educational setting to the dynamic situations encountered by tour guides reinforces the practicality of their linguistic training.

Lastly, participants expressed a collective desire for more advanced or higher-level language training. This resonates with studies by Purwanto (2023), to succeed in any industry, companies must constantly innovate and evolve to stay on the cutting edge and that entails helping their employees continuously develop professionally. The tour guides' aspiration for elevated language proficiency underscores the industry's recognition of the evolving linguistic needs and the importance of ongoing training to enhance communication with an increasingly diverse global clientele. This finding aligns with the work of Burhanuddin & Ratnawati (2021), through training exercise, participants have acquired the necessary lexicon to effectively engage in spoken or written communication in English pertaining to the cultivation of one's potential.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher comes to the conclusion of the research. Based on the research finding and the discussion, the researcher we found research that when we observed the location of the incident, several tour guides there had different knowledge and expertise. This knowledge can be seen from the perspective of age or seniority. The longer he worked at Mangkunegaraan Palace, the more skilled he became at his work. For example, in terms of language skills, senior tour guides are more expert in many languages, not only English, but also Spanish, French, etc. The more skilled they are in various languages, the more flying hours they will have.

So, with the existing differences in knowledge, it is necessary for tour guides to seek additional foreign language tutoring outside of work time to increase their knowledge. If there are several tour guides who still want to learn and learn more about English, then we as observers will hold special English classes for the tour guides, so that their English skills will become better and their confidence will also increase. Some tour guides also have different backgrounds. There are some of them whose last education was taking an English study program and had the status of college graduates. And there are many who graduated from tourism vocational schools who only focus on how to become a tour guide.

So, there are not many English language skills among those who are pure English graduates. Therefore, we plan to hold free English classes for tour guides. There, the majority of tour guides do not require high education. But those who understand tourism and understand basic English and have the courage. So that's what can make them accepted to work as tour guides. Their working hours are also not too strict. This means that they work according to how people work in general. Because remembering that the Mangkunegaraan Palace is a historical place and holds many things from the struggle era. So visiting time is only limited to the afternoon. Tour guides also receive adequate salaries and are paid according to the age limit in the city of Solo.

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