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ESP for Tourism: Does It Meet Employers' Needs and Prepare Students for the Workplace?

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Introduction

Tourism—defined as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (UNWTO, 1998)—represents a convergence activity among different disciplines. Economy, marketing, business, history, geography, art, and

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foreign languages join together in a complex frame of interdisciplinarity. It is precisely this diversity what provides tourism students with a wide range of possibilities within the labour market. The tourism industry is a vibrant and dynamic sector that requires adapting to the professional requirements of companies, meeting the needs of our society, and, unavoidably, adjusting to the effects of globalisation and the constantly increasing level of product innovation.

In a country like Spain—which, prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis, remained the second-world tourist destination, only preceded by France and followed by the USA (UNWTO, 2019)—university studies in tourism are perfectly justified, since they qualify the student both academically and professionally for one of the major economic engines of this nation. In fact, there is an evident necessity to properly equip future professionals seeking entry in the service sector (Blue & Harun, 2003). The degree in tourism in Spain appeared as a response to the particular social and economic demands of the industry. Among many other things, companies in this sector seek graduates who are linguistically competent in foreign languages to cope with the internationalisation in the field, as tourism is international in nature (Davies, 2000), so tourism practitioners operating in foreign languages will need to overcome the barriers of nationalities and cultures (Cronin, 2000).

The transcendence of the international issuing market to the tourist destinations in Spain explains the inclusion of a reasonable number of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in English in tourism degrees in this country. These English modules pursue the mastery of the language from a communicative perspective to ensure students' effective linguistic exchanges—oral and written. The analysis of the specific needs in the use of this language is vital: its specificity and its positioning in the sector of services explain its inclusion into the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) field. English for Tourism (EfT) is a “natural” dimension of the language which contemplates specialised knowledge (Blanco-Calvo & Garrido-Hornos, 2013): it stands as a functional variety of General English or, in other words, as a branch of the language which shows some of its overall features but, additionally, adopts terminology of its own and specific linguistic, pragmatic, and functional characteristics. ESP in general and ESP for tourism in particular entail

developing new types of literacy and communicative skills to prepare students to handle specific professional contexts and practices (Hyland, 2002).

English for Specific Purposes

Considering the prominence of English as an international language (Prachanant, 2012; Szabóné, 2009), universities are currently offering ESP courses to meet the specific needs of students from fields such as science, technology, medicine, engineering, business, and politics (Crystal, 2003; Javid, 2015; Kachru & Nelson, 2006; Laufer, 2008; Suprina & Rahayu, 2017). The effectiveness of this variety of English not only implies an increase in the level of exposure to the language, but it also entails the use of authentic materials in a clearly defined learning context to address the learner's real needs (Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017). Analysing those needs when designing courses and syllabi is imperative to teach the learner how to communicate successfully in specific disciplines and contexts.

A substantial amount of research has been devoted to the distinction between General English and ESP; the definition of the latter, and its historical background and features (Brindley, 1989; Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Finney, 2002; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Munby, 1978; Robinson, 1991). Broadly speaking, ESP refers to the teaching and learning of English for students whose objective is to use this language in a specific discipline or for work-related purposes (Ahmed, 2014; Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017). ESP has some *absolute characteristics*: it has to meet the specific needs of the learners; it uses the methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; and it focuses on the language (grammar, vocabulary, and register), skills, discourse, and so on, appropriate to these activities. ESP also presents some *variable characteristics*: it may be designed for specific disciplines; it may use a different methodology from that of General English; and it is normally designed for adult learners who are intermediate or advanced students in tertiary education or in an expert work environment, so it assumes some prior knowledge of the language system (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

ESP focuses on specific, purposeful uses of the language for particular ends. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlight the idea that the language

learner is studying a language for a practical reason, and, due to this, the curriculum designer uses needs analysis to determine the features of the target language. Eventually, the language instructor adapts content and method to teach those features (Huckin, 2003). As a matter of fact, one of the main tasks of the ESP practitioner is precisely the analysis of the present and target situation to establish the “what” and the “how” of a course (Javid, 2015). For Piyanapa (2004), it is a means to detect what the student needs and a tool to decide the type of ESP instruction they require. Need analysis—defined as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (Richards et al., 1992, p. 242)—should be conceived, therefore, as the starting point or first stage in ESP course development (Flowerdew, 2012; Prachanant, 2012), curriculum renewal, syllabus design, materials development, and methodology updating (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). Since needs analysis entails an awareness of the goal environment, it should mirror the requirements, desires, and needs of the learner in a particular area (Fadel & Elyas, 2015), or, what is the same, the necessities (demands of the target situation), wants (learners’ view on their needs), and lacks (the gap—if any—between the learner’s language proficiency and the target situation language needs) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Needs analysis brings together various sources that provide different perspectives: the students, the language-teaching establishments, and the user institutions (Moattarian & Tahririan, 2014). Their view can help to develop a successful ESP course (Chostelidou, 2010), as course design involves interpreting the needs analysis data to determine the content based on the communicative needs that learners will face in the workplace (Basturkmen, 2003) and produce learning experiences that enable them to perform as expected (Barrantes-Montero, 2009). In short: a curriculum for ESP students should include learning tasks and activities that enable them to use what they learned to execute their jobs more effectively (William & Brunton, 2009) and meet the expectations of their future employers.

ESP for Tourism

Tourism is one of the most powerful contributors to the national economy of many countries, attracting domestic and foreign tourists and providing innumerable and very varied work opportunities (Rahayu, 2020). It stands as the world's largest and fastest growing activity which necessarily implies cross-cultural communication between individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Baum, 2006; Blue & Harun, 2003). The ability to master another language is, accordingly, essential in the development of this sector (Sindik & Božinović, 2013). As a matter of fact, several studies on the specific needs of this industry have shown that a considerable level of competence in a foreign language is a primary concern and an essential operating skill (Davies, 2000; Goodenough & Page, 1993; Hagen, 1992; Metcalfe, 1991).

Tourism programmes in Europe predominantly include foreign language subjects in their courses (Leslie & Russell, 2006), among which English is promoted. The internationalisation of scientific, technical, and economic activities in general has favoured the demand for specialised English (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Rahayu, 2020), and the tourism and hospitality industry is no exception: the function of English as a vehicle for communication is crucial for professionals in this sector to guarantee quality and satisfaction. English is a “tool to make a guest feel at home” (Torres & Kline, 2013), since “making people feel welcome is indeed an art, and a key to success” (Blue & Harun, 2003, p. 78). Hijirida (1980) even affirms that English proficiency is in fact one of the major criteria when hiring tourism employees, as low linguistic competence in this language may entail a problem in attracting potential clients and satisfying their needs. Language becomes necessary for empathy, courtesy, and politeness, but, above all, for routine negotiations between tourists and employees (Prachanant, 2012; Wijayati & Khafidhoh, 2021). Practitioners in the tourism sector need to acquire adequate language skills in order to deal with costumers and visitors and provide service excellence to meet the workplace requirements (Bobanović & Gržinić, 2011; Rahayu, 2020). Consequently, the learning objectives of ESP for tourism are often work-oriented: presenting tourism products for

promotional and advertising purposes, communicating in commercial exchanges, identifying sociocultural differences with international customers, understanding and producing tourism-related texts, and so on.

EfT in higher education has been regarded as a contemporary area of business English (Choi, 2005; Wijayati & Khafidhoh, 2021); it has been defined as a branch of ESP (Kusumawati, 2018; Mahendra, 2020; Prachanant, 2012; Sholikh, 2020) which combines the formal dimension of the language with the vocabulary, expressions, tasks, and linguistic functions typical of the hospitality and tourism industry both in pre- and in-service situations (Blue & Harun, 2003; Wijayati & Khafidhoh, 2021). Therefore, it seems clear that EfT lessons should focus on occupational activities and specific communication skills to bridge classroom use and workplace communication (Fuentes, 2004). In other words, it should cover the language required to understand and interact with members of different cultures in different tourist settings: hotels, travel agencies, and so on (Afzali & Fakharzadeh, 2009; Ghany & Latif, 2012). Tasks should be designed to develop the students' communication skills and self-confidence to perform successfully in their future working environment, so recreating real-life situations will be beneficial for future job prospects and requirements (Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017).

A considerable body of investigation has analysed the use of specific English for diverse occupational purposes (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020; Moattarian & Tahririan, 2014; Nurpahmi, 2017; Ozturk & Bal-Gezgin, 2019; Paniya, 2008; Rahayu, 2020; Suprina & Rahayu, 2017), but, despite the fact that English is the most used language in the hotel industry, the main features of the language of hospitality have not been extensively researched (Blue & Harun, 2003). Similarly, there are not many studies on EfT that have dealt with issues such as testing the effectiveness of courses (Ghany & Latif, 2012) or the relevance of English language preparation at school for the industry needs (Rahayu, 2020). The next sections will discuss the most relevant studies on these issues from the perspective of students and employers.

EfT and Students' Needs

From a student-centred perspective, several researchers have focused on their needs and perceptions. Moattarian and Tahririan (2014) examined the language needs of Iranian students of tourism management specifically, based on their wants, lacks, and necessities. Using a survey and semi-structured interviews with learners, teachers, subject-specific instructors, and experts in the field, these authors concluded that differently from other ESP courses (in which the integration of skills is not essential), listening, speaking, reading, and writing should all be emphasised in ESP for tourism management to fulfil the specific needs of their students. Furthermore, it was found that the real objectives of this specific tourism programme had not been correctly identified up to that moment, which led to students not being satisfied with the instruction they were receiving and demanding a proper revision of the materials and methods employed. Ghany and Latif (2012) also investigated the adequacy of the English language preparation of tourism and hospitality students in Egypt and discovered that students' views on their preparation and language needs differed from those of their teachers: while students felt oral communication skills needed to be emphasised, teachers focused on reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. The authors concluded that the language preparation students received was inadequate and suggested a reshape in the English language instruction of these programmes to help learners be optimally prepared for the workplace. A similar finding was reported by Bury and Oka (2017), who investigated Japanese students' perceptions of the importance of English in the tourism industry and found that confidence and communicative competence—particularly regarding the skills of listening and speaking—were crucial for participants, but reading and writing were also perceived as important.

Other scholars have focused specifically on the effectiveness of courses and materials. Buzarna-Tihenea and Nadrag (2017) explored effective teaching methods and techniques for EfT, and found that speaking and listening skills are key to any English language learner willing to work in the tourism sector and that a communicative and interactive teaching style and active participation in the EfT classroom favours their

development to a large extent. Yasmin et al. (2016) explored the specific language needs of students in the hotel industry in Pakistan and evaluated whether the existing materials matched them. They came to the conclusion that teaching materials should be revised, as they were not specific enough to meet the language needs of the students (in particular with regards to the vocabulary and grammatical structures required for the hotel industry), and needed to include communicative activities related to oral skills that covered functions such as greeting guests and responding to their inquiries. In a related study, García-Laborda (2005) investigated whether travel and tourism textbooks at the time covered the instructional elements and skills perceived as the most important ones by students. He analysed 10 books and surveyed 70 university students and concluded that most textbooks address students' needs only partially.

EfT and Employers' Needs

A few studies have focused on the needs and expectations of tourism practitioners and employers (e.g. Martin & Davies, 2006; Stapa & Jais, 2005; Tipmontree, 2007). Rahayu (2020) gathered data from teachers, students, and workers from the tourism industry to assess whether the English taught at two different higher education institutions in Jakarta met the workplace needs. The results showed that the different sources involved in the study had different views on the matter, but all of them emphasised the importance of including speaking skills in the syllabus. Similarly, Noor (2008) investigated whether students' language skills correlate with the needs of the hospitality industry and found discrepancies between the responses of the students and those of the employers, especially on listening and speaking activities, which were more important for employees than for students. However, both groups of respondents agreed that students should have more communication activities and less writing activities. It was also revealed that students were placed in different departments depending on their communication skills (i.e. those with better communication skills were assigned to the front office while the rest were assigned to the kitchen or housekeeping).

Adorján (2013) carried out a needs analysis collecting data from potential employers and found that learning materials used at Hungarian universities lacked certain key elements mentioned by the employers, as they did not enable students to familiarise themselves with a real working environment or explore local culture and customs or intercultural aspects. She also concluded that although both oral and written tasks would be performed in their future jobs, speaking does not get enough attention. Prachanant (2012) also surveyed the needs of different tourism employees in Thailand and, in line with the studies previously mentioned, concluded that the most important skill was speaking, followed by listening, reading, and writing. His study also revealed that the most commonly employed functions in English were information giving, service providing, and help offering, and the most frequently faced problems were the use of inaccurate vocabulary, inappropriate expressions, or incorrect grammar, and the inability to understand different accents.

Suprina and Rahayu (2017) performed a need analysis to specifically assess the English language needs of travel agents in Jakarta through questionnaires, observations, and interviews. Their results revealed employees' difficulties dealing with (1) grammar and appropriate expressions, (2) vocabulary, (3) translation, (4) speaking, (5) pronunciation, (6) listening, (7) writing, and (8) reading, and confirmed that English language skills were used in their everyday work. Al-Khatib (2005) also focused on travel agents in Jordan and examined their communication needs to check if the material and skills taught to students suited those needs. He concluded that the teaching and learning materials should be more focused on their specific field of work and, unlike most of the studies previously mentioned, found that the most used skill for travel agents is writing (80%), followed by listening (63%), reading (61%), and speaking (61%).

The studies in this section clearly show that the tourism industry regards English language competence as essential and, as Blue and Harun (2003) suggest, only those with good oral and written communication skills tend to be recruited for tourism and hospitality positions. Most of the studies reviewed agreed on the necessity for specificity in the field and the development of oral skills for communicative interaction. Therefore, teaching strategies different from the ones used in the traditional language classroom are required (Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017) and

instructors are expected to make use of materials that will enable this specific instructional process (Wijayati & Khafidhoh, 2021).

Aims of the Study

The present study aims to contribute to the literature presented in the previous section by investigating employers' experiences with interns or recently graduated tourism students to find out whether the content and skills included on the ESP syllabi of tourism undergraduate degrees in Spain actually meet employers' needs and prepare students for the workplace. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the general use and importance of English by companies in the tourism industry in Spain? Does this differ between types of companies?
2. What are the main functions that interns or recently graduated tourism students need to perform in English in the workplace? Does this differ between types of companies?
3. How prepared are interns or recently graduated tourism students to perform those functions in English in the workplace? Does this differ between types of companies?
4. Does EfT in Spain meet the needs of employers? Does this differ between types of companies?

Methodology

Data Collection

An online survey was conducted with tourism employers to explore the research questions mentioned in the previous section. To develop the questionnaire, the researchers looked at the offer of every university in Spain to see which ones had an undergraduate degree in tourism. It was revealed that out of the 84 Spanish universities (51 state, 33 private), only 30 of them did not have an undergraduate degree in tourism. From the

remaining 54 universities, the researchers reviewed the syllabi of the ESP modules offered at these institutions, as this information is publicly available on the website of each university. The information collected was included into an Excel spreadsheet, which was later collated and analysed. It was found that the great majority of universities offer 24 ECTS in English, generally split across 4 modules, or 18 ECTS, generally split across 3 modules.

With regard to the content of the ESP modules, which was the relevant information for the purpose of the study and the questionnaire, we were able to narrow it down to 22 work-related language functions that were consistently presented and emphasised across all the tourism programmes. These functions were as follows:

1. Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers and introducing themselves/others
2. Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers
3. Handling telephone calls
4. Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions
5. Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers
6. Offering products and services
7. Giving directions and practical information
8. Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on
9. Talking about prices, fees, payments, and so on
10. Making presentations and tours
11. Making bookings
12. Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on
13. Negotiating products and services
14. Attending and participating in meetings
15. Communicating formally and politely
16. Apologising and dealing with complaints
17. Using specific vocabulary
18. Reading emails and letters
19. Reading reports and other documents
20. Reading instructions, manuals, and so on
21. Writing emails and letters
22. Writing reports and other documents

With the information gathered and collated, we created a questionnaire that included questions about the respondents (i.e. the employers), the general use of English in their company, the frequency in which the 22 work-related functions above were conducted by tourism graduates in their business, and how prepared tourism graduates were to perform those 22 functions. The final questionnaire included a total of 13 questions distributed as follows (see also Results):

- One multiple-answer question
- Five open-ended questions, with two of them being short-answer questions for the name and location of the company and another one being optional to allow participants to add further information to a previous question
- Seven multiple-choice questions, with three of these questions including the rating of a number of sub-questions (two of them required rating the 22 functions above and the other one 4 different ratings)

The questionnaire was then converted into an online survey using Google Forms and sent by email to over 1000 companies throughout Spain that belong to the tourism industry, including accommodation businesses, cultural and active tourism companies, tourist information centres, and travel and event organisation agencies. Unfortunately, due to the situation with COVID-19 in Spain at the time of data collection, many of these companies were closed and were not able to participate, and others had considerably reduced their staff due to the limited number of tourists. In addition, other companies reported not hiring interns or recently graduated tourism students, so they were excluded from participation.

We received a total of 145 responses, but had to exclude 6 of them. Five of them were excluded because the information they provided was incomplete. The sixth one was excluded because it was the only company that belonged to the transportation category and actually reported that English was not frequently used in their business, so it would not have been representative to make comparisons or draw generalisations. The final sample consisted of 139 employers from different companies throughout Spain: 67 accommodation businesses, 29 cultural and active

tourism companies, 21 tourist information centres, and 22 travel and event organisation agencies. The higher number of responses from accommodation businesses was not surprising as this type of company is the one that receives the largest amount of tourism students.

Data Analysis

The information derived from the questionnaire provided three different types of data, so different analyses had to be used to suit the different data types. Multiple-choice items, which were the great majority, involved a 5-point Likert scale where respondents had to select one answer out of the five alternatives. For these questions, we were interested in analysing the ratings given by each different type of company as well as any significant differences between them. To compare the means of the four independent groups (i.e. the four types of companies) and determine any statistically significant differences on the ordinal dependent variable (i.e. the ratings), Kruskal-Wallis H tests (χ^2) were used. For the multiple-answer question, where participants were allowed to select more than one option, the frequency in which each of the responses was selected by each type of company was analysed. Finally, the data from the three open-ended questions that asked participants to provide their own answers were treated as qualitative data and the most frequent responses as well as anything else of interest are reported.

Results

General Use and Importance of English in Tourism Companies

The first section of the survey was aimed at answering Research Question 1 and finding out about the general use and importance of English by the different types of companies in our sample. The first question asked respondents to rate the frequency in which English is used in their company on a scale from 1 (*Not used*) to 5 (*Constantly used*). As Table 8.1

shows, the use of English in all types of companies is very frequent, with all mean ratings above 4. The comparative analysis conducted revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the ratings between the different companies ($\chi^2(3) = 4.961, p = 0.175$). An interesting observation was that none of the 139 companies in the sample selected the lowest rating of 1, which suggests that English is used to some extent in all of them, and the highest rating of 5 was the most frequent one (see Fig. 8.1).

The second item was the multiple-answer question, which asked employers who interns or recently graduated tourism students normally interact with in the workplace. Four options were provided: *Clients/Visitors*, *Providers/other businesses*, *Supervisors/colleagues*, and *Other*. As Fig. 8.2 illustrates, the frequency pattern is very similar for all types of companies except for travel/event organisation ones, where students interact mostly with *Providers/other businesses*. None of the respondents selected the option *Other*.

The next question asked respondents to rate the frequency in which interns or recently graduated tourism students have to use each language skill (*Speaking*, *Listening*, *Writing*, and *Reading*) in their company on a scale from 1 (*Not used*) to 5 (*Constantly used*). As Table 8.2 reveals, *Speaking* and *Listening* were rated as the most frequently used skills by all types of companies except for travel/event organisation ones, where *Writing* and *Reading* are more frequently used. Comparative analyses revealed that differences were only significant for one of the skills, *Writing*, which was rated as significantly less frequent by tourist information than by travel/event organisation ($p = 0.14$) and accommodation ($p = 0.46$) companies ($\chi^2(3) = 7.942, p = 0.047$).

The final question in this section asked employers about the importance for students to speak English in order for them to be hired on a scale from 1 (*Not important*) to 5 (*Extremely important*). Once again, the ratings provided were very high (see Table 8.3), with no company selecting the lowest rating of 1 (see Fig. 8.3), and no significant differences being revealed between the ratings of the different types of companies ($\chi^2(3) = 2.649, p = 0.449$). In addition, 66 out of the 139 employers (distributed equally across the different types of companies) reported conducting an interview in English before hiring students.

Main Functions Performed in English in Tourism Companies

The second section of the questionnaire was aimed at answering Research Questions 2 and 4 and finding out about the frequency in which the language functions extracted from the syllabi reviewed (see Data Collection) are actually carried out in English by interns or recently graduated tourism students in the workplace in order to find out whether EfT in Spain meets the needs of employers. The first question asked respondents to rate the frequency in which these 22 functions are performed by graduates on a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Constantly*). The mean ratings of each function by each type of company are given in Table 8.4, and they reveal that not all the functions included in the ESP syllabi are frequently carried out by students in the workplace. Accommodation companies reported that only 15 out of the 22 functions are frequently performed (i.e. mean over 3.5). These functions are given below in order of frequency:

1. Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers and introducing themselves/others
2. Giving directions and practical information
3. Making bookings
4. Reading emails and letters
5. Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on
6. Handling telephone calls
7. Communicating formally and politely
8. Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers
9. Offering products and services
10. Talking about prices, fees, payments, and so on
11. Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions
12. Writing emails and letters
13. Using specific vocabulary
14. Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers
15. Apologising and dealing with complaints

The same functions were rated as frequent by tourist information centres, with the exception of *Making bookings* and *Apologising and dealing with complaints*. These 13 functions are given below in order of frequency:

1. Giving directions and practical information
2. Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on
3. Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers
4. Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers and introducing themselves/others
5. Using specific vocabulary
6. Talking about prices, fees, payments, and so on
7. Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions
8. Offering products and services
9. Reading emails and letters
10. Communicating formally and politely
11. Writing emails and letters
12. Handling telephone calls
13. Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers

Similarly, cultural/active tourism companies rated as frequent the same functions as tourist information centres, except for *Handling telephone calls*. These 12 functions are given below in order of frequency:

1. Using specific vocabulary
2. Communicating formally and politely
3. Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers, and introducing themselves/others
4. Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers
5. Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers
6. Giving directions and practical information
7. Talking about prices, fees, payments, and so on
8. Offering products and services
9. Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions
10. Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on
11. Writing emails and letters
12. Reading emails and letters

Interestingly, the functions that these three types of companies rated as the least frequent ones were the same ones: (1) *Attending and participating in meetings*, (2) *Negotiating products and services*, (3) *Writing reports and other documents*, (4) *Reading instructions, manuals, and so on*, and (5) *Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on*.

On the other hand, only eight functions were rated as frequent by travel/event organisation companies, with some of them not being considered frequent by any of the other types of companies (i.e. *Reading reports and other documents*, and *Writing reports and other documents*). These functions are given below in order of frequency:

1. Writing emails and letters
2. Reading emails and letters
3. Reading reports and other documents
4. Using specific vocabulary
5. Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers
6. Handling telephone calls
7. Communicating formally and politely
8. Writing reports and other documents

In addition, the functions rated as the least frequent ones by this type of company are mostly different from the ones in the other three types of companies: (1) *Giving directions and practical information*, (2) *Negotiating products and services*, (3) *Apologising and dealing with complaints*, (4) *Attending and participating in meetings*, and (5) *Making presentations and tours*. Surprisingly, only 5 out of the 22 functions are considered frequent by all types of companies: (1) *Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers*, (2) *Communicating formally and politely*, (3) *Using specific vocabulary*, (4) *Reading emails and letters*, and (5) *Writing emails and letters*.

Furthermore, the comparative analyses performed revealed significant group differences for 11 out of the 22 functions: (1) *Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers and introducing themselves/others* ($p < 0.001$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by the travel/event organisation companies; (2) *Handling telephone calls* ($p = 0.015$), due to the significantly higher ratings given by accommodation companies; (3) *Asking clients*

about their preferences and making suggestions ($p = 0.004$), due to the significantly higher ratings given by tourist information and accommodation companies; (4) *Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers* ($p = 0.024$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (5) *Offering products and services* ($p = 0.005$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (6) *Giving directions and practical information* ($p < 0.001$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by the travel/event organisation companies; (7) *Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on* ($p < 0.001$), due to the significantly higher ratings given by tourist information and accommodation companies; (8) *Talking about prices, fees, payments, and so on* ($p = 0.003$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (9) *Making bookings* ($p < 0.001$), due to the significantly higher ratings given by accommodation companies; (10) *Apologising and dealing with complaints* ($p = 0.048$), due to the significantly higher ratings given by accommodation companies; and (11) *Reading emails and letters* ($p = 0.049$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by cultural/active tourism companies. These results reveal that companies in the tourism industry differ with regards to the type of functions they require students to perform at work. The means also suggest that not all functions are frequently conducted by students in the workplace.

The last item in this section was an optional open-ended question that allowed respondents to include any other functions that students normally perform at work. Only five respondents answered this question, and they all mentioned the translation of documents, such as tour guides or menus. The lack of responses to this question suggests that the content included in the ESP courses of tourism degrees in Spain covers all the functions that students need to conduct at work, except for translations, although not all functions are equally frequent, as it was revealed by the previous question.

Preparation of Tourism Students to Use English in the Workplace

The last section of the questionnaire was aimed at answering Research Questions 3 and 4 and finding out how prepared interns or recently graduated tourism are to perform different functions in English in the workplace and meet the needs of employers. The first question enquired about the overall English language competence that students have, so respondents were asked to rate their preparation when they start working at their companies on a scale from 1 (*Not prepared*) to 5 (*Extremely prepared*). The means in Table 8.5 clearly reveal that all companies believe that students are not very prepared, and the comparative analysis showed no significant differences between the ratings of the different types of companies ($\chi^2(3) = 7.075, p = 0.070$). Interestingly, as Fig. 8.4 shows, most respondents chose the middle rating of 3 (i.e. *Somewhat prepared*) and only 1 out of the 139 companies reported students being extremely prepared (i.e. the highest rating of 5).

The next question asked respondents to rate how prepared interns or recently graduated tourism students are to carry out in English the 22 functions extracted from the ESP syllabi on a scale from 1 (*Not prepared at all*) to 5 (*Extremely prepared*). The mean ratings of each function by each type of company are given in Table 8.6. They are overall considerably lower than the means in Table 8.4 and suggest that all types of companies believe that tourism students are not very prepared to perform these functions in English. Accommodation companies reported that students are prepared to perform only 2 out of the 22 functions (i.e. mean over 3.5): (1) *Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers, and introducing themselves/others* (mean = 3.627) and (2) *Reading emails and letters* (mean = 3.612). A similar picture was revealed for cultural/active tourism companies, which rated students as only being prepared to perform one function (*Welcoming/greeting clients/suppliers, and introducing themselves/others*; mean = 3.552), and for travel/event organisation companies, who do not rate any of the functions over 3.5.

The ratings of tourist information centres were slightly more positive, with four functions rated over 3.5, but all of them with a mean below 4. These functions are given below in order of students' competence:

1. Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers, and introducing themselves/others
2. Giving directions and practical information
3. Reading emails and letters
4. Describing products, attractions, tours, tourist destinations, and so on

On the other hand, the functions with the lowest ratings differ by type of company, but all types of companies rated (1) *Negotiating products and services*, (2) *Attending and participating in meetings*, and (3) *Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on*, within the functions that students are the least prepared to perform.

In addition, the comparative analyses conducted revealed significant group differences for only 5 out of the 22 functions: (1) *Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions* ($p = 0.050$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (2) *Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers* ($p = 0.017$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (3) *Offering products and services* ($p = 0.022$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; (4) *Giving directions and practical information* ($p = 0.018$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies; and (5) *Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on*, ($p = 0.003$), due to the significantly lower ratings given by travel/event organisation companies.

The following question asked employers to answer an open-ended question commenting on the most common problems or difficulties interns or recently graduated students face when using English in the workplace. Fifty-two respondents (distributed equally across the different types of companies) agreed that students' oral expression (i.e. speaking skill) is the most common difficulty. A further 34 respondents (distributed equally across the different types of companies) mentioned students' problems when understanding clients (i.e. listening skill), particularly

when handling telephone calls. Conversely, issues related to written comprehension and expression appear less problematic: only four respondents noted problems when reading texts and eight when writing, particularly emails and reports.

In addition, 16 respondents attributed students' difficulties with transactions and routine tasks to limited everyday expressions and specific vocabulary (e.g. hospitality, history and arts, biology and geology, administration), which were mentioned as key to avoid misunderstandings or miscommunication. In contrast, only one respondent raised grammar errors as a handicap to fulfil regular tasks and another one mentioned transfer errors as a consequence of students thinking in Spanish and translating into English rather than being able to directly use the target language. Dealing with cultural differences was raised as another problem by employers, who commented on the limited courtesy and protocol formulae that students know in English, as well as understanding foreign accents and English native speakers. Interestingly, five employers specifically linked students' inaccurate performance at work with an insufficient instruction received at university, and a further one mentioned that their best employees had acquired a proficient level of English from additional courses outside of university.

Finally, psychological constraints were also highlighted as factors hindering students' performance at work: shyness and embarrassment, along with lack of self-confidence and personal initiative, were raised by respondents from the four types of companies as aspects affecting communication, especially when it is oral. According to the answers received, anxiety and stress play a negative role when students are asked to deal directly with the customer: the fear of not understanding or being understood because of their limited fluency or strong Spanish accent are added difficulties to the lack of practice using the target language.

The last question of the survey was an open-ended question that asked employers to comment on what they would include on an English course for tourism students to prepare them for the workplace. The answers received raised two main aspects by the majority of the respondents: communication skills and specific vocabulary. With regard to communication, oral skills were mentioned in general by 32 respondents (distributed equally across the different types of companies), as well as for specific

functions, with the most representative ones being assisting clients (24 respondents), handling complaints (13 respondents), giving information (8 respondents), using the telephone (6 respondents), solving problems (5 respondents), making reservations (5 respondents), guiding (5 respondents), making suggestions (4 respondents), and selling products (4 respondents). Interestingly, 7 respondents specifically suggested the use of more role-plays. Written communication skills were mentioned by six respondents, specifically for writing emails.

In relation to specific vocabulary, 43 respondents (distributed equally across the different types of companies) mentioned it in their answer. Other answers highlighted the need for more English practice (four respondents), understanding different accents (three respondents), and improving the level of the students (three respondents).

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presented the results from a survey conducted with 139 employers from different tourist companies (i.e. accommodation businesses, cultural/active tourism companies, tourist information centres, and travel/event organisation agencies) with the aim of finding out whether EfT in Spain meets employers' needs and prepares students for the workplace. More specifically, four research questions were addressed: (1) what is the general use and importance of English by tourism companies in Spain?; (2) what are the main functions that tourism students need to perform in English in the workplace?; (3) how prepared are students to perform those functions?; and (4) does EfT in Spain meet the needs of employers?

With regard to the first research question and in line with several studies that highlight the importance of speaking a second language in the tourism industry (Davies, 2000; Goodenough & Page, 1993; Hagen, 1992; Metcalfe, 1991; Sindik & Božinović, 2013), our questionnaire revealed that the four types of companies surveyed use English very frequently and consider speaking this language very important to hire tourism students, which has also been found by other studies (e.g. Blue & Harun, 2003; Hijirida, 1980). In fact, 47.5% of the companies confirmed

conducting an interview in English before hiring them, which demonstrates the importance of being proficient in English to be able to work in this sector. It was also revealed that, in most companies, English is mainly used to communicate with clients/visitors—except for travel/event organisation agencies, who use English more frequently with providers/other businesses, although they also use it with clients. This result is not surprising, as one of the main duties of tourism-related jobs is to connect people (Alcantud-Díaz et al., 2014), deal with the customer, and make them feel welcome (Blue & Harun, 2003; Torres & Kline, 2013).

All four types of companies reported that interns or recently graduated tourism students use all language skills at work very frequently, which supports the findings by Bobanović and Gržinić (2011), Kay and Russette (2000), and Moattarian and Tahririan (2014), who suggest that competence in both the oral and written dimensions of the language is essential for successful communication in the hospitality and tourism sector. However, speaking and listening were rated as the most frequent skills for accommodation, cultural/active tourism, and tourist information companies, and writing and reading for travel/event organisation agencies. Tourist information centres actually reported using writing significantly less frequently than the other companies. These results are in line with Al-Khatib (2005), who also found that the most used skill for travel agents is writing, and with a large number of studies who emphasised the importance of listening and, particularly, speaking skills (Adorján, 2013; Bury & Oka, 2017; Buzarna-Tihenea & Nadrag, 2017; Noor, 2008; Prachanant, 2012; Rahayu, 2020).

The survey items that addressed Research Questions 2 and 4 revealed that not all the language functions included in the EfT offered at Spanish universities are frequently carried out by students in the workplace, and differences were found between the different types of companies with regard to the functions they perform most and least frequently (e.g. *Making bookings* was only rated as a frequent function by accommodation companies and *Reading reports and other documents* only by travel/event organisation agencies). However, despite the differences between the companies, the ratings of accommodation, cultural/active tourism, and tourist information companies were again similar, with most frequent functions being roughly the same for all three, and the least

frequent functions being the same ones: (1) *Attending and participating in meetings*, (2) *Negotiating products and services*, (3) *Writing reports and other documents*, (4) *Reading instructions, manuals, and so on*, and (5) *Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on*. On the other hand, the ratings of travel/event organisation agencies were considerably different, with the least frequent functions being related to listening and speaking skills, and the most frequent functions to reading and writing skills, in line with the findings presented in the previous paragraph. As suggested by Blue and Harun (2003), this is due to the different needs that different hospitality providers have.

Interestingly, 5 of the 22 functions were not rated as frequent by any of the companies: (1) *Making presentations and tours*, (2) *Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on*, (3) *Negotiating products and services*, (4) *Attending and participating in meetings*, and (5) *Reading instructions, manuals, and so on*, probably because they mainly focus on the business dimension of the tourism industry. Conversely, only five functions were considered frequent by all types of companies: (1) *Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers*, (2) *Communicating formally and politely*, (3) *Using specific vocabulary*, (4) *Reading emails and letters*, and (5) *Writing emails and letters*. Relatedly, García-Laborda (2005) and Yasmin et al. (2016) found that tourism materials and textbooks do not fully address students' needs, so this finding will be relevant for EfT course and materials developers, as well teachers, so that they can concentrate on what is relevant for students in the workplace by focusing on the most frequent functions and potentially excluding the least frequent ones.

Finally, the data gathered to address Research Questions 3 and 4 suggest that tourism students' overall English language competence is not sufficient for the workplace. With regard to their preparation to fulfil the different functions taught by EfT syllabi, it was revealed that all companies believe that students are not prepared to perform these functions in English, with all of them rated below 3.7, especially travel/event organisation companies, whose ratings were even lower. According to accommodation, cultural/active tourism, and tourist information companies, students are only prepared to carry out very basic functions such as *Welcoming and greeting clients/suppliers and introducing themselves/others* and *Reading emails and letters*, with tourist information centres also rating

Giving directions and practical information and *Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on*, over 3.5. On the other hand, travel/event organisation companies did not rate any of the functions over 3.5. With regard to the functions with the lowest ratings, although they differ by type of company, all of them ranked *Negotiating products and services*, *Attending and participating in meetings*, and *Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on*, within the functions that students are the least prepared to perform in English. These three functions were actually rated as the least frequent ones by all types of companies, which would make these results less concerning, if the ratings of the other functions were not so low.

This lack of preparation was supported by an open-ended question about the most common problems interns or recently graduated tourism students face when using English in the workplace. Most respondents reported difficulties with oral skills (speaking and listening), which were attributed not only to reduced academic training but also to psychological constraints such as shyness and lack of self-confidence. Similar results were reported by Bury and Oka (2017), who also found that confidence and communicative competence (listening and speaking) were perceived as crucial skills by tourism students.

Therefore, we can conclude that the functions included in the EfT syllabi at Spanish universities attempt to meet the needs of the employers in this sector, as only 5 of the 22 functions found in these programmes were not rated as frequent by any of the companies and only translation was raised in the question that allowed respondents to mention other common functions that had not been included—although, as mentioned above, not all the functions are performed as frequently by all types of companies. However, even though the content matches the employers' potential needs, our results showed that tourism students are not prepared to fulfil these functions in the workplace.

In sum, our findings reveal that tourism undergraduate degrees in Spain include in their EfT modules topics and skills that cover the main professional needs that employers in this sector have, but this does not seem to prepare students for the workplace. Relatedly, Bury and Oka (2017, p. 174) found “a possible mismatch” between the real needs and aims of the students and the content found in English-language courses.

We have now confirmed that the same is true for employers' needs, although the issue does not seem to lay with the content of the ESP modules offered, but to be related to the methodology and materials employed at universities or the need for more ECTS on EfT. Courses and materials, as well as lessons, need to be tailored more closely to meet industry practitioners' needs, who emphasised communication skills (mainly oral) and specific vocabulary and, hence, prepare students to succeed in the workplace.

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 8.1 Rating means and SDs of the frequency in which English is used in each type of company

	Mean	SD
Accommodation (<i>N</i> = 67)	4.567	0.701
Cultural/active tourism (<i>N</i> = 29)	4.207	0.902
Tourist information (<i>N</i> = 21)	4.286	0.902
Travel/event organisation (<i>N</i> = 22)	4.181	1.053

Table 8.2 Rating means and SDs of the frequency in which each skill is used by students in each type of company

	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
Accommodation (<i>N</i> = 67)	4.478 (0.6596)	4.478 (0.660)	4.075 (0.822)	4.164 (0.790)
Cultural/active tourism (<i>N</i> = 29)	4.172 (0.889)	4.138 (0.953)	3.655 (1.233)	3.793 (1.146)
Tourist information (<i>N</i> = 21)	4.381 (0.669)	4.429 (0.676)	3.571 (0.978)	3.667 (0.856)
Travel/event organisation (<i>N</i> = 22)	4.000 (1.234)	4.000 (1.195)	4.273 (0.883)	4.273 (0.827)

Table 8.3 Rating means and SDs of the importance to speak English to be hired in each type of company

	Mean	SD
Accommodation (<i>N</i> = 67)	4.418	0.677
Cultural/active tourism (<i>N</i> = 29)	4.276	0.751
Tourist information (<i>N</i> = 21)	4.238	0.831
Travel/event organisation (<i>N</i> = 22)	4.000	1.069

Table 8.4 Rating means and SDs of the frequency in which each function is performed in English by students in each type of company

	Accomm	Cultural/active tourism	Tourist info	Travel/event organisat
Welcoming/ greeting clients/ suppliers, introducing themselves/ others	4.403 (0.818)	4.034 (0.865)	4.190 (0.873)	3.182 (12.587)
Socialising and making small talk with clients/ suppliers	3.970 (0.999)	3.897 (11.131)	3.810 (0.928)	3.591 (12.596)
Handling telephone calls	4.254 (0.785)	3.483 (13.261)	3.857 (0.910)	3.591 (12.212)
Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions	4.179 (0.869)	3.621 (12.075)	4.048 (0.921)	3.136 (13.200)
Answering questions and solving problems from clients/ suppliers	4.239 (0.836)	4.000 (10.351)	4.286 (0.784)	3.409 (12.212)
Offering products and services	4.194 (0.857)	3.724 (12.789)	4.048 (0.865)	3.091 (13.420)
Giving directions and practical info	4.388 (0.673)	3.897 (11.447)	4.381 (0.669)	2.727 (12.414)
Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on	4.299 (0.759)	3.621 (11.153)	4.381 (0.590)	3.000 (13.093)
Talking about prices, fees, payments	4.194 (0.925)	3.793 (13.196)	4.095 (0.995)	3.045 (12.902)

(continued)

Table 8.4 (continued)

	Accomm	Cultural/active tourism	Tourist info	Travel/event organisat
Making presentations and tours	3.328 (12.357)	3.483 (13.789)	3.238 (10.443)	3.000 (13.452)
Making bookings	4.343 (0.827)	3.276 (16.453)	3.143 (15.260)	3.273 (13.864)
Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on	2.896 (12.569)	3.069 (14.864)	2.810 (14.703)	3.227 (14.452)
Negotiating products and services	2.761 (13.381)	2.552 (15.489)	2.190 (15.368)	2.955 (14.631)
Attending and participating in meetings	2.403 (12.316)	2.345 (13.700)	2.000 (12.247)	3.000 (14.800)
Communicating formally and politely	4.254 (0.859)	4.069 (10.997)	4.000 (10.000)	3.545 (11.843)
Apologising and dealing with complaints	3.910 (10.693)	3.379 (14.739)	3.476 (12.498)	3.000 (14.475)
Using specific vocabulary	4.104 (0.855)	4.276 (0.996)	4.143 (0.793)	3.636 (11.358)
Reading emails and letters	4.328 (0.824)	3.517 (15.029)	4.048 (0.805)	3.909 (10.193)
Reading reports and other documents	3.343 (12.857)	3.138 (14.324)	3.333 (12.383)	3.682 (13.588)
Reading instructions, manuals, and so on	3.075 (12.710)	3.069 (12.798)	2.810 (12.091)	3.182 (15.625)
Writing emails and letters	4.134 (10.135)	3.621 (14.246)	4.000 (0.837)	3.955 (11.329)
Writing reports and other documents	3.060 (12.294)	2.931 (14.125)	2.714 (11.892)	3.500 (14.058)

Table 8.5 Rating means and SDs of the overall English competence of students in each type of company

	Mean	SD
Accommodation (<i>N</i> = 67)	3.149	0.657
Cultural/active tourism (<i>N</i> = 29)	3.034	0.823
Tourist information (<i>N</i> = 21)	3.190	0.680
Travel/event organisation (<i>N</i> = 22)	2.636	0.902

Table 8.6 Rating means and SDs of students' preparation to perform each function in English in each type of company

	Accomm	Cultural/ active tourism	Tourist info	Travel/event organisat
Welcoming/greeting clients/suppliers, introducing themselves/others	3.627 (0.775)	3.552 (0.736)	3.762 (0.625)	3.273 (0.827)
Socialising and making small talk with clients/suppliers	3.284 (0.755)	3.069 (0.704)	3.238 (0.625)	2.727 (0.883)
Handling telephone calls	3.045 (0.787)	3.000 (0.802)	3.238 (0.700)	2.727 (0.827)
Asking clients about their preferences and making suggestions	3.209 (0.729)	3.138 (0.875)	3.333 (0.799)	2.682 (0.780)
Answering questions and solving problems from clients/suppliers	3.045 (0.727)	2.931 (0.799)	3.238 (0.831)	2.545 (0.738)
Offering products and services	3.209 (0.749)	3.172 (0.848)	3.286 (0.717)	2.636 (0.789)
Giving directions and practical info	3.463 (0.745)	3.241 (0.786)	3.667 (0.658)	2.955 (0.844)
Describing products, attractions, tourist destinations, and so on	3.418 (0.819)	3.138 (0.833)	3.571 (0.746)	2.727 (0.827)
Talking about prices, fees, payments	3.269 (0.827)	3.138 (0.743)	3.143 (0.910)	2.818 (0.853)

(continued)

Table 8.6 (continued)

	Accomm	Cultural/ active tourism	Tourist info	Travel/event organisat
Making presentations and tours	3.015 (0.807)	2.931 (0.884)	3.238 (0.889)	2.818 (10.065)
Making bookings	3.373 (0.755)	3.172 (0.966)	3.190 (0.814)	2.864 (0.774)
Doing marketing, advertising, publicity, promotions, and so on	2.761 (0.780)	2.966 (0.944)	2.952 (0.669)	2.591 (0.796)
Negotiating products and services	2.612 (0.870)	2.759 (0.872)	2.667 (0.856)	2.318 (0.894)
Attending and participating in meetings	2.612 (0.834)	2.862 (0.915)	3.000 (0.837)	2.455 (0.858)
Communicating formally and politely	3.239 (0.818)	3.310 (0.849)	3.381 (0.669)	2.864 (0.889)
Apologising and dealing with complaints	3.134 (0.903)	3.034 (0.906)	3.048 (0.973)	2.591 (0.854)
Using specific vocabulary	2.985 (0.807)	3.000 (10.000)	3.333 (0.856)	2.591 (0.908)
Reading emails and letters	3.612 (0.738)	3.379 (0.820)	3.667 (0.730)	3.136 (0.889)
Reading reports and other documents	3.269 (0.790)	3.276 (0.882)	3.429 (10.282)	3.045 (0.999)
Reading instructions, manuals, and so on	3.209 (0.808)	3.241 (0.786)	3.286 (0.902)	3.045 (0.999)
Writing emails and letters	3.433 (0.821)	3.310 (0.930)	3.190 (10.305)	2.864 (0.990)
Writing reports and other documents	3.030 (0.738)	3.034 (0.981)	2.762 (0.889)	2.682 (0.995)

Appendix 2: Figures

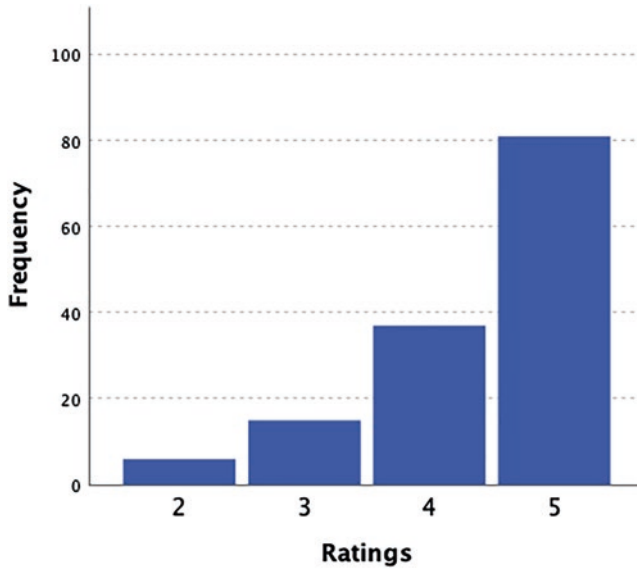


Fig. 8.1 Frequency of the ratings in the question about the use of English in the companies

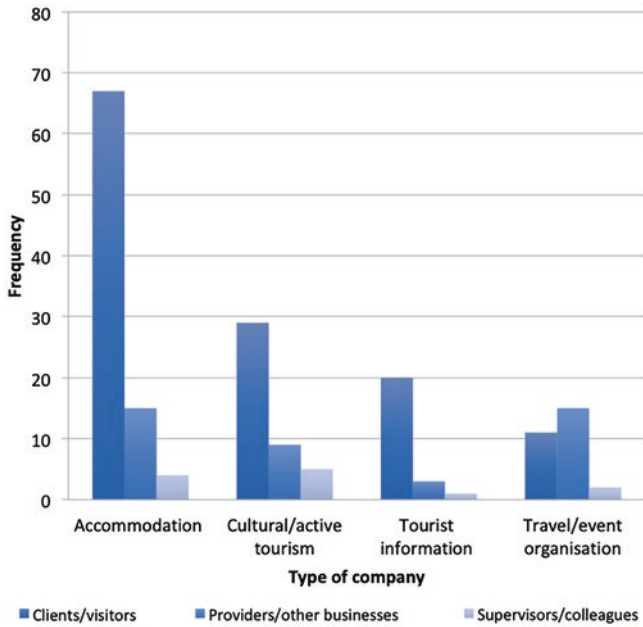


Fig. 8.2 Frequency of the people students interact with in each type of company

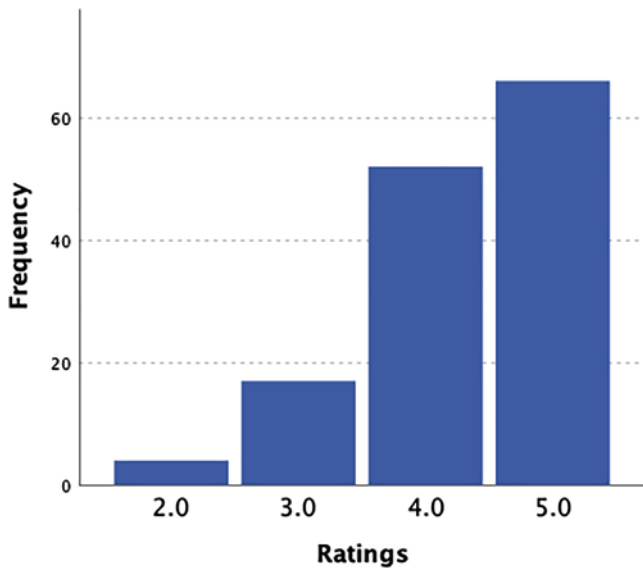


Fig. 8.3 Frequency of the ratings in the question about the importance to speak English to be hired in the company

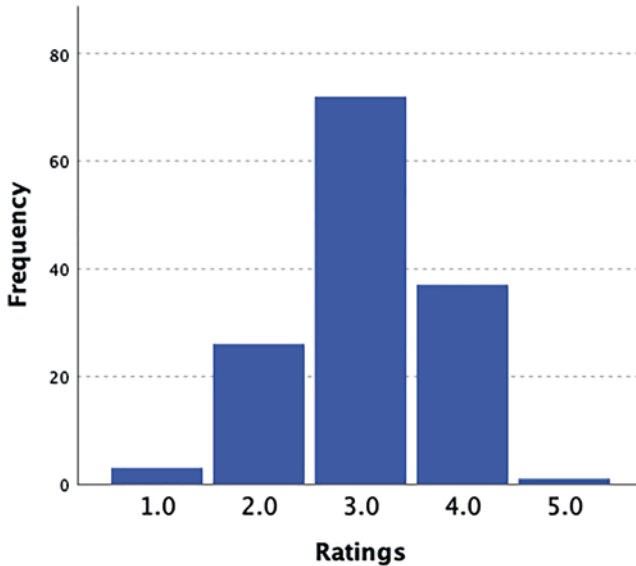


Fig. 8.4 Frequency of the ratings in the question about the overall English competence of student

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