

Needs Analysis of English Language Use in Tourism Industry in Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency is required in all professional areas, but it has become essential in the tourist industry because of its specific characteristics. Needs analysis plays a vital role in developing the curriculum in English for specific purposes. This study identifies the needs and the problems of English language usage among the tourism industry employees in Selangor, Malaysia. The questionnaire was used as the primary data focusing on speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Utilising a descriptive research design, a total of 50 respondents were randomly selected for the study. The findings showed that in general, the respondents' overall needs of English language skills were rated at a high level. Meanwhile, regarding the employees' problems in using English at work were found at a moderate level. The problems encountered were less high compared to their English language needs. The necessities resonated with what English skills are essentials for them to use in their job and to know the elements of each skill to be improved when they learn English. The implication of the findings will be helpful to develop and expand existing English for Tourism curriculum or ESP courses, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, to create a more effective English for tourism course based on the needs of the tourism industry employees in the future.

Keywords: Need Analysis, English for Specific Purpose, Tourism Industry

1.0 INTRODUCTION

English language plays a vital role in the global community as the primary means of communication in general and specific contexts. It is why English language teachers are expected to teach general English and English that is relevant to their interests and needs (Arias-Contreras & Moore, 2022). Nowadays, English is essential for the tourism industry to engage with tourists, negotiate with them, and complete any transactions. According to Badri, Dizaji, and Zeynali (2014), the tourism industry can provide foreign currency to host countries, create jobs in the service and manufacturing sectors, and help governments raise revenue through hotel and other types of taxes, tourist taxes, airport exit taxes, income taxes, and import customs duties. This is because the tourist industry is responsible for the most prominent global movement of people and is one of the world's most extensive economic activities (Thurlow, Adam & Urry, 2002).

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As for Malaysia, after the Movement Control Order has been restricted, people can now cross the state border, Malaysia's tourist industry is rapidly growing in importance as a source of revenue in recovering our country's economy due to the pandemic.

When it comes to tourism, the front-line staff, from border officers to hotel maids, can make guests feel like they have made the perfect vacation choice. As the tourism industry focuses on service, the human factor is essential. For example, hotels and resorts can only attain maximum attraction by combining the efforts of hotel staff and physical infrastructure.

Language plays an integral part in this profession. Most of the time, only individuals with a good knowledge of the English language are given preference for their career in tourism workplaces (Chumphong & Chuai-in, 2020). Language proficiency is emphasised in the industry as language serves as a channel for creating relationships and establishing communication. When used correctly, language can create a very positive image. As a result, employees in the tourism industry, particularly those on the front lines, must have a standard of language ability, especially in English, to communicate effectively and globally. In the hospitality industry, they need to communicate effectively with guests because English language skill is considered a growing worldwide need (Blue & Harun, 2003). Thus, the present study attempts to explore the needs of English language use in the tourism industry.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purpose or ESP is designed for students who want to learn English for a specific purpose, such as understanding aircraft maintenance manuals and then using it to accomplish another goal in performing a specific task or activity. Munby (1978) describes ESP courses as those in which the syllabus and materials are developed by a prior understanding of the learner's communication needs. Brunton (2009) traces the roots of the term English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to the 1960s, when it became clear that standard English courses were frequently unable to satisfy the needs of students and employers. Earlier studies attempted to describe the norms of English usage or its grammar, but now the focus is on how English is used in real-life situations. The spoken and written language differed depending on the situation in which they were utilised. The language used for different reasons differed significantly, for example, the English used in law and medicine. This demanded the establishment of various courses for various groups of students. According to the new theory, learners performed better in a learner-centred environment, including information tailored to their abilities, experience, schemata, and learning techniques and contexts.

Needs analysis has long been a crucial aspect of English for Specific purposes (ESP) practitioners such as researchers, course designers, material creators, testers, evaluators, and classroom teachers, according to Wannapok (2004). As a data collecting approach needs analysis can be defined as techniques for acquiring information about learners' needs, according to Richards (2001). According to Nunan (1988), needs analysis is a set of methodologies and procedures for obtaining data to construct a course. According to Robinson (1991), the term needs analysis is impacted by the analysts' ideological preconceptions, implying that needs are not objective. Widowson (1981) claimed that this form of need might be defined as a goal-oriented definition that refers to the learners' study or career requirements or what they must demonstrate at the end of their language course.

Meanwhile, Piyanapa (2004) defines it as “needs from various perspectives”, focusing on learners’ requirements at the end of a language course. In addition, MacKay (1978) distinguishes between two categories of needs. The first is for academic purposes, where English is essential for further study. Medical students, for example, need English to comprehend lectures and read medical textbooks in English. The latter refers to job requirements requiring English to accomplish a specific task, such as technicians needing English to work on a project in which English is used.

Language is a set of spoken or written symbols that can express thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Draft & Wiginto, 1979). Understanding the significance of language in the tourism industry can help organisations enhance coordination skills (Karsten, 2007; Chen, Geluykens & Choi, 2006), customer satisfaction, and good management (Dickson & Huyton, 2008). People cannot understand what others want if they cannot communicate with them on their terms, according to Domke-Damonte (2001). It suggests that the English language piques people’s curiosity and enormously impacts tourism’s competition. Language is a source that covers almost every area of human life, including everyday routine. Ignoring the importance of language may result in resource loss or tourism development limits owing to a lack of communication and knowledge sharing (Lauring, 2007). Language abilities are required in various professions, according to Block (2005), including sales and marketing management and general management. Listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, pronunciation, tourism vocabulary, grammar, and expression are all part of the language skills and aspects. Each English language skill function is based on English content for tourism courses’ curriculums (Walker, 1996). Vocabulary in tourism skills, for example, includes language functions linked to the tourism industry, tourism news, transportation such as air, rail, and bus travel, hotels, culture, festivals, holidays, ceremonies, meals and giving directions.

Several studies dealing with the importance and challenges of English communication in the tourism area have been widely conducted. Hassan & Tik (2019) found that understanding tourists’ foreign accents and the use of correct English grammar seems the biggest challenge for the employees apart from the communication difficulties. Hence, the respondents agreed that the English language was considered very pivotal in the communication with foreigners, particularly in the context of responding to the tourists’ enquiry about tourism information and other needs. In addition, from the tourists context who visit some attractions in Malaysia, tend to communicate both with native and English (multilingualism) with the employees (Pek, Mee, Nadarajan, Mohamad, & Alias, 2019). Another study whose respondents were students in the tourism and hospitality industry in Thailand also revealed that they had positive attitudes in responding to the question asking for the urgency of the English language in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Furthermore, they also confirmed that listening and speaking were considered the most significant problems in tourism and hospitality industry practices (Lertchalermtipakoon, Wongsunbun, & Kawinkoonlasate, 2021). This finding is supported by the research conducted in the Czech Republic that strongly recommends mastering listening and speaking for people working on tourism since they need to communicate with tourism (Kacetyl, 2018). The ability to speak with foreigners will impact the tourists’ satisfaction during their stay in a particular tourist place (Erazo, Ramírez, Encalada, Holguin, & Zou, 2019). To add the information on employees’ problems in English, a study in Indonesia reported that people working in the tourism industry rated their English as a moderate level where they need to use English to understand the foreigners. They also believed that the fundamental skill of English was essential to learn (Anam & Rachmadian, 2020).

In addition, other studies identified several essential dimensions of language in tourism such as a study about the importance of language in tourist organisational management (Thitthongkam & Walsh, 2010). It

includes improving and maintaining customer happiness, motivating international tourists, understanding demand and culture better, and establishing effective internal and external communication. English is undoubtedly the language of any industry in a global setting, but it is also the language of meeting needs, providing excellent service, understanding people, pleasing them, and solving problems (Harding, 2011). As a result, the English language plays a critical role in tourism growth as a negotiated power source between staff and tourists. Due to the urgency of English in tourism industry as reported through the finding of the previous studies, it is an essential effort to conduct a study on more specific and detailed aspects of the urgency by analysing and determining the needs of English language use among tourism employees. Furthermore, the present study also tries to investigate the problems they encounter when using English at the workplace.

3.0 METHOD

The study utilised a survey design to investigate the needs of English language use among tourism employees at the workplace and the problems that tourism employees encounter when using the English language at their workplace. By investigating a population sample, survey design gives a quantitative description of trends, behaviours, and views in that group or tests for connections among variables in that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A total of 50 respondents working in the tourism industry in the Selangor area of this study were randomly selected. They are front office receptionists, guest service assistants, tour operators, ticket agents, housekeepers, government tourism officers, human hotel resource, aviators, tourism & hospitality lecturers who own their own tourism companies and works as a tourist guide on the weekend, hotel kitchen crews, food and beverage crews, flight attendants, tourism interns.

The data was collected using a questionnaire as the primary source of the instrument. The questionnaire was adapted from Trang (2015) with some modifications made to the questionnaire from the original one by including some English language skills components in the items linked to the research topic and changing a few items for the demographic profile. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C. Section A questions about the respondents' demographics, such as their gender, age, educational backgrounds, MUET bands, as well as the English language skills they utilise the most and the language abilities and elements with which they have the most significant difficulty. The respondents' perspectives on the needs of the English language at their workplace in the tourism industry were explored in section B. In contrast, Section C focuses on the respondents' perceptions of their difficulties when using English at work.

The questionnaires were distributed among tourism employees in the Selangor area for the data collection process. The respondents were contacted via WhatsApp and invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire. They filled in the answers according to their own opinions. An invitation was given to them, together with a description of the research and a link to the questionnaire.

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 after each questionnaire was checked for completion. The data from the questionnaire was analysed after the whole questionnaire had been completed. The descriptive statistic is the most appropriate in assessing the data because the research focuses on English language use among tourist employees at work and the problems that tourism employees face when using English at work. The questionnaire was coded and

tabulated according to the SPSS software items to generate the mean scores and standard deviations. This data type was subsequently interpreted based on its category as follows:

Scale	Mean range	Level
5	4.50-5.00	The highest need
4	3.50-4.49	High need
3	2.50-3.49	Moderate need
2	1.50-2.49	Low need
1	1.00-1.49	The lowest need (Prachanant, 2012)

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Demographic Information of the Respondents

A total of 50 respondents participated in this study. The distribution of the samples by gender represents male 28% (n=14) and 72% of females (n=36). Regarding the ages of the respondents, most of them were aged 20-25 (88%), while 3 of the respondents were aged 26-30 (6%), and 3 of them were aged over 30 years old (6%). Most of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree (64%), while nine were in diploma (18%), and 7 of them earned master's and PhD—degrees (14%). Only 2 of the respondents obtained SPM (4%). Furthermore, the findings also depicted 27 respondents (54%) with modest users of English. While those who were excellent and excellent users were 14 (28%) and 7 (14%). The rests were minimal users (2%) and limited (2%). The respondents felt that English language skills are significant for English language skills at their workplace. Most of them consider speaking (44%) and listening (36%) as the highest needs while reading and listening only (16%) and (4%). On the other hand, they mostly faced difficulties in speaking (46%) and listening (20%) as the most significant problems. Meanwhile, reading and writing were the minor problems for the respondents with (28) and (6%).

The English Skills Needs of the Respondents

This section unveiled the results of the first research question: what are the needs of English language use among tourism employees at the workplace? The data from the distinct sections were shown to describe the needs of the English language used for listening, speaking, reading, and writing among the employees.

Table 1 The English Listening Skills Needs by the Employees

			Descriptive Statistics		
			N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening to face-to-face conversations.			50	4.32	.84
Understanding what clients want.			50	4.20	.90
Listening to verbal instructions.			50	4.10	.78
Listening to telephone conversations.			50	4.00	.92

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Getting personal details of clients.	50	3.98	1.05
Listening to reservation details (flight reservations, hotel reservations, ticket reservations and so on).	50	3.92	1.10
Listening to spoken discourse on tourism topics.	50	3.86	.92
Listening to news related to tourism.	50	3.80	1.10
Total		4.02	0.95

Table 2 depicts that listening skills are among the most needed for most tourism employees in their workplace, with an overall mean score of 4.02 (SD=0.95). They rated the elements in listening skills to a great extent. For example, listening to a face-to-face conversation and understanding what clients want were the highest needs with mean scores of 4.32 (SD=0.84) and 4.20 (SD=0.90). Meanwhile, high listening skills needed were also obtained from listening to a spoken discourse on tourism topics with a mean score of 3.86(SD=.92) and listening to news related to tourism with a mean score of 3.80(SD=1.10).

Table 2 the English-Speaking Skills Needs by the Employees

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inquiring clients' needs and decisions	50	3.98	.86
Negotiating for mutual understanding	50	3.94	1.01
Asking for information from clients	50	3.92	.98
Explaining pricing	50	3.90	.97
Suggesting travel information (eg; information about tourist	50	3.86	1.06
Giving clients directions	50	3.84	1.11
Giving details about transportation	50	3.78	1.07
Taking reservations	50	3.76	1.11
Providing information about travel plans (eg; itineraries, tour programmes)	50	3.74	1.19
Conducting telephone conversations with clients	50	3.70	1.18
Total	50	3.84	1.05

According to the table above, in speaking skills, the respondents also showed that speaking skills are vital in their job and are in high need, with an overall mean score is 3.84 (SD=1.05). The most crucial elements were inquiring about clients' needs and decisions and negotiating for mutual understanding, with

the mean scores of each element being 3.98(SD=.86) and 3.94(SD=1.01). They were followed by asking for information from clients and explaining pricing with mean scores of 3.92(SD=.98) and 3.90(SD=.97). On the other hand, the fewer elements needed by the employees were conducting telephone conversations with clients with a mean score of 3.70(SD=1.18).

Table 3 The English Reading Skills Needs by the Employees

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading information from the Internet, E-mails	50	3.98	.86
Reading written documents related to the tourism industry	50	3.76	.98
Getting detailed information of tourist documents	50	3.72	1.10
Reading news related to tourism	50	3.70	1.01
Reading articles from travel magazines	50	3.68	1.11
Reading brochures or tourist leaflets	50	3.64	1.13
Reading business letters	50	3.32	1.28
Reading faxes	50	2.92	1.36
Total	50	3.59	1.10

Based on the table above, reading skills are also crucial for the respondents after listening and speaking skills at high levels, with an overall mean score is 3.59 (SD=1.10). They mostly just read about the information from the internet and e-mails and read about written documents regarding the tourism information with a mean score of each item were 3.98 (SD=.96) and 3.76 (SD=.98). Besides, a moderate level of English required components was obtained from reading business letters and faxes with mean scores of 3.32(SD=1.28) and 2.92 (SD=1.36).

Table 4 The Needs of English Writing Skills by the Employee

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Writing e-mails	50	3.72	1.21
Writing texts for giving information	50	3.68	1.11
Writing travel plans	50	3.62	1.24
Taking telephone message	50	3.60	1.27
Writing advertisements	50	3.54	1.28
Producing tourist leaflets or brochures	50	3.48	1.16
Writing travel timetables	50	3.46	1.29
Producing faxes or letters in a proper format	50	3.24	1.37
Total	50	3.54	1.22

Table 4 above shows that writing skills are still necessary for tourism employees, with an overall mean score of 3.54 ($SD=1.22$). The most needed elements were shown by writing e-mails with a mean score of 3.72($SD=1.21$). Likewise, other components such as writing texts for giving information ($M=3.68$), writing travel plans ($M=3.62$), taking telephone messages ($M=3.60$), and producing tourist leaflets ($M=3.48$) were also needed by the respondents.

The Problems Faced by the Employees in communicating with the Foreigners

This section details out the second research question: What problems do tourism employees encounter when using English at the workplace. This part further compared the issues faced by the respondents in a different chart for the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Table 5 The Problems Faced by the Employees in Listening Skills When Listening to the Clients

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening to telephone conversations.	50	3.06	1.18
Understanding what clients want.	50	3.02	1.20
Listening to spoken discourse on tourism topics.	50	2.88	1.04
Listening to verbal instructions.	50	2.88	1.00
Listening to reservation details (flight reservations, hotel reservations, ticket reservations and so on).	50	2.88	1.22
Getting personal details of clients.	50	2.86	1.10
Listening to face-to-face conversations.	50	2.82	1.08
Listening to news related to tourism.	50	2.80	1.12
Total	50	2.90	1.11

As shown in Table 5, the data indicated that many of the respondents still encountered moderate problems in listening skills with an overall mean score is 2.90 ($SD=1.11$) in which most of the elements in using them are also at a moderate level—for example, listening to telephone conversations ($M=3.06$), and understanding what clients want ($M=302$). However, the tourism employees faced slight difficulties in listening to a spoken discourse on tourism topics ($M=2.88$), listening to verbal instruction ($M=2.88$), listening to a face-to-face conversation ($M=2.82$) and listening to news related to tourism ($M=2.80$).

Table 6 The Problems of English-Speaking Skills Faced by the Employees when Communicating with the Clients

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Giving clients directions	50	3.06	1.18
Negotiating for mutual understanding	50	3.06	1.11
Inquiring clients' needs and decisions	50	3.00	1.19
Conducting telephone conversations with clients	50	2.88	1.08
Giving details about transportation	50	2.88	1.04
Suggesting travel information (e.g., information about tourist	50	2.86	1.03
Asking for information from clients	50	2.86	1.24
Explaining pricing	50	2.84	1.13
Taking reservations	50	2.82	1.17
Providing information about travel plans (eg; itineraries, tour programmes)	50	2.72	1.06
Total	50	2.89	1.12

According to the table above, it is denoted that most of the employees encountered medium difficulties when speaking with their clients, with an overall mean score is 2.98 (SD=1.12). They found more problems when giving directions to the foreigners (M=3.06), negotiating for mutual understanding (M=3.06), inquiring about their client's necessities (M=3.00), conducting a telephone conversation (M=2.88), and giving details about transportation (2.88). In contrast, they did find many hindrances when explaining prices (M=2.84), taking reservations (M=2.82), as well as giving information about travel plans (M=2.72).

Table 7 The Problems of English Reading Skills Faced by the Employees

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Getting detailed information of tourist documents	50	2.80	1.14
Reading written documents related to the tourism industry	50	2.76	1.15
Reading news related to tourism	50	2.64	1.13
Reading faxes	50	2.52	1.23
Reading information from the Internet, E-mails	50	2.52	1.12
Reading business letters	50	2.48	1.11

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading articles from travel magazines	50	2.40	1.17
Reading brochures or tourist leaflets	50	2.32	1.15
Total	50	2.55	1.15

The table above showed that the tourism employees had a moderate problem with their reading skills. It is shown by the overall mean score of 2.55 (SD=1.15). All elements of reading skills were thought to be small scores which the highest scores were obtained from getting detailed information of tourists document (M=2.80), reading documents related to tourism (M=2.76), and reading news, faxes, and e-mail related to tourism with the mean scores of (M=2.64), (M=2.52) and (M=2.52). The lowest problems were obtained from reading articles and brochures with mean scores of (M=2.40) and (M=2.32).

Table 8 The Problems of English Writing Skills Faced by the Employees

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Writing advertisements	50	2.68	1.11
Writing texts for giving information	50	2.60	1.10
Producing tourist leaflets or brochures	50	2.60	1.10
Writing e-mails	50	2.58	1.21
Taking telephone message	50	2.58	1.16
Producing faxes or letters in a proper format	50	2.54	1.19
Writing travel plans	50	2.52	1.18
Writing travel timetables	50	2.46	1.0
Total	50	2.57	1.13

As shown in Table 8, in the aspect of writing skills, the tourism employees also found slight difficulties in writing, with an overall mean score is 2.57 (SD=1.13). The highest problems were derived from writing advertisements (M=2.68), writing texts for giving information (M=2.60), producing leaflets (M=2.60), and writing e-mails (M=2.58). At the same time, minor issues were writing travel plans and timetables with mean scores (M=2.52) and (M=2.46).

4.0 DISCUSSION

This study attempted to investigate the needs and problems of the English language use experienced by the tourism employees working in the tourism industry in Selangor, Malaysia. The study's findings

revealed that most of the tourism employees perceived that all four skills are needed and essential for listening and speaking skills, followed by reading and writing skills separately. The findings of this study also align with the previous studies, which found that the respondents need to develop their English skills for the four skills to a high extent (Prachanant, 2012; Trang, 2015; Suprina & Rahayu, 2017; Sermsook *et al.*, 2021).

Considering each skill, the study's findings denoted that most respondents intended to foster their listening and speaking skills, followed by reading and writing skills. This finding is also supported by previous studies (Suprina & Rahayu, 2017; Sermsook *et al.*, 2021; Lertchalermtipakoon *et al.*, 2021). It shows that English language skills are pivotal for tourism employees who use them daily. Since the travel and hospitality industry has become a significant economic contributor in Malaysia, they are intertwined with many other areas of the country's economy, both directly and indirectly (Abbas *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, Malaysia's tourist industry is the primary and most significant contributor to the country's GDP. The country's tourism industry saw a 4.8 per cent increase in foreign arrivals from January to May 2019, totalling 10,954,014 visitors and 10,454,447 in the preceding year (Hamid *et al.*, 2021). As a result, the tourism employees must utilise this opportunity by developing their English skills to interact with and guide the tourists' travellers when visiting their destinations or attending tourism events in Malaysia.

On the other hand, the findings also revealed that most of the respondents still encountered problems related to the four English skills, such as listening and speaking skills to the greatest extent, followed by reading and writing skills, respectively. These findings are also in line with the studies done by Aunruen (2005) and Prachanant (2012), in which they found out that tourism personnel had fewer difficulties in writing and using words than their counterparts outside of the tourism industry. They did not believe their reading abilities to be particularly problematic. Likewise, Sermsook *et al.* (2021), in the contexts of Thai and Suprina & Rahayu (2017) in the Indonesian setting, also indicated similar results where most of the respondents faced moderate difficulties in listening and speaking skills.

The tourism employees perceived that the elements in listening, such as listening to telephone conversations, understanding what clients want, listening to a spoken discourse on tourism topics, and listening to verbal instruction, were seen as the most complicated components when they listen to their clients. They were required to pay close attention to what foreign clients uttered, devoting considerable effort to comprehending the points expressed. Additionally, understanding face-to-face interactions, telephone chats, and what tourists desired were, to a degree, their difficulties. Regarding the speaking skills, they mainly faced significant problems in giving directions to the foreigners, negotiating for mutual understanding, inquiring about their client's necessities, conducting a telephone conversation, and giving details about transportation to a moderate degree.

Meanwhile, for the reading and writing skills, most of the respondents faced a minor problem with getting detailed information about tourists documents, reading documents related to tourism, and reading news, faxes, and e-mail related to tourism. Similarly, they found it slightly challenging to produce advertisements, write texts for giving information, produce leaflets, and write e-mails in writing skills. It was similar to Trang (2015), which investigated that writing commercials and marketing plans to sell their service and informational texts were also burdensome for the respondents. Due to these issues, employees frequently requested assistance from other businesses, which increased costs for the company.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The present study was carried out to determine the tourism employees' needs and problems with the English language use among them working in the tourism industry in Selangor, Malaysia. The results showed that the overall needs and problems of the respondents in English language skills are a too great extent. The problems encountered were less high compared to their English language needs. The necessities resonated about what English skills are essentials for them to use in their job and to know the elements of each skill to be improved when they learn English. Therefore, this study is hoped to provide insight for the tourism companies and management and provide inputs for the learners, teachers, and employees in the course planning. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be utilised as a guide for the course designers and instructors in developing the ESP syllabus to provide betterment of the students and employees throughout Malaysia to create more effective ESP courses. It might also be beneficial for future research, in the field of English for Specific Purpose especially English for Tourism, where taking the different setting of research such as in other ASEAN countries can be done one of the potential topics to study about.

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