

# Students' Perceptions of English for Tourism Purposes: Importance, Motivation, and Challenges in Learning

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## Abstract

This study examined tourism students' perceptions of the importance of English for tourism purposes, their motivation in learning English, and the challenges they faced during the learning process. The participants of this study were 40 tourism students from a vocational school or university who were actively learning English for tourism. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of statements related to the importance of English, students' motivation, and learning challenges. The responses were measured using a Likert scale and analyzed in percentages to describe the students' overall views. The results showed that students had a very strong perception of the importance of English for tourism purposes. They were also highly motivated to learn English, mainly because of their future careers, interest in tourism topics, and desire to improve their speaking skills. However, students still experienced several challenges, especially in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence. In conclusion, although students showed positive attitudes and strong motivation, there was still a gap between their awareness of English and their ability to use it confidently in real communication. Therefore, more interactive and practical English learning activities are needed to support their future tourism careers.

**Keywords:** ESP; Importance of Learning English, Learning Challenges; Motivation in Learning English; Students' Perceptions

## INTRODUCTION

English for Tourism Purposes is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that focuses on teaching English used in tourism-related situations (Anam, 2025; Suharto, 2024). It is closely connected to real-life communication in places such as hotels, airports, restaurants, travel agencies, and tourist attractions. In this field, English is not only learned as a subject, but also as a practical tool for communication (Kovačević et al., 2026; Kristiana & Ningsih, 2026). Students are trained to use expressions such as greeting tourists, giving directions, handling reservations, answering questions, and explaining tourist destinations (Elmassri et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2026; Suharto & Sekarasari, 2026a). In this way, English for Tourism Purposes is designed to prepare students for real working situations in the tourism industry. Since the effectiveness of such learning depends not only on the curriculum but also on how students view and respond to it, it is important to examine their perceptions of English learning.

Understanding students' perceptions can provide valuable insights into their attitudes, expectations, and engagement in the learning process. Perception refers to how individuals understand and interpret something based on their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Aulia et al., 2026; Pintado Gutiérrez & Neville, 2024). In education, students' perceptions play an important role because they can influence how students feel about learning, how motivated they are, and how actively they participate in class. When students have positive perceptions of English learning, they tend to be more engaged and willing to improve their skills. On the other

hand, negative perceptions can lead to low motivation, lack of confidence, and less participation in learning activities.

English is widely recognized as the international language of tourism because it is commonly used to communicate with tourists from different countries. Many studies have highlighted the importance of English skills in the tourism industry. For example, (Astawa & Wijaya (2024) found that good English proficiency helps tourism workers communicate more effectively and provide better service to visitors. Similarly, Kondo et al. (2024) reported that English skills can increase employment opportunities, professional competence, and self-confidence among tourism graduates. For tourism students, learning English is essential because their future careers may involve working in hotels, restaurants, airports, travel agencies, or tourist attractions where interaction with international visitors is frequent. By mastering English, students can communicate clearly, explain local culture and attractions, and create positive experiences for tourists.

Although previous studies have shown the importance of English in tourism, most of them have focused on students' language proficiency or learning outcomes. Few studies have explored how tourism students perceive the importance of English, what motivates them to learn it, and what challenges they experience during the learning process at the same time. This gap is important because these factors can influence students' success in learning English. Therefore, the present study aims to examine these three aspects together, providing a more complete picture of tourism students' English learning experiences and offering useful insights for improving English teaching in tourism education.

Based on the background of the study, this research addresses the following questions: how do students perceive the importance of English for tourism purposes, what is their motivation in learning English for tourism purposes, and what challenges do they face in learning English for tourism purposes. The objectives of this study are to identify students' perceptions of the importance of English for tourism purposes, to describe their motivation in learning English for tourism purposes, and to find out the challenges they face in learning English for tourism purposes.

## **METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024) because it aimed to understand students' perceptions of English for Tourism Purposes, particularly in terms of its importance, their motivation in learning English, and the challenges they faced during the learning process. The participants of this study were 40 tourism students from a vocational school or university who were directly involved in English for tourism learning. The data in this study were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to include statements based on three main aspects: the importance of English for tourism purposes, students' motivation in learning English, and the challenges they experienced in learning English. The students responded to each statement, which consisted of five options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. The results were presented in percentages to show the students' responses for each of the three aspects. This analysis provided a clear description of how students perceived the importance of English for tourism purposes, how motivated they were in learning English, and what challenges they faced during the learning process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

**Table 1.** Importance of English in Tourism

No	Statements	Score				
		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	English is important for tourism students.				13	27
2	English helps tourism workers communicate with foreign tourists.				20	20
3	Learning English is important for my future career.				35	5
4	Tourism employees should be able to speak English fluently.			3	10	27
5	English is necessary in hotels, airports, and tourist attractions.				5	35

Based on the questionnaire results from 40 tourism students on Table 1, it was evident that students had a very strong and well-developed perception of the importance of English for tourism purposes. Across all five statements, responses were consistently positive, with no negative responses recorded. Most students selected “agree” and “strongly agree,” which indicated that they generally recognized English as an essential skill in the tourism field, both for academic purposes and future professional needs.

For the first statement, “English is important for tourism students,” 13 students agreed and 27 students strongly agreed. This meant that all respondents (100%) acknowledged the importance of English. The dominance of “strongly agree” responses suggested that many students did not only see English as important in a general sense, but they also viewed it as a very crucial part of their study program. This result reflected a strong awareness among students that English is closely connected to their field of study and cannot be separated from tourism education.

In the second statement, “English helps tourism workers communicate with foreign tourists,” 20 students agreed and 20 students strongly agreed. The balanced results between agree and strongly agree still showed a very high level of agreement. This finding indicated that students clearly understood the practical function of English in real-life tourism situations. They recognized that English is not only used in the classroom, but also becomes a bridge of communication between tourism workers and international tourists who may come from different linguistic backgrounds. The equal distribution also suggested that while some students were confident in expressing strong agreement, others still viewed it as important without emphasizing it as strongly.

For the third statement, “Learning English is important for my future career,” 35 students agreed and 5 students strongly agreed. Although the majority selected “agree,” the result still demonstrated a strong awareness of the relevance of English for future employment. The slightly lower number of “strongly agree” responses may indicate that while students understood the importance of English for career development, some of them may still feel uncertain about their own English ability or their future readiness to use it in professional settings. This suggests that their perception of importance exists, but their level of personal confidence may vary.

In the fourth statement, “Tourism employees should be able to speak English fluently,” 3 students chose neutral, 10 students agreed, and 27 students strongly agreed. This result showed one of the strongest agreements among all items. The majority of students strongly believed that fluency in English is a necessary requirement for tourism employees. The presence of a small number of neutral responses may indicate that a few students were unsure about the level of fluency required in real workplace situations. However, the dominant response clearly showed that most students associated professional competence in tourism with the ability to speak English fluently.

For the fifth statement, “English is necessary in hotels, airports, and tourist attractions,” 5 students agreed and 35 students strongly agreed. This item received the highest level of strong agreement among all statements. It showed that students had a very clear understanding of where English is used in the tourism industry. They strongly recognized that English is essential in key service areas such as hotels, airports, and tourist attractions, where interaction with international tourists frequently occurs. This also reflected their awareness of real-world tourism environments and the importance of English in ensuring smooth communication and good service quality.

Overall, the findings from the questionnaire clearly indicated that students had a very strong and consistent positive perception of the importance of English for tourism purposes. The dominance of positive responses across all statements showed that students not only understood English as an academic subject, but also recognized its real function in the tourism industry. They viewed English as essential for communication, necessary for professional performance, and important for supporting future career opportunities. However, slight variations in the level of agreement also suggested that while students generally understood the importance of English, their confidence and personal readiness to use it in real situations might still differ from one student to another.

**Table 2.** Motivation in Learning English

No	Statements	Score				
		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I am motivated to learn English because of my future career.				21	19
2	I enjoy learning English related to tourism topics.			2	11	27
3	I want to improve my English speaking skills.				15	25
4	I feel excited when practicing English conversations.				19	21
5	I believe English will help me work internationally.				22	18

Based on the questionnaire results from 40 tourism students on Table 2, it was clear that the students had a strong motivation to learn English. Overall, most of their answers were in the “agree” and “strongly agree” categories, which showed that they were generally positive and enthusiastic about learning English, especially for tourism purposes. For the first statement, “I am motivated to learn English because of my future career,” 21 students agreed and 19 students strongly agreed. This showed that all students were motivated by their future job plans. It indicated that they clearly understood that English is important for their careers in the tourism industry. The responses were quite balanced, but the high number of “strongly agree” answers also showed that many students had a strong personal drive linked to their career goals.

In the second statement, “I enjoy learning English related to tourism topics,” 2 students were neutral, 11 agreed, and 27 strongly agreed. This result showed that most students actually enjoyed learning English when it was related to tourism. The majority of “strongly agree” responses suggested that tourism topics made English learning more interesting and meaningful for them. However, the small number of neutral responses showed that a few students did not feel fully engaged all the time. For the third statement, “I want to improve my English speaking skills,” 15 students agreed and 25 students strongly agreed. This showed a very strong desire among students to improve their speaking ability. It reflected the fact that students understood speaking as an important skill in tourism, especially when communicating with foreign tourists. The higher number of “strongly agree” responses indicated that many students were very serious about improving their speaking skills.

In the fourth statement, “I feel excited when practicing English conversations,” 19 students agreed and 21 students strongly agreed. This showed that most students felt positive and even excited when practicing English conversations. It suggested that speaking activities in class were generally enjoyable for them. Although some students felt moderately excited, many of them showed strong enthusiasm during speaking practice. For the fifth statement, “I believe English will help me work internationally,” 22 students agreed and 18 students strongly agreed. This showed that students believed English would help them get international job opportunities in the future. Even though more students chose “agree” than “strongly agree,” the overall result still showed strong confidence in the importance of English for global careers. Overall, the findings showed that students were highly motivated to learn English. Their motivation mostly came from their future career goals, interest in tourism topics, desire to improve speaking skills, and belief in international job opportunities. In general, the students showed a positive attitude toward learning English, although the level of motivation was slightly different from one student to another.

**Table 3.** Challenges in Learning English

No	Statements	Score		
		SD	D	SA
1	I have difficulty remembering English vocabulary.	2	31	7
2	English pronunciation is difficult for me.		11	29
3	I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes.	4	10	26
4	I lack confidence when speaking English.		22	18
5	I lack confidence when speaking English.		10	30

Based on the questionnaire results from 40 tourism students, it was clear that students still faced several challenges in learning English. Even though they showed positive attitudes and motivation in earlier sections, their responses here indicated that learning English was not always easy for them, especially in areas like vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence. For the first statement, “I have difficulty remembering English vocabulary,” 2 students were neutral, 31 agreed, and 7 strongly agreed. This showed that most students had difficulty remembering new English words. Only a few students were unsure, and none disagreed with the statement. It suggested that vocabulary was a common problem for almost all students. Many of them likely found it hard to retain new words, especially if they did not use them regularly in daily practice.

In the second statement, “English pronunciation is difficult for me,” 11 students agreed and 29 students strongly agreed. This showed a very strong level of agreement, meaning that

pronunciation was a serious challenge for most students. Many of them felt that pronouncing English words correctly was difficult, which could affect their confidence when speaking. This also showed that pronunciation was one of the biggest barriers in oral communication for tourism students. For the third statement, “I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes,” 4 students were neutral, 10 agreed, and 26 strongly agreed. This indicated that most students felt worried about making grammar mistakes when using English. The high number of “strongly agree” responses suggested that this fear was quite strong. Because of this, some students might hesitate to speak English freely since they were afraid of being wrong. For the fourth statement, “I lack confidence when speaking English,” 22 students agreed and 18 strongly agreed. This showed that all students experienced low confidence in speaking English to some extent. It indicated that speaking was one of the most difficult skills for them. Many students might feel unsure or nervous when trying to communicate in English, especially in front of others.

For the fifth statement, “I lack confidence when speaking English,” 10 students agreed and 30 strongly agreed. This result repeated the same idea but showed an even stronger response. Most students strongly agreed that they lacked confidence when speaking English. This confirmed that speaking confidence was the biggest challenge faced by the students, which could affect their ability to communicate effectively in real tourism situations. Overall, the findings showed that although students understood the importance of English and were motivated to learn it, they still faced real difficulties in practice. Their main challenges were vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar anxiety, and especially lack of confidence in speaking. These issues suggested that students needed more practice, support, and a comfortable learning environment to help them become more confident English speakers in the future tourism workplace.

## Discussion

This study discussed tourism students’ perceptions of English for Tourism Purposes by focusing on three main aspects: the importance of English, students’ motivation in learning English, and the challenges they faced during the learning process. The findings showed that tourism students had a very strong understanding of the importance of English for tourism purposes. They realized that English was an essential communication tool in the tourism industry, especially for interacting with international tourists in workplaces such as hotels, restaurants, airports, travel agencies, and tourist attractions. In today’s global tourism industry, English is widely used as an international language that supports communication between people from different countries and cultural backgrounds (Suharto & Sekarsari, 2026b). Therefore, students considered English not only as a school subject but also as an important professional skill that would support their future careers.

This finding was consistent with many previous studies which stated that English plays a significant role in supporting tourism services, improving professional communication, and increasing employment opportunities in the global tourism sector. Previous researchers also emphasized that tourism students generally view English as a necessary skill for achieving career success and professional development (Howchatturat, 2026; Hsu et al., 2026; Palacios, n.d.). In tourism-related occupations, employees are expected to communicate effectively with foreign tourists, provide clear information, handle customer needs, and create positive service experiences. Because of these demands, students understood that mastering English could increase their competitiveness in the tourism industry and open wider career opportunities both locally and internationally.

The findings also showed that students had high motivation to learn English because they understood its importance for communication, academic purposes, and future careers. Most students believed that English proficiency could help them interact more confidently with international tourists and improve their chances of getting better jobs in the tourism sector. This result supported previous studies which found that students' motivation in learning English is strongly influenced by their awareness of workplace demands and global competition in the tourism industry. Many earlier studies explained that tourism students are usually motivated by practical goals, such as communicating with foreign tourists, obtaining professional positions, improving career opportunities, and preparing themselves for international work environments (Pamungkas, 2026; Rashid & Malik, 2026; Widhi & Nirwana, 2026).

In this study, students' positive perceptions toward English contributed to their strong motivation to continue learning the language. This indicated that students already had a positive mindset toward English learning, which became an important factor in the learning process. Motivation plays an important role in language learning because motivated students are generally more willing to participate in classroom activities, practice communication skills, and continue learning despite difficulties. Previous research also suggested that students with strong learning motivation tend to show greater persistence and interest in improving their language abilities. Therefore, students' awareness of the importance of English became one of the main reasons behind their enthusiasm for learning the language.

However, despite their positive attitudes and high motivation, students still faced several challenges in learning English. The findings revealed that vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence were the most common difficulties experienced by students. Similar findings were reported in previous studies, where students often experienced difficulties in speaking fluently because of limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, lack of pronunciation accuracy, and low self-confidence (Al-Tarawneh, 2025; Neumann, 2026). Students sometimes understood English theoretically but still struggled to express their ideas clearly during communication. This condition showed that mastering English requires not only theoretical understanding but also continuous practice and real communication experience.

Among these challenges, speaking confidence became the biggest difficulty for students in this study. Many students felt nervous, shy, or afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of others. Some students worried that their pronunciation or grammar might be incorrect, which reduced their confidence in communicating actively. Previous studies also explained that anxiety and lack of speaking practice are major barriers in developing oral communication skills (Samson, 2026). In many cases, students preferred to remain silent because they feared negative evaluation from teachers or classmates. As a result, students had fewer opportunities to practice speaking, which then affected their fluency and confidence development.

This finding suggested that understanding the importance of English and having high motivation alone were not enough to guarantee successful communication ability. Although students already realized the importance of English and showed enthusiasm for learning it, they still needed more opportunities to practice speaking in supportive and interactive environments. Continuous speaking practice is important because communication skills can only improve through frequent use and real interaction. Therefore, students needed learning activities that encouraged them to participate actively and use English more confidently in practical situations.

Overall, this study revealed a gap between students' positive perceptions and their ability to use English confidently in real communication. This finding strengthened previous research which argued that positive perceptions and motivation do not automatically eliminate learning difficulties. Students may understand the importance of English and feel motivated to learn it, but they can still experience psychological and linguistic barriers that affect their communication performance. Therefore, English learning should not only focus on increasing students' awareness and motivation but also on helping them overcome practical communication difficulties.

The findings of this study also had several important implications for students, teachers, and educational institutions. For students, the results showed that even though they already understood the importance of English and felt motivated, they still needed to put more effort into practicing English, especially speaking skills. For teachers, this study implied that teaching English for tourism should focus more on practical communication rather than only theory. For educational institutions, the study suggested that English for Tourism programs should be strengthened by providing more real-world practice opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that tourism students had a very strong understanding of the importance of English for tourism purposes. They also showed high motivation to learn English because they realized its importance for communication, future careers, and tourism-related learning. However, despite their positive attitudes and motivation, they still faced several challenges, especially in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking confidence. Among these, speaking confidence was the biggest difficulty. Overall, there was a gap between students' positive perceptions and their ability to use English confidently in real communication. Based on the results, students are suggested to practice English more often, especially speaking, and not be afraid of making mistakes because mistakes are part of learning. Teachers are suggested to make English learning more interactive by using activities such as role plays, group discussions, and tourism-based conversations, as well as encouraging students to speak with confidence. Institutions are suggested to improve English for Tourism programs by providing more practical activities and real-life practice opportunities, such as cooperation with tourism industries.

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