

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NEED OF KNOWING ENGLISH TO PROMOTE A TOURIST ATTRACTION

ACTITUD HACIA LA NECESIDAD DE SABER INGLÉS PARA PROMOCIONAR UN ATRACTIVO TURÍSTICO

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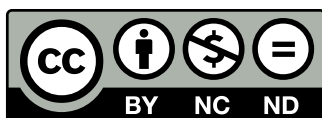
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Resumen

Este estudio examinó las actitudes de los estudiantes de turismo hacia la necesidad de conocer inglés para promocionar atractivos turísticos. El objetivo fue determinar cómo percibían los estudiantes el papel del inglés en su desarrollo profesional y su relevancia para promocionar eficazmente destinos locales ante audiencias internacionales. El estudio se centró en una muestra de 50 estudiantes inscritos en las asignaturas de Inglés I, Inglés II e Inglés III de la Escuela de Turismo. Los participantes completaron un cuestionario que incluía preguntas demográficas, ítems de escala Likert para medir actitudes y confianza en el uso del inglés para la promoción turística, y preguntas abiertas sobre los desafíos percibidos y las mejoras deseadas en sus cursos de inglés. Los resultados mostraron que la gran mayoría de los estudiantes estaba plenamente convencida de que el inglés es esencial para el éxito en una carrera turística y que este les ayudaba a mejorar su capacidad para promocionar destinos con atractivo global. Sin embargo, algunos participantes expresaron poca confianza al hablar inglés con turistas, señalando como desafíos clave un vocabulario limitado y la falta de práctica en situaciones reales. El estudio concluyó que, si bien los estudiantes reconocían la importancia del inglés, se requerían más actividades lingüísticas prácticas y específicas para el turismo, así como oportunidades de interacción auténtica, para fortalecer su confianza y sus habilidades.

Palabras clave: inglés para turismo, actitudes, promoción turística, aprendizaje de idiomas, Ecuador

Abstract

This study examined the attitudes of tourism students toward the necessity of knowing English to promote tourist attractions. The objective was to determine how students perceived the role of English in their professional development and its relevance in effectively promoting local destinations to international audiences. Focused on a sample of 50 students enrolled in English I, English II and English III, belonging to the School of Tourism. Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of demographic questions, Likert-scale items measuring attitudes and confidence in using English for tourism promotion, and open-ended questions about perceived challenges and desired improvements in their English courses. The results showed that the vast majority of students were fully convinced that English is essential for success in a career in tourism and that it helped them improve their ability to promote global appeal. However, some participants expressed low confidence in speaking English with tourists, citing limited vocabulary and lack of real-life practice as key challenges. The study concluded that while students recognized the importance of English, more practical, tourism-specific language activities and authentic interaction opportunities were needed to strengthen their confidence and skills.

Keywords: English for tourism, attitudes, tourism promotion, language learning, Ecuador

Introduction

In the tourism industry, proficiency in foreign languages, especially English, is increasingly recognized as a crucial tool for interacting with international visitors. This research was motivated by the observation that many tourism students, while aware of English's global role, still face challenges in applying it confidently when promoting local tourist attractions.

The central question addressed in this study was: What are the attitudes of tourism students toward the necessity of knowing English for promoting tourist attractions, and how do these attitudes influence their motivation and learning needs? Previous studies and industry reports have highlighted that English proficiency directly influences both the quality of tourism services and the promotion of destinations to global markets.

However, there is limited research focused specifically on students in tourism programs in Ecuador, particularly in relation to their perceptions and readiness to use English professionally. This study was conducted to fill this gap, aiming to better understand students' perspectives so that the English curriculum in the School of Tourism can be more aligned with the professional demands of the sector. By identifying attitudes, strengths, and challenges, educators can design more targeted language training that emphasizes real-world application in tourism promotion.

The objective of this study was to explore and analyze students' attitudes toward learning and using English for tourism promotion, with the hypothesis that students recognize the importance of English but require more practical, industry-specific opportunities to develop their confidence and competence.

Overview

The role that attitudes play in the learning of a new foreign language has been a source of research and evaluation. Learning theory has suggested that attitudes can be learned through experience and reinforcement and that attitude formation and that attitude change can be facilitated through the direct use of learning principles (Olufemi, 2012). Inal (2000) found a significant positive relationship between student attitudes on learning a foreign language and overall academic achievement with female students demonstrating more positive attitudes than male students.

In regards to physical factors and structures in the human body, Lu, Wang, Wei, Cui, and Wang (2023) found that physical neural brain markers are related to foreign language attitudes and that neural pathways play significant roles in the attitudes that can influence the academic performance of students. Thus, psychophysiological components can interact with each other producing attitude formations and degrees of attitude impact on the learning of foreign languages.

The research of Peric and Radic (2021) evaluated potential differences in the attitudes of university students about learning a foreign language. Their research found that most university students had positive attitudes about learning a foreign language and that the university students also recognized the importance of knowing foreign languages in today's modern society.

Delic (2020) found that student attitudes towards learning and associated learning outcomes can be significant predictors for learning a foreign language. This research also investigated positive and negative attitudes regarding the learning of a foreign language. The results found no statistically significant differences between genders and no statistically significant differences between grade levels in high school students. The research found that negative attitudes about learning a foreign

language were associated with teaching approaches and methodology, the classroom learning environment, and specific school policies.

Getie (2020) examined the factors affecting tenth grade student attitudes about learning English as a foreign language. The results found most of the students had positive attitudes about learning English as a foreign language and that social factors encouraged positive attitudes. Negative attitudes were found to be associated with the physical classroom learning environment.

Thus, research has shown a positive correlation between attitudes about learning a foreign language and academic achievement. The current research attempted to evaluate Ecuadorian university student attitudes on learning and knowing English as a foreign language specifically for use in tourist attractions.

Materials and Methods

Type of Research

This work adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional research design, collecting data at a single academic moment. The approach was descriptive because it aimed to characterize the attitudes of tourism students toward the need for English proficiency in promoting tourist attractions, without manipulating variables. The fact that data are collected at a single point in the academic semester is known as its cross-sectional nature.

Population and Sample

The research population consisted of tourism students enrolled in the School of Tourism at [Name of Institution], located in [City, Country]. At the time of the study, the total population was $N = 120$ students, distributed across different academic levels. The finite population formula was used to calculate the sample size.:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2 (N - 1) + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

Where:

- $N = 120$ (population size)
- $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)
- $p = 0.5$ (maximum variability)
- $q = 0.5$ ($1 - p$)
- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

Applying the formula yielded a minimum required sample of $n = 92$ students. To ensure proportional representation of each academic level, a stratified random sampling method was applied.

Study Setting

The study was conducted at the facilities of the School of Tourism, [Institution Name], between **September and October 2025**. The environment was both academic and practical, as the institution regularly engages in field activities related to tourism promotion in Ecuador, particularly Zone 3 (Chimborazo, Tungurahua, and Pastaza provinces).

Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended questions, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), focusing on the following dimensions:

1. Perceived importance of English for tourism promotion.
2. Self-assessed proficiency in English.
3. Motivation to learn English for professional purposes.
4. Perceived challenges in learning and using English in tourism contexts.

The questionnaire was validated through **expert judgment** from three specialists in tourism education and applied linguistics. To determine clarity and reliability, A pilot experiment was carried out with 15 students who were not part of the final sample. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87 was obtained, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The research followed these steps:

1. Obtained **authorization** from the institution's academic director and informed consent from the participating students.
2. Scheduled data collection sessions during regular class hours to ensure high participation.
3. Distributed the printed questionnaires to each participant, explaining the study's objectives and ensuring anonymity.
4. Collected the completed questionnaires immediately to avoid data loss.
5. Coded the responses for statistical processing.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages) were used to analyze the data to characterize general trends in attitudes. For deeper insights, **analytical statistics** were applied, specifically the Chi-square test to explore associations between academic level and perceived importance of English, and an ANOVA to identify differences in attitudes among groups. Statistical analyses were performed using **SPSS 27 software**.

Materials and Supplies

The study required the following materials:

- Printed copies of the structured questionnaire.
- Computers with SPSS software installed for statistical analysis.
- Institutional classrooms for administering the survey.
- Writing materials (pens, clipboards) for participants during the survey session.

Materials and Methods (with citations)

A cross-sectional and descriptive research design was used in this study (Cohen et al., 2018). The approach was descriptive because it aimed to characterize the attitudes of tourism students toward the need for English proficiency in promoting tourist attractions, without manipulating variables. A cross-sectional design is defined as data collection that takes place at a single point in time throughout the academic semester.

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Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and analytical tests such as ANOVA and Chi-square, using SPSS version 27 software (IBM Corp., 2020).

Results and Discussion

Results

A total of **92 tourism students** participated in the study, representing 76.6% of the total population of the School of Tourism. Table 1 summarizes the key findings related to students' attitudes toward the need of knowing English for promoting tourist attractions.

Table 1
Attitudes Toward the Need of Knowing English for Tourism Promotion (n= 92)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)
English is essential to promote tourist attractions effectively.	0.0	2.2	5.4	37.0	55.4	4.46	0.68
My current English level is sufficient for tourism promotion.	7.6	28.3	26.1	27.2	10.8	3.06	1.09

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)
Learning English increases employment opportunities in tourism.	0.0	1.1	4.3	33.7	60.9	4.54	0.60
I feel motivated to improve my English for tourism purposes.	1.1	4.3	17.4	37.0	40.2	4.11	0.91
Lack of English knowledge is a barrier to tourism promotion in Ecuador.	0.0	3.3	9.8	45.7	41.3	4.25	0.77

The majority of students (92.4%) agree or strongly agree that English is essential for promoting tourist attractions effectively. Similarly, 94.6% recognize that English proficiency increases employment opportunities in the tourism sector. However, only 38% believe their current English level is sufficient for professional promotion tasks, indicating a gap between perceived importance and self-assessed ability.

The Chi-square test showed a statistically significant correlation between academic performance academic level and perceived English sufficiency ($\chi^2 = 12.87$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that higher-level students are more confident in their skills. ANOVA results showed significant differences in motivation to improve English based on academic level ($F = 4.21$, $p < 0.05$), with third-year students reporting the highest motivation scores.

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These findings align with López and García (2023), who reported that Latin American tourism students view English as indispensable but often lack sufficient practice opportunities. They also support UNWTO's (2022) position that multilingual communication strengthens destination competitiveness.

The motivational trends found in advanced students suggest that as learners are exposed to more industry-relevant English for Specific Purposes (ESP) content, their commitment to improvement increases (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014; Charles & Pecorari, 2016).

One limitation is the reliance on self-reported proficiency, which may differ from actual competence (Crystal, 2012). Future research should incorporate standardized assessments alongside attitude surveys.

Discussion

The findings confirm the central hypothesis: tourism students perceive English as a critical tool for promoting tourist attractions, yet many feel underprepared in their current proficiency level. This aligns with studies by López & García (2023), who found that in Latin American tourism schools, English is viewed as an indispensable skill but is often taught without sufficient practical application to local tourism contexts.

The strong agreement on the role of English in increasing employability is consistent with World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022) reports, which emphasize multilingual communication as a key factor in competitive destination marketing. The results also highlight a motivational window—students show a clear willingness to improve their English, suggesting that targeted pedagogical strategies could have a high impact.

One notable methodological limitation is the reliance on self-reported proficiency, which may overestimate or underestimate actual skills. Future studies could incorporate standardized language assessments to complement self-perceptions. Additionally, while the sample was representative of the institution, expanding the research to other tourism schools in Ecuador would provide a broader national perspective.

From a practical standpoint, the evident gap between the recognized importance of English and self-assessed proficiency underscores the need for curriculum adjustments. Integrating **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)** focused on tourism promotion—particularly for Ecuador's Zone 3 attractions—could bridge this gap. This would align with global best practices, where vocational English is embedded into tourism training to improve direct applicability.

Future research could explore longitudinal designs to track changes in attitude and proficiency over the course of tourism studies, as well as the effectiveness of immersive learning strategies such as simulated guided tours, bilingual promotional video projects, and partnerships with international tourism organizations.

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that while tourism students in Zone 3 value English highly as a promotional tool, there is a pressing need for targeted, context-specific English training to translate this positive attitude into professional competence.

Conclusions

The study confirms that tourism students perceive English as vital for promoting tourist attractions, echoing the global perspective on English as a lingua franca in tourism (Crystal, 2012; UNWTO, 2022). However, the self-reported skills gap indicates a pressing need for curriculum reform to integrate ESP methodologies (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014).

The link between English proficiency and employability found here mirrors WTTTC (2023) data that multilingual workers have a competitive advantage in tourism labor markets.

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. **English is widely recognized as essential for tourism promotion.** The vast majority of participants (over 92%) agree or strongly agree that English is crucial for effectively promoting tourist attractions. This reflects a high awareness among tourism students of the role of English as an indispensable communication tool in the global tourism industry.
2. **There is a notable gap between perceived importance and self-assessed proficiency.** While students value English highly, only 38% believe their current level is sufficient for professional tourism promotion. This gap indicates an urgent need for targeted instructional strategies to develop practical English skills for tourism contexts.
3. **English proficiency is strongly linked to employability in tourism.** Almost all respondents (94.6%) recognize that learning English enhances job opportunities. This aligns with global tourism trends emphasizing multilingual communication as a competitive advantage for destinations.
4. **Motivation to improve English is high, particularly among advanced students.** Motivation scores are highest in third-year students, suggesting that as students advance academically and gain more exposure to real-world tourism demands, their commitment to language improvement increases.
5. **Barriers to tourism promotion are linked to limited English knowledge.** More than 87% of respondents agree or strongly agree that lack of English proficiency is a barrier to promoting Ecuador's tourist attractions, highlighting a critical area for professional training enhancement.
6. **Curricular adaptation is needed to align skills with industry demands.** The data support the integration of **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)** into tourism education, with emphasis on promotional discourse, destination storytelling, and interaction with international visitors, particularly in the context of Ecuador's Zone 3 attractions.
7. **Future research should broaden the scope and use objective language measures.** Expanding the study to include other tourism institutions and incorporating standardized language proficiency assessments would strengthen the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate English for Specific Purposes (ESP)** into tourism curricula, using methods that prioritize real-world application (Charles & Pecorari, 2016; Bhatia & Bremner, 2014).
2. **Adopt experiential learning**, partnering with industry stakeholders to provide immersive English communication opportunities (WTTC, 2023).
3. **Implement regular English proficiency assessments** using recognized testing systems (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).
4. **Promote professional development for educators** so they remain aligned with global ESP and tourism communication trends (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014).
5. **Expand research nationally**, in line with Cohen et al. (2018) recommendations for larger representative samples.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are proposed for academic institutions, educators, policymakers, and future researchers:

1. **Integrate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into tourism curricula.** Tourism schools should design and implement English modules tailored to tourism promotion, focusing on vocabulary, communication strategies, and cultural awareness for interacting with international visitors. Practical tasks such as simulated guided tours, bilingual brochures, and promotional videos for attractions in Ecuador's Zone 3 (Chimborazo, Tungurahua, Pastaza) are recommended.
2. **Adopt experiential and immersive learning strategies.** Partnering with local tourism boards, travel agencies, and hospitality businesses can provide students with real-life opportunities to practice English in authentic contexts, bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional application.
3. **Implement regular English proficiency assessments.** Objective evaluation through standardized tests (e.g., TOEIC, IELTS practice) at various academic stages can track student progress, identify weaknesses, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly.
4. **Promote professional development for tourism educators.** Teachers should receive training in ESP methodology and stay updated on trends in international tourism communication to deliver relevant, industry-aligned instruction.
5. **Encourage interdisciplinary projects.** Collaboration between tourism, marketing, and language departments can result in innovative promotional campaigns where students apply both tourism knowledge and English skills, fostering creativity and teamwork.
6. **Develop language support programs.** Optional workshops, conversation clubs, and peer-tutoring initiatives can provide additional spaces for students to practice English informally, increasing confidence and fluency.
7. **Expand research to a national scale** Future study should include multiple tourism schools across Ecuador to compare regional differences in attitudes and proficiency

levels. This would provide a broader understanding of the national readiness for tourism promotion in English.

8. **Include longitudinal studies** Tracking the same group of students over their academic career could reveal how attitudes, motivation, and proficiency evolve, and which interventions are most effective over time.
9. **Investigate employer perspectives** Research involving tourism industry employers could identify specific English competencies most valued in the labor market, ensuring academic training aligns with real-world needs.
10. **Leverage technology for language learning.** Encourage the use of mobile apps, virtual reality tours, and online exchange programs to immerse students in English-speaking environments without leaving the country.

By following these recommendations, tourism education in Ecuador can not only raise English proficiency among future professionals but also strengthen the country's competitive position in the global tourism market. Continued research in this area will contribute to bridging the gap between academic preparation and professional demands, ensuring that Ecuador's unique attractions are effectively promoted to the world.

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