

Research Article

Voicing English Learning Needs: A Compatibility Analysis of ‘Foreign Language I’ Syllabus in Ethiopia

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Abstract

In response to suboptimal English language proficiency among undergraduate students in Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education implemented a nationally harmonized curriculum for the BA in Tourism and Hotel Management. It replaced tailored English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules with generic language courses - specifically Foreign Language I. Guided by an applied linguistics - based and tourism-focused framework, this study critically evaluates how effectively the Foreign Language I syllabus aligns with students’ English learning needs, graduate profile indicators, and national human capital priorities. Utilizing a qualitative document-analytic design, the study conducted a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of the syllabus, complemented by a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses for scoping review (PRISMA-ScR-guided scoping review) of 99 empirical sources (4 theses and 95 research articles). A hybrid deductive-inductive coding scheme evaluated alignment across eight skill domains and four core criteria. The results reveal systemic horizontal and vertical misalignments, yielding a low average alignment score of 2.2 out of 4.0 ("Inappropriate/Misaligned"). Listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and intercultural communication components are severely underdeveloped, while grammar and pronunciation show only partial relevance. The current syllabus is pedagogically inappropriate; it could not adequately support learner readiness and industry responsiveness. Therefore, an evidence-based syllabus redesign grounded in ESP principles and workplace-validated communicative tasks is urgently recommended.

Keywords

ESP, Foreign Language I, Syllabus Evaluation, Qualitative Content Analysis, Tourism and Hospitality Education, Needs Analysis

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

English is the most widely used language worldwide, which magnifies its importance as the lingua franca of the globe [11, 22, 28, 35]. Its proliferation is evident in various global domains, including the tourism and hospitality business, where English is

indispensable for an array of operational and managerial functions [16, 21]. Globally, English drives marketing and branding across print and digital media to attract international guests [15, 26]. Furthermore, adopting English as the medium of instruc-

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tion in hospitality education has accelerated industry globalization [2, 32].

Despite the longstanding practice of teaching English in Ethiopia, dating back to the introduction of modern education [13, 14], proficiency in English among Ethiopian secondary school and undergraduate students remains suboptimal [12, 37, 40]. This insufficient linguistic competence has adversely impacted students' academic achievements and could further hinder their professional readiness. In response to this pervasive challenge in tourism and hospitality education, an English for Specific Purpose (ESP) syllabus tailored for Tourism and Hotel Management students was incorporated into the UG tourism/hospitality curriculum by the then Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MoSHE) in 2019 [19], as recommended by [40]. Nevertheless, the present Ministry of Education (MoE) replaced this syllabus with more generic language for specific purposes (LSP) syllabi (*Foreign Language I; Foreign Language II*) in the newly harmonized BA in Tourism and Hotel Management curriculum in 2023. The '*Foreign Language II*' syllabus is not a focus of this study since it is described just as the advanced form of the '*Foreign Language I*' syllabus.

While this initiative signals an awareness of the need for domain-specific language instruction, *Foreign Language I* appears to be misaligned with the specific English learning needs of students and the communicative demands of the tourism and hospitality industry. Scholars argue that LSP/ESP curricula must be grounded in rigorous needs analysis and informed by target situation requirements, learner characteristics, and contextual variables [1, 6, 24]. When these elements are overlooked, course syllabi will be generic documents devoid of pedagogical relevance.

As an instructor responsible for handling the *Foreign Language I syllabus* at Haramaya University, the present researcher observed critical shortcomings in the syllabus that raise concerns about instructional quality and learning relevance. The syllabus lacks specificity about linguistic skills, discourse genres, or communicative tasks pertinent to the tourism and hospitality service. These deficiencies not only hinder instructors' ability to deliver coherent and purposeful instruction but also marginalize learners whose needs remain unexamined and unheard. The problem is not merely structural but systemic. The development of this generic LSP in Ethiopia seems to have excluded ESP specialists.

From a language policy and planning perspective, this syllabus design failure exemplifies how top-down policy initiatives can inadvertently perpetuate inequities in educational outcomes [23, 33, 36]. Students who rely entirely on the education system for English proficiency are disproportionately disadvantaged when curricular decisions ignore their actual communicative environments. In the tourism and hospitality sector, this disadvantage translates into reduced employability, inability to navigate international professional spaces, and diminished capacity to contribute to Ethiopia's growing service economy [20, 39].

These issues necessitate a systematic evaluation of the new syllabus to check that it reflects recognized ESP principles such as authenticity, task-based instruction, learner-centeredness, and alignment with academic and workplace discourse [1, 31]. Moreover, a rigorous review of existing studies on the English learning needs of Tourism and Hotel Management students in Ethiopia, e.g. [40], can provide a foundation for identifying gaps between syllabus intentions and actual English learning needs.

Thus, the present analytical investigation centres on two key research questions:

- 1) What are the specific English learning needs of Tourism and Hotel Management students, as identified through a review of relevant literature?
- 2) How effectively does the newly developed 'Foreign Language I' syllabus address these English learning needs?

Addressing these questions is vital for understanding how Ethiopia's harmonized curriculum can be re-envisioned to empower students linguistically, professionally, and socially within an increasingly globalized tourism and hospitality environment.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. English as a Global Lingua Franca in International Tourism and Hospitality

English has solidified its position as the de facto lingua franca across global tourism and hospitality economies [35]. Tourist/Guest flows increasingly transcend linguistic boundaries, and the interactions require service professionals to communicate intelligibly, efficiently, and interculturally. Research in lingua-franca pragmatics [25] argues that intelligibility, accommodation, and pragmatic clarity define successful communication in globalized service contexts. Nonetheless, research shows that with inadequate needs-driven language training, service staff often struggle to navigate diverse accents, implicit cultural norms, and real-time improvisation [5]. Therefore, an ESP syllabus that neglects authentic communicative needs inherently disadvantage students entering the tourism and hospitality industry.

2.2. ESP and Needs-based Syllabus Development: Principles and Tensions

ESP frameworks are grounded in needs analysis, communicative relevance, and domain authenticity [18, 24]. Needs analyses, particularly target situation analysis (TSA) and present situation analysis (PSA) [7, 9, 29], are considered the backbone of ESP syllabus development as they ensure alignment between content and contexts in the academic and professional arena. [27] accentuates that ESP instruction should

integrate domain-specific lexis, discourse patterns, and communicative functions rather than generic grammar instruction.

Notwithstanding, research repeatedly identifies a persistent misalignment between national syllabi and ESP principles in many non-Western contexts. According to [3, 9], English courses are often overloaded with decontextualized grammar and lack authentic tasks, academic and occupational genres, and intercultural communication strategies. English-taught tourism and hospitality programs are especially vulnerable to such misalignment since they rely heavily on real-time interaction, tourism and hospitality discourse, affective labor, and service recovery communication. This gap between theoretical ESP principles and actual syllabus implementation is at the heart of global calls for tourism and hospitality-oriented English reforms.

2.3. ESP Syllabus Evaluation

The evaluation of ESP syllabi has become a central concern in Applied Linguistics, curriculum studies, and professional education due to the growing recognition that language instruction must be empirically grounded, contextually relevant, and responsive to evolving academic and workplace demands. ESP differs fundamentally from general English instruction in that it is needs-driven, context-specific, and designed to enable learners to perform discipline- or profession-specific communicative tasks [18, 24]. Because ESP syllabi are expected to reflect authentic discourse practices of specialized domains, their relevance must be continually evaluated. The Target Situation Analysis and Present Situation Analysis are foundational to ESP theory [7, 8, 29], but syllabus evaluation serves as the mechanism through which these inputs are validated and operationalized. In this sense, syllabus evaluation is not a peripheral activity but an epistemological requirement for ensuring the integrity and legitimacy of ESP syllabus design.

ESP syllabus evaluation [8, 10] is necessary as misalignment between instructional content and real-world communicative demands is a recurrent problem globally. Research shows that many ESP syllabi are developed on generic EFL templates, which are dominated by decontextualized grammar and minimally informed by authentic academic and workplace discourse [3]. Such syllabi often fail to incorporate domain-specific vocabulary, professional genres, task-based communication, and the pragmatic norms pertinent to academic and workplace performance. Without systematic evaluation, these deficiencies remain undetected and continue to disadvantage learners. This is why [27] argues that ESP pedagogy must be empirically anchored in disciplinary communication practices, and syllabus evaluation is the only practical mechanism for determining whether a designed syllabus actually reflects these practices. Furthermore, ESP syllabus evaluation is essential due to the dynamic nature of professional communication. Workplace genres evolve rapidly in response to new technologies, organizational systems, and global communication norms. In tourism and hospitality, for example, the rise of

online booking systems, digital service platforms, and real-time customer engagement has transformed communicative expectations [17]. A static ESP syllabus becomes obsolete if it is not periodically evaluated for its responsiveness to such changes. Evaluation, thus, supports curricular adaptability and ensures that learners gain the competencies relevant to contemporary professional ecosystems. In this regard, ESP syllabus evaluation is not just diagnostic; it also provides evidence for redesign, innovation, and continuous improvement.

Syllabus evaluation also plays a critical role in promoting alignment within broader educational systems. In connection to this, Constructive Alignment Theory [4] underscores that a coherent curriculum requires clear alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment practices. In ESP contexts, this alignment must further extend to workplace requirements and graduate profiles. Syllabus evaluation enables institutions to assess whether these layers of alignment are functioning effectively or whether critical gaps persist. Research in ESP course quality [1] shows that misalignment often persists when syllabi are not rigorously evaluated.

Finally, ESP syllabus evaluation has significant implications for equity and access. Learners facing lower-resource contexts in specialized programs often rely solely on institutional syllabi to acquire academic and occupational communicative competence. When syllabi are misaligned, the learners suffer disproportionately. Evaluation safeguards that ESP syllabi do not perpetuate such systemic inequities. It also promotes accountability in educational institutions by ensuring that curricula contribute meaningfully to national labor-market goals and human capital development.

In conclusion, theoretical, pedagogical, systemic, and equity-driven arguments highlight the necessity of ESP syllabus evaluation. As a theory-driven and evidence-based process, it is indispensable for ensuring that ESP syllabi are relevant, aligned, and professionally meaningful. Without evaluation, ESP syllabi are static artifacts disconnected from real-world needs, disciplinary communication, and the evolving complexities of globalized professional practices.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative document-analytic design integrating Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) [34] and the PRISMA-ScR scoping review protocol [38]. This design was chosen as it suited the need to review English proficiency requirements in tourism and hospitality academic and occupational contexts, and to examine the alignment between these needs and the syllabus under evaluation.

3.2. Data Sources

Two datasets were used for the analysis conducted in this study. The first dataset entertained the *Foreign Language I*

(*ToHM2031*) syllabus contents drawn from the harmonized undergraduate Tourism and Hotel Management curriculum in Ethiopia. The second dataset consisted of ninety-nine (n = 99) empirical studies identified through a comprehensive scoping review of English learning needs analyses, ESP curriculum research, and tourism and hospitality communication studies published between 1999 and 2025.

3.3. Identification, Screening, and Eligibility of Previous Studies

The identification and selection of studies followed a systematic procedure that adhered to the PRISMA-ScR protocol to ensure methodological transparency and rigor. Comprehensive database searches were conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar using targeted keywords such as *tourism English*, *hospitality communication*, *ESP needs analysis*, and *syllabus alignment*. The initial search results were then screened against four predefined inclusion criteria: (a) relevance to language learning needs in academic or professional contexts, (b) an explicit empirical orientation, (c) a focus on tourism and hospitality or higher education environments, and (d) substantive attention to communicative skills. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded during the screening and eligibility stages.

3.4. Coding and Categorization

A hybrid deductive-inductive coding framework was deployed to evaluate the syllabus. Deductive coding was grounded in constructive alignment theory [4] and ESP principles [18], and it yielded four primary constructs: academic needs, professional requirements, graduate profiles, and national human-capital priorities. Inductively, emerging patterns were categorized into skill-specific domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and intercultural communication) against the four alignment constructs identified through the deductive method. This dual-layer coding approach provided a thorough assessment of the existing syllabus in terms of both theoretical standards and

genuine communicative needs.

3.5. Validation

To enhance credibility, the study employed triangulation by cross-checking findings across articles and the syllabus. This ensured consistency in identified needs and syllabus gaps. The coding framework was also shared with peers for review to refine its reliability. These steps, aligned with Mayring’s [30] qualitative validation principles, enhanced the trustworthiness of the analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. English Learning Needs

Explained in the introduction, English plays a pivotal role in tourism and hospitality. The discussion of findings in this section is guided by the needs analysis theories by [1, 18, 24]. Therefore, the discussion of the findings is presented in three interlinked subsections.

4.1.1.The Role and Significance of English in Tourism and Hospitality Education and Industry

English as the leading lingua franca in tourism and hospitality: As synthesized in Table 1, the literature establishes English as the primary medium for academic discourse, service encounters, guest experiences, and macroeconomic competitiveness. Across the sectoral landscape, English serves as the primary communicative medium for front-line operations, enabling staff to execute core routines such as welcoming guests, advising, problem-solving, and managing complaints. Crucially, this linguistic role extends beyond transactional utility; English acts as a conduit for intercultural exchange, facilitating the negotiation of meaning, enhancing service quality, and sustaining critical socio-cultural dimensions within the industry.

Table 1. The role of English in the Tourism and Hospitality Academia and Sector.

Theme	Accessed and reviewed articles (N= 27)	Synthesized findings
English as the Leading Lingua Franca of the Global Tourism and Hospitality Industry	Al-Saadi (2015); Astawa & Wijaya (2024); Blue & Harun (2003); Bobanović & Gržinić (2011); Chilingaryan (2020); Dann (1996); Dukuzumuremyi Jean L éonard (2021); Fujita (2019); International Labour Organization (2022); Kholidi & Azhan (2022); Kostić-Bobanović & Gržinić (2011); Kurniawan et al. (2023); Lee (2011); Lertchalermtipakoon, Wongsunbun & Kawinkoonlasate (2021); Maci, Sala & Godnić Vičić (2018); Muniyappa (2020); Nahid Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017); Nives & Zrinka (2021); Prachanant (2012); Prabhu & Wani (2015); Pranić,	The collective evidence across all studies establishes English as the dominant lingua franca underpinning communication, service quality, employability, academic preparation, and economic performance in the global tourism and hospitality sector. However, the literature consistently identifies a persistent mismatch between the English taught in educational institutions and the communicative, task-

Theme	Accessed and reviewed articles (N= 27)	Synthesized findings
	Pivčević & Praničević (2021); Raju, Pooja & Rana (2020); Rao & Abdullah (2007); Seon-Jae & Young-Hwa (2011); Tibus & Bendulo (2018); Yufan Li et al. (2022).	based, culturally embedded language required in real industry settings. This signals the urgent need for context-driven, ESP-oriented, and task-based English training.

The reviewed literature treats English as the dominant language of service encounters, including guest registration, problem solving, upselling, guided tours, complaint handling, and digital correspondence (Blue & Harun, 2003; Maci et al., 2018; Prachanant, 2012). It also serves as the primary medium of tertiary tourism and hospitality education, and as a key driver of employability, professional mobility, and productivity. Employees with strong proficiency consistently secure roles demanding greater expertise, deliver higher guest satisfaction, and advance more rapidly; consequently, employers treat English as a baseline requirement (Bobanović & Gržinić, 2011; Kholidi & Azhan, 2022; Prabhu & Wani, 2015). Collectively, the studies in [Table 1](#) establish English as the communicative and economic backbone of global tourism and

hospitality, underscoring its centrality to academic training, service quality, and sectoral competitiveness.

The essence of English skills: Regarding the importance of English proficiency and macro-skills pertinent to tourism and hospitality purposes, the review examined both broad, cross-cutting studies (e.g., Kanca 2024; Rahayu 2020; Saptiany & Putriningsih, 2023) and many skill-specific research works. The collected evidence confirms that listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary influence academic and professional performance and employability. [Table 2](#) details how important English skills are in the tourism and hospitality academic and professional settings.

Table 2. Importance of English proficiency and specific skills.

English skill types	Accessed and reviewed articles	Synthesized findings
English proficiency in general	Abdul Zalil & Lim (222); Al-Malk et al. (2022); Astawa & Wijaya (2024); Erazo et al. (2019); Expósito & Sánchez-Cubo (2025); Hanan & Tawali (2025); Kanca (2024); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Pranić et al. (2021); Putri et al. (2018); Rahayu (2020); Saptiany G. S & Putriningsih L. S. T (2023); Supina (2018); Tahang et al. (2024)	English proficiency is a sectoral prerequisite that influences academic performance, tourist/guest satisfaction, employability, and competitiveness in the global tourism and hospitality business.
Listening	Ayatov (2024); Brownell (2009); Erazo et al. (2019); ILO (2022); Khosiyatkulovna (2024); Thakur & Bhardwaj (2023); Vidak, Kovačević & Kovač (2022); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017)	Listening is critical for accurate guest understanding (often in noisy, accented contexts)
Speaking	Blue & Harun (2003); Bobanović & Gržinić (2011); Kaharuddin, Hikmawati & Arafah (2019); Luka (2015); Namtapi (2022); Putri et al. (2018); Syaifudin (2024); Tanković et al. (2023); Thakur & Bhardwaj (2023); Vidak, Kovačević & Kovač (2022); Zahedpisheh et al. (2017)	Speaking is the most visible, high-stakes skill for front-line tasks (greeting, check-in, complaint handling, upselling). Intelligibility, formulaic service phrases and repair strategies matter more than native-like accent.
Reading	Aman & Sree (2019); Bobanović & Gržinić (2011); Bury & Oka (2017); Deale & Lee (2022); Lu (1999); Putri et al. (2018); Villadiego et al. (2023); Zahedpisheh et al. (2017).	Reading underpins safety, bookings and policy understanding; students may perform well on controlled tasks but struggle with time-pressure, digital and unfamiliar formats.
Writing	Aman & Sree (2019); Bobanović & Gržinić (2011); Bury & Oka (2017); Deale & Lee (2022); Lu (1999); Putri et al. (2018); Villadiego et al. (2023); Zahedpisheh et al. (2017)	Writing is essential for transactional genres (emails, reservation confirmations, reports).
Grammar	Aberra (2018); Al-Malk et al. (2022); Lu (1999); Luka	Grammar remains important, particularly for written

English skill types	Accessed and reviewed articles	Synthesized findings
Vocabulary	(2015)	clarity and formal correspondence, but it is typically lower priority than communicative intelligibility for frontline oral tasks
	Aberra (2018); Al-Malk et al. (2022); Hanan & Tawali (2025); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Putri et al. (2018)	Domain-specific vocabulary (tourism and hospitality terms, phraseology, phrase-banks) boosts fluency and task success.

Listening enables accurate interpretation of requests, accents, safety instructions, and problem situations, with research linking strong listening to superior service quality, lecture comprehension, and listening-task performance (Ayatov, 2024; Brownell, 2009; Khosiyatkulovna, 2024; Vidak et al., 2022; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). Likewise, speaking emerges as the most essential skill, since clear oral communication dominates both workplace requirements and student learning preferences globally (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011; Namtapi, 2022; Syaifudin, 2024; Tanković et al., 2023), and intelligibility, formulaic expressions, and communication strategies predict service quality (Blue & Harun, 2003; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017).

Similarly, reading supports the interpretation of academic texts, menus, reservation details, safety procedures, and customer feedback, proving equally vital for scholarly and operational effectiveness (Bury & Oka, 2017; Deale & Lee, 2022; Lu, 1999; Putri et al., 2018; Villadiego et al., 2023; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). Writing has grown increasingly critical, covering formal reports, professional correspondence, reservation confirmations, and digital communication on booking platforms and social media (Alhumaidan & Alghamdi, 2023; Aman & Sree, 2019; Bobanović & Gržinić, 2011; Bury & Oka, 2017; Deale & Lee, 2022; Lu, 1999; Putri et al., 2018; Villadiego et al., 2023; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). In academic settings, writing remains central to assignments and reflective tasks, calling for stronger genre-based instruction (O'Halloran & Deale, 2004).

Beyond these macro-skills, grammar and vocabulary remain indispensable. Grammar ensures clarity, reduces ambiguity, and promotes professionalism, while specific structures such as polite requests, conditional forms, and mitigated apologies underpin hospitality rapport and service recovery (Aman & Sree, 2019; Blue & Harun, 2003; Lu, 1999). Vocabulary functions as the backbone of sectoral communication,

enabling accurate descriptions of facilities, amenities, itineraries, safety information, and cultural products. It supports listening, speaking, reading comprehension, professional writing, and oral presentations and requires targeted exposure to tourism-specific registers (Al Malk et al., 2022; Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih, 2021; Putri et al., 2018; Tahang et al., 2024).

In conclusion, these findings suggest that industry training should foreground listening and speaking, supported by practical vocabulary and intelligibility-focused grammar, because front-line performance depends on real-time oral communication with diverse international guests. Academic programs, however, must balance oral priorities with robust instruction in reading, writing, grammar, and professional vocabulary, which remain foundational for both scholarly achievement and administrative roles.

4.1.2. English Proficiency Gaps Among Students and Practitioners of Tourism and Hospitality

Shown in [Tables 1 and 2](#), studies confirm the crucial role of English language proficiency in the tourism and hospitality sectors and education, where communication is a key aspect of service quality, guest satisfaction, and academic success. Hence, both industry professionals and students need to demonstrate a wide range of English skills. To present this evidence, the following sections offer two separate analyses: one focusing on industry practitioners and the other on students.

Guest-facing practitioners in the tourism and hospitality industry: For tourism and hospitality practitioners, English proficiency is not merely an asset but a functional necessity; it shapes frontline interactions, operational efficiency, and organizational reputation. The reviewed articles consistently demonstrate that practitioners must deploy English effectively across spoken, written, and intercultural domains. [Table 3](#) synthesizes the key skill gaps identified across the reviewed studies.

Table 3. English language skills needed by guest-facing practitioners in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Skill (gaps observed)	Reviewed studies reporting English skills gaps among guest-facing practitioners	Synthesized findings on recurrent gaps (lacks) reported
Listening	Aberra (2018); Easto et al. (2019); Expósito & Sánchez-Cubo (2025); Gani & Damayanti (2018); ILO (2022);	Inability to understand diverse non-native and native accents; difficulties in processing rapid or

Skill (gaps observed)	Reviewed studies reporting English skills gaps among guest-facing practitioners	Synthesized findings on recurrent gaps (lacks) reported
Speaking	Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Kanca (2024); Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021); Maniruzzaman (2006); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Pham (2023); Putri et al. (2018); Puspitasari (2018); Ratminingsih et al. (2018); Rusmawan et al. (2025); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017) Aberra (2018); Al-Malki (2023); Erazo et al. (2019); Expósito & Sánchez-Cubo (2025); Gani & Damayanti (2018); ILO (2022); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Kanca (2024); Kurniawan et al. (2023); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Oktavinanda et al. (2022); Pham (2023); Putri et al. (2018); Ratminingsih et al. (2018); Rusmawan et al. (2025); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017)	background-noisy speech; failure to pick up implicit requests/nuances; low active-listening strategies (confirmation/paraphrase); poor listening comprehension under workplace conditions Limited fluency and spontaneous production; lack of confidence; poor pronunciation and intelligibility; inappropriate word/phrase choices and collocations; limited formulaic/service phrases; weak repair strategies (asking for clarification)
Reading	Aberra (2018); Erazo et al. (2019); ILO (2022); Kanca (2024); Maglalang (2023); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Putri et al. (2018); Puspitasari (2018); Qaddumi et al. (2021); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017)	Difficulty with comprehending booking systems, maps and itineraries, policies/manuals; weak skimming/scanning strategies; problems with digital reading platforms and non-standard formats
Writing	Aman & Sree (2019); Alhumaidan & Alghamdi (2023); Gjata (2017); Maglalang (2023); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Putri et al. (2018); Puspitasari (2018); Rahman et al. (2022); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017)	Unfamiliarity with workplace genres (emails, reservation confirmations, incident reports); poor clarity and audience adaptation; weak digital messaging style (chat/booking platforms); frequent mechanical/grammar errors in formal documents
Grammar	Aberra (2018); Al-Malki (2023); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Maglalang (2023); Maniruzzaman (2006); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Supina (2018).	Errors that reduce clarity in written texts (tense, agreement, conditionals for apologies/compensation), and limited functional grammar for service formulas
Vocabulary (domain & phraseology)	Aberra (2018); Al-Malki (2023); Erazo et al. (2019); Hanan & Tawali (2025); ILO (2022); Kanca (2024); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Kurniawan et al. (2023); Mohammed & Sanosi (2024); Putri et al. (2018).	Insufficient tourism-specific vocabulary repertoire and phrase banks; inability to describe amenities, services, and itineraries accurately; limited polite/service formulae
Pronunciation / Intelligibility	Gani & Damayanti (2018); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Maniruzzaman (2006); Pham (2023); Ratminingsih et al. (2018); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017).	Segmental and suprasegmental errors that impair intelligibility (vowel/consonant issues, stress, rhythm); accent interference

Listening emerges as one of the most pervasive challenges, with practitioners struggling to comprehend diverse accents, rapid speech, and communication occurring in noisy service environments (Pham, 2023; Maniruzzaman, 2006; Erazo et al., 2019). Difficulties in accurately understanding guests' requests often result in communication breakdowns and service delays.

Speaking is another prominent area of weakness. Studies consistently report limited fluency, inadequate command of service routines, and difficulty producing contextually appropriate expressions during real-time interactions (Kaharuddin et al., 2019; Ratminingsih et al., 2018; Mohammed & Sanosi, 2024). Many practitioners lack confidence when initiating conversations, explaining services, or responding to complaints, particularly in high-pressure frontline settings where

effective communication directly influences guest satisfaction.

Reading and writing skills are also insufficiently developed. Practitioners frequently encounter difficulties interpreting menus, maps, policy documents, booking systems, and guest feedback (Putri et al., 2018; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). Writing-related challenges, including the preparation of emails, incident reports, and reservation confirmations, are similarly widespread (Alhumaidan & Alghamdi, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022).

Deficiencies in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation further constrain workplace communication. Limited command of tourism- and hospitality-specific terminology and inadequate lexical precision are commonly reported (Kanca, 2024; Erazo et al., 2019), often leading practitioners to rely on

translation tools. Pronunciation problems, including segmental inaccuracies and inappropriate stress patterns, further reduce intelligibility when interacting with linguistically diverse guests (Gani & Damayanti, 2018; Pham, 2023).

In summary, Table 3 reveals interconnected English-language skill deficiencies that compromise service quality in tourism and hospitality workplaces. While listening and speaking difficulties pose the most immediate barriers to communication, shortcomings in vocabulary, pronunciation, and

writing further undermine task performance and professional image.

Students in English-taught tourism and hospitality programs: Tourism and hospitality students require English-language preparation that supports both academic success and future professional practice. As shown in Table 4, their needs span general language proficiency, academic literacy, and workplace communication.

Table 4. English language skill gaps among students in the tourism and hospitality programs.

Skill (gaps observed)	Reviewed studies reporting gaps among students	Synthesized findings — recurrent gap types reported for students
Listening	Deale & Lee (2022); Erazo et al. (2019); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Kanca (2024); Kenjaeva (2023); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021); Prachanant (2012); Puspitasari (2018); Tahang et al. (2024); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Yeneneh (2017); Zahedpisheh et al. (2017)	Poor comprehension of diverse accents and rapid speech in video lectures; inability to listen under noise/time pressure; lack of active-listening strategies
Speaking	Al-Malki (2023); Deale & Lee (2022); Gani & Damayanti (2018); James & Tatsuya (2017); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Kurniawan et al. (2023); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Oktavinanda et al. (2022); Putri et al. (2018); Rahayu (2020); Supina (2018); Tahang et al. (2024); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Yeneneh (2017)	Low speaking fluency and confidence; pronunciation/intelligibility problems; limited knowledge of functional/service phrases
Reading	Bury & Oka (2017); Deale & Lee (2022); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Lu (1999); Maglalang (2023); Putri et al. (2018); Puspitasari (2018); Tahang et al. (2024); Villadiego et al. (2023)	Weak strategies for skimming/scanning; difficulties; suboptimal reading comprehension of academic texts (inability to grasp central ideas of academic texts)
Writing	Aman & Sree (2019); Deale & Lee (2022); Eddy et al. (2025); Flaherty & Choi (2013); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Maglalang (2023); O'Halloran & Deale (2004); Putri et al. (2018); Puspitasari (2018); Rahman et al. (2022); Zahedpisheh et al. (2017)	Low self-efficacy and confidence for writing; inability to organize texts and apply mechanics; poor genre awareness for workplace documents; weak digital writing skills; grammar and spelling errors.
Grammar	Aberra (2018); Ahmed (2023); Kenjaeva (2023); Maglalang (2023); Naima et al. (2022); Supina (2018); Yeneneh (2017)	Grammatical errors in writing that affect clarity and academic performance; limited functional grammar for polite requests and service formulas.
Vocabulary (domain & phraseology)	Aberra (2018); Al-Malki (2023); Hanan & Tawali (2025); Kanca (2024); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Putri et al. (2018); Tahang et al. (2024)	Limited tourism-specific vocabulary and phrase banks; inability to accurately describe services and amenities in appropriate words; difficulty in inferring connotative and denotative meanings of discipline-specific words
Pronunciation / Intelligibility	Gani & Damayanti (2018); Kaharuddin et al. (2019); Kusumastiti & Palupiningsih (2021); Ratminingsih et al. (2018); Widianingtyas et al. (2023); Yeneneh (2017)	Segmental and suprasegmental errors reducing intelligibility and confidence; difficulties in pronouncing words correctly (e.g. Recipe as /rIsaIp/); pronunciation alteration (e.g. think as /sInk/); mother-tongue interference

Listening is among the most frequently reported weaknesses. Studies identify difficulties in understanding accented

speech, authentic spoken input, and the rapid exchanges char-

acteristic of workplace interactions (Deale & Lee, 2022; Prachanant, 2012; Tahang et al., 2024). Students often perform better on textbook-based listening activities than on authentic materials.

Speaking represents another major challenge. Students commonly demonstrate limited fluency, hesitation, and inadequate competence in interactive tasks such as greeting guests during internships, making suggestions, and providing explanations (Kaharuddin et al., 2019; Widianingtyas et al., 2023; Al-Malki, 2023). Pronunciation difficulties and insufficient mastery of formulaic expressions further reduce communication effectiveness.

Reading and writing deficiencies are also evident. Students struggle with reading tasks involving technical terminology, digital booking platforms, and discipline-specific texts (Bury & Oka, 2017; Qaddumi et al., 2021). Writing-related challenges, including weak organization, limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, and low self-efficacy, are similarly widespread (Maglalang, 2023; Eddy et al., 2025).

Persistent shortcomings in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation further constrain language performance. Studies report inadequate command of grammar for coherent writing (Supina, 2018; Naima et al., 2022) and limited domain-spe-

cific vocabulary needed to discuss tourism products, guest services, and cultural attractions (Aberra, 2018; Hanan & Tawali, 2025). Pronunciation difficulties likewise hinder oral communication and reduce students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks (Gani & Damayanti, 2018).

To recap, tourism and hospitality students exhibit multidimensional English-language proficiency gaps across both academic and professional contexts. Listening and speaking difficulties constitute the most immediate barriers to workplace readiness, while persistent weaknesses in reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation constrain academic performance and professional development.

4.1.3. Impacts of English Proficiency on Tourism and Hospitality Education and Industry

The literature consistently shows that English proficiency shapes academic success and professional performance in tourism and hospitality. Across geographical contexts (Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Thailand), English functions as a core competency for accessing knowledge, employment opportunities, and service excellence. Table 5 presents how English proficiency influences students' learning experiences and sectoral performance.

Table 5. Impact of English proficiency on academic performance and professional opportunities/operations.

Type of Impact	Reviewed Studies	Synthesized Findings (Cross-Study Insights)
Impacts of English Proficiency on Academic Engagement & Performance	Abute (2016); Aberra (2018); Asio & Quijano (2023); Azkiyah et al. (2023); Christison & Krahnke (2004); Deale & Lee (2022); EF-EPI (2024); Expósito & Sánchez-Cubo (2025); Geide-Stevenson (2018); Heriyanti et al. (2024); Isma A. et al. (2025); Ismajli & Kareva (2024); Jajere & Alice (2025); Kandagor & Rotumoi (2018); Kenjayeva (2024); Maniruzzaman (2006); Rautenbach & Mann (2019); Thorpe et al. (2017); Waluyo & Panmei (2021); Yeneneh (2017); Zahedpisheh, Abu Bakar & Saffari (2017).	Convergent findings show strong positive correlations between English proficiency and academic success. Higher proficiency supports lecture comprehension, note-taking, participation in discussions, grasping academic texts, academic presentations, and writing discipline-specific assignments. Weak proficiency contributes to poor grades, reduced confidence, academic disengagement, and higher dropout risks. Multiple quantitative studies confirm statistically significant predictive power of English proficiency for GPA and academic achievement. Students' choice of English-taught tourism and hospitality programs is also shaped by language competence, with lower-proficiency students avoiding English-medium tourism and hospitality programs.
Impacts of English Proficiency on Professional Opportunities & Performance, and on the Sustainability of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry	Abute (2016); Aberra (2018); Asio T. H. & Quijano G. M. (2023); Azkiyah N. S. et al. (2023); Christison & Krahnke (2004); Deale and Lee (2022); EF-EPI (2024); Expósito and Sánchez-Cubo (2025); Geide-Stevenson (2018); Heriyanti, Suharto, M. F., Yuliana, & Wafom, Y. (2024); Ismajli E. & Kareva V. (2024); Isma A. et al. (2025); Jajere U. A. & Alice O. R. (2025); Kandagor & Rotumoi (2018); Kenjayeva (2024); Maniruzzaman (2006); Rautenbach E. and Mann C. (2019); Saptiany & Putriningsih (2023); Sangnark (2025); Thorpe et al. (2017); Waluyo B. & Panmei B. (2021); Yeneneh (2017); Zahedpisheh, N., Abu	The literature repeatedly demonstrates that English proficiency is fundamental to employability, workplace performance, and long-term sectoral competitiveness. Higher proficiency enhances guest satisfaction, service delivery, upselling capacity, and complaint handling. It supports career mobility and reduces unemployment duration among graduates. Poor English limits job opportunities, weakens organizational communication, compromises service efficiency, and negatively affects revenue generation in hotels and tourist sites. Lexical limitations and weak ESP competencies undermine employees' ability to explain services effectively. Sectoral assessments highlight English communication as a core skills gap affecting productivity

Type of Impact	Reviewed Studies	Synthesized Findings (Cross-Study Insights)
	Bakar, Z., & Saffari, N. (2017)	and international competitiveness, with industry-level implications for revenue, repeat visitation and market positioning.

Table 5 indicates that a substantial body of research identifies English proficiency as a strong predictor of academic engagement, comprehension, and achievement. Studies by Christison and Krahne (2004) and Maniruzzaman (2006) show that weaknesses in listening, speaking, and phonological processing hinder students’ ability to understand lectures, take notes effectively, and participate actively in classroom learning. Similarly, Deale and Lee (2022) report that limited English reading proficiency contributes to academic withdrawal in tourism-related programs. Quantitative studies by Azkiyah et al. (2023), Geide-Stevenson (2018), Asio and Quijano (2023), Waluyo and Panmei (2021), and Kenjayeva (2024) further demonstrate that higher English proficiency is associated with better academic performance, stronger confidence, and sustained engagement. Evidence from Ethiopia (Yeneneh, 2017; Abute, 2016; Aberra, 2018) confirms that deficiencies in English instruction continue to impede students’ academic success, particularly in tourism and hospitality education. Moreover, studies by Thorpe et al. (2017), Kandagor and Rotumoi (2018), and Ismajli and Kareva (2024) highlight the importance of both Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) for mastering complex disciplinary content.

Beyond academia, English proficiency significantly influences employability, career advancement, workplace productivity, and industry sustainability. Employers consistently prioritize English communication skills during recruitment (Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009; Heriyanti et al., 2024; Kanca, 2024), while limited proficiency is associated with longer unemployment and fewer career opportunities (Rautenbach & Mann, 2019; Sangnark, 2025). Strong English skills also enhance service delivery, guest satisfaction, repeat visitation, and revenue generation (Erazo et al., 2019; Saptiany & Putriningsih, 2023; Sanker & Balamayuranathan, 2024). At the industry level, the ILO Rapid Skills Assessment (2022) identifies English communication as a major skills gap affecting the competitiveness of Ethiopian tourism organizations. Furthermore, limited ESP competence and domain-specific vocabulary constrain employees’ ability to explain services, address guest inquiries, implement upselling strategies, and maintain operational productivity (Kanca, 2024; Erazo et al., 2019; Hanan & Tawali, 2025).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that English proficiency is both a cognitive-academic resource and a socio-economic asset, shaping academic success, employability, service quality, and the long-term competitiveness of Ethiopia’s tourism and hospitality industry.

4.2. Alignment of 'Foreign Language I' Syllabus with English Skill Needs

The preceding sections critically analyzed the English language skill necessities (requirements), gaps (lacks), and associated impacts of suboptimal proficiency in the tourism and hospitality education and industry. In this subsection, the capabilities of the existing *Foreign Language I* syllabus in responding to these emerging English language proficiency needs are examined.

The analysis begins with providing some excerpts taken from national strategic documents and the existing harmonized curriculum for the BA in Tourism and Hotel Management program in Ethiopian public universities.

The principal objectives of the tourism development plan are to develop the country’s tourism resources through the involvement of the community and all stakeholders; to develop competent manpower and improve service quality; to strengthen global competitiveness by implementing aggressive marketing and promotion strategies; and to increase the socio-economic benefits from tourism development. (Planning and Development Commission, 2021, P. 47).

The analysis is a testimony of the situation facing the country’s tourism human resources: the extent of staff training is low owing to poor quality of the educational system and lack of specialised research and training; and while the country could leverage on skills transfer, it is quite not easy to hire foreign labour into the country. However, there are lessons to be learnt and opportunities that could be leveraged upon by the country, both regional and international, to improve the prevailing human resource condition in the country. (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2015, P. 69).

The general objective of the program [BA in Tourism and Hotel Management] is to produce qualified manpower that can effectively contribute for the development of the hospitality industry in Ethiopia by making use of the vast potential of the country in the sector. (Ministry of Education, 2023, P. 4).

Graduates of Bachelor of Art in Tourism and Hotel Management will get adequate competency (knowledge, attitude and skills) in the area of Tourism and Hotel Management. Generally, this degree program provides students with the opportunity to pursue career in Hotel and Tourism industr. (Ministry of Education, 2023, P. 6).

The first two excerpts highlight shortages of qualified personnel and the need for workforce development. The next two

excerpts point out the fact that the existing nationally harmonized curriculum (BA in Tourism and Hotel Management) prepares the needed professionals. Nevertheless, the question is the extent to which the provided *Foreign Language I* (pp. 66-67) syllabus contributes to realizing the overarching goal of this curriculum. The syllabus must also be evaluated to

check whether the syllabus responds to English learning needs and workplace English proficiency expectations.

As Table 6 indicates, the Foreign Language I syllabus (ToHM2031) exhibits systemic misalignment with the empirically documented English language demands of tourism and hospitality education and practice.

Table 6. The alignment degree of the Foreign Language I Syllabus with English Learning Needs.

Competence Domain	Average mean of alignment with				Average Mean	Level of misalignment
	Students' English learning needs for academic purposes	English proficiency requirements for professional engagements in the tourism and hospitality industry	Graduate profile set in the newly harmonized curriculum	Goals outlined in national policies and strategic plans		
Listening	2	2	2	2	2	Misaligned
Speaking	3	3	3	3	3	Somewhat Aligned
Reading	2	2	2	2	2	Misaligned
Writing	2	2	2	2	2	Misaligned
Grammar	3	2	3	3	2.8	Somewhat Aligned
Vocabulary	2	2	2	2	2	Misaligned
Pronunciation	3	2	3	3	2.8	Somewhat Aligned
Intercultural Communication	1	1	1	1	1	Extremely Misaligned
Average Mean	2.25	2	2.25	2.25	2.2	Misaligned

Listening competence records the most acute deficiency, scoring 2 (Misaligned). The syllabus incorporates no structured listening components or exposure to authentic spoken input, which contradicts established evidence that positions listening as foundational to both academic achievement and effective guest interaction. This omission signals a major organizational and pedagogical shortfall. Speaking receives a marginally higher score of 3 (Somewhat Aligned). Although basic oral activities such as greetings and self-introductions appear, they remain formulaic and do not extend to the complex, task-based communicative functions required for check-in procedures, complaint mediation, service recovery, and promotional discourse.

Reading and writing both score 2 (Misaligned). The syllabus lacks explicit reading strategy instruction and exposure to authentic workplace genres, including booking confirmations, safety notices, menus, digital interfaces, and policy documents. Such omissions represent a substantive departure from contemporary academic literacy standards and occupational expectations. Similarly, writing instruction concentrates nar-

rowly on sentence-level composition while neglecting professional genres such as email correspondence, reservation confirmations, incident reports, and service messaging.

Grammar obtains a mean score of 2.8 (Somewhat Aligned). While articles, pluralization, and gender marking are addressed, the approach remains predominantly form-focused and detached from meaningful communicative tasks. The syllabus fails to foster the pragmalinguistic competence necessary for professional discourse. Vocabulary scores 2 (Misaligned): beyond limited culinary terminology, the syllabus omits domain-specific lexical items, collocations, formulaic service expressions, and tourism phraseology essential for fluent operational communication. Pronunciation and intonation also register 2.8 (Somewhat Aligned). Despite a reference to oral phonetic correction, the syllabus offers no systematic treatment of stress, rhythm, or intonation, which are critical for intelligibility in multilingual service environments.

Intercultural communication receives the lowest score of 1 (Extremely Misaligned). The complete absence of intercultural competence, pragmatic norms, or cross-cultural commu-

nication components stands in direct opposition to the inherently intercultural nature of the industry and severely weakens the curriculum's capacity to produce globally competitive graduates.

In general, these findings reveal substantive horizontal and vertical misalignment. With an overall mean score of 2.2, the syllabus falls within the Inappropriate/Misaligned range and fails to satisfy the English language needs of students, the communicative expectations of the service industry, the graduate profile set forth in the harmonized national curriculum, and national workforce development objectives. It does not equip learners with the linguistic, pragmatic, or intercultural competencies required for effective academic performance or professional engagement in Ethiopia's evolving tourism and hospitality sector. An immediate, comprehensive redesign grounded in English for Specific Purposes principles, needs-based development, and industry-validated communicative tasks is, therefore, essential.

5. Conclusion

This study evaluated the alignment of Ethiopia's harmonized *'Foreign Language I'* syllabus for the BA in Tourism and Hotel Management with empirical student needs, ESP principles, and hospitality industry demands. Utilizing a qualitative document-analytic design pairing Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) with a PRISMA-ScR scoping review of 99 empirical studies, the analysis revealed systemic, multi-layered misalignment. Listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and intercultural communication are critically underrepresented, while grammar and pronunciation exhibit only partial relevance. The overall mean alignment score of 2.2 classifies the current syllabus as "Inappropriate/Misaligned" for fostering academic success and workplace readiness.

Beyond syllabus evaluation, these findings expose a broader tension in language policy between centralized standardization and contextual responsiveness. Although the Ministry of Education's 2023 harmonization initiative sought institutional consistency across public universities in Ethiopia, replacing a domain-specific ESP syllabus with a generic syllabus prioritized administrative uniformity over pedagogical relevance and industry demands. From an applied linguistics perspective, this top-down approach conceptualizes language learning as a generalizable skill rather than a context-dependent communicative competence shaped by academic and occupational demands. Consequently, while harmonization achieves institutional uniformity, it risks marginalizing documented learner needs and specialized sectoral communication requirements. The theoretical, pedagogical, and policy-oriented implications underscore the need for national curriculum reforms to balance uniformity with disciplinary specificity. To resolve these challenges, the study recommends an ESP-based syllabus redesign integrating authentic communicative tasks, workplace genres, sector-specific competencies, and intercultural skills to enhance educational relevance and

sustain the competitiveness of Ethiopia's tourism human capital.

Abbreviations

BA	Bachelor of Arts
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
LSP	Language for Specific Purposes
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoSHE	Ministry of Science and Higher Education
PRISMA-ScR	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses for Scoping Review
PSA	Present Situation Analysis
ToHM	Tourism and Hotel Management
TSA	Target Situation Analysis
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
UG	Undergraduate

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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