DO YOU SPEAK DIGITAL? – A LITERATURE REVIEW ON LANGUAGE AND DIGITAL COMPETENCES IN TOURISM EDUCATION

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Abstract

Purpose – As tourism has become a prominent industry, there has been a growing demand for skilled professionals, who are able to adapt to technology-laden markets. In this setting, digital development and communication take on an important role, making it necessary to reshape the way tourism education is approached, focusing on the skills required of today's graduates. English is currently the most important global language and it is ranked as a crucial skill for tourism workers. The main goal of this study is to collect, analyse and cross-reference evidence as to the development of language and digital competences in Tourism Education and how they are leveraging digital transformation.

Methodology –The methodology used was based on a literature review focusing on digital technology in the scope of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The data retrieved was analysed as to outline key concepts and best practices within tourism education.

Findings – As the market requires tourism graduates to possess transversal skills, being fluent in English is decisive. Research shows that tourism students need more exposure to technical jargon and quality resources, as there are still significant gaps when it comes to using specific terminology and vocabulary. With technology playing a pivotal role, it is important that tourism education keeps up with current technological developments and changes.

Contribution – Tourism professionals should be proficient English users, capable of interacting, understanding and communicating relevant information. Leveraged by digital technology, this study makes a contribution towards the on-going discussion on the need to reshape tourism education and update the curricula.

Keywords Digital transformation; Tourism Education; ESP; competences

INTRODUCTION

The last decades witnessed significant changes in the tourism industry, ultimately resulting in its emergence as an independent area of study (Airey, 2005). As both public and private sectors became more invested in developing tourist activities, there was a growing demand for quality services and a more skilled workforce, which prompted educational institutions to found research centres and create tourism programs (Fidgeon 2010). Mirroring the growth of the industry itself, tourism education has become more complex, with curricula progressively shifting from a more vocational matrix, towards a more reflective approach that focuses on today's knowledge economy and the dynamic skills it requires (Inui, Wheeler, and Lankford 2006; Marasco et al. 2018; Lyons et al. 2016).

Working in tourism requires creativity, adaptability and flexibility. Because it is a service-oriented industry, heavily reliant on multinational teams and guest-host interaction, communication and language skills are also key. Considered to be pivotal in tourism, having foreign language competences, and most specifically English, can, therefore, be considered an absolute requirement for tourism graduates (Leslie and Russell 2006; Harun and Din 2002; Laborda 2009; Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar, and Saffari 2017).

The term English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career or for business in general. Goal-oriented and based on specific needs, this approach is expected to make use of the "underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines that it serves", centering on "the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre" (Dudley-Evans 1998, 6). Within the scope of hospitality and tourism programs, ESP courses should be career-oriented and meet precise needs, so that future graduates can be better equipped to work in the industry, which, in this day and age will imply working with digital technologies.

As a result of globalization and the penetration of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in all its operational and commercial aspects, the tourism industry has become more sophisticated and demanding (Christou and Sigala 2001; Sigala 2002; Sigala and Baum 2003). Considered to have been going hand in hand (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Dimitrios Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011) technological progress and the tourism industry are closely interrelated, with authors such as Werthner & Klein (1999, p.256) stating that " it incorporates many of the features of the information society such as globalization, mobility and information richness", establishing them as natural partners and mutual enablers.

However, even though the impact of ICT in the tourism industry has been widely recognized and studied, until recently, research on this area was still emergent and focused mostly on specific software, automation processes and distribution (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Collins et al, 2003; Gomezelj & Čivre, 2012). However, as this technological shift escalated, ICT came to play an increasingly important role in promoting innovative learning (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cantoni, 2009; Collins et al., 2003; Kim & Jeong, 2018), which has prompted stakeholders and practitioners to consider that "tourism and hospitality educational curriculum and delivery mechanisms should increasingly nurture and instil the development of information literacy and knowledge management competencies" (Sigala and Baum 2003, 368).

Based on this premise and the increasingly important role English and ESP teaching play in current tourism and hospitality programs, the primary goal of this study is to collect, analyse and cross-reference data as to the interrelatedness between the development of language and digital competences in tourism education. This analysis will be instrumental in providing a framework for upcoming projects, and setting a research agenda for future research.

1. METHODOLOGY

This work is of exploratory nature and is based on a literature review focusing on peer-reviewed, open source research on the use of digital technology in the scope of ESP teaching and learning contexts. It aims at summarizing primary research on this topic and draw global conclusions based on the results of (open-coded) thematic content analysis of the research corpus (Cooper 1984).

In order to outline the problem, researchers began by carrying out an exploratory search in several databases. This was crucial to narrow down the topic and define the objective of the study, i.e. to provide a comprehensive review of research on the use of technology in the scope of ESP, focusing on the key concepts and best practices within tourism education. Limiting the literature search to primary studies published within the last two years (2017-2019), researchers gathered and selected the documentary corpus according to the following criteria:

- The selected databases were to include international, open access, scholarly peer-reviewed journals - specifically B-on, Eric and Google Scholar;
- The search terms used were digital transformation, ESP, Tourism, Higher Education - combined using the Boolean operators OR and AND;
- The documents had to be written in English.

The search was carried out between 10th and 15th February 2019. Due to the specificity of the issue and the scarcity of results, following a preliminary review, the search terms were revised as to include the terms ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching. Thereof, studies referring to ESP/EFL teaching in Tourism-related areas were also included in this analysis.

This process yielded 65 documents from a variety of sources: Google Scholar: 47; B-on: 3; and Eric: 15. These results were then scrutinized as to eliminate duplication. Based on the purpose of the study, the abstracts and conclusion sections of the gathered documents were then analyzed as to the relevance of digital technology and digital transformation within the scope of ESP and Tourism Education, curtailing the final corpus to a total of 16 documents.

Resorting to content analysis, this corpus was then coded according to two key categories: 1) digital technology used in ESP teaching and learning processes – pertaining to the tools and platforms used in this setting; and 2) the advantages of using digital technology in ESP teaching – research focusing on developing specific skills and engaging learning experiences. The data was then cross-referenced as to outline key concepts and best practices within Tourism Education and ESP.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The need for studying English for tourism is irrefutable, not only because it is a worldwide language of communication, but also because, in tourism and hospitality, it plays a critical role in the delivery of quality service (Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar, and Saffari 2017; Herrera 2018). At the same time, mobile device ownership and internet

access is widely spread and devices, apps and platforms are more and more ubiquitous in people's lives; nonetheless, "students do not appear to be using these devices outside of accessing social networks, email, Internet surfing and watching videos" (Cote and Milliner 2017, 196). Furthermore, because digital technology, as well as its use in educational settings, is in constant evolution, to gauge its efficacy and adequacy is not always easy. To this, Sundgren (2017, 3083) also adds "this might be an under-utilised resource that could benefit the educational practices of institutions of higher education".

As the development of digital technology is perceived to be having a great impact on ESP teaching and learning processes (Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar, and Saffari 2017; Reddy and Nazneen 2018; Herrera 2018), a first analysis of the gathered data concentrated on pinpointing digital technology (tools, platforms, etc.) used in ESP teaching, in particular in Tourism, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: **Digital technology used in ESP teaching and learning processes**

Category	Indicators	Studies
The use of digital technology	Podcasting for listening comprehension purposes	Sundgren (2017)
	Text messaging (SMS) for bite-sized learning	Sundgren (2017)
	Instant messaging for developing writing skills	Sundgren (2017)
	Blogging for developing writing skills	Cote, & Milliner (2017)
	Using Facebook to foster collective participation	Lopes, Rego, Fidalgo, Delplancq, & Relvas (2018)
	Using WebQuest to learn terminology	Herrera (2018)
	Using game-based teaching/learning strategies to work terminology	Enticknap-Seppänen (2017)

Sundgren (2017) presented a review that encompassed journal articles published within the time scope 2009 – 2015, focused on the discussion of applications of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) in Higher Education. The reported cases focused on English teaching addressed two language skills: listening (comprehension) and writing. Regarding the former, Sundgren (2017) explains that it involved listening comprehension of podcasts, verified through a set multiple-choice questions, which students should answer via SMS, with feedback to the students' performance relying on automated response. This strategy seems to have resulted in a significant improvement of the students' performance in final examinations.

As to the latter, there seems to be evidence of the efficacy of using text and instant messaging to develop writing skills, e.g. as to the use of English idioms. Nevertheless, the activities, as well as the communication tools involved did not allow for working extensive writing, which could steer student focus toward fluency and complexity, i.e. expressing their ideas efficiently and effectively, using elaborate arguments. A somehow similar strategy is reported by Sundgren (2017), but, in this case, using the WhatsApp platform. The study's conclusions point out that "vocabulary and spelling skills in

language classes improved, but grammar, idea development, and organisation were lacking" (Sundgren 2017, 3090). The novelty, in this case, is the positive effect that the use of this technology has had on the student's motivation to write in English.

Cote and Milliner (2017) developed a study with students enrolled in the College of Tourism and Hospitality, who attend an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class. For this study students were invited to use either a personal blog or website to develop their writing skills, which enabled them, for instance, to embed video and images and manage online discussions. In addition, the use of blogs also posed as important means to increase cultural awareness, providing opportunities to explore the other cultures.

Herrera (2018) put forth a case, which integrated different approaches to the use of digital technology. The author reports the use of Webquests, i.e. an inquiry-based teaching and learning strategy strongly grounded on the web, referring to the fact this "enables students to generate a greater knowledge based on the technical lexicon as the basis for further learning" (Herrera 2018, 10). The author also underlines that, in addition to allowing students to make inferences based on actual cases, this approach also helps them equate solutions for problems in the Tourism area.

Even though virtual reality is not clearly mentioned in the corpus as possibility in the scope of ESP teaching, Enticknap-Seppänen (2017) presents game-based learning potentialities to develop reflect upon professional identity and raise professional awareness, as well as speaking and listening comprehension skills. Furthermore, this study concludes it should be advantageous for teachers to employ "a participatory approach also involving students in game purchase decision-making and design for solutions covering a broad range of learner needs" (Enticknap-Seppänen 2017, 109).

As depicted in Table 2, the results of the data analysis yielded some recurrent advantages in the use of digital technology in ESP teaching.

Table 2: **Advantages of using digital technology use in ESP teaching.**

Category	Indicators	Studies
Advantages of digital technology in ESP	to develop linguistic competences	Enticknap-Seppänen (2017) Herrera (2018) Lopes, Rego, Fidalgo, Delplancq, & Relvas (2018) Wimontham (2018)
	To develop systemic competences	Herrera (2018) Lopes, Rego, Fidalgo, Delplancq, & Relvas (2018) Sundgren (2017) Cote, & Milliner (2017) Enticknap-Seppänen (2017)
	to mobilise and integrate different knowledge areas	Lopes, Rego, Fidalgo, Delplancq, & Relvas (2018) Sundgren (2017) Wimontham (2018) Herrera (2018)
	to deliver situated, authentic learning	Herrera (2018) Enticknap-Seppänen (2017)
	to boost student engagement	Herrera (2018) Wimontham (2018) Enticknap-Seppänen (2017) Lopes, Rego, Fidalgo, Delplancq, & Relvas (2018)

The development of linguistic competences refers to the development of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – within technology-based educational environment. Even though English tends to assume an instrumental role in Tourism Education, the lack of linguistic proficiency is considered critical as it may compromise professional performance (Enticknap-Seppänen 2017; Herrera 2018; Lopes et al., n.d.; Wimontham 2018). Authors such as Herrera (2018) or Wimontham (2018) go insofar as suggesting that the use of digital technology for ESP teaching and learning may be seen as an opportunity to mobilise and integrate different knowledge areas.

In what regards systemic (transversal) competences, authors like Herrera (2018) and Sundgren (2017) point out that the integration of digital technology in teaching and learning processes enhances the development of the students' and teachers' digital competence. Moreover, the use of digital technology can also be a means to set real-life professional contexts and "focus on communication and collaboration, linking academic and human education, both in writing and in speaking situations" (Delplancq et al. 2018, 454). In this scenario, students tend to feel challenged to transform and adapt their use of technology as they enhance creativity and critical thinking skills (Herrera, 2018).

Lastly, by boosting student-student and teacher-student interaction with different information sources and contexts, the use of digital tools also seems to engender higher learning motivation in students and teachers, since it allows for generating and acting within manifold context that favour refreshed communication, collaboration and interaction dynamics (Delplancq et al. 2018).

CONCLUSION

Over the last decades, tourism has become a hub of socio-economic progress and one of the most important industries in the world, with its business volume equalling or even surpassing that of oil and food exports. However, this overall success and prosperity is not without challenges. Recent research has shown that in order to reap the benefits from tourism, stakeholders must invest not only in developing infrastructures, but also in supplying the needs of tourists, which results in a growing demand for skilled professionals, who are equipped with technical, social and structural knowledge in this area.

The growing need to prepare future tourism and hospitality graduates and professionals who are able to adapt to the current globalised, technology-laden markets, is reshaping the way Tourism Education is approached, with curricula becoming more flexible and focused on the skills and competences required of today's graduates.

The main purpose of this work was to carry out a literature review focused on collecting, analysing and cross-referencing evidence as to the development of language and digital competences in Tourism education and how they are leveraging digital transformation. Considering that English and technology proficiency are crucial for practitioners, researchers set out to understand if and how these areas overlap and whether Tourism curricula remain relevant and able to keep up with current developments and trends.

The results of the literature review focusing on teaching ESP and Tourism education shows there is currently a need for studying English for Tourism Purposes, being that there are still significant gaps regarding the use of technical jargon and the availability of quality resources. On the other hand, as the industry grows and quality standards are raised, it is of utmost importance that the language, communication strategies and platforms are accurate and appealing. In addition to playing a pivotal role in providing quality hospitality service and tourist experiences, digital technology can also support language learning within this scope. Because it is ubiquitous and readily available, digital technology currently plays on approach to language teaching in this setting. In addition to an instrumental, software-based components, digital technology is considered to contribute to promote inquiry based teaching and learning and develop creativity and critical thinking skills, as well as supporting integrated learning by mobilizing different skills and areas of knowledge. A closely related trend is that research becomes less about specific devices and more about which learning opportunities can be unfolded with ubiquitous access (Sundgren, 2017).

In addition to fostering collaboration and interactions, using digital technology to promote ESP within Tourism Education is also considered to increase students' motivation and engagement, with some authors also highlighting the fact that it raises cultural and professional awareness.

However, despite the perceived advantages, the data also suggests that digital technology is still underutilized for learning. In addition to focusing mostly on listening and writing skills, the platforms and tools analysed within the scope of the literature review are still lacking in what regards complex writing and idea development.

In conclusion, the data provides conclusive evidence of the value of language skills within tourism programs, as they are considered an important asset for more skilled and versatile practitioners. There is also evidence to support the need to further invest and develop the use of digital technology to promote teaching English for Tourism purposes.

In terms of future research, considering the challenges outlined in the previous section, it would be relevant to invest in long-term, specific studies that can help HEI review and update the way language learning is incorporated into Tourism curricula. On the other hand, the rapid technological development in the field of mobile devices can substantially change the conditions for research in just a few years time (Sundgren, 2017), deeming it necessary to continuously review curricula, keeping the relevant and innovative. This could be instrumental in bridging the gap between HEI and the market, thus contributing towards 21st century skills building.

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