

## GAYO'S LINGUA TOURISM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON ENGLISH NEEDS AND STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the English language proficiency of tourism players in the Gayo Highlands and suggests strategic training paths under the English for Tourism (EfT) model. The design that was used was a quantitative, cross-sectional design using a Likert-scale questionnaire to measure the four core skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results indicated that there was a high difference between the receptive and productive skills, with listening and reading being much better compared to speaking and writing. The Pearson correlation analysis also revealed that listening and speaking skills ( $r = 0.95$ ) were highly correlated, and it is worth discussing the pedagogical significance of the integrated input-output strategies. The findings highlight the importance of communication and culturally responsive training programs, which address the authentic language utilization that is necessitated in the ecotourism and heritage settings of Gayo. This is in accordance with previous studies that underscored the expectations of the society of the tourism actors not only to apply English functionally but also to project cultural identity by means of language. Practical suggestions are the use of mobile-assisted learning devices, participatory training creation, and stakeholder collaboration among local agencies and training institutions. The research has both theoretical contributions to the ESP/EfT scholars and practical usefulness to the policymakers and tourism developers who are concerned with sustainable language learning.

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### INTRODUCTION

Being the largest archipelago globally, Indonesia provides and, in certain aspects, depends on the tourism industry. The sector not only enhances the merits of the economy, but it can also be used to propagate local heritage and identity. With the ever-globalized market, tourism destinations that identify themselves with genuine cultural experiences and good service have a decisive competitive advantage. The ability of local

tourism to speak English is one of the critical areas of provision to ensure such quality. Since it emerges as the lingua franca in international traveling, English can be used to mobilize and capture a diverse panorama of visitors in a professional and meaningful way. Incidentally, this interaction is not flippant, and its efficacy perhaps can directly enhance tourist satisfaction, positive cultural interactions, and create a global image of a quality tourism destination (Erazo et al., 2019; Hassan & Tik, 2019).

The importance of using the English language in the hospitality industries of Southeast Asia is already well-documented in the academic literature. Indonesian hotel staff, as Prima et al. (2022) have found, perceive lingua to be a lot more than technical expertise. To them, it is rather a door to professional development and the best guest service. This feeling is reflected in Thailand, with Jantawong et al. (2023) reporting that tourism employees tend to have a hard time with some of the most crucial skills of face-to-face communication, very listening and speaking. And here is the substantive issue; formal education is capable of improving textual abilities such as writing and reading, but productive abilities require a contextual practice. It is one of the gaps that are not overcome by most common English courses.

In returning to the local setting, Aceh, an Indonesian province that has its own rich and strong Islamic values, is faced with compound challenges. The provincial centre, such as Gayo Highlands, is fast becoming known as an ecotourist and Halal tourist destination. Such potential is, however, frequently stifled by a mere absence of special training in the English language that would consider the particular features of the region in terms of religion and cultural background (Manan et al., 2023). Kamaliah et al. (2019) stated that the importance of effective communication in tourism does not imply the presence of lexical items or what the locals often face, grammatical rules. It concerns being a symbol of local identity and making the visitors familiar with the culture in the form of delicate interactions. It was demonstrated in their work that employees able to describe the elements of culture using English created a positive experience for a visitor.

Although this is evident, in Indonesia, most of the training programs initiated by the government still implement an off-the-shelf program. We observe the programs in other areas, such as Tabanan in the Bali Province and Blitar in the East Java Province, relying on standardized materials that have absolutely nothing to do with local requirements (Indriani et al., 2022; Prasetyo et al., 2023). The outcome is also expected, with the learners being taught the language with minimal importance to their respective career fields. Eventually, this result causes them to get disengaged and reach very low practical accomplishments. This issue highlights that there has been a long-standing

critical lack of understanding in the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is a discipline that requires that all teaching should be preceded by an in-depth needs analysis (Aysu & Özcan, 2021; Ijabah & Amrullah, 2023).

A more specific pedagogic approach to fill these gaps can be found in EfT, which is a long-established subfield of ESP. EfT stresses real-life communication, language use based on tasks, and cultural competence. EfT is formed around two main strands, as Ennis (2019) and Maci (2010) coin, one of which is concerned with the way English is taught in the context of tourism, and the other is concerned with the linguistic properties of the discourse of tourism. These two strands intersect where the need to equip the learners to experience the authentic service encounter, where language is not merely a tool, but also a means of cultural exchange.

There are two dimensions in the EfT curriculum design: linguistic diversity and cultural competency. The former recognizes that tourism employees have to deal with tourists with different languages and thus, should be trained to learn different English accents, combinations of English expressions, and casual speech. This is particularly a requirement in listening and reading, where the understanding of world English is so vital. According to McHenry (2019), EfT must support learners to negotiate this linguistic plurality, exposing them to the variety of English varieties that tourists use in tourism discourse.

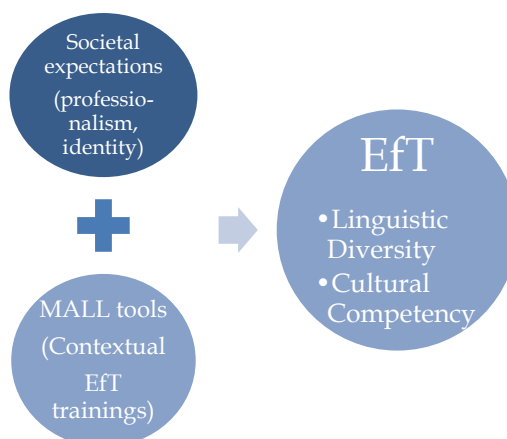
Cultural competency, in its turn, focuses on the socio-pragmatics of communication. This also encompasses the knowledge of Islamic etiquette, local lifestyle, and traditional narratives in Aceh. Tourism professionals are not service providers but cultural ambassadors, as Luo (2022) claims. They are supposed to be able to transmit local stories authentically and respectfully, including the ways of drinking coffee in Gayo, Islamic greetings, or environmental activities, through their English language expression. This forecast is in line with Pratiwi et al. (2023), highlighting that the communities are growing to regard tourism actors as embodiments of regional identity and professionalism.

In this regard, training must move beyond grammatical instruction to foster interpersonal awareness and local storytelling ability. Studies in ecolinguistics and context-sensitive discourse, e.g., Kamarullah and Yanti (2024), have shown that English used in rural tourism must agree with ecological values, spiritual traditions, and community expectations. In regions like Gayo, where spiritual and ecological tourism overlap, language instruction must embrace these realities to remain relevant and impactful.

Another critical component in delivering such training, especially in underserved areas, is technology. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as a promising approach to extend access to English education. MALL enables flexible, learner-centered instruction through mobile apps, videos, and interactive simulations. It supports the development of communicative skills, particularly listening and speaking, through context-aware content that learners can engage with at their own pace. Research by Andujar (2016) shows that MALL enhances learner autonomy and speaking confidence, while Kamarullah, Fadhillah, et al. (2024) emphasize its potential in rural Aceh, where traditional classroom infrastructure may be lacking.

Modules that MALL would be able to aid in Gayo Highlands are role-plays of local people receiving visitors, an introduction to local traditions, or even tours of eco-sights provided through mobile platforms. This will enable the workers in tourism to practice and perfect their use of English when they are not in a classroom. Nevertheless, similar to any teaching instrument, the usefulness of MALL requires appropriate content design, scaffolding, and cultural relevance. MALL can be combined with EfT in a thoughtful manner since it will help to make training more available and localized.

As a way to make these insights operational, this research uses a modified theoretical framework, which combines the EfT model and linguistic diversity, cultural competency, societal expectations, and digital affordances (see Figure 1). This framework can be used analytically and pedagogically: it can be used to inform the empirical study of language competencies of tourism workers in Gayo, and it can be used to design sustainable, culturally integrated training solutions.



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Therefore, the research questions guiding this study are:

1. What is the level of English language competency of local tourism actors in the Gayo region?
2. What training strategies or interventions are needed to effectively and sustainably improve their English proficiency?

## METHODS

In this research, a quantitative descriptive research design was used since it aimed to explore the competency of the English language among tourism actors in the Gayo Highlands of Aceh in Indonesia. It was planned to trace self-reported proficiency in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and to investigate the relationships between these skills and the EfT framework that entails linguistic diversity and cultural competency.

### *Research Setting and Participants*

The study was carried out in some of the main centers of tourism activities in the Gayo Highlands, especially in Central Aceh Regency and environs. The areas have been witnessing increased ecotourism activities and cultural tourism that require increased English language skills among the service providers in these areas.

Purposive sampling was applied to the respondents in such a way that it involves tourism players who have direct contact with international tourists. There were 34 respondents in the sample, as shown in Table 1, who comprised local guides, homestay owners, workers in the cafes, and the sellers of souvenirs. The subjects were told of their rights, their voluntary participation, and that they could pull out at any moment.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43	60
	Female	28	60
Age Group	18-25 years	6	17.65%
	26-35 years	15	44.12%
	36-45 years	9	26.47%
	46+ years	4	11.76%
	Tour Guide	10	29.41%
	Homestay/Café operator	12	35.29%
	Souvenir vendor	5	14.71%
	Other tourism services	7	20.59%
	18-25 years	6	17.65%

**Data Collection**

The data were gathered from March to May 2025 online and offline by distributing printed surveys to the community tourism offices and the local community groups. The respondents were promised confidentiality and volunteered to take part in the study.

A questionnaire was created, which is structured to gather information on the level of self-perceived English proficiency in the four core skills. The scale of the questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale with the choices of 1 (Very Poor), 2 (Poor), 3 (Fair), 4 (Good), and 5 (Excellent). This method is a common technique used in ESP research on the measurement of language competency (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013).

The methodological scope of this instrument needs to be explained. The questionnaire was set in such a way that it would measure self-perceived competence as opposed to objective and demonstrably high linguistic competence (i.e., real competence). The approach, although a subjective one and likely to be biased, was chosen due to its feasibility in getting a preliminary, broad-strokes picture of the confidence of the tourism actors in the four domains of language skills (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Self-Perceived English Proficiency Level Questionnaire Items

Language Skill	Descriptions	Items
Listening	This section assessed perceived ability to understand spoken English in tourism contexts.	Understanding simple questions from foreign tourists Understanding tourist directions or requests (e.g., directions, site info) Understanding basic conversations about tourism services Understanding instructions related to reservations or bookings in English Understanding conversations with foreign accents (e.g., from Europe or Asia)
Speaking	This section assessed perceived confidence in producing spoken English for service encounters.	Greeting and welcoming foreign tourists Explaining basic information about tourist destinations Offering and explaining tourism products/services (souvenirs, tour packages, transport) Giving directions or instructions to tourists Handling complaints or inquiries from tourists politely
Reading	This section assessed the perceived ability to comprehend written English in tourism materials.	Understanding information on a tourist map in English Reading menus or price lists in English Understanding emails or messages from foreign tourists regarding reservations Reading and understanding online tourist reviews Reading brochures or travel guides in English
Writing	This section assessed perceived confidence in	Writing short messages to tourists in English (WhatsApp, SMS, email)

Language Skill	Descriptions	Items
	producing written English for tourism tasks.	Writing descriptions of tourism products or services Writing social media posts in English for tourism promotion Responding to online reviews or comments from foreign tourists Writing information or instructions in English for visitors

Content and clarity of the instrument were tested by the review of two senior lecturers in ESP. It should be pointed out that this validation is related to the design and relevance of the questionnaire. Since this research is on self-perception, its findings could not be checked with other external and objective performance-based tests (i.e., speaking interviews or standardized tests), which would be a requisite of a study on real competence. Five local tourism workers were then used to pilot the instrument so that it would be clear and contextual. The results, however, are to be understood as a gauge of self-analysis and assumed preparedness to interact English language, which is an important initial step in a bigger needs analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The overall competency levels were interpreted using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations. Also, Pearson correlation was applied to test the relationships between the four language skills. All the statistical works were done using SPSS version 25. The EfT theoretical framework, which associates listening and reading with linguistic diversity and speaking and writing with cultural competency, was used to triangulate the quantitative results in accordance with the interpretation model proposed by Hassan and Tik (2019) and Ennis (2019). The design of this method facilitated the analysis to be in line with the local context and the larger theoretical principles of EfT education.

The reliability analysis was carried out to verify the internal consistency of the self-assessment items. The four skills Likert-scale items had a high degree of reliability with a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.88. This implies that the measures applied to assess each of the perceived skills were dependable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This paper examined the English proficiency of 34 tourism actors in the Gayo Highlands, in the form of guides, homestay operators, cafe employees, and service providers. The subjects rated their listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Since the region is still expanding as a cultural and ecotourism destination within Aceh Province, good English communication is going to play a crucial role in the area, not only in various ways of guaranteeing the quality of services but also in the improvement of the overall experience of the international visitors with whom they regularly interact.

### Level of English Language Competency among Gayo Tourism Actors

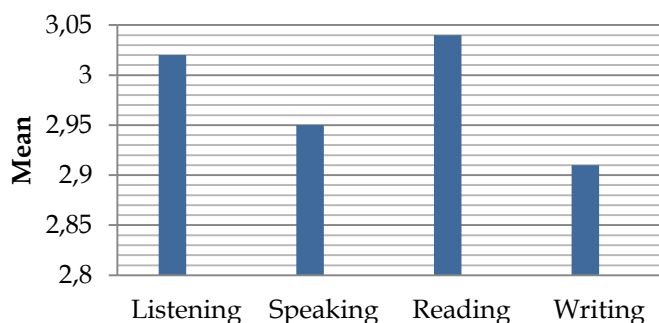
*Descriptive statistical analysis.*

The average scores of every language skill, as recorded in Table 3 shows that the respondents tended to rank themselves at a moderate proficiency level in all the categories. The most rated skills were Reading (M = 3.04, SD = 0.87) and Listening (M = 3.02, SD = 0.75), whereas the scores of Speaking (M = 2.95, SD = 0.86) and Writing (M = 2.91, SD = 0.84) were slightly lower. The range of minimum to maximum value was 1.2 to 5.0, indicating a range of variability of self-perceived competency and indicating different degrees of formal education or prior training.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of English Language Skills (*n* = 34)

Language Skills	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Max
Listening	3.02	0.75	2.0	5.0
Speaking	2.95	0.86	1.6	5.0
Reading	3.04	0.87	1.2	5.0
Writing	2.91	0.84	1.6	5.0

All these results indicate that the participants tended to be relatively competent in receptive skills (listening and reading) and a notch less confident in productive skills (speaking and writing). When applied to EfT, that means that even though the majority of the participants are likely to comprehend tourist questions or commands, they might face difficulties in creating the answers, particularly during long or culturally perceptive dialogues.



**Figure 2. Mean of Self-assessed English Skill Proficiency**

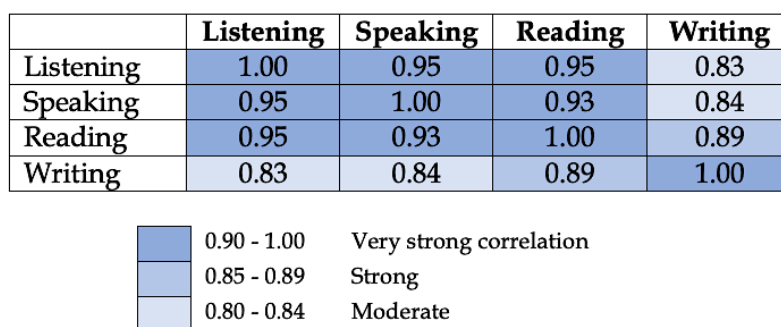
Figure 2 shows the average scores of self-reported English language skills in the tourism actors of Gayo Highlands. Reading and Listening were the most rated skills, and lowest in the case of Writing. This supports the results presented in Table 1 and demonstrates higher receptive skills among the participants than productive ones.

The fact that the reading score is a bit higher suggests that the person is somewhat acquainted with written content, maybe through signage, menu, or promotional material, whereas the writing score is relatively lower, which may imply that the person is not as engaged with written communication, e.g., emails, tour plans, and formal documentation.

### Relationships among Skills and Implications for Training Design

Correlation analysis.

In order to analyze the relationship between the four language skills, Pearson correlation was performed. Figure 3 illustrates the intensity of correlation between the four English language skills measured. The deep blue color indicates a high positive correlation, especially between Listening and Speaking ( $r = 0.95$ ) and Reading ( $r = 0.95$ ), which shows that they are dependent on each other in the context of communicative tourism.



**Figure 3. Correlation Matrix of English Language Skills**

The high scores on the list of strong relations between Listening, Speaking, and Reading, as observed in Figure 3, imply that there is a high degree of interdependence between these skills in the daily tourism interactions. This implies that people who perform better on one front will perform well on the other. Although the concept of writing, however, continues to be closely connected, there seem to be rather different challenges. The latter can be explained by the fact that writing in English does not only involve vocabulary and grammar knowledge but also knowledge of the text structure, tone, and audience.

The close correlation of Listening with Speaking ( $r = 0.95$ ) validates the previously held pedagogical belief in ESP and EfT that oral proficiency is based on aural understanding. Tourism is a situation where interaction is usually unplanned and service-based, so listening skills directly translate into speaking skills.

### **EfT Framework Implications**

Listening and Reading can be studied in the context of the EfT framework since, in the given domain of linguistic diversity, understanding and adjusting to diverse types of English, including non-native English and other accents, is essential. Speaking and writing, meanwhile, reflect cultural competency in that, in addition to the language manifestation, there is a sense of politeness practice, turn-taking, and expectations of the guest.

Mean scores and correlations with Writing are lower, which supports the notion that the expressive skills, and especially those that involve formal structure or asynchronous messages (e.g., emails, reports), should be addressed specifically. Writing may not be extensively used and thus not developed in the Gayo environment, where tourism communication is mostly informal and verbal. However, with the growth in diversification and digital promotion of tourism, the competence of writing is becoming more crucial.

In addition, it is observed that the intercorrelations between the four language skills are high, which would mean that an intervention based on training that develops the skills holistically might prove more effective as compared to one based on specialized techniques. As an example, speaking simulations can be matched with listening exercises, and reading exercises with the writing activities, which reflect the real tourist world situation and allow answering guest reviews or writing tourism itineraries.

## **Recommendations for Training Design**

The results reveal the necessity of a specialized EfT program that facilitates the receptive and productive language differences but incorporates cultural contextualization. Examples of such training modules may involve speaking activities in scenarios (e.g., role plays about tourist questions), writing workshops (e.g., co-writing hotel or cafe descriptions), and guided reading and listening activities (e.g., reading tourism brochures, listening to podcasts or YouTube travel videos and content). A task-oriented and modular approach that is consistent with the real job description of the learners should be suggested. These approaches can be followed in some jobs.

- a. Homestay operators may benefit from modules on welcoming guests, explaining facilities, and managing online bookings.
- b. Tour guides may require advanced speaking and listening skills for storytelling, safety instructions, and handling complaints.
- c. Souvenir vendors and café workers may need functional phrases for transactions, small talk, and cross-cultural politeness.

Moreover, the findings can be used to develop a localized English proficiency model to fit tourism stakeholders in Aceh. This may be part of regional tourism development programs or incorporated in vocational training centers and university community service agendas. With the empirical data as the foundation of training material, these programs will lead to improved conformity of the needs of the learners and the instructional practice.

Finally, the high correlations between the skills would provide an opportunity to carry out diagnostic testing because the progress of one area might serve to predict the others. This is quite compatible with the competency-based approach to language instruction and provides a useful instrument in the form of continuous assessment of future programs.

## **Discussion**

### **Understanding Competency Gaps in the Gayo Context**

This research demonstrates informative trends when it comes to the English language proficiency of tourism players in the Gayo Highlands, especially in the EfT model. The general competence levels of the four language skills are average, with the receptive skills (reading and listening) showing a higher rank than the productive skills (speaking and writing). This tendency follows the previous studies in the same tourism environment, which revealed that employees are more likely to acquire passive skills as a result of being

exposed to them but have difficulty in developing active skills unless taught to do so (Erazo et al., 2019; Hassan & Tik, 2019).

The listening and reading scores mean a lot, as they are rather high, implying that the Gayo tourism actors are more or less good at interpreting the tourist needs and the ability to work with written texts like signage or menus. This is in line with the linguistic diversity aspect of EfT that focuses on understanding in diverse environments (McHenry, 2019). The reduced proficiency in speaking and writing, however, shows that there are difficulties in generating language, which are mostly culturally relevant. Since cultural competency is the core of the EfT (Anggayana, 2023; Ennis, 2019), the specified gap should be bridged with the help of customized training sessions, which will comprise interactive speaking and writing tasks and will be contextualized in terms of local tourism settings.

The current research is also consistent with recent academic studies, which demand context-sensitive approaches to instruction. The use of MALL tools based on tourism-specific interactions was recommended in the study by Kamarullah, Fadhilah, et al. (2024), which justifies this suggestion since blended and technology-based learning is vital in rural education settings. This can be attributed to the demographic analysis that indicates that the percentage distribution of genders is relatively balanced and that the majority of the participants are in the 26-35 age group. It means that they have a young and possibly technologically oriented workforce who would be receptive to novel ways of learning, which in this instance is MALL. Its tools can be used to overcome training accessibility hurdles in distant locations as well as provide practical, dialog-based material that replicates real-life situations. Andujar (2016) also concluded that MALL was effective in building confidence and fluency in talking among learners, especially in informal places such as cafes or homestays. These results create opportunities to incorporate digital platforms in the process of training tourism English in Gayo Highlands.

The other implication is the issue of job roles. The largest group of respondents includes tour guides and the operators of cafes/homestays, who can have the most direct contact with the international tourists. Such roles require more than simple communication, interpersonal sensitivity, and local culture explanation skills. This cultural-linguistic expectation interaction demands a holistic training (Anggayana, 2023). It is not enough to translate tourism brochures or know the lists of vocabulary lists. Storytelling, the elements of local culture, and role-playing activities to reflect the reality of the interactions should be implemented in the programs. In its turn, this coincides with

the results of research by Pratiwi et al. (2023), who have noted that local communities have high expectations regarding tourism actors to be knowledgeable of the English language, not necessarily as one of the technical abilities but rather as an expression of local identity and professionalism.

Other comparative studies in other Indonesian provinces have demonstrated the same trends, e.g., Prima et al. (2022). Listening and reading were also ranked higher than speaking and writing by the tourism workers in Nusa Dua, Bali, but this skewed score was ascribed to the fact that they had fewer chances to learn language in contexts. The socio-cultural aspect of these issues is also experienced in Aceh, such as the lack of contact with visitors abroad (not only to major destinations such as Sabang or Takengon cities) (Manan et al., 2023). Consequently, the interventions should not only be skill-based but also regionally based.

### **Implications for English Training Strategies and Interventions**

Considering such results, the training plans should be effective on receptive and productive skills, and practical learning with the main focus on scenario-based learning should be chosen. As an example, the gap in the understanding and expression can be closed with the help of simulations of tourist interactions, storytelling practices, and role-play activities. These practices have been established in EfT studies as the means of establishing confidence and fluency (Anggayana, 2023; Erazo et al., 2019).

Interestingly, the high correlations of skills, especially between listening and speaking ( $r = 0.95$ ) and reading and writing ( $r = 0.89$ ), indicate the interrelatedness of language development. This is in line with a model that can be used to support communicative competence introduced by Canale and Swain (1980), in which proficiency in a certain area strengthens other performance areas. In practice, this implies that by improving listening by means of audiovisual input, speaking may get better indirectly, and that systematic reading may be of use in streamlining writing fluency.

The high inter-skill correlations indicate that it is possible to apply integrated training modules, in which the listening activities directly lead to the speaking tasks, or reading reflections are followed by writing. This justifies the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) that have demonstrated their effectiveness in the workplace-oriented ESP courses (Hassan & Tik, 2019; Purwanto et al., 2024).

Moreover, the training programs should be localized so that both domestic and foreign service requirements are reflected in the training programs. As an example, the

Gayo case demonstrates the importance of sociocultural assimilation in teaching the English language. Cultural background and environmental sensitivity were helpful in the language learning context, as Kamarullah and Yanti (2024) proved their work on ecolinguistics and discourse. This translates into tourism actors not just achieving the capability to communicate functionally, but also the linguistic means to present local heritage and traditional rituals (ex, coffee culture) and natural ecology authentically. The individualized documents with the English descriptions of natural sites, coffee culture, or the life of Islamic people can be crucial because both linguistically and culturally pertinent. Failure to connect training and local communicative requirements can lead to shallow competence, which is culturally inept.

In addition, the clear divide between receptive and productive skills raises questions about the role of curriculum design and training delivery. As found in Kamarullah, Sarinauli, et al. (2024), instructional interventions, especially those mediated by AI or self-paced technologies, can significantly impact learner engagement and perceived efficacy. However, such tools must be supported by instructor guidance, formative feedback, and context-relevant tasks to avoid technological fatigue or surface-level engagement.

Moreover, the literature also supports the use of needs-based training over generic ESP courses. As highlighted by Aysu and Özcan (2021), ESP for tourism must be grounded in actual workplace demands rather than abstract linguistic objectives. The lack of formal needs analysis in many existing programs leads to low engagement and suboptimal outcomes. The present study contributes by providing an evidence-based snapshot of Gayo tourism actors' competency levels, which can serve as a blueprint for future curriculum development.

This also implies pedagogical strategies of scaffolding learning sequences which start with receptive tasks (e.g., watching tourist interactions, reading itineraries) and end up in productive ones (e.g., writing simple emails, rehearsing guided tours). This type of sequencing is correlative to the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (2009), according to which comprehensible input comes before the output and gradually forms the confidence of learners.

Moreover, collaboration with the local stakeholders, such as tourism offices, local community centers, and schools, is essential. Community-based English language programs have been successfully shown to work well with collaboration to make them more relevant and sustainable (Indriani et al., 2022; Prassetyo et al., 2023). In Gayo, one

can develop similar partnerships in order to contextualize EfT to the coffee culture of the region, eco-tourism, and local heritage sites.

Lastly, the research has certain limitations. Self-evaluation can be inaccurate on proficiency, and the sample, though representative, is small. Triangulation of findings can be introduced in future research by making direct performance tests or observation approaches, which Li and Seale (2007) recommend. Additionally, it is possible to enhance the knowledge about particular communicative challenges experienced by tourism actors by qualitative follow-ups (e.g., interviews or focus groups).

To conclude, this paper supports the evidence of the necessity of a localized, evidence-based, and skill-based approach to English language training in the Gayo Highlands. It confirms the topicality of the EfT framework and highlights the paramount importance of the connection of linguistic diversity to cultural competency in tourism communication. Strategic training and cross-sectoral assistance would ensure that the actors of the Gayo tourism will be able to approach global tourists more effectively, retaining their cultural identity and enhancing it.

## CONCLUSION

This study tested the levels of the English language proficiency of the tourism actors in the Gayo Highlands and presented the training strategies based on the EfT framework. The results have shown that receptive skills (listening and reading) are fairly developed, and productive skills, especially speaking, are not. One of the main weaknesses that should be highlighted in this study is that it is self-evaluated. This, as the correct commentary of the editor, is a test of perceived competence rather than objective or real competence. This subjectivity implies that the results are prone to bias on the part of the participants (i.e., over- or under-confidence) and that the results do not measure their linguistic proficiency directly and with validity, but instead represent how the tourism actors perceive themselves to be doing.

This main limitation directly informs other methodological limitations, namely the utilization of a standardized, performance-based test (as a speaking interview or TOEIC-style test), which was not employed to test these self-assessments. This would have been a step that would be taken in a study that purports to measure real competence, though it was too early, and too much of a perception that this preliminary study was exploring. Therefore, reliability testing concerned the internal consistency of the perception-based items, rather than the issue of whether the items are always able to measure the objective, external skill domains.

Within the educational aspect, a sense of urgency exists to introduce task-based training modules that focus on actual real-world communication activities, e.g., leading a tour, handling a reservation, or telling cultural stories. MALL can be used as an effective delivery channel, especially to rural learners. Collaborating with vocational institutions should be done at the policy level so as to incorporate EfT in the growth process of the regions. Having introduced cultural and ecological content into language education, EfT will be able to promote inclusive and skill-based as well as locally grounded tourism communication.

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