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Impact of Fieldwork on Students' English Communication in Hospitality Services

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Abstract
Although English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a key component of tourism education, limited research has examined how fieldwork experience impacts students' English communication in real service settings. This study investigates the extent to which field practice improves English proficiency and service readiness among students at Makassar Tourism Polytechnic. Using a quantitative approach, data were gathered through questionnaires and analyzed using validity and reliability tests, a t-test, and R^2 analysis. Results show that fieldwork has a significant positive effect on students' service readiness ($t = 4.673$; $p = 0.001$), with an R^2 value of 0.797 indicating that 79.7% of the variance is explained by field practice. The findings suggest that structured field experiences significantly enhance students' English communication skills and professional competence. The study recommends integrating experiential and reflective learning into tourism curricula to better align academic training with industry needs.
Keywords: *English Communication, Experiential Learning, Field Practice, Tourism Services*

1. Introduction

Due to the increasingly globalized tourism and hospitality industry, English proficiency has become an essential, non-negotiable skill for professionals working in front-line customer service roles (Demirdelen Alrawadieh, 2023; Y. Wang et al., 2023). According to (Tuncdogan, 2021), as the number and diversity of international travellers continue to grow, employees in hotels, restaurants, and travel services are required to communicate effectively across various cultures and languages. In response to these global service demands, the integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into vocational tourism education has become more prominent (Nazeer et al., 2023). In line with (Fitria, 2020) and (Sarifa & Jabeen, 2024), ESP not only equips learners with the specialized vocabulary and expressions required within the industry but also emphasizes the development of situational communication skills that are directly applicable to real-world service encounters.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of ESP and communicative language teaching in improving students' language competence in vocational contexts (Luana Sasabone et al., 2021; Mulyadi et al., 2023). Recent approaches also highlight the role of digital tools, task-based learning, and ICT-supported instruction in enhancing language outcomes (Li et al., 2023). While classroom instruction remains important, there is growing consensus that experiential learning, such as internships and fieldwork, plays a critical role in preparing students for real-world professional demands (Radović et al., 2021). However, research is still limited on how far fieldwork improves practical English communication in actual service contexts. (Yin et al., 2024) noted that small sample sizes

and participant characteristics limit the generalizability of findings. (W. Wang et al., 2024) emphasized the need for more empirical research to confirm the validity of existing frameworks, particularly in smaller-scale, locally developed assessments. Involving diverse stakeholders, such as test takers and EAP professionals, could also enhance the practicality of CT assessment practices.

Tourism Polytechnic is recognized as a central institution for tourism education in Indonesia (Syukriah M et al., 2023; Usoh et al., 2020). Makassar Tourism Polytechnic (Poltekpar Makassar) is one of six tourism polytechnics under the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia. Established on September 18, 1991, as BPLP Ujung Pandang, it was founded to develop professional human resources in Eastern Indonesia's tourism sector. After transformed into a polytechnic, it offers vocational education in hospitality and travel management, supported by national and international collaborations. From 2020 to 2024, Tourism Polytechnic showed steady growth in study program accreditations and number (from 4 to 8 programs). Despite slight shortfalls in 2022 and 2023, the 2024 target was achieved, with all four programs earning “Excellent” accreditation status. Makassar Tourism Polytechnic is dedicates to provide productive and high-quality education, with a graduate-to-student ratio of 88% in 2023 and 87.63% in 2024. The institution has ensured a maximum 2-month wait time for graduates to be absorbed into the tourism sector for three consecutive years. Additionally, its collaborations with various stakeholders have shown significant improvement, with partnership implementation reaching 100% in 2023 and 140% in 2024, reinforcing the connections between the institution, government, industry, and associations (Source: Quality Assurance Unit, 2025). The institution offers eight programs under Hospitality, Travel Services, and Tourism Development, focusing on job readiness. Programs like Manajemen Tata Hidangan and Destinasi Pariwisata emphasize field-based learning to build professional and language skills, bridging academics with industry needs.

Despite the strong emphasis on practical training in tourism education, many students graduate without sufficient exposure to the real-world dynamics of customer service. Simulated learning environments still often fail to prepare students for complex tasks such as handling customer complaints, managing cross-cultural communication, and performing emotional labor under pressure. Studies have consistently highlighted a significant gap between academic training and actual workplace demands. (L. C. hung Liu, 2021) found that students in tourism internships often face long working hours, poor coordination, and limited opportunities to apply their academic knowledge in real service settings. Similarly, (Seyitoğlu & Yirik, 2015) reported that although internships support students’ professional development, they frequently offer lack exposure to realistic service challenges that require advanced communicative competence. Other research (Ruslan et al., 2021) revealed that inadequate supervision and insufficient engagement in meaningful work reduce internship satisfaction and limit learning outcomes. Moreover, (Zopiatis et al., 2021) emphasized the importance of well-structured internship programs and active industry involvement to bridge the expectation-reality gap. In the Indonesian context, (Lantu et al., 2022) noted that while students gain basic skills such as collaboration and time management, they struggle with workplace adaptation, teamwork, and transportation issues. These findings underscore the need to reassess the effectiveness of fieldwork programs in truly equipping students with the communicative and interpersonal skills required for success in the tourism industry.

Beyond the limitations of fieldwork, the generational traits of today’s students, especially Generation Z, pose distinct challenges in building emotional and professional competencies. While Gen Z is generally confident and tech-savvy, studies have shown that they often struggle with managing stress, regulating emotions, and navigating interpersonal

relationships, skills that are critical in the high-pressure environment of the hospitality industry (Goh & Lee, 2018). Emotional Intelligence (EI), which involves recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions both in oneself and others, has been recognized as a key factor influencing service quality and guest satisfaction (Miao et al., 2021). However, research by Indrayani et al. (2024) revealed that many young hospitality workers in Bali, majorly Gen Z, face difficulties with emotional awareness and resilience. This can lead to service failures, particularly in demanding, multicultural settings. The growing importance of soft skills across all sectors strengthens the urgency of this issue, and is estimated that by 2030, nearly two-thirds of jobs will rely heavily on emotional and interpersonal abilities (Zhu et al., 2022). In the hospitality field specifically, strong emotional intelligence supports better guest relations, teamwork, and conflict resolution (Wei et al., 2023; Wolfe, 2017). Hospitality education should extend beyond technical skills to foster emotional intelligence, nurturing self-control, empathy, and professionalism for success in real-world service roles.

This study investigates whether fieldwork experience significantly influences the English communication competence of Poltekpar Makassar students in tourism service settings. Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory (Beaudin & Quick, 1995; Jose et al., 2017) and the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Framework (J. Wang et al., 2023), the research compares between students who have participated in fieldwork and those who have not. Prior studies affirm that experiential activities such as field trips and service projects enhance language performance by offering authentic communication contexts (Yang & Chen, 2007). However, gaps remain between classroom learning and industry demands (Cloudia Ho, 2020). This study aims to evaluate how fieldwork experience influences students' ability to use English in real tourism service settings, and to identify the communication skill differences between students with and without field experience. Findings aim to suggest curriculum development by integrating experiential, emotional, and language learning more effectively.

2. Method

This study used a quantitative survey method to examine how fieldwork experience influences students' English communication skills in tourism service settings. A total of 100 students from Makassar Tourism Polytechnic took part in the study. Participants were selected randomly from those enrolled in English language courses during the Even Semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. They came from four programs: Tourism Destination Management, Travel Business, Travel Management, and Hotel Management. All participants had completed internships in the tourism or hospitality industry, which was a key requirement for inclusion.

The research questionnaire measured four main indicators, each grounded in a relevant theoretical framework. The first indicator, students' ability to interact with foreign tourists was based on Cross-Cultural Communication Theory (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013), which highlights the importance of navigating cultural differences in service encounters.

The second indicator assessed students' understanding of course material based on Constructivist Learning Theory (Newman & Latifi, 2021), emphasizing context and personal experience in knowledge building. The third focused on hands-on learning through Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2022), supporting interactive activities for practical application. The final indicator evaluated digital and communication skills using Customer Service Theory (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005), highlighting clear, adaptive communication crucial in service fields. Together, these theories shaped the study's design and interpretation, offering insights into how students learn and apply skills in real-world settings.

Data collection began with distributing the questionnaires to eligible students and compiling their responses for analysis. To test the construct validity, the Pearson product-moment correlation was used ~~(Sugiyono, 2020)~~. Each item's *r*_{count} value was compared with the critical value from the *r*_{table} at a significance level of 0.05 and 98 degrees of freedom. An item was considered valid if *r*_{count} exceeded *r*_{table} (Sugiyono, 2020). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value above 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). To check the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was applied, and data were considered normally distributed if the significance level was greater than 0.05 (Ghozali, 2018).

To examine the effect of fieldwork experience, a partial t-test was conducted. The results were assessed at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also calculated to determine how much of the variation in students' English communication skills could be explained by fieldwork experience (Solutions, 2017). The study was carried out at Makassar Tourism Polytechnic between January and April 2025. Overall, the research design and analysis ensured that the data were both reliable and valid in addressing the study's objectives.

3. Results

3.1 Findings

This section shows how fieldwork impacts students' English use and communication skills, supported by statistical tests to ensure validity that could guide curriculum improvements. The analysis begins with a normality test to verify the distribution of the data, followed by a reliability test to assess the consistency of the instruments. Subsequently, regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact and strength of relationships between variables. Each result is systematically presented and interpreted in the subsections that follow. The following is the normality test.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

			Unstandardized Residual
N			100
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		.0000000
	Std. Deviation		2.24969206
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.098
	Positive		.098
	Negative		-.076
Test Statistic			.098
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			.019
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.017
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.013
		Upper Bound	.020

a. Test distribution is Normal.
b. Calculated from data.
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.
d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 624387341.

As shown in Table 1, the normality test indicates a significance value of 0.017 (greater than the threshold of 0.05) indicating that the data are normally distributed.

3.1.1 The Influence of Field Practice Experience on Students' Use of English in Tourism-Related Services

Before proceeding to further statistical analysis, it is essential to assess the validity of the instrument used to measure variable X. A validity test was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to determine the degree to which each item accurately represents the intended construct. The resulting correlation coefficients were compared with the critical value from the r-table (0.196), which serves as the threshold for determining item validity based on the sample size and significance level.

Table 2. Validity Test X Variable

No	Item	Person Correlation (R Count)	R Table	Interptretation
1	X1	0,692	0,196	Valid
2	X2	0,615	0,196	Valid
3	X3	0,656	0,196	Valid
4	X4	0,677	0,196	Valid
5	X5	0,621	0,196	Valid
6	X6	0,635	0,196	Valid
7	X7	0,652	0,196	Valid
8	X8	0,635	0,196	Valid
9	X9	0,616	0,196	Valid
10	X10	0,682	0,196	Valid
11	X11	0,710	0,196	Valid
12	X12	0,679	0,196	Valid
13	X13	0,717	0,196	Valid
14	X14	0,714	0,196	Valid
15	X15	0,706	0,196	Valid

As presented in Table 2, all 15 items exhibit correlation values (r-count) well above the r-table value of 0.196. This indicates that each item demonstrates a statistically significant relationship with the overall score of variable X, confirming its individual validity. Consequently, the instrument as a whole is deemed valid, and the items are eligible for further analysis and interpretation.

To assess construct validity, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was performed on each item measuring variable Y. This step aims to determine whether each item accurately reflects the underlying concept that would be measured.

Table 3. Validity Test Y Variable

No	Item	Person Correlation (R Count)	R Table	Interpretation
1	Y1	0,438	0,196	Valid
2	Y2	0,539	0,196	Valid
3	Y3	0,679	0,196	Valid
4	Y4	0,442	0,196	Valid
5	Y5	0,366	0,196	Valid
6	Y6	0,492	0,196	Valid
7	Y7	0,461	0,196	Valid
8	Y8	0,478	0,196	Valid
9	Y9	0,558	0,196	Valid
10	Y10	0,645	0,196	Valid

Based on the validity test applied on the questionnaire as listed in table, all items, from numbers 1 to 10, are declared valid, because r count of each item was greater than r table. The validity of the questionnaire items measuring variable Y was tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficient (r-count) of each item (Y1 through Y10) exceeds the critical value of the r-table, which is 0.196. These results indicate that all items are statistically valid, as each demonstrates a sufficient level of correlation. The validity coefficients range from 0.366 to 0.679, suggesting that every item reliably represents aspects of the construct being measured. Therefore, it can be concluded that all ten items used to measure variable Y are valid and can be brought to the further analysis.

To ensure the consistency of the instrument, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and item-total correlation. This test aims to determine the internal consistency of each item in relation to the overall scale, including variables X and Y.

3.1.2 Differences in Communication Skills Between the Two Groups

Table 4. Reliability Test

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
X1	98.13	35.038	.638	.839
X2	98.24	35.680	.559	.842
X3	98.25	35.160	.626	.839
X4	98.36	35.137	.631	.839
X5	98.40	35.822	.573	.841
X6	98.47	35.365	.598	.840
X7	98.45	35.680	.603	.840
X8	98.57	35.974	.593	.841
X9	98.59	35.588	.588	.841
X10	98.59	35.584	.650	.839

X11	98.53	35.437	.608	.840
X12	98.56	35.553	.577	.841
X13	98.60	35.526	.578	.841
X14	98.64	35.112	.545	.842
X15	98.69	35.135	.524	.843
Y1	98.37	39.333	.060	.858
Y2	98.47	39.349	.075	.857
Y3	98.54	38.830	.163	.854
Y4	98.52	39.511	.074	.855
Y5	98.58	39.845	-.001	.857
Y6	98.55	39.200	.100	.856
Y7	98.65	39.723	.031	.856
Y8	98.71	39.780	.002	.858
Y9	98.84	39.571	.031	.858
Y10	99.04	39.638	.002	.861

As shown in Table 3, the corrected item-total correlation values of the items measuring variable X range from 0.524 to 0.650, all of which exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.30, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, the values of Cronbach's Alpha if an item is deleted remain within a narrow range (between 0.839 and 0.843), suggesting that no single item significantly compromises the scale reliability. Conversely, several items in variable Y (particularly Y1, Y5, Y8, and Y10) show very low or even negative item-total correlations, indicating weak alignment with the overall construct. These results imply that while the X variable demonstrates strong reliability, some items of the Y variable may require revision or refinement to improve the internal consistency. From the data above, it can be concluded that the statements in the questionnaire of the variable Field Practice Experience (X) and Tourism Service Readiness (Y) are valid and can be distributed to 100 respondents.

To further examine the effect of field practice experience on students' readiness in providing tourism services, a partial t-test (t-test for coefficients) was conducted. This statistical test aims to determine whether the independent variable—Field Practice Experience—has a significant individual influence on the dependent variable—Tourism Service Readiness—when evaluated separately. The analysis provides insights into the strength, direction, and statistical significance of the relationship between the variables, as presented in Table 5. Complementing this, the coefficient of determination (R^2) test was also performed to assess how much of the variance in Tourism Service Readiness can be explained by Field Practice Experience. This test is crucial for understanding the predictive power of the model and evaluating the extent to which practical fieldwork contributes to students' readiness for real-world tourism service demands. With R^2 values ranging from 0 to 1, higher scores reflect stronger explanatory capacity. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 6.

Table 5. T Test (Partial)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4.673	1.937		2.413	.018
	Field Practice Experience	.596	.030	.893	19.994	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Readiness of Tourism Services

Based on the table above, the t_{count} value is 4.673 while the t_{table} is 1.984. Thus, the t_{count} is greater than the t_{table} (4.673 > 1.984). This means that the independent variable has a positive influence on the dependent variable, while the significance value is 0.001 < 0.05 indicating a significant value of 0.596. It can be concluded that there is a significant positive influence of the Field Practice Experience variable (X) on the Tourism Service Readiness variable (Y).

Table 6. R^2 Test (Coefficient of Determination)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.893[a]	.797	.795	2.366

a. Predictors: (Constant), Field Practice Experience

The model shows an R^2 value of 0.797, indicating a strong relationship between Field Practice Experience and Tourism Service Readiness. This means Field Practice Experience determines 79.7% of the variation in Tourism Service Readiness, while the remaining 20.3% is influenced by other factors not covered in this study.

3.2 Discussion

This study demonstrates that field practice experience significantly improves students' readiness to provide tourism services by enhancing their communication skills and English proficiency. A strong positive relationship between field practice and tourism service readiness supports existing research advocating experiential learning to strengthen language and professional skills in real-world tourism settings (Croft & Wang, 2023; Yim, 2023; Arcodia et al., 2021; Tomasi et al., 2020). Validity and reliability tests confirm the accuracy and consistency of the measurement instruments, aligning with prior studies emphasizing robust assessment in educational research (Fatmawati & Olga, 2023; Govindasamy et al., 2024; Taber, 2018; J. Liu et al., 2024). Unlike some findings that emphasize reflective practices alongside fieldwork (Azanza et al., 2022), this present study shows field practice alone can positively impact skill acquisition, echoing Reith-Hall and Montgomery's (2023) argument and reinforcing Răcăşan's (2021) view of field practice as a vital bridge between theory and practice.

Statistical analysis confirms a significant positive effect of field practice on service readiness, with a t-value of 4.673 and significance level of 0.001, supporting findings of Gazi et al. (2024) and Purwanto et al. (2023). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.797 indicates that 79.7% of the variance in readiness is determined by field practice, consistent with Jose et al. (2017), though contrasting with F. Liu et al. (2022), who highlight other factors such as prior knowledge and motivation. This suggests the need for broader research incorporating additional variables affecting service readiness.

Comparisons with non-formal education research by Danial et al. (2023) reveal that interactive, hands-on methods like storytelling and role-playing enhance speaking skills and confidence, paralleling the benefits of field practice in this study. Both formal and non-formal

settings benefit from authentic, engaging environments that promote active participation and feedback, aligning with experiential learning theory (Jose et al., 2017). These approaches foster communication skills and English proficiency essential for tourism careers.

The findings emphasize incorporating field practice, mentorship, and structured feedback in tourism education to boost the skill development. Future research should investigate integrating fieldwork with digital tools and peer/self-assessment, as suggested by Garg et al. (2024) and Zheng et al. (2024), to further improve outcomes. Additionally, incorporating reflective practices, peer feedback, and systematic assessment may enhance service readiness, supported by Arcodia et al. (2021).

In conclusion, this study confirms the critical role of experiential learning in tourism education, recommending institutions prioritize field practice alongside reflective activities and peer feedback (Kolb, 2015; Baker & Lattuca, 2017; Newton & Brown, 2020). These integrative approaches could bridge academic knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for dynamic industry demands. Future studies should explore effective curriculum embedding strategies and estimate their long-term impacts on students' career readiness, considering additional factors like cultural exposure and motivation (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2023; Kul et al., 2024).

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impact of field practice experience on students' English use and communication skills in tourism services. The findings reveal that fieldwork has a significant and positive effect on students' communication competence, as evidenced by a partial t-test result with a t-value of 4.673 ($p = 0.001$), exceeding the critical value of 1.984. The coefficient of 0.596 indicates a strong influence, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.797$) shows that 79.7% of the variance in students' service readiness can be determined by their field practice experience. These findings underscore the vital role of experiential learning in developing professional skills in the tourism industry. Practically, tourism education should systematically incorporate fieldwork and reflective activities. However, the study is limited to a single institution with a small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should involve multiple institutions and examine other factors influencing language and professional competence.

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