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A Needs Analysis for English for Specific Purposes Speaking Skills Development for Tourism Front-Liners: Targets, Challenges and Learning Preferences

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Abstract. English is the lingua franca in the Maldives tourism industry, and learning English with a focus on the tourism industry is essential. However, there are limited context-specific learning materials tailored to cater to the front-liners' needs. This study explored their speaking needs to develop an English for specific purposes (ESP) module. It examined the importance of speaking English for front-line workers, their challenges, learning preferences and readiness for mobile learning. The study was conducted qualitatively through semi-structured interviews with 14 tourism front-line staff members and two lecturers, as well as an analysis of 10 job descriptions of front-line staff. The findings revealed that English is crucial for them to speak with guests and colleagues. The target situations for speaking English include welcoming guests, check-in and check-out processes, enhancing the guest experience and handling requests and complaints. They face challenges due to limited vocabulary and grammar, as well as affective factors such as language anxiety and a lack of confidence. The speaking competency needs of front-line staff encompass grammar, vocabulary, and core speaking skills, including requesting, expressing, explaining, providing information, offering advice and describing. Participants prefer to learn through task-based, collaborative and contextualised tasks. They also preferred technology-integrated activities, such as multimedia learning and game-based

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learning and are ready to adopt mobile learning. An ESP speaking module should include content relevant to authentic scenarios, and purposefully selected vocabulary and grammar to enhance effective speaking delivered through mobile technology, integrating multimedia and game-based learning. The findings provide valuable insights for developing an ESP module to teach and learn speaking skills for tourism front-line staff.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; Maldives tourism; needs analysis; speaking skills; tourism front-liners; qualitative inquiry

1. Introduction

English is the language of communication in the hospitality industry. As an international language and being fundamental in tourist-client interactions (Coelho et al., 2024), it serves as the working language between tourists and service providers. Consequently, employees are required to speak English (Al-Saadi, 2015), and it is particularly essential for front-office staff (Kijpoonphol & Linh, 2020). Speaking is a vital facet of communication, and it is crucial for career enhancement (Rao, 2019). Competent second language speakers must be able to use speech to achieve their communicative goals (Goh & Burns, 2012). However, second language learners find it challenging to develop their speaking skills (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019), and most learn speaking for general purposes, leaving a gap when they enter the workforce and need to speak in professional contexts.

Due to the importance of speaking skills in the tourism industry for communication with international clients, it is crucial to train front-line staff for effective communication at work. This makes preparing them to speak fluently and effectively important, necessitating the tailoring of their preparation to their professional needs. Such preparation is particularly significant in a country like the Maldives, where tourism is the primary source of income. Given the importance of learners' target needs (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Fitria, 2020; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Odotu & Khoiriyah, 2023), it is essential to understand the needs of front-line staff to tailor a speaking module to their professional and learning needs.

Current research in ESP needs analysis in the tourism industry identifies the need for learning speaking skills and improving confidence (Dendeng & Xenia, 2025), enhancing customer service interactions, providing information, handling complex vocabulary, and addressing cultural differences (Ouarniki & Boumediene, 2025), and guest inquiries, clarification, and conversational skills in the tourism sector (Shoaib et al., 2023). Wongkittiporn (2024) identified the importance of cross-cultural communication, pragmatic strategies for apology and pronunciation accuracy. Challenges identified include finding inappropriate words and expressions in speech, as well as struggling to understand foreign accents (Malini et al., 2022). It also reported task-based learning and immersive learning as essential teaching methods (Ouarniki & Boumediene, 2025).

The existing studies provide valuable insights for ESP curriculum development. However, the contexts of the existing studies differ from the context of the Maldives, which operates a variety of resorts under a one-island-one-resort concept and comprises a large population of locals and foreigners working to serve international tourists from across the globe. Additionally, most studies focus on macro skills, including reading, writing, speaking and listening and do not specifically address speaking skills and their associated challenges. Additionally, the employees' perspectives do not specifically focus on front-line staff. Hence, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis of tourism front-liners in the Maldives tourism, focusing specifically on front-line workers in resorts.

This study aimed to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis to tailor an ESP speaking skills module to enhance the communicative competence of front-line workers and improve service quality in the Maldives' tourism sector. It attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the importance of English language speaking skills for front-line workers in the Maldives tourism industry?
2. What challenges do they encounter in practising English speaking skills?
3. What is the front-liners' preferred learning activities to learn English speaking skills?
4. What is the front-liners' readiness for adopting mobile learning to learn English speaking skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English in the Tourism Industry

Due to its widespread use in the global community, English is the primary language of communication in the tourism industry. Kholidi et al. (2022) emphasises that language proficiency is crucial in the tourism industry, as it serves as a channel for establishing communication and building relationships. Front-line staff are the most crucial group, as they are the first point of contact between the establishment and its guests, and communication typically begins in the front office (Dewi et al., 2021; Sayin & Karaman, 2019). Therefore, front-office employees must be able to converse with guests fluently.

2.2 English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a field that tailors instruction to specific purposes (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Fitria, 2020; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021; Namtapi, 2022; Orodu & Khoiriyah, 2023). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP is an approach to language teaching that considers learners' needs and interests when determining the content. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) highlight the use of discipline-specific methodologies and activities, as well as the attention to language, skills, discourse and genres, as essential characteristics of ESP.

Recent literature describes ESP as a language teaching approach in which the learners' reasons for learning justify the content and method (Namtapi, 2022), and courses are designed with a specific focus on the purpose for which the English

language is needed (Zaman, 2024). Several methods have been employed to tailor ESP to cater to the learners' needs. ESP has adopted technology in teaching, making it more flexible, engaging and learner-centred through the integration of tools such as mobile applications, learning management systems, and real-time communication and simulation tools (Nuryanti, 2025) and digital tools such as YouTube, Padlet and Quizlet are increasingly used in ESP instruction to simulate real-world situations, improve speech perception and promote active participation in language learning (Galiya & Botakoz, 2025).

2.3 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the primary step in designing ESP courses (Namtapi, 2022). There are different models of needs analysis. The model proposed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) was selected for this study as it provides a comprehensive approach to analysing needs in the ESP context. This model includes target situation analysis (TSA), present situation analysis (PSA), learning situation analysis (LSA), and means analysis (MA). TSA incorporates the reasons for language learning in a particular situation, or the target situation's language needs to function competently in the specific context. PSA helps identify current English language problems. LSA enables us to understand the learning strategies and styles. Lastly, MA refers to the means of language learning, including facilities and devices.

2.4 Speaking Skills Competence

Speaking is a structured process of meaning reception and production (Brown, 1994), facilitating listeners' acceptance and understanding of a conversation (Syakur et al., 2020). Goh and Burn (2012) propose a model of second language speaking competence, comprising knowledge of language discourse, core speaking skills, and communication strategies. To speak well, learners must possess a sound knowledge of language and discourse, which encompasses grammatical, phonological, lexical, and discourse knowledge (Goh & Burn, 2012). The second aspect is the core speaking skills, which include pronunciation, speech function, interaction management, and discourse organisation. The third aspect, communication strategies, includes cognitive, metacognitive, and interactive strategies.

2.5 Previous Studies

Different studies related to needs analysis have investigated the English language needs of employees, learners, and other stakeholders in the tourism industry. This includes understanding the skills needs of employees in the hospitality industry (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Dendeng & Xiena, 2025; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021; Ouarkini & Boumediene, 2025) or the English language needs of students in the hospitality field at the university level (Anam & Rachmadian, 2020). While some studies explored language needs in general (Asyu & Özcan, 2021; Firharmawan & Andika, 2019; Gopal et al., 2021; Kholidi et al., 2022; Malini et al., 2022; Mohammad & Sanosi, 2024; Namtapi, 2022), others specifically analysed the English-speaking needs of stakeholders related to the tourism industry (Kijpoonphol & Linh, 2020; Wongkittiporn, 2024).

Kijpoonphol and Linh (2020) studied the English communication needs of front-office staff in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. They used three questionnaires and a semi-structured interview to gather data from 16 front-office staff, 16 non-Thai guests, and 10 hotel managers. The findings revealed that the speaking skills front-line staff needed, including welcoming and greeting guests, providing information about rooms and facilities, suggesting tourist attractions, and recommending local food. Although not a direct needs analysis, research conducted by Wongkittiporn (2024) to develop an instrument for needs analysis in the hospitality field involved interviews with internship students, teachers, and employees, and identified themes such as cross-cultural communication, pragmatic strategies for apology, and pronunciation accuracy as important.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the specific speaking skills required by tourism front-line staff in the Maldives. As the qualitative design facilitates understanding people in their own terms (Patton, 1980), it allows for the collection of rich information from participants. Moreover, it seeks to understand and explore (Nassaji, 2020), allowing information-rich data through in-depth conversations with participants. This design was particularly suitable for this study as it aimed to explore participants' views based on their knowledge and experience.

3.1 Sampling and Participants

Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants. It enabled the selection of individuals who could express their understanding of the problem under investigation (Creswell, 2007). Two groups of participants – front-line employees and lecturers – were selected. The inclusion criteria for front-line staff were: 1) a local currently working in a resort in the Maldives, and 2) employed at the front-office department in a resort. The lecturers were selected based on 1) currently teaching in the front-office course, and 2) having at least 5 years' teaching experience in this field. Both groups were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study.

The participants included 14 front-line staff and two lecturers. The front-liners included 11 males and three females, aged between 20 and 52 years, and most of them joined the workforce after completing secondary school. Their experience in the industry ranged from three months to 14 years. The two lecturers, one male and one female, held postgraduate qualifications and had over 15 years of experience. In addition to collecting data from individuals, job descriptions of front-office staff were gathered from resorts in the Maldives to conduct a task analysis, thereby triangulating the data on target situations by understanding the requirements from the employer's perspective.

3.2 Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview protocol developed to conduct a needs analysis of the English language skills required by front-office operators in the Maldives tourism industry (Shoozan & Mohamed, 2024). The interview protocol incorporates TSA, PSA, LSA, and MA (Dudley-

Evans & St. Johns, 1998). The protocol was developed, validated by five experts, refined, and pilot tested. The interview protocol comprised eight main questions related to the importance of English-speaking skills, the challenges they faced in speaking English, learning preferences, and their readiness for mobile learning.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

After registering the research at the university in the Maldives, resorts were contacted to share information about the research and request permission to interview participants, who were contacted later. The information sheet and consent form were shared with the participants, and consent was gained before conducting the interviews either face-to-face or online, depending on accessibility. The hybrid approach facilitated broader participation and maximised the richness of data (Rahman et al., 2024). This was particularly useful in the Maldives, where a one-island-one-resort concept limits physical accessibility. The lecturers' interviews were held online via Google Meet, on their request. The approximate duration of the interviews was 40 minutes, and all interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis, a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following six stages: 1) familiarising yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) reporting the themes, was employed to analyse data. Both inductive and deductive methods of coding were used. The data drive the inductive coding, whereas a deductive approach involves pre-conceptualised ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the research questions informed the coding deductively, the codes were generated inductively from the data. A similar practice was demonstrated by Braun and Clarke (2012).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, enhancing the authenticity of the data sets. The transcriptions were shared with participants for member checking. The data items were transferred to NVivo and coded at the semantic level. Once all data sets were coded, the codes were reviewed and clustered into potential themes, which were reviewed and defined, considering that they needed a singular focus, should not overlap, and should address the research questions – three aspects of good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A peer debriefing was conducted to discuss the codes, their alignment with themes, and their relevance to the research questions.

4. Findings

The data were analysed and presented by organising the themes in the order of the research questions. The findings are presented with data extracts from employees (E), lecturers (L), and job description documents (D).

4.1 Importance of speaking English (TSA)

The themes “speaking with guests” and “speaking with colleagues” were generated as key indicators of the importance of speaking English, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Importance of English-speaking skills

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Speaking with guests	Speaking during check-in and check-out	asking information
		briefing guests
		explaining bills
	Interactions in handling requests and complaints	asking for details of requests and complaints
		follow-up with guests
	Enhancing guests' experience	providing information
		explaining procedures
		describing attractions and events
	Welcoming and farewell	greetings
		welcoming
		introductions
		farewell wishes
Speaking with colleagues	Departmental interactions	briefing and debriefing
		reporting to seniors
	Coordinating with other departments	informing issues, requests and complaints
		follow up

4.2 Speaking with guests

Data from all sources indicate the importance of speaking English when interacting with guests. Front-line staff speak with guests during the check-in and check-out processes, enhancing the guest experience, handling requests and complaints, and welcoming them and bidding farewell. For example, E06 highlighted the use of English to conduct a briefing during check-in and give information about the activities. Several participants also corroborated this, and it was a task in the job descriptions.

"We give briefing about how the island is, what are the activities you can do, and then give them a quick briefing about what is available to them." (E06)

"Give an overview of resort/hotel amenities and services." (D1)

"because they are going to be meeting with people from other countries, I think it is one of the most important things for them to have a good grasp of English language." (L01)

Specific skills required include providing information, asking questions, giving briefings, requesting information, and confirmation checks.

"We must ask questions and confirm what their request or complaint." (E05)

"Provide information about local attractions, dining options, and activities." (D5)

"... they have to suggest the best excursion... islands life, the locality, also needs to be explained." (L02)

English is also important for speaking with colleagues, facilitating interaction within the department, and coordinating with other departments. For example, while E01 recognised the need to speak during briefings and handovers, E10

pointed out the interactions with other departments, such as Housekeeping. This idea was found in all sources of data.

"At work, the colleagues also we are using English most of the time.... in handover and briefing." (E01)

"Communicating with relevant departments regarding guest requests and preference." (D1)

Overall, the findings highlight the significance of speaking English in the target situations, specific skills required, and routine tasks, suggesting the importance of emphasising these situations and skills in developing a module to teach speaking skills for them.

4.3 Challenges in speaking English

The main challenges participants highlighted were related to language and affective factors, shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Challenges in Speaking English

Themes	Sub-themes	codes
Language accuracy and fluency	Vocabulary limitations	insufficient tourism vocabulary
		difficulty in using words
		difficulty with the guests' language
	grammatical limitations	lack of grammatical knowledge
confusion in grammatical choices		
Affective factors	Language anxiety	Worry about failure
		Worry about others' opinions
	Lack of confidence	Fear of speaking
		hesitance

4.4 Language accuracy and fluency

Language accuracy and fluency were a challenge. All the participants articulated challenges due to limited vocabulary and grammar. The employees recognised the uniqueness of tourism English and highlighted limited knowledge of terminologies, difficulties in using words, and challenges in understanding words used by clients. The participants also highlighted the challenges faced due to limited grammar.

"We are using different terms which normally don't use in life." (E14)

"... It's quite difficult for me to use some words with them." (E11)

"Most difficult for me is tense, sometimes when I speak to guests, also I confuse tense." (E02).

"I found most students are very weak in this area, grammar and vocabulary." (L02)

Overall, this theme highlights the linguistic challenges faced in terms of language accuracy and fluency, an important aspect of second language speaking competence highlighted by Goh and Burns (2012). This suggests the significance of providing linguistic input for teaching grammar and vocabulary.

4.5 Affective factors

The second challenge they face is affective factors, comprising 'language anxiety' and 'lack of confidence'. Some of them find it challenging to speak due to anxiety, while others lack the confidence to speak.

"I was in front of guests like shivering, because guests ask me question and I was not able to respond to him." (E08)

"Sometimes, I hesitate of telling a word wrong in a big crowd." (E03)

"It is kind of shyness and awkwardness in such scenarios when we just needed to use English." (E10)

Affective factors are also linked to linguistic barriers; for example, some individuals hesitate to speak due to the fear of using words incorrectly. Thus, addressing linguistic barriers with sufficient practice to become confident in using them is essential.

4.6 Preferred learning activities

Two themes, task-based learning and technology-integrated learning, were found to be learning preferences. They are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Preferred learning activities

Themes	Sub-themes	codes
Task-based learning	Collaborative learning	group discussions
		one-to-one interactions
	Contextual learning	role-play activities
		real-life tourism scenarios
Technology-integrated learning	Multimedia learning	audio-video lessons
		documentaries and movies
	Game-based learning	interactive games
		interactive quiz

4.7 Task-based learning

The majority of participants preferred learning collaboratively with others and in a contextualised setting through authentic scenarios and tasks from the tourism industry.

"For me working in a group is much easy because the way others speak also it help to improve my speaking level." (E01)

"... scenario-based, and activities engage the person, role-plays in the context of resorts." (E08)

"I found that dramas, presentations, those kind things mostly are liked." (L02)

This theme suggests that effective learning activities should incorporate discussion, collaboration, and tasks relevant to the tourism context.

4.8 Technology-integrated learning

Most participants prefer to learn using multimedia, such as videos and images, as well as game-based learning, through games or interactive quizzes.

"I think watching videos...activities based on videos." (E10)

"I think interactive quiz helps me to know more and also to practice." (E11)

However, the lecturers reported negative experiences in using technology in their classes with tourism students.

"... I cannot say that using the application or technology that they are really ready to learn." (L01)

"I have used VR as well, maybe virtual reality they don't have much experience; they were not much interested in them." (L02)

This theme suggests that the front-liners' preferred learning activities included collaborative learning and technology-integrated learning; however, incorporating lecturers' feedback was necessary to create a more learner-friendly learning platform that matched the learning preferences of the target audience.

4.9 Mobile learning readiness

The data revealed that front-line workers were ready to use mobile learning to enhance their speaking skills, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Mobile learning readiness

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Familiarity and comfort with mobile learning	Familiarity with mobile devices	Use the phone daily
		Use mobile devices for work
		Use mobile apps
	Comfortable in using mobile devices for learning	Used the phone for online learning
Used mobile apps for learning		
Positive attitude towards mobile-assisted language learning	Positive perceptions of mobile learning for English	Apps improve English
		Using apps for learning is easy
	Willingness to use mobile apps for learning speaking skills	Willing to use apps for learning to speak
		Interested in learning to speak through apps

4.10 Familiarity and comfort with mobile learning

Most participants were familiar with mobile devices and were comfortable using them for daily activities and learning. The front-liners commonly expressed this view.

"I am familiar with it., I use my phone all the time." (E02)

"I am also using some application to learn using my device." (E01)

4.11 Positive attitude towards mobile-assisted language learning

The front-liners had a positive attitude towards mobile-assisted language learning. They had a positive perception of using mobile learning for learning English and were willing to use mobile apps to improve their speaking skills.

"I enjoy learning using phone." (P14)

"I have used Duolingo for a while, and it is a very helpful." P07

"We work in a busy environment, using an application is the best option actually." (E08)

This theme emphasises the participants' readiness to use mobile learning for developing speaking skills. Although the lecturers did not have a favourable experience integrating selected technology in classrooms, the participants' views suggested they were ready for technology-integrated learning. This implies the importance of selectively choosing the technology that caters to the learner's preferences.

5. Discussion

5.1 Importance of speaking English

Data revealed the importance of speaking English for tourism front-liners to communicate effectively during check-in and check-out, enhance guest experiences, manage requests and complaints, welcome and bid farewell to guests, and interact with colleagues. The literature reported the importance of speaking English for general conversation (Malini et al., 2022) and for providing services and disseminating information (Malini et al., 2022; Namtapi, 2022; Ouarniki & Boumediene, 2025). Specific skills highlighted by participants of this study included asking questions and responding, providing confirmations, providing information, explaining, describing, and briefing, echoing the literature, which reported explaining, responding to questions, and providing directions (Asyu & Özcan, 2021; Datu et al., 2020; Kijjoonphol & Linh, 2020).

Although similar in tasks, the target situations in the context of the Maldives differed; for example, they were required to give information about island life, describe excursions related to island communities, sea sports, local attractions, Maldives history and lifestyle, and explain various room types, such as water villas. Moreover, they were required to speak English when communicating with co-workers. Although research on this aspect is limited, it is crucial in the Maldives, as the industry attracts workers from around the globe. The findings suggest the importance of selecting learning materials and activities that align with these target situations and skills.

5.2 Challenges in speaking English

Participants found it challenging to speak due to limited vocabulary and inadequate grammatical knowledge. They also encountered affective factors, such as language anxiety and lack of confidence.

Previous research supports the notion that context and field-related vocabulary are crucial for employees to communicate effectively with tourists (Namtapi, 2022). Moreover, a lack of grammatical competence has been identified as a significant issue. While some struggled to construct sentences in English naturally due to a lack of grammatical knowledge (Malini et al., 2022), others recommended incorporating language forms, such as grammar, into the design of courses (Namtapi, 2022). This highlights the importance of focusing on vocabulary and

grammar, as well as selecting it purposefully, to help front-line staff use language accurately and fluently in target situations.

As mentioned by Goh and Burns (2012), those who experience language anxiety worry about potential failure and are concerned about what others may think. In this study, participants expressed anxiety about speaking in English, anticipating that they might fail to convey their intentions. Moreover, some participants reported feeling unconfident and hesitating to speak, a common challenge faced when speaking with foreign guests (Malini et al., 2022; Nampati, 2022). Thus, it is crucial to consider the target situations, the skills required to speak in those situations, the language necessary to navigate them effectively, and provide sufficient practice to use them confidently.

5.3 Preferred learning activities

All the participants preferred collaborative and contextual learning through interactions and discussions related to tourism tasks. Researchers have reported the effectiveness of interactions and discussions in teaching and learning speaking skills, supporting the social constructivism viewpoint and emphasising the role of social interactions in learning. Megat-Abdul-Rahim et al. (2021) state that interactive learning makes learners interested and provides them with space to progress. Moreover, learners prefer discussion or pair-work to learn speaking for tourism (Asyu & Özcan, 2021), suggesting that adult learners prefer discussion for learning.

Most participants in this study preferred discussions to help them learn from what others said and to gain confidence. Thus, discussing and collaborating with others not only helps in learning to speak but also boosts confidence and reduces anxiety. Their preference for contextual learning and tourism-specific scenarios suggests the need to develop activities based on tourism scenarios in the Maldives, so that they become better equipped when facing similar situations at work.

While the front-liners preferred technology-integrated learning and game-based learning, lecturers did not respond positively to these approaches. They had not planned diverse technology-based lessons and were unsure whether learners were ready for it. However, technology integration is an accepted concept in adult learning, promoting self-regulated and personalised learning. The literature on language teaching and learning, as well as ESP, emphasises technology-integrated learning. Akkara et al. (2020) demonstrated that technological interventions significantly improved learners' speaking skills.

Moreover, the participants preferred learning using videos, podcasts and similar media, emphasising their preference for multimedia. They also expressed interest in game-based learning. Lisnawati (2021) highlighted that multimedia facilitated the success of students' speaking skills by using it in the pre-speaking, speaking and post-speaking stages of learning. Moreover, game-based learning helps decode information (Adipat et al., 2021), decreases affective factors such as anxiety, and increases willingness to communicate (Ayedoun et al., 2019; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Thus, choosing relevant platforms to deliver technology-

integrated learning and developing lessons that incorporate multimedia content, including videos, images, text and interactive elements such as quizzes, is essential to cater to the needs. The findings emphasise the importance of understanding learners' preferences and selecting technology accordingly.

5.4 Mobile learning readiness

The participants are ready to learn speaking skills using mobile learning. They are familiar with the learning device and have a positive attitude towards mobile learning as a means of enhancing their speaking skills, supporting the previous study by Mumthaz (2021), which highlights that learners in higher education institutions in the Maldives are psychologically ready to adopt mobile learning. Furthermore, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) offers flexibility (Alzieni, 2024), impacts the development of speaking skills (Li, 2024), provides opportunities for practice and feedback (Alzieni, 2024), and enhances speaking performance (Ko & Lim, 2022).

Moreover, while Chien, Hwang and Jong (2020) found MALL effective in reducing anxiety, Hsu and Liu (2021) stated that MALL promotes self-regulated and collaborative learning. Integrating mobile learning into ESP instruction supports tailoring ESP speaking instruction to learner needs, providing a more flexible, self-directed, and personalised learning experience. Hence, developing the ESP module for tourism front-line learners using MALL is a suitable learning solution to enhance speaking skills by aligning learning to target situations, incorporating multimedia and technology into lessons, and helping to improve vocabulary and grammar, thereby reducing language anxiety and boosting confidence.

5.5 Implications for module development

This study identifies the speaking skills needs of front-line workers that must be addressed in an ESP module to enhance their speaking competency. Table 5 presents the speaking competency needs based on the findings of the Target and PSA.

Table 5: Speaking competency needs of tourism front-liners

Speaking competency component	Specific knowledge, skills or strategies
Knowledge of language and discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatical knowledge • Lexical or vocabulary knowledge
Core speaking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech functions (request, explain, give, offer, describe) • Interaction management (initiate, maintain, end conversation) • Discourse management
Communicative strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive strategies • Metacognitive strategies • Interaction strategies

Goh and Burns (2012) proposed knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and communication strategies as aspects of second language

speaking competence. Integrating this model with the findings, it is evident that an ESP module for Maldives tourism front-liners should focus on enhancing speaking competency through knowledge of language, core speaking skills and communicative strategies. Since the target situations for front-liners to speak in English involve core speaking skills such as requesting information, explaining procedures, giving information, offering advice or suggestions, describing attractions and initiating, maintaining and ending conversations, these are considered their core speaking skills.

Moreover, as the participants expressed challenges due to grammatical and vocabulary limitations, they require lessons to teach relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures, enabling them to speak effectively in the front office. Additionally, it is essential to equip them with the necessary communicative strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and interactional strategies. Examples of these strategies include using common words (cognitive), planning what to say (metacognitive), and employing comprehension checks or confirmation checks (interaction) (Goh & Burns, 2012) to manage the challenges they face.

Furthermore, the design principles should be based on needs analysis. The following are preliminary design principles that must be confirmed during the design and development phase of the project through the integration of learning theories, expert, and user validation.

- Create content relevant to the target situations by choosing topics related to the tourism front-liners' professional speaking needs.
- Incorporate authentic scenarios from the real workplace to give more authentic language input and speaking practice.
- Include interactions and discussions to promote scaffolding to enhance learning and confidence, reducing anxiety.
- Use multimedia and interactive elements to engage learners in speaking skills development through video lessons, games, and simulation of authentic scenarios from the Maldives tourism context.
- Deliver focused learning lessons accessible anywhere, anytime through mobile learning.

6. Conclusion

Front-line staff require English-speaking skills to interact with international visitors and communicate effectively with colleagues from diverse nationalities. They use English in their routine work, particularly when providing information and assistance, checking in and checking out, handling requests and complaints, and enhancing guest experience. The key challenges they face in practising speaking are a lack of language accuracy and fluency, including vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, as well as language anxiety and a lack of confidence, which hinder their speaking. The speaking skills competency aspects that need to be included in the module include language knowledge, core speaking skills, and communicative strategies.

This study also found that participants preferred task-based language learning and technology-integrated activities, and they were willing to use mobile learning for developing speaking skills. The findings provide valuable insights for developing an ESP module to teach and enhance speaking skills for tourism front-line staff, ultimately aiming to improve the guest experience and operational efficiency of the hospitality industry in the Maldives.

7. Limitations and recommendations

This study examined the significance of English-speaking skills and the challenges they present from the perspective of employees in the tourism industry. The primary focus on employees to understand the learners' requirements is a limitation, as it limits the findings to the needs of prospective students. This could limit the breadth of information from the current students' viewpoint, which could add valuable perspectives to the development of a speaking module. However, including front-line staff with a wealth of industry experience and lecturers' perspectives added invaluable insights to prepare learners taking the module to work in the industry. Moreover, since it is an ESP module, insights from the industry professionals currently active were critical to equip them with industry-specific experiences. Future research should focus on perspectives from a broader range of stakeholders.

8. References

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