

BEYOND VOCABULARY: HOW ENGLISH FOR TOURISM CLASS IS IMPACTING EFL STUDENT'S ENTHUSIASM IN THE FIELD

Saiful Akmal, Adib Arkan Hakim, Rusmiati

*saiful.akmal@ar-raniry.ac.id

Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study examines English as Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of the English for Tourism (EfT) course, the challenges they encountered, and explores how these experiences influence their career motivation toward the tourism sector. Ten purposively sampled EFL learners from the Department of English Language Education at UIN Ar-Raniry participated in structured interviews. Thematic analysis identified four main perceptions (skill development, increased interest, career motivation, and perceived irrelevance) and four key challenges (limited real-world practice, tourism-specific vocabulary difficulty, low speaking confidence, and unengaging materials). The study found divergent effects on students' career motivation: some became more motivated to improve, others were discouraged, and some remained indifferent. The paper argues for more authentic, practice-oriented EfT instruction and concludes with practical recommendations for curriculum design and future research.

Keywords: EFL students; English for Tourism; student perception

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most essential fields for global economic growth, especially in developing countries where it fundamentally contributes to national and regional income. In Indonesia, Trisoko et al., (2024) believe that tourism acts as a decisive part in supporting home-grown economies, creating employment opportunities, and promoting cultural heritage. Aceh, as one of Indonesia's distinctive provinces, has increasingly positioned itself as a competitive tourism destination. Iconic places and historical sites such as Sabang Island, Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, and The Aceh Tsunami Museum attract both domestic and international visitors, contributing significantly to regional economic development (Rindrasi, 2019). The provincial government's promotion of Islamic tourism and eco-tourism has further strengthened Aceh's image as a culturally and environmentally conscious destination (Huda et al. 2021).

In the context of global tourism, English generally functions as a lingua franca that bridges communication between local service providers and international visitor (Lee et al., 2023; Astawa & Wijaya, 2024). Effective communication skills in English enable tourism professionals to assist tourists, explain local attractions, handle inquiries, and provide quality service, all of which shape visitors' overall experiences. Wilson (2018) calls this as linguistic accommodation whereby English proficiency is central to service quality and cross-cultural

*Corresponding author

Saiful Akmal

Email: saiful.akmal@ar-raniry.ac.id

communication in the tourism industry (Dewaele et al., 2018). Thus, English for Tourism (henceforth Eft), an application of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is designed to equip learners with language and pragmatic skills for tourism contexts. Within English Language Teaching (ELT), this orientation aligns with the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which underlines modifying language instruction to EFL students' specialized demands (Ghafar, 2022; Utami et al. 2019). Recognizing this demand, higher education institutions in Aceh, including UIN Ar-Raniry, have incorporated Eft courses into their curricula (Yoestara et al., 2021).

Eft is designed to equip students with practical communicative competence required in tourism-related professions. The course emphasizes tourism-specific vocabulary, hospitality expressions, tour guiding techniques, and intercultural communication skills (Veerachaisantikul et al., 2025). It often integrates simulations and role-play activities to mirror real-scenarios such as assisting travelers, managing reservations, and responding to complaints (Suyunovna, 2023). Such experiential speaking learning strategies are consistent with communicative language teaching approaches that aim to develop learners' functional language use in authentic contexts (Purwaningsih et al., 2019). In Aceh where Islamic tourism and eco-tourism are growing, Eft courses have become increasingly important for preparing graduates to work with international visitors.

Previous research suggests that participation in Eft courses may influence students' career orientations. Gani and Damayanti (2018) revealed that speaking English is the key in promoting tourism in Aceh. They believe making amends to the instructional system relevant to the field of tourism in the department can yield better results. In view of this, career motivation acts as an inner paradigm that facilitates the connection between language learning practices and students' professional goals in tourism-related fields. In the context of Eft, career motivation includes students' basic initiative to follow tourism careers, their perceived self-efficacy in using English for work, and their goal focused performance in making for the hospitality workforce. Ushioda and Dörnyei (2021) motivated self-system framework recommends that students' ideal professional selves with envisioned roles as tour guides, hotel staff, or cultural envoys may function as influential motivational mechanism that withstand engagement with language learning tasks.

When Eft courses effectively bridge the gap between classroom teaching and real-world tourism circumstances, students are more likely to internalize professional identities associated with the tourism sector (Jennings et al., 2015). Equally, when students notice the uncoupling between course content and real workplace difficulties, motivational deterioration and career rerouting may happen (Ushioda, 2011). Considering how Eft courses relate with these motivational dynamics is consequently vital for producing course curricula that not only shape linguistic skills but also endure students' long-term desire to proceed careers in tourism.

In Aceh's unique sociocultural setting, however, tourism operates within the framework of Islamic values and the implementation of Sharia law (Hariani & Hanafiah, 2024; Purwandani & Yusuf, 2024). This context introduces particular considerations for students who may perceive potential tensions between religious norms and the expectations of international tourism. Eft courses attempt to address these complexities by integrating cultural sensitivity and ethical communication strategies, enabling students to maintain local values while providing inclusive hospitality. The balance between professional competence and cultural identity becomes a crucial factor shaping students' attitudes toward the tourism sector.

Despite this relevance, previous studies have largely focused on English for Specific Purposes analysis for curriculum evaluation and students' English proficiency levels in general tourism education setup (i.e. Chamorro et al.2022; Zahedpisheh et al. 2017). Despite these prior studies contributions on the body of knowledge in using Eft for language learning are inevitable, little is known about how Eft shapes students' career motivation in the Indonesian Islamic context. This paper tackles this disparity in knowledge by investigating students' perceptions of Eft and the challenges they experience, and by exploring implications for their career readiness.

Based on this context, the present paper aims to examine the influence of English for Tourism courses on EFL students' career motivation for the field. Specifically, this paper examines EFL students' perceptions of the relevance of EFT courses to their career interests and identifies challenges they encounter during the learning process. By focusing on eighth-semester English department students at UIN Ar-Raniry, this research adds to the increasing studies on language education within vocational and professional domains. Furthermore, it provides insights for educators seeking to enhance curriculum design and instructional practices in English for Tourism programs.

METHODS

This paper employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of EFT courses and their influence on their career motivation for the field. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows thorough scrutiny of participants' knowledges, attitudes, and interpretations rather than numerical measurement. Such an approach is appropriate for understanding how learners construct meaning from educational experiences and how these experiences shape their motivation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019).

The study was carried out at an Islamic university in Sumatera. The population consisted of 187 students from the 2021 cohort who had accomplished the EFT courses from the Department of English Language Education. Ten students (P1–P10) from the Department of English Language Education at UIN Ar-Raniry were selected using purposive sampling. Selection criteria included in this study are 10 high performing students who have completed the EFT course representing five different units, and willingness to participate in an in-person structured interview.

A purposive sampling technique was labored to take participants who met detailed conditions: from the 2021 cohort, had completed the English for Tourism course, and demonstrated strong academic performance in the course. They were selected because they have already explained that they are those who eagerly planned to pursue future career in EFT related fields. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to select information-rich participants who can provide relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Based on these criteria, ten students were selected as research participants. The participants consisted of both male and female students from the English Language Department. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms (P1-P10) were used in reporting the findings.

Data were accumulated via semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Semi-structured was chosen to facilitate systematic comparison of responses while capturing detailed personal experiences. A total of ten open-ended questions were developed to explore students' perceptions of EFT classes, their learning experiences, challenges encountered, and the perceived influence of the course in their motivation for careers in the tourism sector. Each interview lasted approximately 5-10 minutes and was conducted offline. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription. The face-to-face format enabled the researcher to build rapport, observe non-verbal cues, and clarify responses, when necessary, thereby enhancing the credibility of the data. The interview protocol consisted of ten open-ended questions covering course relevance, perceived skills gained, encountered challenges, and effects on career interest.

The data were examined by thematic analysis ensuing the procedures outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). The analysis involved several stages. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to produce textual data. Second, the transcripts were carefully inspected multiple occasions to gain familiarity with the data. Third, meaningful units of data were coded by categorizing main phrases, concepts, and recurring ideas related to students' career motivation, challenges, and career orientation. The codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and organized into overarching themes. This process enabled the identification of patterns across participants' responses, such as increased confidence,

perceived career relevance, cultural considerations, and the need for practical experience. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions to explain how English for Tourism classes influence students' career motivation toward tourism sector. To improve the trustworthiness, member checking was conducted. After the initial analysis, selected participants were requested to evaluate the summarized interpretations of their answers to sanction the accurateness and validity of the researchers' interpretations. This process allowed participants to verify whether their perspectives had been represented correctly and helped strengthen the credibility of the qualitative findings. To improve trustworthiness, the researcher applied member checking and peer debriefing with a colleague. Analytic decisions were documented to provide an audit trail.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the results derived from thematic analysis of the interview data and discusses them concerning the research questions and relevant works. The analysis revealed two main categories: students' perceptions of the relevance of EfT courses in determining their interests in the field of tourism and challenges encountered in learning EfT and their influence on students' motivation toward tourism-related careers.

Students' Perceptions of EfT Courses

Four major perceptions emerged. First, most participants (P1–P7) perceived EfT as instrumental in developing practical skills tourism-specific vocabulary, professional expressions used in hospitality, and communicative routines for interacting with tourists. This aligns with ESP literature that emphasizes task-based, workplace-relevant learning (Hyland, 2021). Second, several students (P1, P2, P5, P6, P8, P9) noted that EfT stimulated their interest in tourism through simulations, cultural topics, and situational roleplays, which supports self-determination perspectives on intrinsic motivation. Third, a subset of participants (P3, P7, P9) reported increased motivation of career options e.g., tour guide, front-office roles, and travel consultancy consistent with studies that position ESP as broadening professional horizons (Alkandari & Alfaraj, 2025). Finally, some students (P4, P6, P8, P10) viewed the course as misaligned with their goals and therefore irrelevant, echoing research on engagement that links perceived relevance to motivation (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Development of Tourism-Related Communication Skills

Most participants perceived the English for Tourism course as beneficial in developing practical communication skills relevant to the tourism industry. Seven out of the students emphasized that the course improved their understanding of tourism-specific language and communication practices.

Excerpt 1

P1: *"Built on my understanding in the lesson, we acquire how to write and speak English that is typically applied in the holiday business commerce."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P5: *"It grows my confidence in working with travelers as in this class I learn words and expressions that are popular to the leisure industry."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

P6: *"This course can boost my familiarity about home-grown and global culture."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

The responses in excerpt 1 suggest that EfT courses help students develop communicative competence relevant to professional tourism contexts. This finding supports

the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which emphasize the development of language skills personalized to EFL learners' specialized requests. According to Hyland (2021), ESP instruction becomes more effective when language learning is directly linked to real-world professional communication. The development of tourism-specific skills also contributed to increased student confidence in interacting with international visitors. When students feel more prepared to communicate in professional contexts, their motivation to explore related career opportunities tends to increase.

In addition, students who have shown strong favor for tourism are implicitly shown their language skills the room for aspiring their latent orientation toward service-facing roles and reinforced their self-concept from the course. On the other hand, students who felt that the course is irrelevant likely feel that the simulations in the course could be performative rather than meaningful experience in the professional world. As Aceh presents a unique sociocultural context for its Islamic or halal tourism or tourist destination including its potentials and challenges. This means that career motivation towards tourism is not genuinely psychological but can also be based by structural and sociocultural context too.

Growing Interest in the Tourism Sector

Another prominent finding was the emergence of new or stronger interest in tourism careers among several participants. As can be seen in excerpt 2, participants reported that the course influenced their curiosity and motivation toward the tourism field.

Excerpt 2

P1: *"Due to this lesson, I have an attentiveness in at work in the vacation industry. I consider working there will be exciting and we can see a lot of overseas people."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

In addition, P3 and P5 described the course as alternative career option beyond traditional teaching careers as can be seen in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 3

P3: *"This lecture is also a decent start for me, who is not so involved in the education field, so I can nurture my attention in holiday business as an alternative."* (Interview Transcript, 21/1/2026).

P6: *"When learning this course, I find that I am involved in this sector and want to discover more."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

Students' responses in excerpts 2 and 3 indicate that exposure to tourism-related communication scenarios and cultural topics can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation to explore careers in the tourism industry. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which states that learners are more motivated when learning activities are meaningful and connected to their interests (Deci, 2014). In this case, authentic tourism contexts appear to make the language learning experience more relevant and engaging (Montgomery, Balzotti & Hansen, 2026).

The use of contextualized learning activities, as Jennings (2015) appears useful to help students imagine themselves working in real tourism environments as professionals. As a result, EFT course may function not only as a language learning experience but also as a form of career exposure. This suggests that integrating authentic professional scenarios into language instruction can play an important role in shaping students' professional aspirations.

Increased Awareness of Tourism Career Opportunities

In addition to developing skills and interest, some students reported that the course expanded their understanding and career possibilities within the tourism industry. Participants

explained that the course helped them recognize that tourism offers diverse professional roles beyond tour guiding. For instance, one participant noted:

Excerpt 4

- P2: *"Afterward, I am extra alert of career chances in the field, not only a tour guide."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).
 P9: *"I see that work prospects in the field are relatively bright."* (Interview Transcript, 23/1/2026).
 P10: *"I began to understand that professional prospects in the field are very diverse."* (Interview Transcript, 23/1/2026).

The data in excerpt 4 suggest that EfT courses play an important role in broadening students' career perspectives (Chamorro et al, 2022). Exposure to professional language and workplace scenarios can help students envision potential roles within the tourism industry. In ESP education, according to Wulandari et al. (2025), career-oriented learning is often emphasized because it bridges the language gap between academic and professional practice. By introducing students to authentic tourism contexts, EfT courses may help them develop a clearer understanding of industry expectations and employment opportunities (Bury & Oka, 2017). This awareness can enhance career readiness by allowing students to align their language skills with potential professional options.

Perceived Irrelevance to Personal Career Goals

Despite the positive perceptions by many participants, some students felt that the course was not directly relevant to their personal aspirations. Four participants stated that their interest in tourism remained unchanged after completing the course. One participant explained:

Excerpt 5

- P2: *"Really, this course didn't actually encourage my interest in working in leisure industry. I notice this area is fascinating, but it is enormously unlike my potential dream occupation."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).
 P4: *"Honestly, this class doesn't impact my attention in thriving in the tourism sector of any kind for it feels less significant to me."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).
 P5: *"For myself, this class does not add my curiosity in working in the tourism area. It goes back to personal concerns."* (Interview Transcript, 21/1/2026).

These responses highlight the role of personal goals and motivation in determining student career motivation and engagement (Nayir, 2017). Lacey et al. (2022) further assert that even when a course is well designed, its impact may remain limited if the content does not align with learners' career aspirations. Educational research suggests that perceived relevance strongly influences students' engagement and motivation in learning activities (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018; Johansen et al. 2023).

Challenges in Learning EfT and Their Effects

Four primary challenges were identified. (a) Limited real-world practice: participants (P2, P3, P6, P9) reported that the course emphasized theoretical knowledge and offered insufficient opportunities for field visits, internships, or extended simulations. This gap impeded transfer of classroom learning to authentic settings (Jackson, Fleming & Rewe, 2019). (b) Tourism-specific vocabulary: several students (P1, P4, P7) found industry terms unfamiliar and hard to retain, underscoring the need for repeated contextualized exposure (Suyunovna, 2023). (c) Low speaking confidence: P5 and P8 experienced anxiety during

performance tasks, consistent with literature on communicative anxiety in ESP classrooms (Topalov et al., 2023). (d) Unengaging materials: at least one participant (P10) described the materials as monotonous, reducing motivation (Ahmed et al., 2004).

These challenges had varied effects on students' career motivation. Some students (P1, P2, P3, P5) responded to difficulties with increased effort and targeted practice, demonstrating behavioral engagement and persistence (Dewaele & Li, 2021). Others (P4, P6, P8) reported discouragement and reduced motivation in tourism careers. Meanwhile, a group (P7, P9, P10) remained indifferent, as their initial orientations were not career-focused toward tourism. Overall, the data suggest that EfT can strengthen professional motivation when paired with authentic practice and engaging materials; absent these, benefits may be limited.

Limited Opportunities for Real-World Practice

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was the lack of practical learning opportunities. Several students felt that the course focused heavily on theoretical knowledge rather than real-world practice. One participant stated:

Excerpt 6

P1: *"The assignments and the entire lesson solely concentrate on concept lacking direct exercise; thus, I don't categorically know the work description in the field."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P4: *"Too much theory and not adequate practical rehearsal. Occasionally I'm disorganized about how to instrument the concept into factual circumstances."* (Interview Transcript, 21/1/2026).

P9: *"I reflect we don't have adequate real-life preparation in this course, so I just depend on the concept that I read from the textbook."* (Interview Transcript, 23/1/2026).

These responses suggest that students perceive a gap between classroom learning and professional practice (Du-Babcock, 2016). ESP scholars emphasize that authentic learning experiences such as simulations, internships, or field activities are essential for preparing students for professional environments (Ramsa & Raiwan, 2019; Bilodid & Vorobel, 2022). Without such experiences, learners may find it difficult to apply theoretical knowledge in real situations.

Difficulty with Tourism-Specific Vocabulary

Another challenge reported by participants involved understanding and memorizing tourism-related terminology.

Excerpt 7

P2: *"Pronunciation and practical words are the most problematic. There are words that are hard to say and many vocabulary that I don't frequently catch."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P3: *"The usage of words that are specialized to the tourism industry is demanding because the vocabulary is seldom used in normal situations."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P7: *"The key task is that I don't know the precise vocabulary in the field."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

These responses indicate that specialized vocabulary presents a barrier for some learners (Win et al., 2021). Previous research on ESP highlight that professional or technical vocabulary requires repeated exposure and contextual practice to be effectively acquired (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2017; McLaughlin & Parkinson, 2018)

Low Speaking Confidence

Some participants also reported difficulties related to speaking confidence during classroom activities. One student admitted:

Excerpt 8

P2: *"Occasionally I even feel doubtful when I have to say nonstop in English."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P5: *"My main test was the speaking segment, particularly when undertaking roleplays in front of the class because I felt less self-assured."* (Interview Transcript, 21/1/2026).

These responses reflect a common challenge faced by many language learners: speaking anxiety. In communicative language learning environments, students are often required to perform oral tasks that may create pressure, particularly for learners who feel uncertain about their linguistic competence.

Studies on second language learning indicate that anxiety and lack of confidence can negatively influence students' willingness to communicate in the target language (Dewaele, 2019; Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018). When learners fear making mistakes or being evaluated by peers, they may avoid participating actively in speaking activities. Nevertheless, communication-based tasks remain essential in Eft courses because tourism professions require frequent oral interaction with international visitors. Therefore, instructors may need to create supportive learning environments that encourage gradual participation and reduce performance anxiety, allowing students to build confidence through consistent practice.

Influence on Students' Career Motivation

The challenges experienced by students influenced their career motivation toward the tourism sector in different ways. For some students, challenges became a source of motivation for improvement. One participant explained:

Excerpt 9

P1: *"Although it's a little hard, I still need to pick up unhurriedly because working in tourism requires good communication skills."* (Interview Transcript, 20/1/2026).

P6: *"The problems stimulated me to learn and train tougher, especially in communication."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

These responses demonstrate that some students interpret learning challenges as opportunities for personal development (Plack et al., 2022). However, for other participants, challenges reduced their motivation in tourism careers. One student explained:

Excerpt 10

P8: *"The tasks made me less interested as the learning approaches didn't feel related to the experience of working in tourism."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

P6: *"I understand that I have trouble talking naturally in English, so this task disturbs my curiosity in working in tourism."* (Interview Transcript, 22/1/2026).

Finally, several participants reported that the challenges had no influence on their motivation because they were never motivated in tourism careers in the first place. As one student explained:

Excerpt 11

P9: *"Not disturbed whatsoever for I was not concerned from the start in working in the field."* (Interview Transcript, 23/1/2026).

These findings suggest that the impact of Eft courses depends not only on course design but also on students' prior motivation and career goals. When learners perceive a strong connection between course content and their aspirations, tasks may improve

motivation (Johansen et al. 2023). Yet, when such alignment is absent, the course may have limited influence on their career motivation.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to examine English as Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of the English for Tourism (EfT) course, the challenges they encountered, and the ways these experiences influence their career motivation toward the tourism sector. Findings indicate that English for Tourism (EfT) courses at UIN Ar-Raniry exert varied influences on students' career motivation within the tourism sector. Many participants reported enhanced communicative competence, mastery of industry-specific vocabulary, and increased motivation in tourism-related careers. However, others experienced discouragement or indifference due to the lack of authentic practice opportunities and unengaging materials. These patterns underscore the need for EfT curricula that integrate experiential, task-based, and confidence-building approaches to strengthen students' professional readiness. In terms of pedagogical implications, EfT curricula should balance linguistic instruction with authentic, practice-based tasks. Recommended interventions include: structured internships or industry practicums, regular field visits to local tourist sites, integrated task sequences that simulate front-office and guiding encounters, and explicit vocabulary recycling strategies (e.g., spaced repetition, task-based retrieval). Instructors should also incorporate speaking confidence interventions such as scaffolding, peer feedback, and low-stakes performance opportunities. In addition to this, the management of the department of English Language Education should consider formal partnerships with local tourism businesses to facilitate placements and guest lectures. Course syllabi may include modular options allowing students to choose tourism-focused tracks aligned with their career intentions. Future investigations should expand the scope of inquiry through larger and more diverse samples, adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and include perspectives from lecturers and industry stakeholders to triangulate findings. Such comprehensive exploration would contribute to a deeper understanding of how EfT programs can be optimized to enhance both language proficiency and employability in the tourism industry.

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