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Design, Teaching, and Assessment of an English for Specific Purposes Course for Tourism Students

Diseño, enseñanza y evaluación de un curso de inglés para fines específicos dirigido a estudiantado de turismo

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ABSTRACT

This study outlines the steps to develop an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for tourism students at the National University, Brunca Regional Headquarters, Pérez Zeledón Campus. The course was developed as part of a capstone project for the Master's program in Applied Linguistics. The resulting deliverable was a course that targeted English used at hotel reception desks. This endeavor can serve as a baseline for future ESP projects in the tourism sector. This article details the design, teaching, and subsequent assessment of an English for Occupational Purposes course. The course aims to meet the specific needs of tourism students by providing language training focusing on tasks and scenarios at the hotel reception desk. The information necessary to design the course was compiled through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and surveys answered by students, employers, alumni, and instructors. Based on the results, the "English for Hotel Reception Desk" course, designed under an English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and a Task-based Approach methodology, effectively addressed specific on-the-job tasks carried out by hotel receptionists. Despite the challenge of teaching a large class size online, students displayed high levels of engagement and improved language skills, supported by collaboration with industry experts and positive course evaluations.

KEYWORDS: English for Specific Purposes, ESP, English for Occupational Purposes EOP, Tourism, Needs, Curricular Design, Evaluation.

RESUMEN

Este estudio describe los pasos para implementar un curso de Inglés con Fines Específicos diseñado para estudiantes de turismo de la Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca, Campus Pérez Zeledón. El curso se desarrolló como parte de un proyecto de un programa de maestría en Lingüística Aplicada, lo que resultó en un curso de inglés dirigido al uso de esta lengua en la recepción de hoteles. Esta iniciativa puede servir como base para futuros proyectos de ESP en el sector turístico. Este artículo presenta los procesos de diseño, enseñanza y evaluación de este curso de Inglés con Fines Ocupacionales, que tiene como objetivo satisfacer las necesidades específicas del estudiantado de la carrera de turismo en el ámbito de la recepción hotelera. La información necesaria para el diseño del curso se obtuvo tras la aplicación de cuestionarios, entrevistas y encuestas a partes interesadas del proceso, como estudiantes, empleadores, graduados y profesores. Los resultados de la implementación del curso indicaron que el programa de inglés para recepción, diseñado bajo una metodología de Inglés con Fines Ocupacionales y un enfoque basado en tareas, abordó de manera efectiva las tareas específicas de la recepción hotelera, a pesar de desafíos como la enseñanza virtual y los grupos numerosos. Los estudiantes demostraron altos niveles de compromiso y mejora en sus habilidades lingüísticas, respaldados por la colaboración con expertos de la industria y evaluaciones positivas del curso.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Inglés con Fines Específicos, IFE, Inglés con Fines Ocupacionales, EOP, Turismo, Necesidades, Diseño Curricular, Evaluación.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development in Costa Rica is essential for addressing student needs and many of the country's unique socio-economic demands. Firstly, it is important to examine the definition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This study draws on multiple perspectives to gain an in-depth understanding of the field. [Hutchinson and Waters \(1991\)](#) described ESP as “a learner-centered approach primarily concerned with what learners learn and their needs” (p. 2). Similarly, [Dudley-Evans and St. John \(1998\)](#) provided a detailed framework that classifies ESP characteristics into two types: absolute and variable. Absolute ESP characteristics involve meeting learner-specific needs, employing methodologies and activities relevant to a particular field, and using appropriate language for those contexts. Variable ESP characteristics, on the other hand, focus on using ESP for specific disciplines with a different approach from General English (GE), and target intermediate to advanced-level adult learners. The aforementioned definitions exemplify how ESP is distinct from other English teaching approaches while still preserving links to GE.

More recent definitions reiterate the learner-centered approach of ESP and its focus on professional skills development. According to [Day and Krzanowski \(2011\)](#), ESP consists of “teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular learners for a particular purpose” (p. 5). Furthermore, the “P in ESP is always a professional purpose—a set of skills that learners currently need or will need when working in their professional careers” ([Day & Krzanowski, 2011](#), p. 5). Given the broad range of professional needs, ESP has traditionally been divided into three major branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Professional Purposes (EPP), and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). These three branches vary depending on specific learner needs and contextual factors ([Basturkmen, 2010](#)). [Anthony \(2018\)](#) further defined ESP as “an approach to language teaching that targets the current and future academic or occupational needs of learners” (p. 11). Lastly, [Basturkmen \(2021\)](#) defined ESP as “the field of language teaching that aims to support learners with the linguistic needs of their study or work area (p. 55).” These perspectives highlight the complexity of ESP and its adaptability to diverse learner contexts.

In this context, the project adopts an ESP rather than a GE approach to equip tourism students with the linguistic tools necessary to make them more marketable for employment opportunities. Although ESP shares similarities with GE, it differs significantly in its application. [Hutchinson and Waters \(1991\)](#) noted that “in theory, nothing; in practice, a great deal” separates ESP from GE (p. 53). This distinction arises from ESP's focus on addressing learner-specific needs. According to [Kitkauskienė \(2011\)](#), both GE and ESP aims to develop communicative competence in oral and written discourse,

emphasizing grammar and vocabulary accuracy. However, ESP has a practical focus on preparing students for specific professional settings. Kitkauskienė also asserts that ESP builds on GE, noting that “ESP always rests on the knowledge of general English” (p. 90) and that “applying ESP properly implies considering significant aspects of the learning process, such as the needs, professional profile, and professional field of the students” (Gamboa-Agüero & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2021). Thus, while GE forms the foundation, the level of specificity required by ESP significantly influences how English courses are designed.

Moreover, ESP is a broad discipline encompassing two main areas: EAP and EOP. While distinctions and sub-classifications vary among authors, this study focuses on EOP, which targets occupational language needs. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1991), EOP and EAP differ in how language will be used—be it in an academic or work setting. EOP courses are designed to meet learners’ specific needs in professional settings. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) define EOP briefly as “English that is not for academic purposes; it includes professional purposes in administration, law, and business, and vocational purposes in work or pre-work situations” (p. 7). This study involved an EOP course developed for pre-service tourism students, based on an analysis of the objective and subjective needs of in-service and pre-service tourism professionals, a key workforce in Costa Rica.

Tourism is a key economic driver in Costa Rica. Each year, thousands of tourists from around the world visit the country, creating employment opportunities nationwide. In fact, “tourism is one of the main drivers of the country’s economy ... directly accounting for 6.3% of the national economy and 1.9% indirectly, which totals 8.2% of the Gross Domestic Product” (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, 2025). The Brunca Region, which encompasses much of the Costa Rican Pacific coast, boasts diverse tourist attractions such as national parks, mountain peaks, and beaches. The regular influx of English-speaking tourists underscores the demand for tourism professionals with English proficiency. According to Brida and Zapata (2010), “on average, the contribution of the tourism sector to economic growth was positive, accounting for 13 percent of the country’s growth” (p. 327). Therefore, to better serve their clients, tourism organizations need employees with specific English language abilities.

Tourism has increased significantly in the Brunca Region over the past few decades. According to the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (2011), visitors traveled there to explore beaches, hike in the national parks, observe mangroves, and climb peaks, such as Mount Chirripó. In an effort to provide support for this growing sector, the National University, Brunca Region, Pérez Zeledón Campus, now offers a Sustainable Tourism Management major. The program includes an English language requirement comprised of four “Integrated English” courses and two “Oral Communication” courses. “Integrated English 3 and 4” expose students to general tourism vocabulary through the *English for International Tourism* textbook series. However, students receive limited exposure to language

specific to a workplace setting. Students could greatly benefit from more targeted English training to improve their integration into the job market.

As [Paltridge and Starfield \(2013\)](#) remarked, ESP focuses on teaching English for specific professional or academic purposes. Students studying tourism can enhance their employability by honing their English language to industry standards according to typical career roles. This project adopts an EOP methodology, addressing professional and vocational language requirements ([Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998](#)). As [Peters-Fernández \(2013, cited in Rico et al., 2019\)](#) stated, “Workers have specific and particular lexical and linguistic needs in their daily work contexts, and these demands can be successfully addressed under appropriate training conditions” (p. 12); EOP may serve as a key element to promote hospitality training ([Soekarno & Ting, 2020](#)). The project sought to meet these specific training needs.

Objectives

The following describe the objectives of the ESP process in this study:

- Analyze the needs of in-service and pre-service tourism students in terms of specific training and occupational trends.
- Design an English for Occupational Purposes course to address the needs of tourism students.
- Deliver an English for Hotel Reception course to the target population.
- Evaluate results at the conclusion of the course.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of previous initiatives related to implementing targeted English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses in the tourism sector in Costa Rica. Furthermore, Part II presents a key theoretical framework underpinning the study and details concerning the methodology employed during the course design and delivery stages.

Previous Studies

As a developing country, Costa Rica advocates English language training so that the population may leverage more job opportunities. This section offers a concise overview of the development and impact of EOP in Costa Rica.

Review of EOP Efforts. Some studies and projects have addressed EOP and its development in Costa Rica. [Rodríguez \(2006\)](#) reported on “the experiences of IMPACT, a 200-hour intensive training program in English for Occupational Purposes (Costa Rican EOP IMPACT), piloted in seven multinational companies in Costa Rica in the year 2003” (p. 27). This study concludes that the capstone project “proved to be a successful model for English language training. Both workplace training and teacher development projects produced very positive results” ([Rodríguez, 2006](#), p. 35).

Moreover, [Araya-Garita \(2015\)](#) proposed that changes be made to the array of Conversation Courses at the University of Costa Rica’s School of Modern Languages “to highlight the importance of

offering advanced ESP courses to complement the Conversation Program” (Araya-Garita, 2015, p. 211). Since this ESP program was designed to address student needs it was suggested that the program “be included among professional engineers, economists and health providers, among others” (Araya-Garita, 2015, p. 217). This undertaking to provide courses targeted to specific student needs demonstrate how ESP-trained professionals contribute to generating ideas for reaching out to more professional areas and audiences.

Lastly, the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) developed “Inglés por áreas” (English for specific fields), an English course for enrolled UCR students and staff to learn English or hone their English communication skills. The program is designed to provide insight and contribute to the academic and professional development of course participants (School of Modern Languages, UCR, 2025).

The Need for EOP in Costa Rica. According to Hernández-Herrero (2008), national and foreign companies currently face the need for personnel to speak, read, and write at least one additional language, especially English. An essential requirement is that people have a high intermediate or advanced level, specifically in the branches of customer service and others. Foreign companies operating in Costa Rica emphasized this by requiring an advanced level of English language and knowledge for specific purposes (ESP) or English related to their work. Based on previous findings, these companies require EOP training courses to help prepare both the workforce as well as pre-service students become proficient in the English-language related to their occupational fields. Employment is a critical issue in Costa Rica; thus, specific linguistic training can improve possibilities for student success upon entry into the tourism workforce.

EOP in Costa Rica’s Tourism Sector. The main ESP effort linked to tourism in Costa Rica is found in a study by Ruiz-Navarrete (2014) for the Ecological Tourism majors at the Guanacaste Campus at the University of Costa Rica. The author conducted a preliminary needs assessment revealing that the use of English for vocational purposes impacts a person’s professional life more significantly since they are able to communicate specific work-related tasks in their field of expertise. Thus, there is a need to rethink conversational English courses and merge them with language skills to bolster the future workforce. Similar efforts could be carried out in Costa Rica to further contextualize English language training to the needs of the regions and students.

Framework for the Study

This section reviews relevant theory that conceptualizes the main processes that comprise this ESP experience.

Needs Analysis. Needs assessments or needs analyses (NA) are an integral part of ESP course development. Course designers discovered what students need to learn and prepare an effective plan to

address their requirements. According to Hyland (2022), an NA is carried out “to establish the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of a course and is the first step in ESP course design. Investigating the specific sets of skills, texts and language a particular group of learners must acquire is central to ESP” (p. 205). In this respect, Flowerdew (2013) asserted that “needs analysis, carried out to establish the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of a course, is the first stage in ESP course development, followed by curriculum design, materials selection, methodology, assessment, and evaluation” (p. 325). Belcher (2006, as cited in Starfield, 2013) maintains that a needs assessment “has been one of the cornerstones of the ESP approach and has always been research-based, with a move since the 1980s to include information about subjective learner needs, their desires, investments, goals and memberships in multiple communities” (p. 468). Such aspects render Ns the starting point for any ESP course development project, followed by careful planning and execution.

In this regard, ESP courses focus on meeting student needs. Practitioners perform a NA since they are “an integral component of language curriculum development. It provides the basis for lesson planning, syllabus design, materials evaluation and development, and instructional design and assessment development” (Widodo, 2014, p. 127). Hyland (2006) remarked that “needs analysis refers to the techniques for collecting and assessing information relevant to course design: it is the means of establishing the how and what of a course” (p. 73). Consequently, Hutchinson and Waters (1991) claimed that “analysis of target situation needs is concerned with language use. But language use is only part of the story. We also need to know about language learning” (p. 63). Determining student need will remind instructors what they, in turn, must know. Although instructors have oversight on student learning, it is the students themselves who are ultimately responsible for their own progress.

Graves (2000) stated that a needs assessment is systematic and focuses on an ongoing gathering of information about student needs and preferences in making decisions. Richards (2017) considered needs analyses as the starting point and a core dimension of backward design in the curriculum. Also, according to Witkin and Altschuld (1995), situation analysis is “a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about a program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources. The priorities are based on identified needs” (p. 4). A course can be catered to address such needs and wants appropriately by considering the learners’ subjective needs. By including course professors and possible employers, it is intended to gather a more holistic view of the students’ needs.

Course Design. The process of designing a course requires a specific focus on different areas, such as developing its rationale, discovering entry and exit levels, and choosing course contents (Richards, 2001). ESP course development also focuses on understanding the target discipline. They must “aim to provide students with focused instruction, concentrating on the literacy practices of the relevant

domain or context. The approach assumes that such targeted language learning will be highly motivational for learners because it specifically addresses their language learning needs” (Hafner & Miller, 2019, p. 6). ESP course designers ought to collect information on the domain or field via NAs to reach specificity and promote learner motivation and course efficacy.

From Needs Analysis to Course Design. In ESP, NAs are the first and most relevant step towards course design. As stated by Basturkmen (2010), an NA “is a pre-course design process in which information is gathered to help the teacher or course developer decide what the course should focus on, what content in terms of language or skills to include and what teaching/learning methods to employ” (p. 26). However, the course design goes beyond a list of steps that need to be followed while analyzing the NA results. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1991), course design entails the interpretation of raw data to create a set of teaching-learning experiences “whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge” (p. 65). The NA and its interpretation are central elements to transferring data and converting it into manageable teaching-learning units. Against this background, Hutchinson and Waters (1991) provided a practical interpretation of what shape the NA data should be given in course design. The authors remarked that ESP course design requires theoretical and empirical information to create a syllabus, design its materials, teach these materials, and devise evaluation procedures to assess the course goals.

Course Methodology. The course syllabus adopted an EOP vision with a Task-Based Approach, emphasizing communication and real-world tasks rather than language forms. This will answer the needs at the workplace, for example, since tasks involve learners using the target language for particular purposes (Flowerdew, 2013; Willis, 1996). The methodology embraced both input-based and output-based strategies, guiding students through stages from language analysis to authentic task performance and reflection (Basturkmen, 2014). Besides, Font (2006) presented a six-stage lesson framework supported EOP methodologies: it embedded input-output cycles into the lesson plan. Controlled practice focuses on input strategies, guided practice bridges to output, integrated practice concentrates on output, and creative application, or workplace tasks, and emphasizes output-to-input in an authentic assignment. These stages are meant to scaffold learners in the preparation for authentic tasks to be enacted in hotel reception contexts.

Regarding the practitioner, Harding (2007) identified five roles for ESP teachers: teacher, course designer, researcher, collaborator, and evaluator. He emphasized that addressing learner specific goals and problems, especially motivating pre-service students, was paramount. Collaboration with experts is also key in ESP. Northcott (2013) and Stewart (2018) discussed some benefits of co-teaching, while Flowerdew and Peacock (2005) suggested ways of involving subject specialists, such as through consultations or assessments. According to Brand-Fonseca and Segura-Arias (2023), team teaching

can help bring different views into the classroom along with expertise and authentic experiences. Thus, course contributors specializing in English for Hotel Receptionists courses contribute to filling knowledge gaps and increasing the level of authenticity.

Corpus use, which dates back to the 1960s-70s, is a fundamental tool of ESP. It helped develop materials based on frequency analyses of words and phrases (Boulton, 2016; Gavioli, 2005). For course delivery, virtual education, imposed by COVID-19, employed tools like Zoom and WhatsApp for synchronous learning, enhancing task authenticity (Finkelstein, 2006; Racheva, 2017).

In terms of instruction, the teaching approach used was TBA and focused on experiential learning, emphasizing meaning-making and real-life tasks (Nunan, 2011; Willis, 1996). The effective design of ESP material involves a process of evaluating, adapting, or developing materials, guided by learner needs and feedback (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991). Reception staff provided authentic language samples to shape course materials.

Finally, ESP evaluation includes learner assessments and course evaluations, ensuring alignment with course objectives and workplace demands (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). Experts participated as evaluators for proficiency tests, ensuring realistic skill assessments. Continuous course evaluation, during and after delivery, measures effectiveness and relevance in real-world contexts (Basturkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This section offers an outline of the research methodology followed in the study and provides information on the steps taken to complete the NA, course design, and course delivery stages.

Context

The National University, Pérez Zeledón Campus, is located in the Brunca Region in southern Costa Rica. Its Sustainable Tourism Management major has existed for more than a decade. This major has an English language component that intends to provide students with English language training. This English component comprises four integrated English courses and two oral communication courses.

Participants

The English for Hotel Receptionists course was taken by twenty pre-service tourism students from the Universidad Nacional, Brunca Branch, Pérez Zeledón Campus. These students were in their third year in the major, and they were taking their last English course from their major. Their ages ranged from 19 to 25 years old. These participants were from different municipalities in the Brunca Region, located in the southern part of Costa Rica, and because of their socioeconomic condition, most of them were scholarship holders.

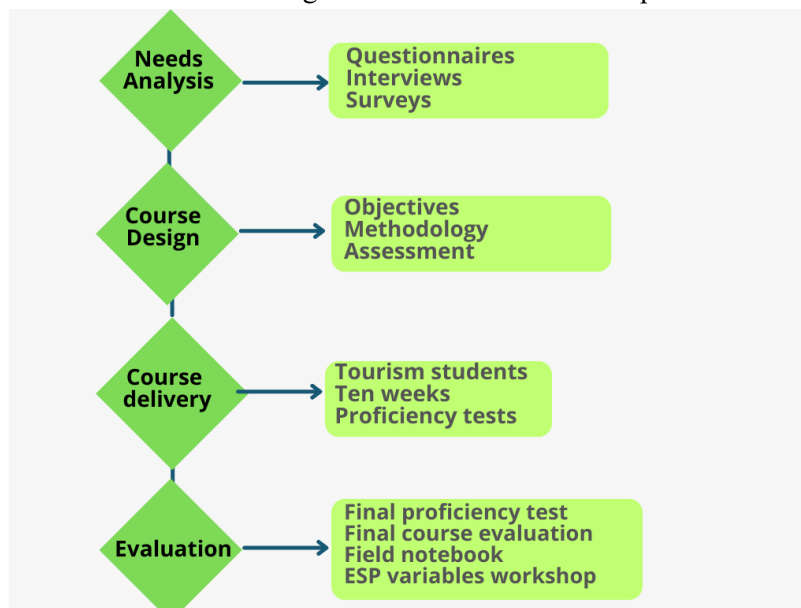
Instruments

This study used a multi-method approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods embedded in the three main stages that built up this ESP process: Needs Analysis, Course

Design, Course Delivery, and Evaluation. This section provides an overview of the instruments employed in the research process and clarifies the steps followed in each one. Figure 1 illustrates the different elements used for the methodology of this study.

Figure 1.

Methodological elements and their components



Note: Summary of the ESP process.

Needs Analysis

To ensure credibility and validity in the study, the analyst used stakeholder and method triangulation during data collection. Stakeholder triangulation involved gathering insights from various groups, including students, alumni, and potential employers, while method triangulation included structured interviews, questionnaires, and follow-up interviews. The process began with alumni completing a questionnaire to identify linguistic needs and workplace experiences, followed by detailed interviews with selected alumni to deepen their understanding of specific language requirements. Finally, current STM students were surveyed to capture their perspectives on English needs in future workplaces.

Furthermore, drawing from Douglas's (2016) guidelines for ESP curriculum design, the analyst created instruments to assess the linguistic gaps of alumni, the needs of current students, and the expectations of employers. These instruments included alumni questionnaires, interviews, and a survey for students, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of English language demands. The results remarked on the importance of designing an English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) course tailored to the needs of Sustainable Tourism Management students. Given the high number of STM graduates employed in hotel reception roles, a specialized EOP course focusing on hotel reception is recommended. This course would prepare students for the specific language demands of front desk positions,

improving their employability (Segura-Arias, 2024). This needs analysis highlighted the importance of designing an English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) course tailored to the needs of Sustainable Tourism Management students. Given the high number of graduates employed in hotel reception roles, a specialized EOP course focusing on hotel reception is recommended. This course could prepare students for the specific language demands of front desk positions, improving their employability (Segura-Arias, 2024). Grounded in these conclusions, a course was designed to address these needs.

Course Design

The English for Hotel Receptionists course was designed using a learner-centered methodology based on a needs analysis (Segura-Arias, 2024). A ‘wide-angled’ approach was adopted to cater to a general audience, focusing on transferable skills rather than specific roles (Basturkmen, 2010). Using AntConc software, Corpus analysis was employed to analyze authentic dialogues from reception desk contexts, identifying frequently used words to inform the course vocabulary (Basturkmen, 2010). Also, the syllabus was organized following a Task-Based Approach, emphasizing real-life tasks, which were designed as ‘pedagogical tasks’, aiming to help learners practice meaningful communication (Nunan, 2011). Five units, covering check-in, phone calls, information requests, complaints, and check-out, were sequenced logically to mirror actual workplace processes.

Course content was divided into pedagogical (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) and target content (e.g., greetings, telephoning expressions), with the latter directly linked to workplace tasks (Belcher, 2006, cited in Basturkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Methodologically, input-based and output-based strategies were integrated using four approaches: predominantly input, input-to-output, predominantly output, and output-to-input (Basturkmen, 2014). Font’s (2006) six-stage cycle, from controlled practice to creative application, allowed students to practice and perform the tasks. The creative application phase let learners explore workplace scenarios and present them, which in turn reinforces learning through reflection and feedback. In this regard, the instructor worked with four professional receptionists to enhance authenticity. These professionals shared information, told stories of their work, and developed materials to make tasks more realistic and relevant to real life. According to Jasso-Aguilar (1999, cited in Basturkmen, 2014), this has provided students with real-life context and meaningful learning.

How the course was taught

The course was taught to a group of twenty third-year Sustainable Tourism Management students during a ten-week period. The students were currently enrolled in their last English course, an oral communication course with an English Practicum component.

As part of the course’s assessment plan, the instructor implemented a mid-course evaluation and a final course evaluation. In these instruments, the students provide feedback concerning satisfaction

and overall pertinence of the course in addressing the students' perceived needs. The results from the mid-course evaluation expect to gather information to adjust the course program and enhance its effectiveness if necessary while still in progress. The final evaluation seeks to gather relevant information from the students, and its results are more far-reaching since they will serve as a decision-making tool, as explained in the next paragraph.

Evaluation of the ESP Process

The following tools were employed to gather information about the main objectives of this project.

The English for Hotel Receptionists course was evaluated using several tools to determine its effectiveness in meeting the needs of tourism students. The Final Course Evaluation collected feedback from students on several aspects, including the alignment of course objectives with their needs, the relevance of the content, the quality of tasks and materials, and the instructor's performance. Additionally, the Final Proficiency Test assessed students ability to handle reception-related tasks assessed by both the instructor and working hotel receptionists. A holistic rubric was used to gauge proficiency levels.

Furthermore, the instructor also kept a Field Notebook to reflect on teaching strategies, learning outcomes, and student participation. This tool provided valuable insights into possible refining needed of the course content and methods. Meanwhile, the ESP Variables Workshop explored challenges encountered in the teaching process, fostering collaborative problem-solving between students and instructors to enhance future iterations of the course. Finally, the Placemat Consensus gathered input from peers and students to evaluate the course's overall success and the instructor's performance, resulting in a comprehensive report. Together, these tools provided sufficient data to evaluate the effectiveness of the NA, course design, and course delivery.

RESULTS AND COURSE PROPOSAL

The NAs provided sufficient information to guide the course design stage for developing an English for Hotel Receptionists course (Segura-Arias, 2024). This section presents the resulting syllabus by focusing on its description, methodology, and objectives.

Course Description

The resulting syllabus was a task-driven English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) course that intends to help tourism students, hotel employees, and those who plan to work at a reception desk to understand, respond, and deal with the linguistic and professional skills to serve an English-speaking clientele. The course has an emphasis on training intermediate students to complete front desk-related tasks using proper English terminology, expressions, and language structures. There are five main tasks: Check-in, Telephone Calls, Inquiries and Guest Complaints, Emails, and Check out. Each set is fragmented into mini-tasks that integrate different language skills and draw attention to essential lan-

guage functions, vocabulary, and grammar. The course aims at providing the learners with the necessary tools to deliver quality service, making their jobs a more comfortable and professional experience.

Methodology of the Course Program

The EOP course adopted a four-step method based on input and output strategies, using a Task-Based Approach to prepare students for hotel reception tasks. Students must first analyze language samples required for these tasks and practice them in class. They then perform production tasks in authentic or simulated reception environments. Participation in real-world activities encourages reflection and helps students identify learning gaps. In the classroom, students were guided to reflect on their needs and develop solutions based on their experiences and subject knowledge. Active engagement and collaboration are essential, with students playing a key role as co-creators of knowledge. The instructor supported this process by providing authentic materials and working beside the subject-matter experts to facilitate learning.

General Objective of the Course

To provide learners with the required English language skills to work as part of a hotel reception team by participating in reception-specific tasks aimed at strengthening their understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills in the target language.

Main Objectives

The students enrolled in this “English for Hotel Receptionists” course will learn the following:

1. The appropriate English vocabulary and expressions to check-in guests.
2. How to effectively handle hotel complaints, provide solutions and explanations of operations through proper English structures and vocabulary.
3. Respond to inquiries from potential desks both in-person and over the phone by asking accurately structured questions and expressions commonly hotel receptionists.
4. Help guests make a hotel reservation using the proper terminology.
5. Resolve guest complaints by making use of proper English structures and polite language.
6. Respond to e-mails in correct English grammar and syntax.
7. Successfully convey information about other off-site services, using the right vocabulary and expressions in English.
8. Help guests with the check-out procedure through proper English expressions and vocabulary.
9. Minimize misunderstandings by improving English pronunciation of numbers, currencies, dates, and specialized lexicon.

Results of the ESP Process

The development of the English for Hotel Receptionists course culminated in its delivery and evaluation, with key decisions in NA, course design, and implementation shaping its outcomes. The

course was based on a Task-Based Approach (TBA), emphasizing authentic, real-world tasks relevant to hotel reception roles. Activities were designed to progress from controlled practice to integrated, communicative tasks, allowing students to build confidence and apply their learning effectively.

Aside from feedback from various sources, including the Placemat Consensus, Field Notebook, and Final Course Evaluation, highlighted the course's strengths. Students and experts agreed that tasks were well-designed, realistic, and aligned with industry needs. Collaboration with receptionists, many of whom were alumni, provided contextualized insights and validated the relevance of course content. Suggestions included simplifying content presentation and adding more context to vocabulary instruction, which were considered for future improvements.

Course task sequencing and use of input/output methodologies effectively engaged students. Controlled, guided, and free stages ensured students gained the skills and confidence needed for final tasks. Students found the tasks challenging but manageable, with strong motivation to apply their learning. Overall, the task-based design and expert input were pivotal in achieving the course's goals and aligning with students' professional needs.

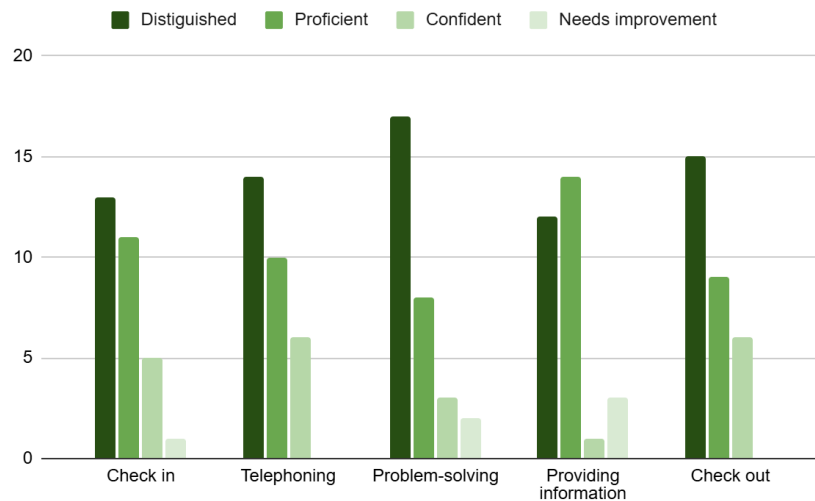
Course Delivery

The instructor drew on previous GE and ESP experience (Kitkauskienė, 2011) but encountered some problems such as giving feedback to individuals in large online classes. The peer review pointed to a need for clearer instructions and more corrective feedback. Small group activities, self-assessment, and peer feedback were among the strategies proposed to resolve such problems (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Despite the challenges, the instructor provided a positive learning environment and used various platforms to effectively balance corrective and positive feedback from students. In terms of learning, the course reproduced authentic hotel reception tasks (Nunan, 2011; Willis, 1996) to assist students in using English for a particular purpose. The Final Course Evaluation and Field Notebook showed that students were better equipped to deal with professional situations, use the relevant vocabulary, and perform tasks confidently. Observers also confirmed that the activities met the course objectives and students' needs. Also, the materials were designed and evaluated to support ESP teaching (Harding, 2007; Hutchinson & Waters, 1991). Students and observers agreed that the materials were authentic, engaging, and appropriate for the course. The use of language samples from receptionists ensured ongoing needs analysis and high specificity (Graves, 2000).

Furthermore, the English for Hotel Receptionists course addressed EOP needs (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), aligning with Costa Rica's demand for English-proficient professionals (Hernández-Herrero, 2008). Students reported the course helped them understand workplace scenarios and develop relevant skills. A final proficiency test, assessed by the instructor and receptionists, confirmed learners' ability to handle reception-related tasks, validating the course's success. Figure 2 summarizes the level of proficiency shown by the students per unit:

Figure 2.

Level of Proficiency of the English for Hotel Receptionists Course Students per unit



Source: Results obtained from the Final Proficiency Test.

The students ranked very high in all five units; 47,3% of the students obtained distinguished level marks, and 34,6% received proficient level scores when seen holistically across units. In other words, 81.9% of students were placed as distinguished or proficient performers. These results suggested that the course helped the students become proficient English users to perform staple tasks from a hotel reception.

The results of the English for Hotel Receptionists course emphasized the effectiveness of its TBA and expert collaboration in achieving the course objectives. The authentic tasks aligned with the professional needs of hotel reception roles, as identified in the NA, ensuring that students increased their practical language skills to perform in real-world hospitality settings (Soekarno & Ting, 2020). Feedback obtained from students and experts confirmed the relevance and applicability of the course contents, with the inclusion of industry insights and authentic language samples supporting the course's effectiveness and closely connecting class activities with workplace tasks. The high proficiency levels achieved by the majority of students in the Final Proficiency Test (81.9% at distinguished or proficient levels) validated the success of the course in preparing students for workplace tasks. However, some areas for improvement were identified, including simplifying content presentation and enhancing vocabulary instruction, which can be incorporated into future implementations of the course or in new ESP courses.

CONCLUSIONS

The processes of planning, designing, delivering, and evaluating the English for Hotel Receptionists course have allowed me to employ the strategies learned during ESP training development to complete the process successfully. This section explores the conclusions obtained from the course design stage and the delivery of the resulting English for Hotel Receptionists course.

Course Design Conclusions

EOP is an ESP branch that requires development in Costa Rica due to the increasing demand that foreign and local companies have for English training in specific areas. The English for Hotel Receptionists course was designed under an EOP methodology where the main goal is completing tasks from a professional field, replicating actual activities (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). EOP course design and the NAs results guided the course towards a task-based grounding. EOP added an extra challenge to the course developments because “the point of departure for task-based language teaching is real-world or target tasks” (Nunan, 2011, p. 12). Although the researcher has experience in language teaching, the lack of knowledge of the target subject (hotel reception) required further preparation and careful choice of strategies to fulfill the students’ needs. The first step taken to address this need was using the TBA as the English for Hotel Receptionists course’s backbone. The task-based syllabus incorporated five units that framed teaching and learning under the development of tasks related to Check-in, Telephone Calls, Problem Solving, Emails, and Check-out. These units provided a comprehensive approach to regular tasks performed at hotel reception desks that can be applied and transferred to more specific places and situations.

Another action that helped accomplish a course design grounded on EOP was the choice of activity sequence. The use of Font’s (2006) learning cycle allowed for an organized plan to present students with tasks under an input-output methodology (Basturkmen, 2010). These course design elements outlined its methodology and permitted having a blueprint for planning and organizing content. One roadblock encountered during course design was the writing of the objectives. Although the NA provided sufficient data to derive clear goals from it, limited experience in course design and the difficulties of visualizing the specific learning units in the hotel reception added an extra test to the ESP learning process. The use of the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound) model (Doran, 1981) served as a practical guide to writing objectives that worked for the ESP course.

Nonetheless, transferring the NA results to a tangible program proved to be a defying feat, given that design aspect consisted of interpreting raw data to create a set of teaching-learning experiences “whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991, p. 65). In ESP, learning stakes are high because students may have elevated expectations of the course, especially in EOP settings where occupational and professional interests are high.

Course Delivery Conclusions

The students engaged in the completion of tasks while employing the appropriate English language targeted in each session. One of this project’s objectives was to assess the effectiveness of the linguistic tools provided to students in the English for Hotel Receptionists course by observing their task performance and learning outcomes. The Field Notebook, Placemat Consensus, and student assess-

ment permitted the evaluation of the students' performances during their learning process focused on assessments related to their performance in the workplace (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). The students showed engagement and outstanding results throughout the lessons and tasks they carried out. The course evaluations and final proficiency test also yielded positive insights. The students were pleased with the course and the insight acquired revealed the extent to which student garnered showing how much learners gained from the course (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The final proficiency test revealed that the learners could perform skillfully in all the units and manage the exigencies of a particular situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991).

One aspect that added to the efficacy of the course was the methodology and sequencing of the lesson plans. The instructor merged input and output methodologies (Basturkmen, 2010) with a sequence of tasks grounded in the communicative use of the language (Font, 2006). Through this method, students received input to gain a better understanding of the target task and witness English-language use in a realistic setting. The guided practice allowed students to manipulate the language in input-to-output activities; these tasks helped prime language structures and practice the target vocabulary and pronunciation. The integrated communicative practice exposed students to the main task in a predominantly output activity. Finally, the creative application intended to have students complete a homework assignment that helped bring students closer to hotels and the reception position, having learners go from output to input. This merging methodology and stage sequencing aided students' learning by scaffolding both subject understanding and language use.

Additionally, a component that became a highlight in the English for Hotel Receptionists course was the help of expert receptionists. "Collaboration between subject-area specialists and language specialists is essential for the overall success of the ESP program" (Stewart, 2018, p. 141), and this was evident as the experts collaborated with the instructor by providing language samples and specific situations that were included in the materials and the tasks presented to the students. Team teaching should be part of every EOP course; support for teaching language-learning expertise helps connect the course's occupational aspect with language learning (Brand-Fonseca & Segura-Arias, 2023). Language experts working together with subject specialists (Basturkmen, 2010) also aided students motivation as they felt assurance that the contents of the course relate to real-life occupational tasks. Such a boost in engagement was evident during the mid-course evaluation, where some students asked for more interventions and support from the receptionists.

Limitations and future research

The English for Hotel Receptionists course challenged the ESP instructor in many ways. Firstly, the COVID-19 world pandemic made it mandatory for the course to be taught virtually, which posed a challenge for some students who had difficulty in accessing the course due to internet connection issues. The main difficulty was faced by the instructor who, nevertheless, had to cope with a large

class size of twenty students. Providing such a large class with individualized feedback was nearly impossible, especially when ESP required instructors to provide one-on-one advice about their language and subject skills (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). This issue was analyzed in an ESP Variables Workshop, which allowed ESP instructors to make suggestions. The most relevant insights suggested setting separate meetings with the students to provide personalized feedback about the task performance, opening individual breakout rooms to offer feedback about their performance, and taking advantage of small group activities to speak with the learners. An important recommendation was to create a feedback culture, where positive reinforcement from peers and the instructor is encouraged and well-received. The feedback issue can be remedied by working with smaller groups, but it is worth addressing since it may be a recurring situation throughout ESP courses in Costa Rica, especially in college settings.

To summarize, the experience gained this project reveals the benefits in providing specific English training for tourism students and professionals. It is suggested that national institutions explore the possibility of more ESP courses, not only for students but also for in-service professionals, especially for tourism entrepreneurs. English courses that aim at the specific needs of tourism businesses can make a difference in terms of customer satisfaction and quality of communication.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the English for Hotel Receptionists course, several recommendations can be made for future course developments in ESP, mainly for Costa Rica's growing tourism sector. Firstly, it is fundamental to consider the expansion of the collaboration between subject-area experts and language specialists in the design and delivery of ESP courses. As experienced during course delivery, the involvement of expert receptionists significantly contributed to the authenticity and relevance of the course content. They helped provide real-world language samples and tasks that reproduced possible future challenges faced by hotel receptionists. Thus, future courses should prioritize such collaboration to boost target language training and increase learner motivation. Furthermore, addressing the challenges posed by large class sizes in ESP courses is essential. Personalized feedback is vital to student progress, and as such, dividing large groups into smaller break-out groups and plan individualized feedback sessions could help improve the learning experience. Such practices are recommended, especially when students struggle to complete tasks and use technical language appropriately.

Extensive reflection on the course delivery underscored the need for ongoing adaptation to meet the evolving demands of the tourism industry. Future research should explore the potential for regular, in-service ESP courses not only for students but, also for tourism experts in the Brunca Region and other developing areas in Costa Rica. This could better ensure that the hotel staff possesses the necessary linguistic and professional skills to meet the increasing demand for specialized English proficiency. Moreover, given the positive outcomes observed in the English for Hotel Receptionists

course, there is a need to expand the implementation of task-based learning approaches in regular English courses for tourism in Costa Rica. The TBA proved to be effective in engaging students and providing practical, applicable language skills in possible work-related tasks. Such practices can better prepare students for real-world situations, leading to improved customer satisfaction and more effective communication in professional settings.

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