



Developing Communication Skills of ESP Learners Specializing in Hospitality Management

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Abstract

This paper outlines an experiential framework for developing traditional and remote communication skills among English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners in Hospitality Management. It shares practical insights and pedagogical experiences in developing effective oral and written communication skills of ESP learners specializing in Hospitality Management. In the rapidly evolving global tourism industry, hospitality professionals must possess strong communication skills to handle diverse guest interactions, uphold service quality standards, and resolve workplace conflicts efficiently. Addressing this need, the study details an experiential learning framework implemented over several semesters at Brusov State University, focusing on the integration of task-based and project-based learning methodologies. Students were actively engaged in real-world professional scenarios, including simulated reception desk operations, mock "Mystery Guest" evaluations, and the collaborative design of comprehensive Service Blueprints for boutique hotels. By shifting the pedagogical focus from traditional grammar-centric instruction to immersive, industry-driven problem-solving tasks, learners significantly enhanced their professional vocabulary, situational fluency, and intercultural awareness. Furthermore, incorporating authentic hospitality case studies encouraged critical thinking and teamwork, bridging the gap between academic theory and industry requirements. The paper discusses the structural design of these interactive classroom activities, evaluates the feedback mechanisms implemented during student performance assessments, and addresses the primary pedagogical challenges encountered by instructors. Ultimately, this reflection demonstrates that integrating authentic, hands-on professional experiences into the ESP curriculum not only boosts student engagement but also equips future hospitality managers with the robust communicative tools necessary to gain a competitive advantage in the contemporary hospitality market of Armenia and beyond.

Keywords: *ESP, hospitality management, communication skills, task-based instruction*

Introduction and Pedagogical Rationale

In today's rapidly globalizing and tech-driven tourism sector, English has evolved from a basic academic requirement into a critical operational asset and quality benchmark [4]. Modern guests expect highly personalized, immediate, and culturally sensitive service across both physical front desks and expanding digital touchpoints (such as messaging apps, virtual concierges, and online review platforms). Within this competitive environment, effective communication directly influences brand loyalty, service ratings, and overall revenue performance. However, frontline hospitality professionals and managers operate in high-pressure settings where purely grammatical knowledge is insufficient. Success requires rapid problem-solving, vocal tone control, and emotional intelligence to handle diverse international clientele, prevent operational bottlenecks between departments, and de-escalate service breakdowns [8]. To bridge the gap between traditional classroom instruction and modern industry standards, this ESP framework shifts the pedagogical focus from grammar drills to authentic, task-based simulations. By immersing learners in real-world professional scenarios, the curriculum develops the practical oral, written, and digital competencies needed to gain a distinct competitive advantage in the contemporary hospitality market of Armenia and beyond.

Oral Communication Competencies (Spoken Hospitality Discourse)



Oral competence requires situational fluency, register flexibility, and pragmatic politeness across core operational areas [5]:

- **Verbal Fluency:** Expressing operational information clearly and politely with industry-specific accuracy [15].
- **Vocal & Tone Modulation:** Regulating pitch, volume, and pacing to convey warmth, calm authority, and empathy under pressure [13].
- **Active Listening & Clarification:** Using physical cues, paraphrasing guest inquiries, and asking targeted open/closed questions before taking action [14].
- **Non-Verbal Service Delivery:** Managing eye contact, posture, and facial expressions to project approachability and attentiveness [13].
- **Core situational Spoken Genres:**
 - **Front-Desk Operations:** Greeting arrivals, managing check-in/check-out, and clarifying billing details [5].
 - **Concierge Consultations:** Recommending local attractions, transportation, and amenities with cultural tact [8].
 - **Face-to-Face De-escalation:** Applying de-escalation protocols to validate guest concerns calmly without assigning premature blame [13].
 - **Corporate Sales & Event Negotiations:** Conducting meetings regarding banquet layouts, room blocks, catering menus, and pricing packages [14].

Written Communication Competencies (Professional Literacy & Documentation)

Written communication ensures accuracy in internal team operations and external guest relations:

- **Professional Correspondence:** Drafting clear booking confirmations, billing explanations, and formal notices adhering to standard commercial layouts [15].
- **Service Recovery via the HEART Framework:** Handling guest complaints using a structured five-step approach [13]:
 - H (Hear): Acknowledging and validating the specific problem.
 - E (Empathize): Showing genuine understanding of guest frustration.
 - A (Apologize): Offering a sincere, professional apology.
 - R (Resolve): Proposing actionable, tangible solutions.
 - T (Thank): Thanking the guest for their feedback to preserve loyalty.
- **PMS Record Precision:** Recording guest preferences, dietary requirements, and shift logs in management software (e.g., Opera) concisely and without ambiguity [14].
- **Procedural Documentation:** Collaboratively designing Service Blueprints, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and incident reports using technical hospitality terms [2].

Remote and Online Communication Competencies (Digital Hospitality Discourse)

To prepare learners for hybrid front desks and online guest relations, the curriculum integrates digital communication channels:

- **Synchronous Video Intermediation:** Managing virtual front-desk checkpoints via Zoom or MS Teams, ensuring proper camera eye contact, audio clarity, and technological fluency (screen-sharing floor plans and billing folios) [12].
- **Asynchronous Video Messaging:** Recording concise 60-second personalized pre-arrival welcome videos for VIP guests or asynchronous shift-transition video logs using platforms like Loom or Flip [11].
- **Digital Netiquette & Rapid Messaging:** Balancing professional formality with concise speed across live chat, SMS, and WhatsApp business channels without colloquialisms or regional slang [10].



- **Public Online Reputation Management:** Crafting public responses to guest reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews, blending brand protection with genuine digital empathy [13].

Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence (Interpersonal Dimension)

Linguistic proficiency must be paired with emotional regulation and interpersonal sensitivity [7], [8]:

- **Emotional Intelligence (EQ):**
 - **Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation:** Recognizing personal stress triggers and staying composed during high-volume periods.
 - **Empathy & Motivation:** Sensing unspoken guest needs and maintaining an enthusiastic, guest-centric attitude.
- **Intercultural Competence:** Adapting language patterns, body language, and greetings to diverse cultural backgrounds and English proficiency levels [6].
- **Patience & Conflict Mediation:** Resolving multi-layered guest issues under time pressure while reaching constructive compromises [8].
- **Interdepartmental Synergy:** Communicating concisely with housekeeping, food and beverage, engineering, and front office teams to ensure operational flow [2].
- **Service Personalization & Teamwork:** Tailoring communication to individual guest preferences while collaborating effectively with housekeeping, food and beverage, and management teams [4].

The framework introduced below, applies experiential methodologies to link academic theory with hotel operations:

Table 1. ESP Pedagogical Methodologies and Didactic Approaches

Pedagogical Method / Tool	Classroom Application in Hospitality ESP	Target Competency Developed
Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Simulating front-desk check-ins, VIP check-outs, and billing dispute resolution.	Situational fluency, spontaneous vocabulary recall, and service pragmatics.
Project-Based Learning (PBL)	Collaboratively designing Service Blueprints and operating manuals for boutique hotels.	Critical thinking, collaborative dialogue, and technical writing.
Mystery Guest Evaluations	Conducting mock undercover service audits using structured peer rubrics.	Analytical evaluation, quality control discourse, and formal reporting.
Case Study Method	Analyzing authentic service failures, overbooking crises, and safety incidents.	Problem-solving, mediation strategies, and cross-departmental coordination.
Video Role-Reversal	Recording interactions and reviewing footage to assess posture, tone, and language.	Metacognitive self-awareness, vocal pacing, and body language control.
EdTech (AI & VR)	Roleplaying with demanding AI guest personas and practicing in virtual hotel lobby environments.	Conversational adaptability under stress and technological fluency.
Structured Rubrics & Feedback	Evaluating complaint responses on digital empathy, accuracy, and actionability.	Formative assessment, objective performance benchmarks, and iterative writing skills.

To bridge academic theory and industry demands, the course adopts experiential learning methodologies supported by concrete classroom implementations:



Practical Methodological Implementations

1. **The "Three-Channel" Multi-Tasking Simulation (TBLT):**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* Students run a simulated 20-minute front-office shift where they simultaneously manage three incoming streams of communication:
 - *Voice (VoIP):* Handling an incoming phone call regarding a noisy air-conditioning unit, requiring immediate active listening, calming language, and ticket creation.
 - *Instant Chat (WhatsApp/Live Webchat):* Responding within 3 minutes to an in-house guest requesting dietary-safe restaurant recommendations and arranging transport.
 - *Email:* Replying to a prospective client requesting late check-out policy exceptions ("I can arrange a late check-out until 2:00 PM at no additional charge").
 - *Target Skill:* Pragmatic register-switching between spoken, rapid-text, and formal written discourse under cognitive load [13].
2. **Collaborative Boutique Hotel Service Blueprinting (PBL):**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* In groups of four, students conceptualize a fictional boutique hotel (e.g., an eco-resort in Dilijan or a historic boutique hotel in Yerevan). They map out the complete guest journey across physical touchpoints, front-stage staff actions, backstage support, and digital interfaces (PMS logs, automated pre-arrival emails).
 - *Target Skill:* Formal technical writing, collaborative managerial communication, and systemic operational understanding [14].
3. **Mystery Guest Quality Audits:**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* Students conduct mock mystery visits in peer-staged hotel simulations (lobby, restaurant, concierge). Using standardized industry audit rubrics, they evaluate their peers' performance (greeting within 30 seconds, tone warmth, upselling language) and submit an analytical "Mystery Guest Audit Report" with actionable managerial recommendations.
 - *Target Skill:* Analytical discourse, objective quality control reporting, and professional feedback formulation [8].
4. **Authentic Case Studies in Crisis Management:**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* Learners analyze actual critical incidents, such as severe double-booking during peak festival seasons or food contamination reports. Teams act as the hotel executive committee, drafting an immediate guest de-escalation script, an interdepartmental briefing memo, and an external public relations statement.
 - *Target Skill:* High-stakes problem solving, crisis communication, and ethical risk mediation [7].
5. **Video Role-Reversal and Micro-Reflective Debriefing:**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* Students record a 3-minute video handling an aggressive guest complaint using tools like Flip or Loom. Working in pairs, they mute the audio to critique non-verbal cues (eye contact, posture, defensive facial expressions), then play it with audio to evaluate vocal modulation, filler words, and empathetic phrasing.
 - *Target Skill:* Metacognitive awareness, body language control, and autonomous pronunciation self-correction [11].
6. **EdTech Integration (AI Guest Personas & VR Lobby Scenarios):**
 - *Classroom Scenario:* Students engage in spoken dialogues with AI language models configured to roleplay specific guest profiles (e.g., an impatient corporate traveller or an anxious non-native speaking tourist). Additionally, VR headsets place students in a busy lobby environment where background noise forces them to practice vocal projection and clear articulation.
 - *Target Skill:* Stress tolerance, prompt lexical recall, and technological adaptability [10].

Institutional Context



The pedagogical framework detailed in this study was implemented across four consecutive academic semesters within the Faculty of Public Communication and Service at Brusov State University, Yerevan. The cohort comprised 68 third- and fourth-year undergraduate students specializing in Hospitality and Tourism Management. Prior to enrollment, learners demonstrated intermediate to upper-intermediate English proficiency (CEFR B1–B2 levels). The curriculum was delivered over 15-week semesters (4 contact hours per week), designed to systematically transition students from isolated lexical practice to unscripted, high-pressure professional encounters.

To evaluate situational fluency and professional literacy objectively, the course replaced conventional multiple-choice tests with a three-tier formative feedback loop:

- **Criterion-Referenced Rubrics:** Written tasks (such as online complaint responses and service blueprints) were assessed using structured rubrics evaluating *Digital Empathy*, *Linguistic Accuracy*, and *Actionability of Service Recovery* on a 5-point scale.
- **Peer-Led "Mystery Guest" Audits:** During live desk simulations, non-participating peers acted as undercover quality auditors, utilizing standardized checklists to score opening greetings, time-to-resolution, and vocal politeness, followed by immediate oral debriefings.
- **Video-Assisted Self-Correction:** Utilizing recorded role-play interactions, learners completed guided self-assessment logs analyzing their non-verbal behaviours, filler-word frequency, and acoustic pacing before receiving instructor annotations.

Implementing an experiential, multi-channel ESP curriculum revealed several distinct pedagogical obstacles for instructors:

- Significant gaps in baseline English proficiency among learners frequently hindered spontaneous dialogue during unscripted simulations, requiring instructors to design differentiated scaffolding tasks and pre-task vocabulary banks.
- Language instructors faced challenges mastering specialized hotel operational procedures and Property Management System (PMS) workflows, underscoring the necessity of ongoing collaboration with hospitality industry practitioners.
- Managing multi-channel tasks (such as handling phone inquiries, live chats, and guest logs concurrently) initially caused student communicative anxiety, necessitating gradual task escalation rather than immediate full-scale immersion.
- Ensuring equal access to VR equipment, stable video platforms, and industry-standard software required continuous adaptations to available institutional infrastructure.

As observed, the evolution of the international hospitality industry has transformed the nature of professional communication. Modern hospitality managers must operate as versatile communicators who can shift effortlessly between physical frontline engagements and complex digital touchpoints. The experiential ESP framework detailed in this paper addresses this requirement by moving pedagogical practice beyond traditional grammar drills and isolated vocabulary memorization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, within the contemporary tourism and hospitality industry, English has transcended its traditional role as a mere foreign language subject to become an indispensable operational competency and a decisive benchmark of service quality. Modern hospitality professionals—from frontline desk personnel to general managers—must adeptly navigate diverse intercultural encounters, defuse service breakdowns, resolve complex guest complaints, and maintain seamless interactions across both traditional reception desks and expanding digital touchpoints. To closely align higher education outcomes with these evolving industry expectations, this ESP framework immerses learners in authentic, experiential problem-solving scenarios that cultivate both technical language mastery and interpersonal dexterity. By systematically integrating spoken situational fluency, precise written documentation, multi-channel remote communication, and emotional intelligence, the curriculum effectively transforms language classrooms into dynamic professional training grounds. Ultimately, by instilling the linguistic precision and empathetic communication demanded by international hospitality standards, this pedagogical approach empowers



future managers with the strategic tools necessary to excel and thrive across the modern global hospitality landscape.

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