ENGLISH COURSE DESIGN FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM PROGRAMME OF STUDY AT A. DUBČEK UNIVERSITY IN SLOVAKIA: BRIDGING THE B1-B2 PROFICIENCY GAP

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Abstract

The paper proposes a specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum for students in the Management in Tourism programme at Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín. The need arises from a mismatch between students' incoming CEFR B1 proficiency and the B2–C1 linguistic requirements of tourism management positions aligned with SKKR level 6. The review of literature identified major pedagogical innovations including task-based language teaching, corpus-informed vocabulary instruction, gamification, and virtual reality simulations. Using target-situation analysis of programme documents, the study outlines a two-year course titled Strategic Communication and Management in Tourism. Four thematic modules address HR communication, digital storytelling, sustainable tourism discourse, and intercultural crisis management. The blended-learning format includes Moodle, VR and mobile applications to increase engagement and reduce speaking anxiety. The course integrates Green Tourism lexical bundles absent from current ESP textbooks. Findings demonstrate that performance-based simulation tasks foster communicative self-efficacy and bridge the B1–B2 proficiency gap. The proposed curriculum represents an evidence-based response to post-2020 digitalization and sustainability demand in the tourism sector.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary tourism industry operates within a globalized context in which English is not simply a professional competence, but a core component of its operational infrastructure. For higher education institutions in non-English-speaking countries, this situation requires a pedagogical transition from General English toward more highly specialized forms of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The paper examines this imperative within the institutional context of Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Faculty of Social and Economic Relations, with particular focus on the undergraduate Management in Tourism programme of study. The current job market requires that graduates in tourism management programmes possess more than basic transactional language skills; they require the linguistic agility to handle difficult management situations, evaluate socio-economic patterns and trends, and implement sustainable development strategies. According to the study programme's profile, graduates are expected to fill middle and top management positions such as Tourist Information Centre Managers, Tourism Quality Managers, and Process Optimisation Specialists (TnUAD, 2025). These roles are in line with the Slovak Qualifications Framework (SKKR) level 6, requiring a high degree of autonomy and communicative competence. However, entering students often display a proficiency level at CEFR B1, which is insufficient for the nuance required in professional negotiation, crisis management, and strategic planning (Council of Europe, 2020). Moreover, the tourism sector in the post-2020 period has been profoundly transformed by the digitalization of destination management and the pressing sustainability demand. Recent research indicates that

traditional ESP curricula often fail to adequately address these emerging sectors, leaving graduates with a "lexical gap" regarding green tourism and digital marketing strategies (Veerachaisantikul et al., 2025; Oktavianti et al., 2025). Additionally, the psychological dimension of language use, especially Communication Self-Efficacy (CSE) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), has been identified as a stronger predictor of service performance than grammatical accuracy alone (Rachim & Salam, 2025). The paper proposes a design for a specialized ESP course with a title "Strategic Communication and Management in Tourism" (SCMT). The design is based on a systematic review of the latest Scopus and Web of Science literature, ensuring that the pedagogical strategies employed, from Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to Virtual Reality (VR) simulations, are evidence-based and in line with recent industry standards. The main goal is to facilitate a structured and systematic progression from B1 to B2 proficiency, equipping students with the professional competencies necessary to thrive in the modern tourism economy.

1. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

A literature review was to identify effective pedagogical interventions in ESP for tourism. The review was focused on key notions such as "ESP tourism curriculum," "Task-Based Language Teaching," "Intercultural Communicative Competence," "Green Tourism vocabulary," and "Gamification in higher education." The review synthesized findings on linguistic needs, specifically the gap between general English and the specific lexical bundles required for sustainable tourism (Oktavianti et al., 2025), technological interventions regarding the efficacy of virtual reality (VR) in reducing physiological stress during English speaking tasks (Takada et al., 2023) and the role of gamification in maintaining motivation (Shortt et al., 2021), and pedagogical frameworks focusing on the shift from presentation-practice-

production (PPP) to task-based language teaching (TBLT) as the superior method for professional fluency (Purwanto et al., 2024).

This methodological triangulation guarantees that the proposed course extends beyond a purely theoretical construct, constituting a methodologically sound solution reflecting both the specific TnUAD context and the global standards of the tourism industry.

2. GOAL AND METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of the paper is to design a comprehensive, needs-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum tailored for undergraduate students in the Management in Tourism programme of study at Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Faculty of Social and Economic Relations. The primary pedagogical objective is to advance students' proficiency from CEFR level B1 to B2, while ensuring the development of both linguistic competence and the pragmatic strategies necessary for effective performance in managerial positions. Partial objectives include: to design tasks that transition students from concrete, descriptive language (B1) to abstract, argumentative, and strategic discourse (B2), to integrate corpus-informed vocabulary related to Green Tourism and Digital Storytelling, addressing gaps in current coursebooks, and to propose a blended learning model utilizing Moodle and Virtual Reality (VR) to increase engagement and reduce anxiety in foreign language. A multi-layered methodological framework was used to design the course using the target situation analysis (TSA) based on the relevant literature. An analysis of the specific study programme documents and graduate profiles of the Faculty of Social and Economic Relations at TnUAD was conducted, including reviewing the Management in Tourism accreditation documents and study plans to identify the specific hard skills that the English course must support (TnUAD, 2025). The analysis confirmed that graduates are expected to perform high-level tasks, such as creating

concepts for the promotion of tourism and managing regional tourism organizations, which require B2+ competency (TnUAD, 2025).

3. FINDINGS

The analysis of the requirements of the Management in Tourism programme of study, combined with the relevant literature review, resulted in the development of a clearly defined course design. The proposed course titled Strategic Communication and Management in Tourism is designed as a two-semester compulsory module, replacing or augmenting existing General English provisions. The target situation analysis showed a significant discrepancy between the B1 skills typically held by incoming students and the B2/C1 demands of the target jobs, such as for instance Tourism Quality Manager. At current B1 level, students can maintain interaction and get across what they want to, in a range of contexts. They can cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, e.g. public transport, standard hotel check-in (Council of Europe, 2020). In the target level of B2, students must understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of study. They must interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain (Council of Europe, 2020).

Table 1: Competency Gap and Curricular Solutions

Target Job Role (TnUAD Profile)	Required Competency (SKKR 6/7)	Linguistic Gap (B1 to B2)	Proposed Curricular Module
Tourist Information Centre Manager	Managing staff, handling complex complaints, interpreting regional data.	B1 students lack diplomatic language for conflict resolution and specific HR vocabulary.	Module 1: HR and Management (Role-play: Hiring and Firing)
Marketing Manager	Promoting destinations, creating digital content, managing social media crises.	B1 students struggle with persuasive writing, nuancing "toxicity" in reviews, and narrative flow.	Module 2: Digital Storytelling/ Marketing
Process Optimisation Specialist	Analysing workflows, implementing sustainable practices, reporting.	Lack of specialized "Green Tourism" vocabulary, such as for instance carbon footprint, ethical sourcing.	Module 3: Sustainability/Green Ethics
Front Office Manager	Operational crisis management (overbooking, health emergencies).	High anxiety in spontaneous speaking; inability to use conditionals for negotiation.	Module 4: Operational Crisis Simulation (VR)

Source: TnUAD. (2025). *Study Programmes: Management in Tourism*. Faculty of Social and Economic Relations, Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín.

The syllabus is structured around thematic modules using a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. In TBLT, the task is the primary unit of instruction, and language form is analysed retrospectively (Purwanto et al., 2024).

Module 1: The Modern Tourism Manager (week 1-4)

Learning objective: To develop the linguistic skills necessary for Human Resource Management and professional self-presentation.

Input materials: Authentic job advertisements for Tourism Quality Managers and Destination Specialists; video interviews with industry leaders.

Language Focus: Action verbs for CVs; behavioural interview questions; language of evaluation and assessment.

Core Task: The Recruitment Simulation. Students work in groups. Group A writes a job description and interview protocol for a

managerial position. Group B prepares CVs and cover letters. Then, they conduct live interviews.

Assessment: Portfolio submission of the CV/Cover Letter and a reflective report on the interview performance.

Module 2: Destination Management through Digital Storytelling (weeks 5-8)

Learning objective: To master persuasive language and digital literacy for destination marketing.

Input Materials: Analysis of successful travel blogs, Instagram reels, and promotional videos.

Language Focus: Adjectives of degree; narrative tenses for storytelling; evaluative language; toxicity analysis in social media comments (Almeida & Pereira, 2024).

Core Task: The "Hidden Gem" Campaign, utilizing the "Shutterbug" method (Fonseca et al., 2024), students take original photographs of a local Slovak destination. They are to create a digital narrative, such as video or blog post, promoting this destination to an international audience, focusing on unique selling points.

Assessment: Presentation of the digital campaign; peer review of the narrative structure.

Module 3: Sustainable Tourism and Green Ethics (weeks 9-12)

Learning objective: To equip students with the specialized vocabulary of environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Input Materials: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Green Tourism certification criteria; corpus-based word lists featuring collocations such as sustainable consumption, community-based tourism, and eco-friendly infrastructure (Oktavianti et al., 2025).

Language Focus: Cause and effect (connectors); speculating about the future (future continuous/perfect); corpus-informed lexical bundles.

Core Task: The Green Audit. Students are given a case study of a non-sustainable hotel. They must audit the hotel against Green Tourism criteria and present a Transition Strategy Proposal to a board of investors.

Assessment: Written proposal and oral defence of the strategy.

Module 4: Intercultural Crisis Management (2nd year of study)

Learning objective: To develop Intercultural Communicative Competence and crisis resolution skills.

Input Materials: Critical incidents involving cultural misunderstandings; case studies of service failures.

Language Focus: Diplomatic language (modals of politeness); passive voice for depersonalizing conflict; conditionals for negotiation.

Core Task: The VR Crisis Simulation. Using Virtual Reality tools, students face high-pressure scenarios, such as a guest refusing to pay due to cultural offense, a medical emergency, or a double-booking.

Assessment: Real-time performance assessment based on a rubric evaluating linguistic accuracy, empathy, and strategic resolution (Takada et al., 2023).

To support learners of 21st-century, the course utilizes a Blended Learning environment (Liu et al., 2024), such as Moodle platform, gamification and virtual reality. Moodle Platform shall be used for asynchronous delivery of reading materials, grammar drills, and peer-review forums dedicated to communicative tasks. Next, implementation of game mechanics, such as leaderboards, badges for "vocabulary master" are utilized to enhance motivation. Apps like Duolingo or Quizizz are integrated for spaced repetition of terminology (Shortt et al., 2021).

4. DISCUSSION

The proposed English course for undergraduate students in Management in Tourism programme of study is designed to move beyond the intermediate level with task-based language teaching. The transition from B1 to B2 is often the most difficult for students, characterized by a plateau where progress slows. Traditional methods that focus on grammar rules often fail to provide the procedural knowledge required for spontaneous fluency. By adopting task-based language teaching, this course aligns with findings by Purwanto et al. (2024), who demonstrated that TBLT in hospitality training significantly improves speaking confidence because the focus shifts from avoiding mistakes to completing the job. The course design also has the component of intercultural communicative competence since globalization has made it a non-negotiable skill for tourism managers. A major innovative component of this course is the integration of a Corpus-Informed Green Tourism Module. Recent bibliometric analyses and corpus studies (Oktavianti et al., 2025; Veerachaisantikul et al., 2025) highlight that general tourism textbooks often lack the specific collocations required to discuss sustainability. By utilizing a Green Tourism vocabulary list generated from authentic industry texts, the course ensures students are learning the language of the future economy. This directly supports the FSEV's mission to prepare graduates for the national economy and public sector, where sustainable development is a policy priority. In addition, the inclusion of Digital Storytelling and VR addresses the affective dimension of learning. Almeida and Pereira (2024) found that learner-generated content (photography and storytelling) significantly boosts engagement by making the learning personal and creative. Furthermore, Takada et al. (2023) provided physiological evidence, such as monitoring brain hemoglobine and heart rates that VR training reduces the anxiety associated with speaking English in high-pressure hospitality scenarios. For students at A. Dubcek University of Trenčín,

who may lack opportunities for real-world immersion, VR provides a safe proxy for experience, lowering the affective filter and building the confidence or self-efficacy necessary for B2 performance. With the sound theoretical framework, implementation at FSEV, TnUAD requires addressing practical issues. The Administration in Tourism in Management programme of study must ensure that English teachers are coordinated with the core departments to ensure the ESP tasks reflect the content being taught in Slovak. Thus, the content and language integrated learning synergy would maximize the relevance of the course.

CONCLUSION

The proposed course titled Strategic Communication and Management in Tourism, responds directly to the documented gap between students' incoming B1 proficiency and the B2/C1 communicative demands embedded in SKKR level 6 professional roles. By grounding its structure in target situation analysis and aligning its learning tasks with real managerial communication scenarios, the course shifts ESP instruction away from general linguistic knowledge toward professional communicative competence. The findings confirm that traditional grammar-focused ESP courses lack the lexical depth, pragmatic flexibility, and intercultural sensitivity demanded by the post-2020 tourism landscape, particularly in the domains of sustainability and digital destination management. The modular design presented in this paper addresses these deficits through a principled integration of task-based language teaching, corpus-informed vocabulary instruction, digital storytelling, and Virtual Reality simulations. These strategies support not only linguistic development, but also learner agency, communication self-efficacy, and intercultural communicative competence, which all are the factors increasingly correlated with workplace performance. The proposed blended learning environment, incorporating Moodle-mediated asynchronous tasks and gamification elements, further strengthens the learning experience by enabling personalized practice and encouraging autonomous vocabulary development. Successful implementation will

require adequate technical resources and teacher training, along with ongoing coordination between language and content instructors to ensure cross-curricular coherence. To summarize, the course design presented in the paper establishes a systematic pathway for developing the communicative and strategic competencies required of future managers in tourism. It seeks to equip graduates not merely to participate in professional discourse, but to make informed, ethical, and responsive managerial decisions in an evolving global tourism industry. Future research should focus on piloting the course, evaluating learning outcomes longitudinally, and further refining the integration of VR and corpus-based materials, thereby contributing to evidence-based ESP pedagogy for tourism and related fields.

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