


The Importance of English in Tourism Industry: *Pariwisata* Majority Vocational High School Students' Perception

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A B S T R A C T

English proficiency is widely recognized as essential for careers in the tourism industry, limited studies have specifically explored how vocational high school tourism students perceive the importance of English in relation to their future professional needs. This gap is particularly evident in vocational education contexts, where classroom instruction does not always align with workplace communication demands. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry and factors influencing these perceptions. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through open ended questionnaires and semi interviews with twelfth grade students of the Tourism Department at SMK Airlangga. The data were analyzed through organizing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting emerging themes. The findings indicate that students generally perceive English as an essential skill for communicating with foreign tourists and supporting future employment in tourism related fields. Internal factors such as motivation and self confidence, along with external factors including school learning activities, contribute to shaping students' perceptions. The study concludes that contextual and application-based English instruction is necessary to align vocational education with tourism workplace requirements.

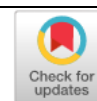
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INTRODUCTION

English for Tourism (EFT) is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that focuses on developing communicative competence required in tourism related professional contexts, such as hospitality services, tour guiding, and interaction with international tourists. Donesch-Jezo (2012) explains that ESP is designed to meet learners' specific occupational needs, emphasizing relevance between language instruction and workplace demands. In this context, English for Tourism equips learners with practical language skills that support real communication in tourism settings, making it an essential component for those preparing to work in the global tourism industry.

The tourism industry relies heavily on effective communication between service providers and tourists from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. English functions as an international lingua franca that enables tourism workers to provide information, offer services, and ensure guest satisfaction. Prachanant (2012) highlights that speaking and listening skills are the most frequently used English competencies in tourism workplaces, particularly for giving directions, explaining attractions, and responding to tourists' needs. Therefore, proficiency in English is a crucial requirement for maintaining service quality and competitiveness in the tourism sector.

English for Tourism not only emphasizes general language proficiency but also focuses on functional and pragmatic language use tailored to tourism contexts. Wardana and Farmasari (2021) argue that EFT is specifically designed to support tourism workers in explaining cultural and historical attractions, interacting politely with guests, and representing local destinations professionally. Similarly, Nashir et al. (2022) state that English

competence enhances communication effectiveness, guest comfort, and the overall sustainability of tourism businesses. These perspectives confirm that EFT plays a strategic role in preparing learners for real professional communication in tourism environments. Fikri et al. (2025) demonstrates that positively influence students' engagement and perceptions in vocabulary learning, indicating that learner centered instructional innovation plays a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward English learning. Given these insights, there remains a need to specifically explore vocational students' perceptions of the importance of English in tourism contexts, especially in vocational high school environments.

Vocational high schools are educational institutions that aim to prepare students with practical skills aligned with workforce requirements. In line with this objective, Romanova (2022) explains that vocational education emphasizes the development of employability and job-oriented competencies that correspond to industry demands, enabling students to function effectively in real workplace settings. Within tourism programs, this orientation requires vocational students to acquire English proficiency that supports direct interaction with foreign tourists in professional contexts. Furthermore, Rahman (2018) highlights that vocational education plays a crucial role in enhancing students' career readiness by fostering adaptability, professional attitudes, and work-related competencies essential for successful entry into the labor market. In addition, vocational education emphasizes contextual and application based learning, where classroom instruction is designed to reflect real workplace situations and professional demands. Dane and Paragae (2024) explain that vocational learning should integrate practical activities and real world applications to prepare students effectively for their future careers.

Despite the importance of English for tourism careers, vocational high school students often face challenges in mastering the language. These challenges may arise from internal factors such as motivation, interest, and self-confidence, as well as external factors including teaching strategies, learning environments, and school facilities. Arifin et al. (2025) note that vocational students' readiness for tourism related employment is influenced by both personal and institutional support systems. Limited opportunities for communicative practice may reduce students' confidence and hinder their ability to use English effectively in real tourism settings.

Students' perceptions play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of English language learning, as they shape learners' motivation, engagement, and overall learning experiences. Scholars in second language acquisition emphasize that learners who hold positive perceptions toward language learning tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and active participation, which contribute to better learning outcomes. In the context of English for Tourism, positive student perceptions encourage learners to engage more confidently in communicative activities and to use English actively in professional and workplace related situations, such as interacting with foreign tourists. This view is supported by Gardner (2001), who explains that learners' attitudes and motivational orientations significantly influence their involvement and success in second language learning. Furthermore, Hasrul et al. (2021) found that students' perceptions of English for Tourism are closely related to curriculum relevance, teaching methods, and the authenticity of learning materials, indicating that meaningful and industry-oriented instruction strengthens students' positive perceptions and supports effective language learning.

Both internal and external factors contribute to shaping students' perceptions of English learning. Internal factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and learning interest influence how students engage with language instruction, while external factors such as classroom activities, teacher support, and learning facilities affect students' learning experiences. Qiao (2024) explains that second language learning is influenced by psychological and contextual factors that interact dynamically, affecting learners' responses to language input. Understanding these factors is particularly important in vocational tourism education, where practical language use is emphasized.

Several previous studies have reinforced the relevance of English in tourism. Chan et al, (2022) highlight that cultural influences and the university environment play an important

role in improving English proficiency through academic support and extracurricular activities, while individual English language skills have also been shown to affect academic performance, communication effectiveness, and the quality of social interactions. The study revealed that effective use of English improved communication with tourists and increased customer satisfaction, ultimately contributing to the growth of the tourism industry. Similarly, international research by Ryan and Deci (2000) using Self Determination Theory highlighted that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations strongly shape learners' perceptions and performance in language learning. Rahimi et al, (2022) further explained the Motivational Self System, which underlines how students' self confidence and their vision of themselves as competent language users influence their engagement in English learning.

Despite the growing body of research on English in tourism, a clear research gap remains. Most previous studies have focused on university students or professional tourism practitioners, while limited attention has been given to vocational high school students, particularly those enrolled in tourism programs who are preparing to enter the tourism industry. Furthermore, few studies have examined students' perceptions by considering both internal factors such as motivation and self-confidence and external factors such as learning activities and school facilities within vocational education contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate vocational high school students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry and to identify the internal and external factors that influence those perceptions. The study is guided by the following research questions namely, (1) How do vocational high school students perceive the importance of English for communication in the tourism industry? and (2) What internal and external factors influence their perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism sector?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach to explore vocational high school students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain an in depth understanding of participants' views, experiences, and interpretations related to a particular phenomenon. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on exploring and interpreting the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or educational issues through the analysis of textual data in natural settings. In line with this perspective, this study aimed to capture students' perceptions of English as a crucial skill for supporting their readiness to enter tourism related professions.

Respondents

The respondents of this study were 22 twelfth grade students from the Tourism Department at SMK Airlangga Sidoarjo. The respondents were selected because they are vocational students who are directly prepared to enter the tourism industry, where English plays a significant role as a medium of international communication. Their learning experiences provided relevant insights into how vocational high school students perceive the importance of English for future careers in the tourism sector.

Instruments

The research instruments used in this study consisted of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire comprised 10 statements, which were designed to explore students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry as well as the internal and external factors influencing those perceptions. All questionnaire items were presented in the form of statements to which students responded based on their level of agreement. The questionnaire was followed by semi-structured interview questions placed directly below the questionnaire items. The interview questions were intended to clarify students' responses to the questionnaire and to obtain deeper explanations regarding their perceptions and learning experiences related to English for Tourism.

The questionnaire items were developed based on relevant theories and previous studies concerning students' perceptions of English for Tourism, motivation, and learning

factors. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and interview questions were reviewed and validated through expert judgment by the research supervisors, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the instruments for vocational high school students in the tourism department. This validation process helped ensure that the instruments were appropriate for exploring students' perceptions in a vocational tourism context.

Procedures

The data collection procedures were conducted in several stages. First, the researcher obtained permission from the school and explained the purpose and procedures of the study to the respondents. After obtaining consent, the questionnaire was distributed to twelfth grade students of the Tourism Department during regular school hours. The students were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire and respond to the semi-interview questions independently based on their level of agreement with each statement. All data collection activities were carried out in a natural school setting to ensure that the respondents felt comfortable and were able to provide authentic responses based on their experiences. After all data had been collected, the researcher conducted an initial review of the responses to ensure their completeness and clarity.

Data Analysis

The analysis began with organizing and preparing the data obtained from the questionnaires and semi-interviews. The researcher then read the entire data set to gain a general understanding of students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry. In the next stage, the data were coded by identifying significant statements and grouping similar responses into categories related to students' perceptions and influencing factors. These categories were further developed into broader themes representing the main findings of the study. Finally, the themes were interpreted by relating the findings to relevant theories and previous studies to explain patterns within the data and draw conclusions regarding vocational high school students' perceptions of the importance of English for tourism careers.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of the research data, the researchers applied several trustworthiness strategies. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of methods, namely by comparing and confirming the data obtained from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Data from both instruments were used complementarily to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions. In addition, the researcher's direct involvement in the data collection process allowed for a more contextual understanding of the students' answers. Dependability was maintained by describing the research procedures systematically and consistently so that the research process could be clearly traced. Confirmability is ensured by presenting research findings based on data obtained from respondents, not based on the researcher's assumptions. With the application of these strategies, the validity and reliability of the qualitative data in this study can be accounted for.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study focusing on students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry. The data were obtained from a mixed closed and open ended questionnaire distributed to 22 twelfth grade students of the Tourism Department at SMK Airlangga Sidoarjo. The findings are described qualitatively to capture general tendencies, supported by diagrams and students' responses, in line with a qualitative descriptive research approach.

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Students' Perception of the Importance of English in the Tourism Industry

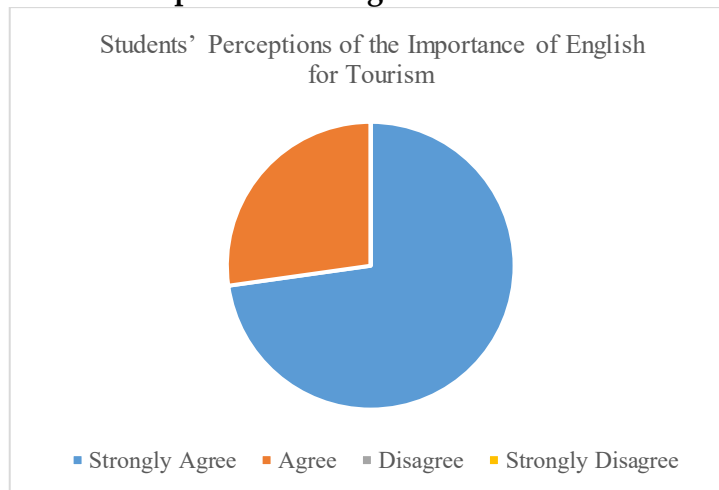


Figure 1. Student Perceptions of the Importance of English for Tourism

Overall, the findings indicate that vocational high school students hold highly positive perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry. English is perceived not merely as an academic subject but as a crucial professional competence required for success in tourism related careers. This perception reflects students' awareness of the increasing demands of a globalized tourism workforce, in which English functions as a primary tool for communication, service delivery, and professional interaction with international tourists.

The findings further reveal that twelfth grade students of the Tourism Department at SMK Airlangga Sidoarjo strongly recognize the importance of English for their future careers. Most students expressed strong agreement that English plays a vital role in the tourism industry, particularly in facilitating communication with foreign tourists. This finding suggests that students clearly understand English as a practical workplace skill rather than solely as a school subject. This result aligns with Prachanant (2012), who emphasizes that speaking and listening skills are the most essential communicative competencies in tourism settings. The high level of agreement found in this study indicates that students are aware of workplace expectations and the communicative demands they are likely to face in real tourism environments.

The semi-interview data further strengthen these findings. Students explained that English enables them to interact more effectively with international tourists and enhances their readiness to perform tourism related roles such as tour guides and tour leaders. They also reported that English proficiency helps them deliver information more clearly, provide better services, and avoid misunderstandings when dealing with foreign visitors. These perceptions are consistent with the views of Wardana and Farmasari (2021), who argue that English for Tourism equips learners with the ability to explain destinations, provide professional services, and represent local culture in global interactions.

This positive perception is further supported by students' direct statements from the semi-structured interviews. One student stated, "English is very important for a career in tourism because we will meet foreign tourists and need English to communicate clearly." Another student explained, "If we can speak English well, we can guide foreign tourists and give better service." These responses indicate that students clearly associate English proficiency with professional performance and service quality in tourism-related occupations.

These findings demonstrate that students' positive perceptions of English are closely linked to their awareness of future workplace demands. When learners recognize the practical relevance of English to their professional goals, they tend to develop a more purposeful and meaningful approach to language learning. In this context, English is no longer perceived as a theoretical subject but as a functional tool required for professional performance in tourism settings. Such perceptions contribute to stronger motivation, more active engagement in learning, and greater readiness to apply English skills in real tourism contexts. Therefore, English instruction in vocational schools, particularly in tourism programs, should emphasize

contextual and communicative learning activities that simulate real world tourism situations. This approach can help students connect classroom learning with actual industry demands and better prepare them for future employment.

Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions of the Importance of English

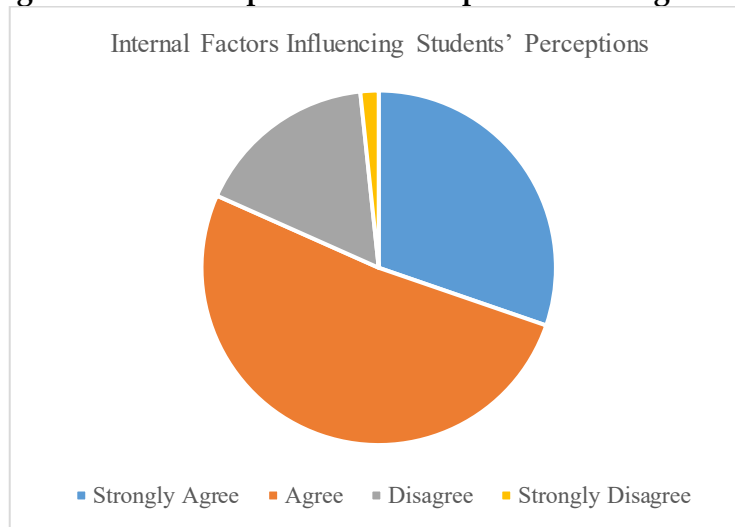


Figure 2. Internal Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions

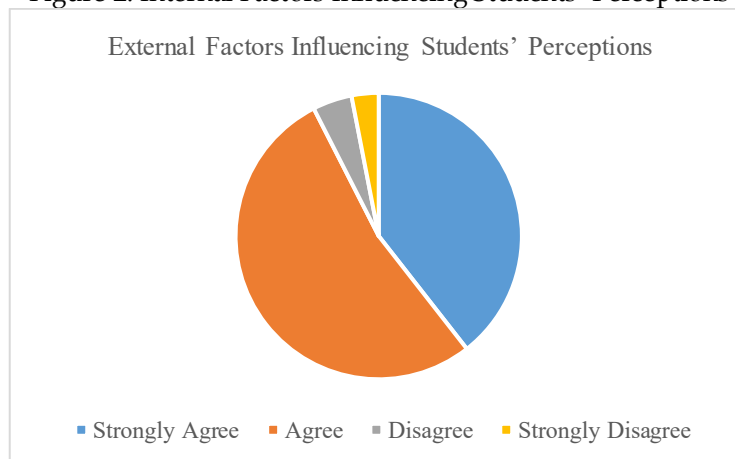


Figure 3. External Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions

The findings reveal that students' perceptions of the importance of English are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including motivation, learning interest, self-confidence, learning activities, and school facilities. These factors are presented descriptively through diagrams to illustrate general response tendencies rather than numerical comparisons.

Based on internal aspects, motivation appears to be the most dominant factor. Most students expressed agreement that they are motivated to learn English because it is relevant to their future careers in the tourism industry. This tendency indicates that students are able to associate English learning with professional needs and workplace expectations. However, the diagram also shows more varied responses regarding self-confidence. While many students feel confident using English, a noticeable number expressed uncertainty, suggesting that confidence remains a challenge for some learners.

Students' motivation is strongly reflected in interview responses. One participant stated, *"My desire to work in the tourism sector motivates me to learn English because English is very necessary for communicating with foreign tourists."* However, self-confidence remains a challenge for some students. A student admitted, *"When speaking in English, I still lack confidence because I am afraid my pronunciation is wrong."* This finding confirms that although students are highly motivated, psychological barriers may hinder their active use of English.

This finding is consistent with Qiao (2024), who emphasizes that psychological factors, particularly self-confidence, play a crucial role in second language use. Students who experience anxiety or fear of making mistakes may hesitate to use English actively, even when

they recognize its importance. Furthermore, students who perceive English as difficult or intimidating tend to show lower learning interest, which can reduce their engagement in classroom activities.

The external aspects indicate that most students perceive school learning activities as helpful in understanding how English is used in tourism related workplaces. This suggests that classroom instruction has begun to reflect vocational needs and real-world applications. Such findings align with the principle of vocational education, which emphasizes contextual and application-based learning to prepare students for professional environments (Dane & Paragae, 2024).

Nevertheless, the diagram also reveals that some students feel learning activities remain too theoretical and provide limited opportunities for authentic communication practice. This condition supports Afzali and Rezapoorian (2014) argument that English for Tourism instruction often lacks pragmatic and expressive elements necessary for real interaction. In addition, responses related to school facilities show that although many students feel supported by available media, others perceive limitations due to incomplete facilities or infrequent use of language learning resources, which restrict opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills.

Regarding external factors, students reported mixed experiences. One student mentioned, *"The school lessons help me practice English, especially when giving presentations in English."* However, another student expressed concern, stating, *"Sometimes the lessons focus too much on grammar and not enough on real conversations."* In terms of facilities, a student noted, *"Because there is no language lab at my school, it is hard to practice speaking and listening."* These responses indicate that while instructional support exists, limitations in facilities and authentic practice opportunities still affect students' learning experiences.

Overall, students' perceptions of the importance of English are shaped by the interaction between internal readiness and external learning support. High motivation and awareness alone are not sufficient if they are not accompanied by confidence building activities and adequate learning resources. Therefore, English instruction in vocational schools should integrate supportive learning environments, contextual teaching strategies, and optimized use of facilities to strengthen students' perceptions and readiness to use English confidently in tourism related careers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate vocational high school students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry and to identify the internal and external factors influencing those perceptions. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students of the Tourism Department hold highly positive perceptions of English as an essential competence for tourism related careers. The findings indicate that most students perceive English not merely as an academic subject, but as a professional skill required for effective communication with foreign tourists and for supporting success in the tourism industry. This perception reflects students' awareness of global workforce demands and the communicative needs of the tourism sector. Furthermore, the study reveals that students' perceptions of the importance of English are shaped by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include motivation, learning interest, and self-confidence, while external factors involve learning activities, teaching strategies, and school facilities. Motivation emerged as the most influential factor, whereas self confidence remains a challenge for some students in using English actively. These findings highlight that positive perceptions of English are influenced not only by students' individual awareness, but also by a supportive learning environment. Therefore, English instruction in vocational high schools, particularly in tourism programs, should emphasize contextual and communicative learning approaches and provide authentic practice opportunities to strengthen students' confidence and professional readiness. Overall, this study concludes that English proficiency is perceived as a strategic competence by vocational high school students preparing for tourism related careers. Positive perceptions toward

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English contribute to students' employability, professional communication skills, and confidence in performing tourism related tasks. Future research is recommended to involve broader participant groups and to explore the implementation of English for Tourism instruction more deeply in order to obtain more comprehensive findings. Based on the findings, this study provides important pedagogical implications for English teachers in vocational high schools, particularly in tourism programs. Teachers are encouraged to implement contextual and communicative teaching approaches that reflect real tourism workplace situations, such as role plays, simulations, and task-based activities involving tourist interactions. Such practices can help students build confidence, improve speaking skills, and apply English meaningfully in professional contexts. Additionally, teachers should provide supportive feedback to reduce students' anxiety and encourage active participation in English communication. Several limitations that provide directions for future research. Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups from different vocational schools or tourism programs to enhance the generalizability of findings. Further research may also explore the implementation of specific English for Tourism teaching strategies or instructional models and examine their impact on students' communicative competence and confidence. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to investigate how students' perceptions of English develop over time as they transition from school to the tourism workplace.

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