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Identifying the English Language Skills Training Needed by Tourism Practitioners for Optimizing Tourism Development in Bolaang Mongondow Regency

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Abstract: This study aims to identify the English language skill needs of tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency to support regional tourism development. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method using a needs analysis approach, strengthened with a SWOT analysis. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations involving 50 tourism practitioners. The findings reveal that most practitioners possess limited English proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening. Demographic factors, most participants being over 50 years old and only educated up to senior high school, contribute to the low level of competence. The study further shows that the most essential skills are speaking for tourism services, listening for understanding international visitors' requests, and mastering tourism-specific vocabulary. Based on these results, a preliminary English training model was designed within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), emphasizing simulations, role-play, and contextual vocabulary enrichment. SWOT analysis was applied to ensure the training design not only addresses existing weaknesses but also leverages local strengths while opening opportunities for tourism development.

Keyword: English Language Skills, Tourism Practitioners, Needs Analysis, SWOT, ESP

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency among Indonesians is considered moderate compared to other ASEAN countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. This highlights the need for continuous efforts to improve English skills in order to strengthen the nation's competitiveness. Proficiency in English should not only be measured by the number of words a person knows but, more importantly, by the ability to construct sentences that are contextually appropriate. Such skills are crucial to ensure that the intended meaning of communication is delivered clearly and effectively (Matara, 2019). Among the sectors that most urgently require human resources with strong English abilities is the tourism sector. Tourism has become one of the strategic drivers of regional economic growth in Indonesia, contributing to increased local revenue, the creation of new jobs, and the acceleration of infrastructure development (*RENCANA STRATEGIS 2020-2024 KEMENPAREKRAF/BAPAREKRAF*, n.d.). This supports

the view that the tourism sector plays a vital role in boosting local income, which in turn improves the welfare of communities living near tourist sites and drives overall economic growth (Ndjurumbaha et al., 2024).

Bolaang Mongondow Regency has considerable tourism potential, offering diverse attractions that range from beaches, lakes, and hot springs to cultural, historical, religious, and culinary tourism (*SISTEM INFORMASI PARIWISATA DAN KEBUDAYAAN DI KABUPATEN BOLAANG MONGONDOW*, n.d.). Yet, this potential has not been fully realized or promoted effectively, largely due to limitations in human resource capacity, especially in terms of English language skills among local tourism actors. Foreign language proficiency, particularly in English as an international language, is essential because it plays a key role in tourism promotion, reservation services, customer service, and guiding (Dewi, 2023). Effective communication is therefore central to ensuring quality services. The quality of service is closely linked to how well employees are able to communicate, both with their colleagues and with guests (Maharani et al., 2024).

Table 1. Tourist Visit Data in Bolaang Mongondow Regency (2024)

Month	Domestic Tourists	International Tourists	Total Visitors
January	38,010	131	38,141
February	8,418	0	8,418
March	7,420	0	7,420
April	42,632	0	42,632
May	13,466	0	13,466
June	31,431	0	31,431
July	31,469	70	31,539
August	11,686	0	11,686
September	16,908	0	16,908
October	10,468	0	10,468
November	12,031	63	12,094
December	37,093	0	37,093
Total	260,941	264	261,205

The table reveals distinct patterns. Peaks in domestic tourist arrivals occurred in April (42,632 visitors) and December (37,093 visitors), likely connected to extended holidays and annual cultural events such as the Ritual Mandi Safar in Babo Village and year-end celebrations. In contrast, other months show fluctuating numbers, with significant declines in February (8,418 visitors) and March (7,420 visitors). The minimal contribution of international tourists underscores existing challenges in accessibility, global promotion, and the quality of tourism services that meet the expectations of foreign visitors. A critical factor behind this issue is the limited proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, among local tourism practitioners. English serves not only as a bridge for intercultural communication but also as a powerful tool for promoting local destinations on the global stage.

Therefore, enhancing the capacity of human resources through needs-based English language training is essential. Training programs that are both relevant and context-sensitive for local tourism actors are expected to improve service quality, strengthen promotional efforts, and ultimately increase the attractiveness of Bolaang Mongondow Regency to international tourists.

In this context, English language skills are a fundamental component of the tourism industry. Limited English proficiency reduces the quality of interaction with international visitors, as tour guides serve as cultural bridges between local communities and visitors from diverse backgrounds (Herienda et al., 2024). For this reason, English language training based on needs analysis offers a relevant approach to designing effective training programs. A needs

analysis can be understood as a systematic and comprehensive effort to examine existing challenges with the goal of accurately identifying their multiple dimensions (Nurhalim & Puspita, 2021). Training that is carefully designed around the real needs of industry practitioners is more likely to improve both competence and job performance (Kholidi et al., 2022). In addition, tailoring training content to local situations and contexts is necessary so that participants feel directly connected to the learning materials (Widiatmoko et al., 2024).

Related to the condition above, there are three research questions in this study:

1. What is the current level of English language proficiency among tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency?
2. What English language skills are most needed by tourism practitioners in the region?
3. What is the initial design of a relevant and contextual English language training program for local tourism practitioners?

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design supported by a needs analysis approach within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Language learning should be tailored to the learner's specific needs in their professional or academic context. Needs analysis is the cornerstone of ESP, helping researchers design relevant curricula. (Kharatova, 2021). To strengthen the analysis, a SWOT framework will also be employed to map the internal and external factors that influence the English proficiency development of tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) provides a strategic framework to evaluate internal and external factors affecting program design and implementation (Pravana et al., 2017).

The research will take place in Bolaang Mongondow Regency, involving tourism practitioners who directly interact with visitors, such as homestay and accommodation providers, cultural and culinary tourism actors, small-scale tourism entrepreneurs. Purposive sampling will be used to select approximately 50 participants. Semi structured interview is used to explore current English proficiency, challenges, and learning needs. Besides, observation and field note are also used to capture authentic communication practices in tourism encounters. In analysing the data, researcher used thematic analysis to extract recurring themes on proficiency levels and language needs.

FRESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Current English Proficiency of Tourism Practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow

Findings show that most tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency possess limited English proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening. While several practitioners are capable of handling very basic functions such as greetings and offering short responses, they face significant challenges when required to perform more complex communicative tasks. Explaining the details of tourist attractions, assisting with reservations, or addressing complaints from international visitors are often out from their current capacity. This situation is similar with the local community guides in Lantebung where community guides in Lantebung lacked structured English training relevant to their tourism activities (Dewanti et al., 2025). This lack of proficiency directly affects service quality, reducing the potential to create positive visitor experiences and limiting the region's ability to compete with destinations where service providers have stronger English language skills.

Another important factor influencing these results is the demographic profile of the practitioners. Most of them are above 50 years old and have an educational background limited to senior high school, even junior high school, where as the research says that English proficiency and communication anxiety related to the age and high school (Tang & Zhou, 2025). This combination has contributed to the relatively low level of English proficiency, as many of them did not have consistent exposure to English language learning opportunities

during their schooling years, nor have they had substantial chances to practice the language in their daily lives. As a result, they tend to rely heavily on local dialects or Bahasa Indonesia when interacting with tourists, which creates a communication gap with international visitors.

2. English Language Skills Most Needed

The results of the needs analysis indicate that the most critical English language skills required by tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency are speaking and listening. Among the 50 practitioners surveyed, the majority emphasized that their greatest difficulties arise when attempting to interact with international visitors in real time. While they are often able to manage basic greetings or simple exchanges, they struggle with maintaining conversations, explaining tourism products, and responding to spontaneous questions. This finding reflects a gap between their current abilities and the communicative demands of the tourism sector, where direct interaction with foreign tourists is central to service quality.

The emphasis on speaking skills stems from the fact that practitioners frequently serve as the first point of contact for visitors. Tasks such as welcoming guests, providing directions, describing attractions, or giving safety instructions all require oral communication that is clear and contextually appropriate. Without sufficient proficiency, misunderstandings can occur, which not only disrupts service delivery but also diminishes the overall tourist experience. Listening skills are equally important because practitioners must accurately understand diverse accents and respond quickly to tourists' needs. Misinterpretations at this stage could lead to frustration for both parties and reflect poorly on the destination's hospitality standards.

These findings also align with broader research in English for tourism contexts, which consistently highlights oral communication as the most urgent need for practitioners in community-based tourism settings. For the participants in this study, many of whom are over 50 years old and have limited formal education, the challenge is even more pronounced, as they have had minimal exposure to authentic English interactions. Another research identified similar needs in Tete Batu, where guides required targeted vocabulary to introduce local culture effectively (Setiawan & Husnu, 2025).

3. Preliminary Training Design

The SWOT analysis for designing English training described as strengths include high motivation among practitioners, rich cultural and natural attractions as authentic training contexts, and government support for tourism development. Next, the weaknesses are primarily the lack of structured English training, limited vocabulary, and low confidence in communication among tourism practitioners. Then, the opportunities arise from the global demand for eco-tourism and cultural tourism, the availability of digital/AI-assisted learning tools, and national language training policies. The last is threats include competition with regions like Bali and Yogyakarta that already have strong English capacity, potential loss of international market interest, and persistent socioeconomic barriers.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of English Training Design

Strengths	Weaknesses
- High motivation among local tourism actors to improve English proficiency.	- Limited vocabulary and lack of confidence in speaking English.
- Rich cultural and natural attractions that provide authentic training contexts.	- Absence of systematic English training programs tailored to tourism needs.
- Supportive local government through tourism development initiatives.	- Inconsistent exposure to foreign tourists, limiting practice opportunities.
- Community-based tourism is already recognized as a growth sector.	- Strong reliance on domestic visitors; minimal interaction with international tourists.

Opportunities	Threats
- Growing global demand for eco-tourism and cultural tourism.	- Competition with other regions in Indonesia (e.g., Bali, Yogyakarta, Lombok) that already have strong English capacity.
- Availability of digital tools and AI-assisted platforms for English learning.	- Risk of losing international market interest if service quality remains low.
- National policies supporting foreign language training in tourism (Kemenparekraf programs).	- Socioeconomic disparities may limit participation in training.
- Increasing accessibility due to infrastructure development in the region.	- Language barriers may reinforce negative tourist perceptions.

This analysis shows that while motivation and cultural resources are strong enablers, the absence of systematic training remains a critical obstacle. At the same time, opportunities through digital innovation and eco-tourism trends can be strategically leveraged to overcome weaknesses and mitigate threats.

Building on the needs assessment and SWOT analysis, a needs-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program is proposed. The training emphasizes in some aspects, they are speaking for guiding and service encounters, listening comprehension in real-life contexts, tourism-specific vocabulary enrichment, task-based simulations and role-play to replicate authentic interactions. Effective ESP course design for tourism must be rooted in needs analysis and include authentic communication tasks with performance-based assessment (José & Rica, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights three key findings regarding the English language needs of tourism practitioners in Bolaang Mongondow Regency. First, most practitioners currently possess low levels of English proficiency, especially in speaking and listening. While they can manage basic interactions such as greetings, they encounter significant challenges in handling more complex communicative tasks such as explaining attractions, processing reservations, or addressing international visitors' concerns. This situation is further influenced by demographic factors, as many practitioners are over 50 years old and have only completed senior high school, resulting in limited exposure to English learning.

Second, the most urgently needed skills are practical communicative competences in speaking and listening, which are essential for improving service quality in direct interactions with international visitors. The ability to master tourism-specific vocabulary is also crucial, particularly in promoting local culture, culinary heritage, and eco-tourism experiences. Without these skills, practitioners risk limiting both the effectiveness of their communication and the overall attractiveness of Bolaang Mongondow as an international destination.

Third, the findings informed the development of a preliminary training design rooted in the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), needs analysis, and supported by SWOT analysis. This training framework emphasizes role-play, task-based simulations, and vocabulary enrichment, all tailored to the local tourism context. By addressing weaknesses while leveraging strengths such as cultural richness and high motivation, the proposed training design has the potential to improve practitioners' English proficiency, enhance service delivery, and increase the region's competitiveness in the global tourism market..

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