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## ENHANCING TOURISM SPECIALISTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Abstract. This study investigates how digital technologies can improve English proficiency among tourism specialists. The research involved 120 students from a university's tourism program, divided into two groups: an experimental group that used mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations, and a control group that continued with traditional face-to-face instruction. Over the course of 10 weeks, the experimental group showed significant improvements in their TOEIC scores, speaking and writing skills, and overall engagement. In contrast, the control group saw only modest progress. The results suggest that incorporating digital tools like mobile apps, online learning platforms, and virtual simulations can not only boost language proficiency but also increase motivation and make learning more engaging for tourism students.

*Keywords: Digital technologies, English proficiency, tourism specialists, mobile apps, virtual simulations.* 

#### Introduction

In today's globalized world, English proficiency is a key requirement for professionals working in the tourism sector. Tourism specialists, including tour guides, travel agents, hotel managers, and other stakeholders, often interact with international visitors and clients, making strong English communication skills essential. Traditional classroom-based language teaching methods, though effective, may not always meet the needs of this diverse, fast-paced sector. The rise of digital technologies presents an opportunity to enhance language learning through more flexible, engaging, and personalized approaches.

This study focuses on the integration of digital technologies in the language learning process for tourism specialists. It seeks to understand the role of digital tools, such as mobile apps, elearning platforms, and interactive simulations, in improving English proficiency. The study aims to provide evidence on the effectiveness of these tools in bridging the gap between conventional teaching methods and the demands of modern tourism professionals.

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### **Literature Review**

The role of English in tourism has been widely acknowledged in the literature. English is the most commonly used international language in tourism, and a high level of proficiency is required for professionals in this field to effectively communicate with global tourists. Sohail, Khan, and Ali [1] emphasize that English language proficiency is crucial for improving interactions between tourists and service personnel, enabling them to meet the needs and expectations of international guests. Goh, Tan, and Chen [2] also argue that English proficiency is not only a key communication skill but also an essential element for the competitiveness of the tourism sector, identifying challenges faced by industry professionals in mastering the language and proposing solutions to overcome these difficulties.

Traditional language learning methods often fall short of addressing the specific contextual needs of the tourism industry. Chen and Lee [3] argue that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is crucial for tourism, as language needs in this profession differ from general language learning. ESP focuses on functional aspects of the language, which helps tourism professionals develop the skills most relevant to their profession. However, they acknowledge that traditional teaching methods are not always capable of addressing the dynamic nature of the tourism sector.

Recently, digital technologies have opened up new opportunities for improving English language proficiency, especially for professionals in tourism. Boulton [4] highlights the role of digital technologies in language learning, noting that tools such as mobile apps and virtual learning environments provide greater interactivity and flexibility. These technologies allow learners to practice language skills in contexts that simulate real-life tourism scenarios. Kukulska-Hulme, Reinders, and Jones [5] emphasize the potential of mobile learning in tourism, stating that these tools allow professionals to learn at their own pace and integrate learning into their busy schedules. They argue that mobile learning can bridge the gap between traditional classroom learning and the real-world applications needed in tourism.

Immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are gaining recognition for their ability to create interactive, context-specific learning situations. Jang and Choi [6] present a case study of using virtual reality to teach English to tourism students in realistic, simulated environments. These technologies enable learners to engage with the language in a more meaningful way, creating situations they might encounter in their professional lives, such as conducting a tour or handling tourists' inquiries. Zhao and Li [7] further argue that virtual simulations offer a new paradigm for language acquisition in tourism education, providing immersive environments where learners can practice communication skills in tourism-related situations.

Gamification is also one of the digital methods that has proven effective in maintaining learners' interest, particularly among adult learners in fast-evolving sectors like tourism. Nguyen and Tran [8] explore how gamification, through points, rewards, and tasks, can enhance motivation and retention in language learning. This approach is especially important for professionals who may face challenges in staying motivated through traditional methods. Gamification appeals to learners' intrinsic motivations, making language learning more engaging and less intimidating. Thomas and Wyatt [9] discuss broader opportunities for using technology in language learning, arguing that the integration of digital tools into professional English development can lead to more engaging and effective learning environments.

Wu and Zheng [10] provide additional evidence on how digital tools can enhance communication skills in tourism. They argue that tools such as multimedia content, discussion

forums, and interactive language exercises are especially effective in helping professionals develop communication skills needed for dealing with a variety of tourists. Ziegler [11] adds that innovations in technology, including the use of interactive digital textbooks and video content, play a key role in improving tourism education, offering learners an engaging and flexible learning environment that reflects the realities of the tourism industry.

Warschauer and Healey [12] discuss broader trends in computer-assisted language learning (CALL), noting how computers and digital technologies transform the traditional learning environment into a more dynamic and flexible one. In tourism, these changes enable professionals to engage in language learning that is directly related to their work.

Zhang and Wang [13] emphasize the impact of multimedia learning on language acquisition. They argue that multimedia tools such as videos, podcasts, and interactive media are particularly effective in creating a rich learning environment that fosters listening comprehension, speaking practice, and understanding. For tourism professionals, this multimodal approach provides an opportunity to familiarize themselves with various accents, dialects, and communication styles, which are crucial for successfully navigating the diverse interactions they encounter in their professional roles.

## Methodology

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design to assess the impact of digital technologies on the English proficiency of tourism specialists. This design was chosen because it allows for a comparison between two groups (experimental and control), while maintaining ethical and logistical considerations in a real-world educational setting. Since random assignment was not feasible due to class sizes and the structure of the tourism program, a quasi-experimental design provided an opportunity to observe and compare the effects of the intervention in a natural classroom environment. The use of two groups—one experiencing the intervention and the other receiving traditional instruction—helps to isolate the effects of the digital tools on language learning outcomes.

A total of 120 participants, divided into two groups, were selected from a university's tourism program. The experimental group (60 participants) used a combination of digital tools, including mobile language apps, online courses, and virtual simulations, while the control group (60 participants) continued with traditional face-to-face instruction. The sample size was determined based on the need for statistical power to detect significant differences in language proficiency between the groups, ensuring robust results. A larger sample size also helps to increase the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Over a 10-week period, the experimental group engaged in a digital learning environment that incorporated the following components:

- **Mobile Language Apps**: Participants used Duolingo and Babbel to practice vocabulary and grammar daily. These apps were chosen due to their proven efficacy in language acquisition, flexibility for self-paced learning, and accessibility for learners at various levels. Studies have shown that such apps can significantly improve vocabulary retention and grammar comprehension in a contextual, engaging way [1][2].
- Online Courses: Participants enrolled in an online English for Tourism course, which included reading materials, listening exercises, and interactive activities. The online course was designed to simulate authentic tourism situations, which is crucial for the development of professional English in tourism contexts. This component was selected to allow students

to learn at their own pace, fostering autonomy and deepening understanding of tourismspecific terminology and concepts.

• Virtual Simulations: Virtual reality-based role-playing activities simulated tourism scenarios, such as customer service interactions and guided tours. These simulations were chosen to enhance practical language skills and provide immersive, real-world experiences that engage learners beyond traditional exercises. Virtual simulations are known to improve speaking fluency and contextualized language use, offering students the chance to apply what they have learned in realistic settings without leaving the classroom [3][4].

The control group continued with the traditional curriculum, which focused on classroom lectures and textbook-based exercises. This method was maintained to provide a clear baseline for comparison against the more dynamic digital approach used in the experimental group.

### **Instruments and Data Analysis**

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of digital learning tools on English proficiency. These methods were selected to not only measure improvements in language proficiency but also to gain insight into participants' subjective experiences with the digital tools.

- English Proficiency Test: A standardized test, such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), was used to evaluate the overall language proficiency of both groups before and after the intervention. The TOEIC was chosen due to its widespread use in academic and professional settings, particularly in evaluating the language skills needed in tourism contexts. The test measures listening, reading, and writing skills, and was selected because of its focus on practical, professional English [5]. It provided a reliable benchmark for assessing changes in language proficiency.
- Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI): Conducted to assess speaking fluency and accuracy in simulated tourism scenarios, the OPI was rated using the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale to ensure consistent and objective results. The OPI was selected because it allows for direct observation of students' ability to communicate in real-life tourism situations, assessing not just fluency but also the appropriateness of language in specific contexts. Oral proficiency is a critical skill for tourism specialists, and the OPI provided a valid measure of this competence.
- Writing Proficiency Test: A writing task was assigned, focusing on tourism-related themes, to evaluate grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and task completion. Writing is a core skill for tourism professionals, and this task was designed to assess both language form and the ability to present information clearly and effectively, which are key in tourism communication.
- Surveys and Questionnaires: Participants' perceptions of the learning experience were gathered through surveys that measured the perceived effectiveness and engagement of digital learning tools, such as mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations. These instruments were chosen because they provide insight into how students interacted with the tools and whether they perceived the tools as useful in enhancing their language skills. Feedback from learners helps to contextualize the quantitative results and provides a more holistic understanding of the intervention's impact [6].

## **Data Analysis**

The pre- and post-test results were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the improvements in language proficiency and paired t-tests to compare the performance of the

experimental and control groups before and after the intervention. Paired t-tests were selected because they allow for comparisons between two related groups (pre-test vs. post-test results), thus highlighting the impact of the intervention. These statistical methods are widely used in educational research to test the effectiveness of interventions [7].

Thematic analysis of survey responses was performed to identify common themes regarding the participants' experiences with the digital tools. This qualitative method was chosen to uncover the underlying reasons behind participants' attitudes and experiences. It allows for the identification of patterns in the data, offering deeper insights into how the digital tools influenced learners' engagement, motivation, and perceived learning outcomes. Qualitative data are particularly valuable in educational studies because they provide context to the numerical results, revealing how and why students respond to different instructional methods.

The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for the quantitative analysis, which allowed for conducting t-tests, paired comparisons, and descriptive statistics. SPSS is commonly used in educational research due to its ability to handle large datasets and its range of statistical tools. For qualitative data, NVivo was used to perform thematic analysis, identifying patterns and themes related to the participants' experiences with the digital tools. NVivo is widely used in qualitative research for organizing, coding, and analyzing textual data, making it ideal for analyzing the open-ended responses in the surveys and interviews [8].

### Results

The results of this study demonstrate a clear positive impact of digital technologies on the English proficiency of tourism specialists. The following tables, graphs, and pie charts present a detailed overview of the findings.

Group	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Mean Difference	t-Statistic	p-Value
Experimental Group	650	720	+70	-8.53	<0.001
Control Group	655	670	+15	-2.42	< 0.05

 Table 1 – Pre- and Post-Test Results (TOEIC Scores)

This table summarizes the pre- and post-test TOEIC scores for both the experimental and control groups. The significant improvement in the experimental group's scores (p < 0.001) compared to the modest improvement in the control group (p < 0.05) highlights the effectiveness of the digital tools.

Table 2 – Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Scores

Group	Pre-Test (ILR Level)	Post-Test (ILR Level)	Mean Improvement
Experimental Group	ILR Level 1	ILR Level 2	+1 Level
Control Group	ILR Level 1	ILR Level 1	No Change

The Oral Proficiency Interview results showed that participants in the experimental group advanced by one ILR level (from Level 1 to Level 2), indicating significant improvement in speaking fluency. In contrast, the control group did not show a significant change.



**Graph 1** – Writing Proficiency Test Results (Average Scores)

This Graph-1 shows the average scores of the writing proficiency test. The experimental group exhibited a substantial improvement in writing skills, from 72 to 83, whereas the control group showed a more modest increase, from 70 to 75.

The pie chart below illustrates the participants' satisfaction with the digital learning tools (mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations).



**Figure 1 – Survey Feedback on Digital Learning Tools** 

The survey feedback showed that 85% of the experimental group was either satisfied or very satisfied with the digital tools used in the study, with a significant proportion (45%) indicating they were "very satisfied." This reflects the positive reception of mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations.

**Table 3 – Survey Responses on Perceived Benefits of Digital Tools** 

Tool/Method	Percentage of Positive Feedback	
Mobile Language Apps	85%	
Online English for Tourism	90%	
Virtual Simulations	80%	

The table above provides an overview of the perceived effectiveness of each digital tool. Participants gave high ratings to the online course and mobile apps, with 90% of participants finding the English for Tourism course useful, and 80% praising the virtual simulations for enhancing their speaking skills.

Improvement in Engagement Levels (Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Survey)

The results clearly show that students in the experimental group became much more engaged after using digital tools.

Group	Pre-Test Engagement (%)	Post-Test Engagement (%)
Experimental Group	65%	90%
Control Group	60%	65%

#### Table 2 – Changes in Student Engagement Levels before and after Using Digital Tools

Before the intervention, engagement levels in both groups were quite similar. However, after introducing mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations, engagement in the experimental group jumped from 65% to 90%. Meanwhile, the control group, which continued with traditional instruction, saw only a minor increase from 60% to 65%.

This suggests that digital tools didn't just help with language skills—they also made learning more engaging and motivating for students.

The results presented in these tables and graphs highlight the positive impact of digital tools on language proficiency and student engagement in the experimental group. The experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in language skills across all measured areas, including TOEIC scores, oral proficiency, writing skills, and engagement levels. These results support the hypothesis that integrating digital technologies such as mobile apps, online courses, and virtual simulations into language learning can enhance both proficiency and motivation in the context of tourism education.

### Discussion

The results of this study strongly suggest that the integration of digital technologies into English language learning for tourism specialists offers significant benefits over traditional methods. The experimental group showed substantial improvements in both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) language skills. The positive outcomes can be attributed to the interactive and immersive nature of the digital tools, which provided learners with real-world simulations and practice in context-specific scenarios, such as customer service and guided tours.

The study also highlights the importance of flexibility and autonomy in learning, as digital tools such as mobile apps and online courses allowed participants to learn at their own pace, which is crucial for busy professionals in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the use of gamification and interactive simulations kept learners engaged, contributing to sustained motivation and improved retention of language skills.

The study also identified some challenges, particularly in terms of accessibility and technical issues with virtual simulations. While digital tools can enhance learning, ensuring that all learners have access to the necessary technology and support is essential for maximizing the benefits of digital learning.

#### Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of digital technologies on enhancing English proficiency among tourism specialists. The experimental group, which used digital tools such as mobile language apps, online courses, and virtual simulations, showed notable improvements in all areas of language proficiency—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—when compared to the

#### control group.

The results clearly demonstrate that integrating digital tools into language learning provides a more engaging, flexible, and effective approach for tourism professionals. These tools not only allow learners to practice and improve their language skills in real-world tourism contexts but also cater to the specific needs of the tourism sector, making language learning more relevant and practical. Additionally, the ability to learn at one's own pace and engage in immersive, interactive experiences significantly enhances motivation and retention, which is crucial for adult learners in the fast-paced tourism industry.

The positive findings from the study suggest that digital technologies can play a transformative role in the development of English language skills for tourism professionals. While challenges like technical issues or resistance to new technologies may arise, the overall benefits of integrating these tools into tourism education are evident.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that tourism education programs incorporate a combination of digital technologies alongside traditional teaching methods. This approach not only addresses the practical needs of tourism specialists but also ensures that they are better equipped to communicate effectively with international tourists, thereby improving both their career prospects and the overall quality of service in the tourism industry.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of digital learning tools on language proficiency, examine the specific tools that have the greatest impact, and address the challenges faced by learners and educators in implementing these technologies effectively.

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# ЦИФРЛЫҚ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАР АРҚЫЛЫ ТУРИЗМ МАМАНДАРЫНЫҢ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІН МЕҢГЕРУІН АРТТЫРУ: ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТТІК ЗЕРТТЕУ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақала цифрлық технологиялардың туризм саласындағы мамандардың ағылшын тілін қалай жақсарта алатынын зерттейді. Зерттеуге университеттің Туризм бағдарламасының 120 студенті қатысты, олар екі топқа бөлінді: Мобильді қосымшаларды пайдаланатын эксперименттік топ, онлайн курстар және виртуалды модельдеу және дәстүрлі бетпе-бет оқытуды қолдана отырып оқуды жалғастыратын бақылау тобы. 10 апта ішінде эксперименттік топ TOEIC ұпайларында, сөйлеу және жазу дағдыларында және жалпы қатысуда айтарлықтай жақсартуларды көрсетті. Бақылау тобы тек орташа нәтиже көрсетті. Зерттеу нәтижелері мобильді қосымшалар, онлайн оқыту платформалары және виртуалды модельдеу сияқты цифрлық құралдарды пайдалану тілдік құзыреттілікті жақсартып қана қоймай, мотивацияны арттырып, туризм студенттері

#### үшін оқуды қызықты ететінін көрсетеді.

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# ПОВЫШЕНИЕ ВЛАДЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ СПЕЦИАЛИСТАМИ ПО ТУРИЗМУ С ПОМОЩЬЮ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ: ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ

Аннотация. Данное исследование изучает, как цифровые технологии могут улучиить уровень английского языка у специалистов в области туризма. В исследовании приняли участие 120 студентов программы туризма университета, которые были разделены на две группы: экспериментальную группу, использующую мобильные приложения, онлайн-курсы и виртуальные симуляции, и контрольную группу, продолжавшую обучение с использованием традиционного очного обучения. В течение 10 недель экспериментальная группа продемонстрировала значительные улучшения в баллах ТОЕІС, навыках говорения и письма, а также в общей вовлеченности. В то время как контрольная группа показала лишь умеренные результаты. Результаты исследования показывают, что использование цифровых инструментов, таких как мобильные приложения, онлайн-платформы для обучения и виртуальные симуляции, не только способствует улучшению языковой компетенции, но и увеличивает мотивацию, делая обучение более увлекательным для студентов туризма.

**Ключевые слова:** Цифровые технологии, английский язык, специалисты в области туризма, мобильные приложения, виртуальные симуляции.