



INTEGRATING CONTENT AND COMMUNICATION IN AN "ENGLISH FOR TOURISM" COURSE. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

In the field of English for Specific Purposes, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been reputed to be an effective approach to fostering both linguistic and professional competencies. The present study explores the Tourism students' needs, lacks and wants regarding their academic and professional usage of Specialized English to prepare for future jobs in the hospitality industry, and it is based on the data analysis collected in a survey addressed to 1st year Tourism Geography students enrolled at the Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University. The special roles of task-based activities, usage of authentic materials as instruments of practice and autonomous learning in language and content learning are investigated in correlation with increased levels of student satisfaction. The encouraging results of our findings are further discussed for best practice implementation and the pedagogical implications for designing future ESP curricula and syllabi. This study investigates how increased value can be added to ESP classes by CLIL approaches, particularly when such an approach is founded on task-based learning, design of authentic learning materials and language learning optimization via AI driven tools. New learning requirements and tailored employability skills are essential for Tourism students, who show strong interest and readiness in exploring and utilizing a wide range of digital tools to enhance their industry-related competencies and the current study indicates how such learning needs can be molded in CLIL tailored language courses. While experimenting with both foreign language and specialized content in such customized micro-communities of practice, learners are exposed to a plethora of scenarios in which motivation enhancement, and the building of transversal skills are genuine gains.

Keywords: CLIL, task-based activities, authentic materials, increasing students' motivation, integrated learning

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INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The current study explores how English for Tourism courses can go beyond traditional language classes by integrating content, language, and professional communication in higher education for tourism students. Our theoretical framework outlines the derived benefits of such an integration, how it can be structured using theoretical models like the Content and Language Integrated Learning [CLIL] and Task-Based Language Teaching [TBLT] how AI and digital tools enhance learning together with some pedagogical takeaways that can be applied to an English for Specific Purposes course. The aim of the study is to identify



and discuss ways of better aligning tourism language courses with the real-world demands of the hospitality industry, focusing on students' academic growth and professional readiness.

In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the integration of content and language learning has emerged as a necessary step and response to the communicational and professional demands of specialized fields such as business, tourism and hospitality or IT. One of the most prominent approaches that uses the content and language learning framework is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a methodology based on facilitating learning contexts for students to acquire knowledge and skills about a subject through a foreign language, enabling simultaneous acquisition of both content knowledge and linguistic (Coyle et al., 2010; Hermawati, 2022). While both ESP and CLIL aim to develop language competence in a specific context, ESP focuses primarily on the specialized discourse and skills required in a particular profession or field, whereas CLIL integrates this with subject content learning to achieve dual-focused outcomes (Mezei, 2024). The focus in the present study is particularly shifted towards CLIL, even if the analyzed course is an ESP course. Nonetheless, seeing that in their further professional training, students are required to choose at least a CLIL course as part of their M.A. program, we, as instructors, have designed and taught the undergraduate Tourism ESP course more as a pre-CLIL/introductory course to facilitate the dual focus and to train learners to achieve both language competencies and domain-specific skills that are interdependent.

This pedagogy with a dual focus is highly relevant for students majoring in tourism and hospitality, who must master a wide range of domain-specific terms and concepts and make proper use of advanced communication skills when handling global guest interactions. The pedagogical strength of CLIL can be noted in its 4Cs framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture— framework that was applied into CLIL by Coyle et al. (2010). Each element of the 4Cs has the role of providing integrated skills in context during the language class, so students could expand their transversal skills acquisition. In the context of the English for Tourism course, for instance, in terms of Content, students engage with authentic materials such as hotel booklets, travel agency brochures, and sustainability guidelines, thus becoming familiar with industry-specific know-how as reservation protocols, check-in/check-out procedures, and green tourism practices among others. The particularity is that such content is not introduced as isolated learning items but rather embedded within language units to provide relevance and contextual understanding.

With *Communication* as another core element in the CLIL framework, language instructors facilitate learning contexts in which students are required to use English effectively in a variety of professional scenarios from making polite inquiries to handling guest complaints in written and spoken formal language, to giving directions, or writing promotional emails and articles for tourism packages. These task-based learning chunks often involve role-playing authentic service encounters, where learners must put to use linguistic forms and proper register in order to interact with international guests.

Cognition, a third layer of the approach, is stimulated through problem-solving activities such as handling overbooking conflicts, planning and describing tour itineraries, or processing guest feedback to improve service delivery. These tasks are more than learning scenarios as they require critical thinking, decision-making, and the capacity to apply both language and content knowledge in context.

Addressing the component *Culture* in this teaching framework means exploring intercultural etiquette and delving into layers of meaning making in terms of cultural interactions. Students are often required to work with case studies that present cross-cultural misunderstandings and design, prepare and deliver presentations on how hospitality customs vary across cultures. As Apelt et al. (2023) emphasize, "simply learning vocabulary and grammar is not enough"; students also need to develop a strong intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in order to master the subtleties of hospitality communication across diverse cultures (p. 572). By embedding authentic, culturally contextualized learning scenarios within language instruction, CLIL provides an encompassing platform to foster these skills and train students into becoming genuine professionals in the field of hospitality.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be an effective and relevant teaching tool. Highly relevant for the design of tasks as meaning-focused activities with a clear communicative purpose, the use of the TBLT approach can foster learning through engagement and interactivity rather than the more standardized use of pre-taught language forms (Ellis, 2024). In the ESP for Tourism and Hospitality, TBLT can be implemented



through a variety of practice activities: simulations such as hotel check-ins, complaint resolution, itinerary planning, and marketing prompts for destinations and attractions, all of these mirroring workplace realities (Hassani & Wang, 2023). These activities facilitate not only the teaching of language, but they also foster students' immersion in problem-solving practices of the hospitality field, building up their transversal skills and more confidence in the actual practical use of language in their future workplace.

The advantage of using TBLT can also be seen as a practical reaction to various concerns raised in studies on English-Medium Instruction (EMI). For example, Costa & Coleman (2013) and Dafouz (2018) both report there are challenges in aligning language development with disciplinary instruction, including teacher uncertainty and insufficient scaffolding. TBLT can instead address these issues by embedding language practice into subject-based activities, facilitating an enriching learning framework for students. Moreover, CLIL in higher education sits "at the crossroads of ESP and didactic reflection" (Taillefer, 2015, p. 35), with a core intent of matching pedagogical input with practical communicative aims.

Likewise, with the increasing affordances provided by digital tools and AI-driven technology, further customization of teaching content is a prerequisite, especially in the context of fostering learner autonomy. Most TBLT frameworks support the integration of AI and digital tools to adapt the resources and simulate real-world learning scenarios. Asrifan et al. (2025) indicate the potential of using AI-enhanced ESP models in which collaborative groups are formed dynamically based on cognitive profiles (in which patterns of strengths and weaknesses related to information processing, learning, problem-solving and academic response are used) and tasks are adapted in real-time to suit learner styles and intelligences. Using such approaches may both improve student engagement and enhance motivation, while at the same time allowing language instructors to differentiate content units and scaffold tasks. The potential of AI-supported learning through TBLT in the ESP class is also confirmed through similar findings such as the study by Kim & Sim (2024), which indicates that AI-assisted learners in ESP contexts can lead to increased self-regulated learning and content mastery. One significant takeaway is that, by generating adaptive environments, real-time feedback is provided, which is crucial in supporting students refine their performance in interactions that are service-oriented.

In addition to facilitating advanced adaptive task design, AI also supports multimodal content creation, which is particularly relevant in the case of generative visuals (for example, various AI-driven tools such as DALL.E, Midjourney, RunwayML can be used to generate visuals that can be further used in brochure design, ads or virtual tours projects) in tourism-related language instruction. Learners can enhance their language production skills by stemming from oral image description to image and video integration in brochure writing and to creating their own images to be further used in project-based learning. This triggers various benefits, as, on one hand, it requires students to practice their language skills in accordance to developing digital skills and AI know-how, while, on the other hand, it supports an inclusive transversal skill building during the ESP class. The various AI-driven platforms and tools such as Ideogram.ai, ChatGPT, Replika, Character.ai can be used as virtual tutors (role-playing with virtual avatars), can simulate dialogues with tourists or customers in specific scenarios and enable authentic practice in travel sales, airport check-in, or destination guiding. Bellés-Calvera (2025) confirms how such platforms empower students to generate visual content that enhances oral and written communication.

The specific components of the CLIL-based contents in an ESP course are the result of careful needs analysis in second language acquisitions, which are usually applied as forms at the beginning of the academic year to undergraduate students. The dual focus embedded in the CLIL approach ensures that learners are developing their language competence and at the same time acquiring subject-specific knowledge. This dual focus is essential in vocational and professional contexts such as tourism, where communicative effectiveness depends heavily on mastery of domain-specific vocabulary, discourse genres, and cultural conventions (Basturkmen, 2010; Fortanet-Gómez, 2013). More than responding to students' expectations and needs when designing a TBLT based language course, the focus is also on integrating communicative competence models (Canale & Swain, 1980) with task-based learning strategies in order to place more emphasis on real-world professional communication tasks over grammar instruction which may often appear decontextualized to learners. Such an approach may indicate a clearer preference on behalf of students for



practical and hands-on speaking and listening activities, as this gives them the opportunity to practice and engage in learning scenarios that closely mirror their future workplace activities.

Equally important, the use of specialism in language instruction is also a motivating tool for learners, who are more engaged and appear to show retention improvement, as they see clear relevance between the language classroom and their future careers (Dörnyei, 2001). In seizing this opportunity to mix language acquisition with content knowledge, learners perceive their ESP course more like a professional gateway, which properly equips them with the linguistic instruments to operate in the hospitality field.

Another highly relevant aspect to be taken into account when designing and implementing a TBLT-based ESP course is that autonomous language learning must play a pivotal role in the field of tourism and hospitality. In this context, learners are trained to acquire the ability to take charge of their own language learning processes, allowing them to customize vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, and communicative skills according to the specific requirements of their professional domain. Since autonomy enhances learner motivation and engagement (Benson, 2011), a well-tailored ESP context allows for autonomous learners to better prepare for their future professions. In the case of tourism and hospitality, where interaction with guests, cultural awareness, and service-oriented communication are essential, autonomous learning supports the acquisition of context-specific linguistic competencies. When it comes to the category of materials that can be suitable for autonomous learning, students can independently explore a variety of authentic materials, from hotel brochures and leaflets, restaurant menus, travel blogs, and customer service dialogues (both AI generated ones and video recordings of actual interactions) to improve their receptive and productive skills. Even more so, learner autonomy not only improves linguistic performance but also cultivates lifelong learning skills, which are essential in the ever-evolving global tourism industry (Little, 2007).

The aim of the current study, which is detailed in the following section, is to explore the usage of CLIL elements (task-based activities, authentic materials) in correlation with increased level of students' academic and professional satisfaction. The analysis is built on two core research questions: Are learners' expectations regarding the blend of specialism content and language skills aligned with their target need of language skills further in a professional career?, and respectively, What language activities and level of tasks contribute to a motivating learning experience? The analysis of respondents' answers will indicate how a language course customized in a CLIL-based approach can enhance learning and raise awareness among students over the relevance of using a foreign language as an essential tool in their content acquisition process.

The study consists of the data analysis based on a survey that addressed 1st year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania (both the Cluj-Napoca and Bistrița study branches) – students who specialize in Tourism and Geography and who will potentially seek employment in the hospitality industry. Our research has stemmed from the necessity to improve the professional training we are offering our students, not just the linguistic-communicative facet of our teaching. One of the essential questions ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers are asking themselves frequently is how much specialized content to include in the course and how much percentage should be dedicated to foreign language teaching, considering that ESP teachers are not content specialists. We, as course tutors, are also aware that the needs and wants of our students should set the tone, regardless of what specialized literature recommends, so with this end in mind we have decided to investigate these by means of a needs analysis survey. The results of the survey will calibrate our teaching and syllabi design to better suit the professional training necessities of our students for a smoother integration in this very dynamic labour market.

METHODOLOGY

The current article capitalizes on the results of a questionnaire sent to the 120 students enrolled at the "Geography of Tourism" specialization of the afore-mentioned faculty. The survey was edited as a Google Form and was transmitted to the students online, using the Microsoft Teams system. The completion of the form was an anonymous process and spanned a timeframe of two weeks in March 2025. The questionnaire received 81 responses and was mostly a quantitative investigation, comprising 16 multiple-choice questions



and one open-ended inquiry. The survey (see Appendix) consists of seventeen questions, the majority of questions being multiple choice ones, while others are checkboxes type, with one final question designed as a short answer one. The first part of the survey investigates the sociometric profile of the respondents and the following questions progressively focus on students' language level, on their expectations regarding the ESP course, as well as their attitudes to the content-language blend that defines the taught course.

From the answers received we managed to sketch our students' sociometric profile: the overwhelming majority are very young high-school graduates – 87% being aged 18-25, just 6% are aged 21-25, 1% reported an age ranging between 26-30 and 5% were aged over 31. Most of them are female (72%) and only 27% are male. In terms of English proficiency level almost half (45%) reported having level B2, 19% have level B1, 12% are at level A2, 9% are at level C1 and only 2% are at level C2. These reported levels reflect the results of a placement test they had to take at the beginning of the semester (9% of the students reported not having taken the test). These findings show that the great bulk of our students are at an intermediary level (at least B1) and above, which is the recommended entry level for those who would like to attend the "English for Tourism" course. Our students also reported the number of years they have been studying general English before joining the university – more than half of them (43 respondents – 53%) have studied this language since primary school (for 12 years), almost a quarter (20 respondents, 24%) have studied it since kindergarten (for 14 years), only 17 students (21%) reported learning English since secondary school (for 8 years) and just one student mentioned having started the study of the language in high-school (for 4 years). These two survey items combined show that $\frac{3}{4}$ of our students are very comfortable with studying and using English, since they have done this for a very long time, the process almost becoming a routine for them, and their level for the most part is at least intermediary if not even advanced. Therefore, from the point of view of the difficulty of studying a new matter (tourism issues) in English and from the point of foreign language communication, they should not report any discomfort regarding the ESP course.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the main issues we, as course tutors, wanted to know was whether our students expect their ESP course to be another English course that would serve either as a remedial course (for the students at level A2 and B1) or as an advanced course that would improve even more their general English communication skills (for students at levels B2, C1). Surprisingly, neither was their choice, our respondents opting, in a great majority, for a language course that would have a strong specialist content. Asked how they would characterize their mastery of English from the lower educational system, more than a third (35%, 29 respondents) said that they have a satisfactory knowledge of English, but they still need improvement. Almost the same number, 23 students – 28%, mentioned they consider having a solid knowledge of English (vocabulary, grammar, skills), but they still need to prepare for their future profession. Then 20 students admitted they have a basic knowledge of English and still need to learn a lot and only 9 respondents chose the variant "I have a very solid knowledge of English which is enough for me" (which basically implied that they need no English course whatsoever). In summary, more than 65% of the students are aware they still need to learn better English, especially in preparation for their future career.

Asked about their expectations from the "English for Tourism" course they get at university, their most important need (based on their choice of the top four options from a list of 10 items) were :1) to learn about tourism-related topics in English (66%), 2) to study specialized vocabulary for their academic and professional domain (64%), 3) to practice more speaking skills (59%), 4) to learn about geography-related topics in English (55%). Other options in decreasing order were: to practice more listening skills, to practice more writing skills, to practice more reading skills, to study more grammar, to learn about anglophone cultures. We can easily conclude that their overwhelming desire from the English course is to focus heavily on specialism content and practicing skills (like speaking) that will be frequently need in the interactions from the hospitality industry. Studying other general English skills and knowledge comes as a minor concern from them.

Inquired about their wants from the course as interpreted from their choice of a top four options from a list of 10 items (here we do make a distinction between what the students need, usually to fill a gap

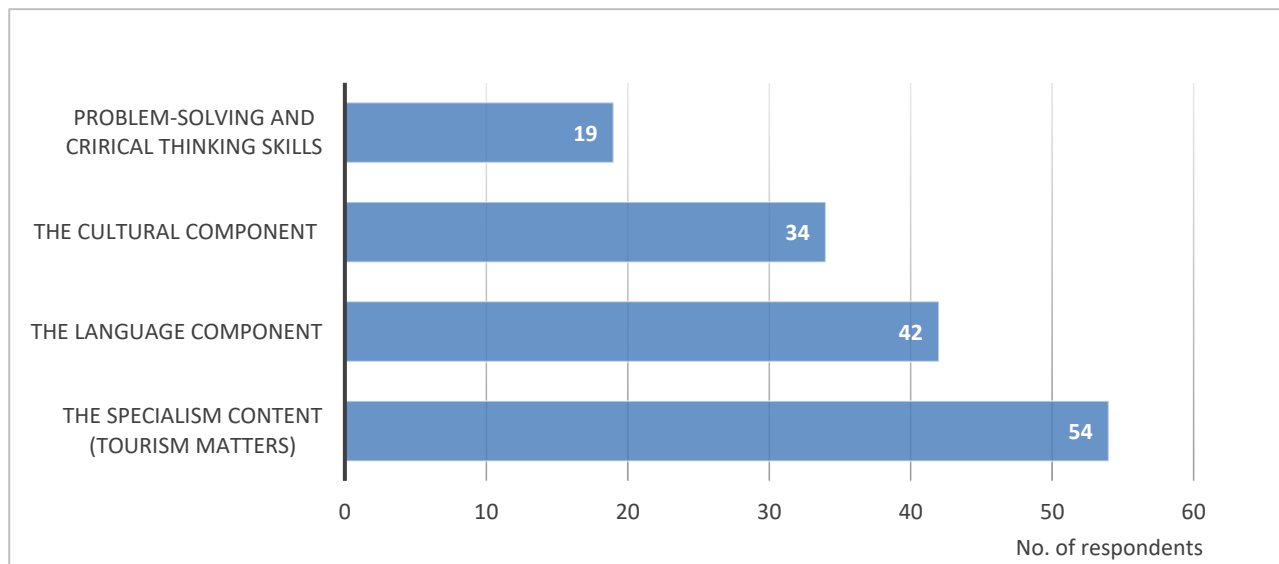


in their skills or knowledge, and what they want from a course, usually what they prefer studying because it's their passion) our respondents again underlined their preference for specialist-specific matters in two of their first choices. Their first choice was to study specialized English to be prepared for their future professions (87%), the second choice was a more generally valid – improving their general English skills (66%), The third option was for them to improve their knowledge about the hospitality industry (jobs, types of companies, requirements, etc.) (59%), while the fourth option was to improve their background cultural knowledge (48%). In decreasing order, they also expected the ESP course to help them with: improving their geography knowledge, improving their people skills, helping them with their own personal development, improving their critical thinking skills, teaching them to study on their own. Only one respondent out of 81 mentioned that there is no need for any kind of English course at university. This indicates that upon enrollment in the course our students expect diving into specialism matter rather than just improving their English language skills

Furthermore, considering that in the debates about the best way to achieve balanced courses that integrate both content learning and language acquisition, specialists often speak about the importance of the 4Cs framework (content, communication, cognition and culture) when devising ESP syllabi and courses, we wanted to evaluate our course with our students' feedback on their preferred mix at the course. Asked which component of the course is more useful for them, a comfortable majority of our students (66.7%, 54 respondents) mentioned they prefer the specialism content more than anything else because they want to work in the domain – we see this illustrated in *Figure 1*. Their second preference goes to the language component (51.9%, 42 respondents) since they feel they need to improve their English, the third option is for the cultural component because they are curious about other cultures (42%, 34 respondents), and last but not least, they prefer the cognition component where they develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills (23.5%, 19 respondents).

Figure 1

Students' preferences for the various components of the "English for Tourism" course (Students picked their first 2 choices to get an accurate order of their preferences)



Their perception about the course also doubles these findings. At the "English for Tourism" course, most students (42%) feel that they are learning more about tourism (jobs, companies, specific skills, branches of the hospitality industry), 37% percent of them reported that they feel they are learning more English while also studying about Tourism (basically both at the same time), 11% said they feel their English remained constant but they know more about Tourism because of this language course and 9% reported making



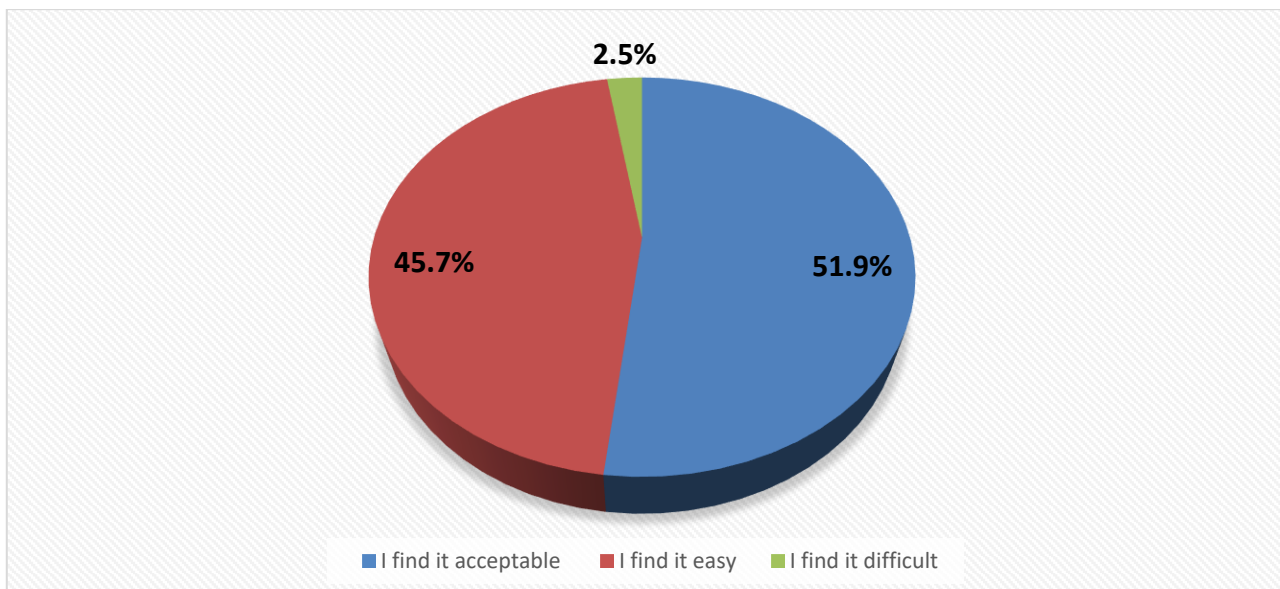
progress only with the language part. Once again, we notice that for most of them language acquisition is seen as a useful tool to prepare for a future job, but in itself it is not valued much.

Students mention they are happy that the ESP course mixes studying English with tourism matters, 99% of them finding this the ideal form of studying English at university. Only 1% would prefer to just study some of the Tourism courses in English (a classical CLIL variant), with no separate “English for Tourism” course option. None of them opted for studying just general English and none of them said they need no foreign language course at all. To sum up, our students are aware of the importance of mastering a foreign language in the hospitality industry, but in the way it should be studied according to them, the real-life content matter and purpose should be paramount.

Considering that when enrolling in the ESP course our students are just freshmen with no experience of the specialist domain and with very little previous knowledge or even courses dedicated to tourism per se in their 1st year of study at the faculty, we can infer that the satisfaction with the English course they reported, may also come from the fact that some of the specialist matters discussed in class are new for them, being mentioned in the foreign language course first. This novelty factor that the “English for Tourism” course brings is not to be neglected. About a third of the respondents (37%) say that the specialism content mentioned during the English course is already known to them from their background knowledge, but 27% say that those matters are new to them and were first mentioned at the English course and 7% said that most of those matters are new and mentioned for the first time at the English course. Only 22% mentioned that some of those subjects are also taught by the Tourism professors, and the least percentage, 6.2% represents students who mentioned that most of the tourism matters taught at English are also taught by their specialism tutors. It seems that during their first year of study, the English course is among the few ones who break the ice in starting to prepare students for the tourism jobs they aspire to. Based on the topics and subject matter studied during the ESP course students report specific preferences regarding the course’s inclination for emphasizing specialism content over language communication.

Figure 2

The level of difficulty perceived by students for studying specialism content (tourism matters in English)



One reason for expressing satisfaction that the ESP course deals mostly with specialist content rather than English communication skills, can be found in the reported easiness in studying tourism content in a foreign language, as illustrated in *Figure 2*. Almost half of the students (45.7%) mentioned they find it easy to study tourism matters in English, 51.9% find it of medium difficulty and only 2.5% mentioned it was difficult for them. When we inquired in the survey whether the students’ level of English prevents them from understanding the tourism matters discussed at the course and from participating in the discussions, 38%



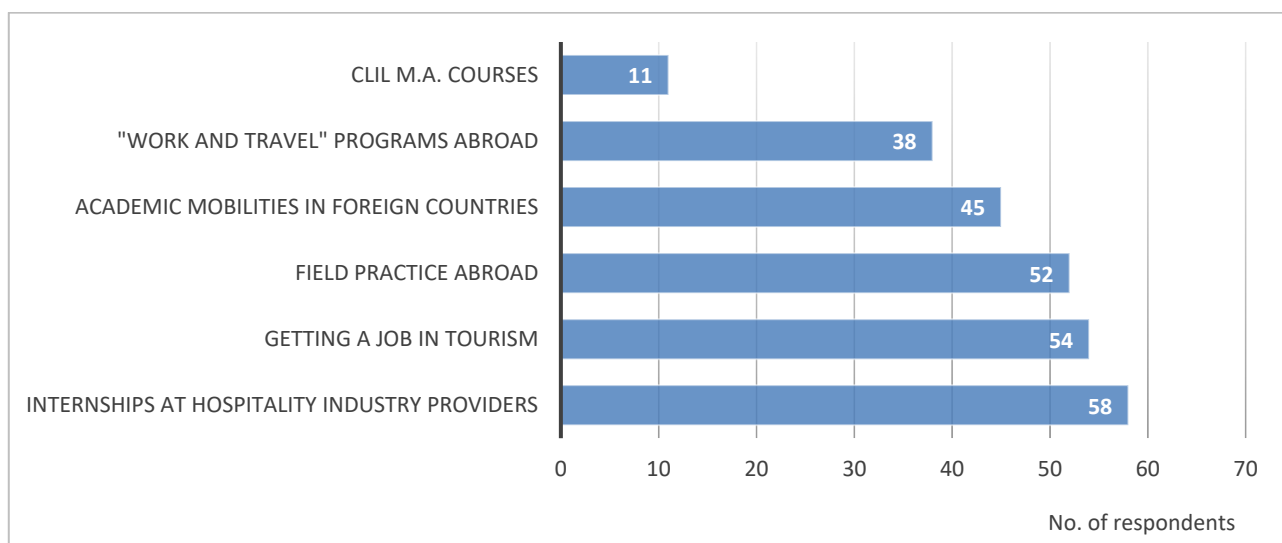
mentioned not having any problem at all, 34% observed they can understand the course well, but they are afraid to express themselves in English and 13% reported that sometimes they have difficulty understanding the course and participating in it. Only 9% mentioned that due to their low level of English they cannot participate in the course even though they understand it, while a mere 3.7% reported they do not understand what the course is about because of their low proficiency level. These last results correlate with our initial findings that most of the students are at least at an intermediary level, only 12% reported being at level A2. We consider that an adequate English proficiency level of minimum B1+ would be necessary for the students to find the course helpful for their future professional training. Lacking this minimum requirement, all specialist content topics, debates and necessary skills cannot compensate for the frustration students would feel when they cannot access subjects that interest them significantly.

In line with the correlation between satisfaction with the course and the English proficiency level, are also the results to another question, whether our students would recommend the “English for Tourism” course to their younger colleagues. An overwhelming majority answered “yes” – 86%, 12% conditioned this recommendation on the newer students’ English level (“maybe, depending on how good they are with English”). Only 1 respondent out of 81 said he/she would not recommend this course to the next generation of Tourism students, thus confirming that students find no difficulty in studying specialism content in English.

The pragmatism our students express towards their study of English is revealed by the results to a survey question about the future usefulness of the tourism content and foreign language acquisition provided by their ESP course. According to them, this course is supposed to help them first and foremost with job-related concerns: first with internships at hospitality industry providers that students are required to take starting with their second year in college (option picked by 58 respondents). Then the course should be useful for getting a job in tourism – as indicated by 54 respondents, followed by the option “field practice trips abroad” chosen by 52 respondents. We must mention that all of these are necessities for hospitality industry students, both internships and field practice trips are mandatory. After these professional related goals, as we can see in *Figure 3*, the students consider that the English course could help them with academic mobilities in foreign countries (e.g. Erasmus + programs), with “Work and Travel” programs to foreign countries (mostly the U.S.A. and Greece). Their last option was considering the “English for Tourism” course useful for preparing them for attending M.A. Tourism courses taught in English by specialism professors (what we would call proper CLIL courses). The utility of the English course is correlated with professional rather than academic goals and with the opportunity to practice task-based activities.

Figure 3

The future utility of the content knowledge and language skills acquired at the “English for Tourism” course. (Students picked their 3 favorite options to get an accurate order of their preferences)

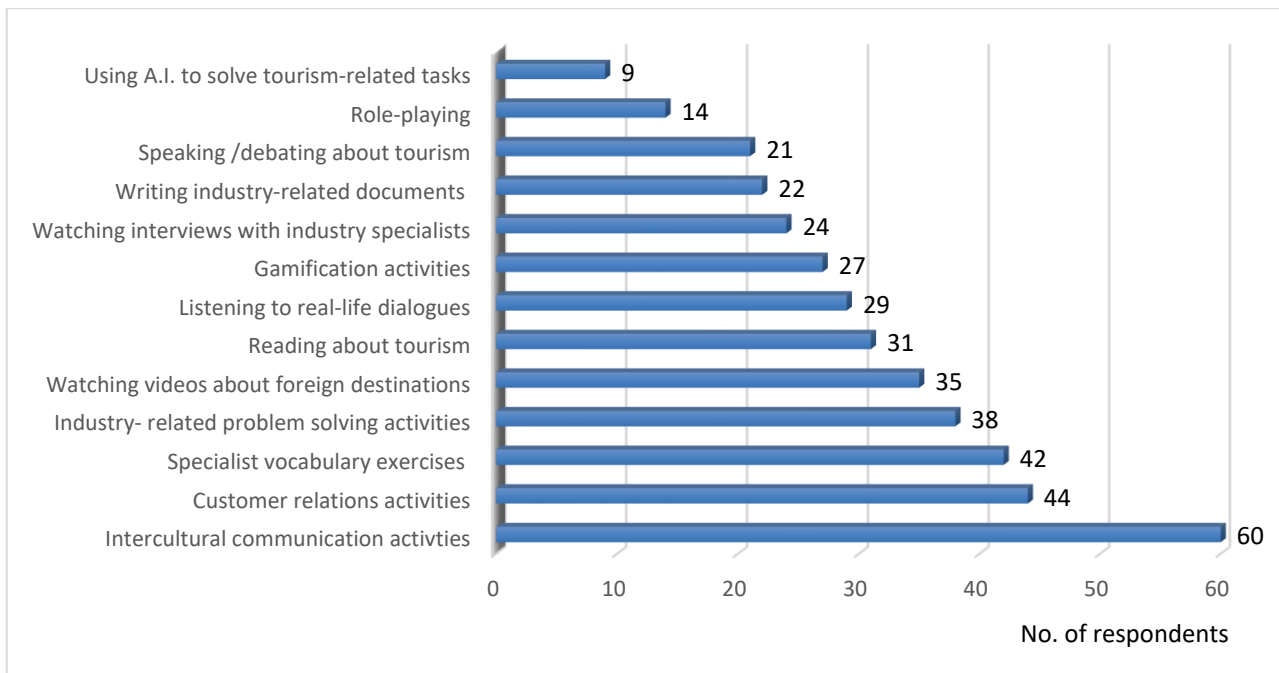




Probably the most important component that renders an ESP course so useful in preparing students for their future profession is the chance to practice task-based activities that engage students in activities that have real-world relevance and practical applications. Since they mimic real-life situations, they focus on the learners' needs and the specific language skills required by their prospective jobs, making the learning process more relevant and engaging. Quite often, for such activities we use materials which are authentic to the learners' professional or academic contexts, providing them with relevant and practical language exposure. Inquired about their favorite activities to practice during the "English for Tourism" course, the students picked many types of exercises where they get to put into practice skills and knowledge that is highly relevant for working effectively in the hospitality industry, as we can see represented in *Figure 4*. Their top choice (based on their selection of five favorite options from a list of 13 items) was practicing 1) intercultural communication activities (60 respondents), 2) customer relations activities (44 respondents), 3) specialist vocabulary exercises (42 respondents) and 4) industry-related problem-solving exercises (38 respondents). We can notice that these choices are essential in a service-based sector where interacting with and helping customers, quite often foreign ones, is crucial. Other activities preferred by the students for the ESP course were in decreasing order: watching videos about foreign destinations, reading about tourism, listening to real-life dialogues, gamification activities, watching interviews with industry specialists, writing industry-related documents, speaking/debating about tourism, role-playing and their last choice was to use A.I. to solve tourism-related tasks.

Figure 4

Students' favorite activities during the "English for Tourism" course. (Students picked their 5 favorite answers to get an accurate order of their preferences)



In a nutshell, looking at the activities our students prefer, we can easily see they are aware that the reason for their study of specialized English is to prepare them for customer interaction, for intercultural interaction and for executing specific tasks within the hospitality industry which they need to know from day one. In this respect, both course tutors and students view with the same eyes the paramount importance of specialism content within the English class. It is more than communication in English properly, it is about communicating effectively in English to interact with and help tourists with the highest degree of professionalism.



CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study confirm that the integration of content and foreign language communication in a CLIL-based approach in the English for Tourism course can provide a meaningful learning path for students. By embedding real-world scenarios, specialized vocabulary, intercultural communication tasks into language instruction, such a course has the potential to support both linguistic acquisition and professional savviness. Students expressed a clear preference for engaging with specialism content over items representing isolated language practice (such as grammar or vocabulary items without a more tailored contextual framework). Their responses suggest that effective ESP instruction in tourism should be more than teaching English, but rather about enabling learners students to use language with confidence and competence in their future professional contexts. The analysis of the conducted research confirms that when it comes to the integration of specialism content and language skills, learners' expectations are aligned with their need for language proficiency on their professional careers. Moreover, the findings indicate that purposeful and level- adjusted language tasks can lead to a motivating learning experience as it enhances both content comprehension and engagement in the learning process, thus validating the potential of adapting a language course as a CLIL-based course.

The particular role of task-based learning and digital innovation based on the use of AI-driven tools and digital platforms to further enhance learner autonomy and motivation is noteworthy. Including tasks that rely on problem-solving simulations, AI-supported items, and communication exercises that mimic industry specific scenarios shifts the learning focus toward more authentic learning. This aspect can be valuable, especially during the early stages of academic training (first year undergraduate students in this case) when students usually encounter and work with professional content for the first time. The analysis of the respondents' needs shows that when language instruction is aligned with specific learning goals and career motivation, learners' engagement can increase. Therefore, a course design that embeds professional content, encourages and facilitates self-learning and makes use of digital tools can become an effective model for modern ESP curricula in tourism and hospitality education.

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Appendix A

English for Tourism - "Content and Language Expectations" Survey

Dear students,

This questionnaire addresses you, Tourism students from Babeş-Bolyai University. As Tourism English teachers we would like to find out your opinions about the degree to which you expect to learn specialism content from us (tourism matters) or language training (more English) or both. This can help us better prepare for our courses and help you acquire the best skills for your future jobs. Completing this form takes about 10 minutes and it is an anonymous process. Your results will help us modify our syllabus and write an article showing our findings in a scientific journal. Thank you for taking the survey!

1. Your age:
 - 18-20
 - 21-25
 - 26-30
 - 31+
2. Your gender:
 - Female
 - Male
3. Your English proficiency level (as revealed by the Placement test).
 - A1
 - A2
 - B1
 - B2
 - C1
 - C2
 - I don't know / I did not take the test.
4. For how many years have you been studying English before joining university?
 - Since kindergarten (14 years)
 - Since primary school (12 years)
 - Since secondary school (8 years)
 - Since high school (4 years)
 - I have started studying English at university.
5. How would you characterize your mastery of English that you have from the lower educational system?



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- I have a very solid knowledge of English (vocabulary, grammar, skills) which is enough for me.
- I have a very solid knowledge of English (vocabulary, grammar, skills) but I need to prepare for my future profession.
- I have a satisfactory knowledge of English, but I still need improvement.
- I have a basic knowledge of English, but I still need to learn a lot.
- I have a very little knowledge of English; I am just starting to learn it.
6. At university, at the beginning of your "English for Tourism" course, your expectations were: (Tick your favorite 4 choices)!
- To study more grammar.
- To study specialized vocabulary for your academic and professional domain.
- To practice speaking skills more.
- To practice more listening skills.
- To practice more writing skills.
- To practice more reading skills.
- To learn about anglophone cultures.
- To learn about geography-related topics in English.
- To learn about tourism-related topics in English.
- To improve your public speaking and oral presentation skills.
7. At university, you want the "English for Tourism" course to help you with: (Tick your favorite 4 choices)!
- Improving your general English skills.
- Studying specialized English to prepare you for your future profession.
- Improving your background cultural knowledge.
- Improving your knowledge about the hospitality industry (jobs, types of companies, requirements, etc.)
- Improving your geography knowledge.
- Improving your critical thinking skills.
- Improving your people skills.
- Teaching you how to study on your own.
- Helping you develop as a person in general.
- You don't think you need an English course of any kind at university.
8. Considering what you have studied on this course so far, which component of the course is more useful for you? Tick a maximum of 2 answers!
- I prefer the language component, as I need to improve my English.
- I prefer the specialist content (tourism matters) as I want to work in the domain.
- I prefer the cultural component because I am curious about other cultures.
- I prefer the part where we develop our problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills.
9. At this course, do you feel that...
- You are making more progress with your language skills (you have learnt more English than before).
- You are learning more about tourism (jobs, companies, specific skills, branches of the hospitality industry, etc.)
- You are learning more English while studying about tourism (you are learning both at the same time).
- Your English remained constant but now you know more about tourism than before.
10. Are you happy that this course mixes studying English with studying tourism matters?
- Yes, this is ideal - to mix learning a foreign language we need for our job with specialist matters.
- No, I would rather just study general English.
- No, I would rather just study some of my Tourism courses in English (with no separate "English for Tourism" course).
- No, as a Tourism student, I don't need a foreign language course at all.
11. How do you view the Tourism matters (specialism content) discussed at the English course?
- Some of these matters are already known to me (from my background knowledge).
- Some of these matters are also taught by our Tourism professors.
- Most of these matters are also taught by our Tourism professors.



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- Some of these matters are new and they were first mentioned at the English course.
 - Most of these matters are new and they were first mentioned at the English course.
12. How easy it is for you to study tourism matters (specialism content) in English?
- I find it difficult.
 - I find it acceptable / of medium difficulty.
 - I find it easy.
13. Does your level of English stop you from understanding the tourism matters discussed at the course and participating in the discussions?
- Yes, my English level is low, and I don't understand what the course is about.
 - Yes, my English level is low, I understand the course, but I cannot participate in the discussions.
 - Sometimes I have difficulties understanding the course and participating in the discussions.
 - No, I can understand the course well, but I am afraid to express myself in English.
 - No, I have no problems at all - I always understand the course and I like participating in the discussions.
14. Do you consider that the tourism content and foreign language you learn during the English course could be used in the future for... (Pick 3 of your favorite answers).
- Field practice abroad ("practice" trips with tourism professors in foreign countries).
 - Internships at hospitality industry providers (hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, TICs, etc.)
 - Academic mobilities in foreign countries (Erasmus + programs).
 - Attending tourism courses taught in English by our specialism professors at the M.A. program.
 - Work and travel programs to the USA, Greece, Germany, etc.
 - Getting a job in tourism.
15. Which activities would you rather practice during the English for Tourism course? Pick 5 of your favorite answers!
- Learning new specialist vocabulary.
 - Reading about tourism.
 - Listening to real-life dialogues between tourists and hospitality specialists / hosts.
 - Speaking / debating about tourism - presenting our point of view.
 - Role-playing real-life dialogues.
 - Exercises that involve using A.I. to solve tourism-related tasks.
 - Exercises that involve games / gaming to solve language tasks.
 - Writing industry related documents (emails, memos, reports, itineraries, promotional brochures, etc.)
 - Learning about new cultures around the world and how to interact with foreign people.
 - Learning how to solve industry-related problems (at the hotel, at the restaurant, during the road trip, etc.).
 - Learning how to deal with customers.
 - Watching videos about foreign destinations.
 - Watching videos with industry specialists being interviewed about their job.
16. Would you recommend this course to the next generation of Tourism students?
- Yes.
 - No.
 - Maybe (depending on how good they are with English).
17. What suggestion do you have for your teacher to better help you improve your English and learn about tourism?
