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Tourism Students' and Recent Graduates' Perceptions of Integrating Soft Skills into English for Tourism Courses

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Abstract

In the dynamic and service-oriented industry, tourism requires employees to possess a combination of high-touch and high-tech skills. For high-touch skills, English courses for tourism students provide an appropriate context for developing these competencies because language learning naturally involves communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. This study investigated tourism students' and recent graduates' perceptions of the integration of soft skills into English for Tourism (EFT) courses at the University of Finance – Marketing (UFM). A quantitative research design was employed using an online questionnaire administered to 118 current students and recent graduates of UFM from the 2022–2025 cohorts. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that participants considered all twelve pre-identified soft skills as important for their future careers. Participants also strongly supported integrating soft skills into EFT courses. Although current EFT courses were perceived to positively contribute to soft skills development, their contribution was relatively limited. This revealed a gap between the participants' perception of the significance of soft skills to tourism majors and their perceived contribution of existing tourism English curricula to the development of these skills. The findings also demonstrated that EFT courses should adopt more experiential and learner-centered pedagogical approaches, such as authentic workplace simulations, collaborative learning, intercultural communication, and reflective activities.

Keywords: English for Tourism (EFT); soft-skills integration; learner perceptions; employability; experiential learning; Vietnam

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1. Introduction

Tourism has been the fastest-growing industry since the beginning of the 21st century (Robin Walker & Keith Harding, 2006, p. 10). In a series of meetings lasting from 2007 to the end of 2009 for the summit titled “Tourism Education Futures - 2010-2030: Building the Capacity to Lead”, 45 senior tourism educators and tourism experts from 13 countries discussed how tourism education should develop between 2010 and 2030 to prepare graduates for a rapidly changing tourism industry (Sheldon et al., 2008). The summit admitted that this industry has been strongly affected by external impacts such as social diversity, technological development, and climate change. Tourism students who are entering these fragile and sensitive sectors need to have a new set of skills, competencies, and knowledge to work (Sheldon et al., 2008) because this industry requires a labor force with “high touch and high tech”. “High touch” could mean soft skills that tourism employees apply to satisfy tourists, and “high tech” refers

to hard skills and knowledge to work in the industry (International Air Transport Association [IATA], 2007, pp. 31–34).

English and interpersonal skills related to English use have become crucial elements for doing business effectively in the globalized world. The service sector, especially tourism, needs a labor force with English competence and interpersonal skills. As Delors (1996) reported, from 60 to 80 percent of the population of industrialized countries work in the service sector. People working in the service sector need not only “hard” skills, known as professional skills, but also “soft” skills or interpersonal skills (Delors, 1996).

Therefore, the summit suggested that tourism education should be comprehensively redesigned by rethinking both what is taught and how it is delivered. This transformation requires redefining the knowledge and skills expected of graduates, questioning traditional assumptions and educational structures, and moving beyond conventional teaching practices (Sheldon et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, even universities in Europe have not provided sufficient numbers of qualified entry-level employees for the tourism labor market (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022; Tanković et al., 2021). One of the reasons for the shortage of soft skills among recent graduates is that universities have not identified proper soft skills for each major, even though they have integrated soft skills into their curricula (Namjildorj, 2025). According to Namjildorj (2025), universities should survey stakeholders to find out updated and necessary soft skills for each major before designing and implementing their curriculum.

Likewise, UFM has been seeking ways to improve its curriculum recently; however, the university has not properly identified and assessed the soft skills for tourism students. As English teachers of English for Tourism courses (EFT) at the University of Finance – Marketing (UFM), the authors hope to identify appropriate soft skills, competencies, and activities to improve tourism education at UFM through their survey research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of hard skills and soft skills

Cologne (2000) defines hard skills as “the academic skills, experiences, and expertise which are specific, can be easily taught, and include things like being able to read a book, an article, or write an essay. Most people with the same level of education and experience should have roughly the same level of hard skills.” He also defines soft skills as “personal values and interpersonal skills that determine a person's ability to fit into a particular structure, such as a project team, a rock group, or a company” (Cologne, 2000, p. 1).

According to Robles (2012), hard skills refer to the technical knowledge and job-specific competencies required to perform occupational tasks. They are typically acquired through education and training and can be readily measured and evaluated. Whereas soft skills are non-technical personal attributes, interpersonal abilities, and professional behaviors that enable individuals to interact effectively with others and perform successfully in the workplace (Robles, 2012).

Coates (2006) said that hard skills are technical or administrative procedures related to an organization's core business, such as machine operation, computer protocols, safety standards, financial procedures, and sales administration. These skills are typically easy to observe, quantify, and measure. In contrast, he defined soft skills as “people skills,” which are more difficult to observe and quantify. These skills are essential not only in the workplace but also in everyday life, as they enable individuals to communicate effectively, listen actively, engage

in dialogue, provide feedback, collaborate with others, solve problems, contribute to meetings, and resolve conflicts (Coates, 2006).

Generally, soft skills are personal values and interpersonal skills that demonstrate how people communicate and interact with one another. They are skills related to personal traits and the sensibility to communicate and deal with problems at work. They do not relate to technical or professional proficiency or experience. Briefly, soft skills include two main parts: personal traits and interpersonal skills.

2.2. The Importance of Soft Skills in the Service and Tourism Sectors

Tanković et al. (2021) state that the tourism workplace requires employees to have soft skills for two main reasons. The first reason is that this is a ‘people-based industry’ which deals with different sectors and suppliers working together to provide services to tourists. Secondly, tourism is a leisure industry that demands workforces to use their soft skills in order to make customers happy. These interpersonal qualities can be particularly important in service encounters. However, studies showed that tourism students are not sufficiently prepared for the workplace (Lolli, 2013; Stevens, 2005 as cited in Tanković et al., 2021). Thus, the tourism workplace lacks qualified entry-level employees who possess soft skills (Tanković et al., 2021).

Robles (2012) examined the importance of the top 10 soft skills by surveying 90 business executives to identify soft skills that employers expected their new employees to possess. The findings revealed that high levels of importance were assigned to soft skills, including integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic. This illustrated that employers placed considerable importance on those soft skills when evaluating prospective employees.

2.3. Soft skills required in the Tourism Industry

In this research, the writers focus on the soft skills that can be taught or trained in English courses for tourism majors, not the innate personal traits. Therefore, the literature review was narrowed to identify important soft skills for tourism students and staff.

The summit “Tourism Education Futures - 2010-2030” summarized core values that tourism education should be built on, such as cultural diversity, creativity and innovation, experiential learning, openness, respect for people, lifelong learning, and ethics (Sheldon et al., 2008). It also pointed out skills that tourism education should develop, including teamwork, effective listening and negotiation, leadership and motivation, virtual collaboration, emotional intelligence, adaptability, multitasking, critical thinking, practical judgment, innovation and entrepreneurship, digital communication, cross-cultural competence, risk management, and proactive problem prevention (Sheldon et al., 2008).

Radovanović & Mitrović (2022) surveyed learners’ perceptions of the contribution of English language courses to soft skills development. Their questionnaire included 32 identical, randomly ordered statements describing skills and personal attributes. Each statement related to one of the 12 soft skills. Their results showed that EFT contributed most strongly to the development of verbal communication, cultural adaptation, critical thinking and problem-solving; positively to non-verbal communication, teamwork, presentation skills, time

management, adaptability and flexibility; moderately to empathy, information skills, decision-making, and conflict management.

In broader research, Tanković et al. (2021) surveyed 404 students majoring in tourism and 431 tourists to examine the importance of 19 pre-identified skills from the perspectives of the two groups. In the paper, the researchers classified the 19 skills into two categories: 5 communication skills and 14 soft skills. Both students and tourists acknowledged the investigated communication skills and soft skills as essential competencies in the tourism industry. Though there were slight differences between students and tourists in their perspectives, they both rated oral communication skills as very important, and the other skills as very important or extremely important, with mean scores for most skills exceeding 4, ranging from 4.25 to 4.81. Only listening communication skills (3.84) were considered moderately important.

2.4. Description of the selected soft skills

According to the literature, researchers used different terms or categories to describe soft skills in their studies. Based on the study of Radovanović & Mitrović (2022), who classified 32 statements describing personal qualities and competencies into 12 soft skills, the authors of this paper, along with the studies of Tanković et al. (2021) and Robles (2012), provided a basis for examining the importance and development of these soft skills in the present study.

Some common soft skills are essential for tourism employees to master so they can fulfill their tasks properly. The first and most important one is communication skills, which refer to “the ability to share ideas, feelings, opinions, and information between two or more parties in a way that a common understanding of the message among all parties is ensured” (Youssef, 2017, as cited in Tanković et al., 2021). Previous studies (Robles, 2012; Tanković et al., 2021) also regarded communication skills as very important. Tourism staff need to communicate in different contexts, directly and indirectly, online and offline, formally and informally, verbally and non-verbally. Communication skills in tourism not only convey verbal messages but also combine non-verbal expressions (Tanković et al., 2021). Secondly, teamwork and building relationships are highly rated in these surveys. This skill is the ability to cooperate and work effectively with others (Tanković et al., 2021; Robles, 2012). Thirdly, conflict management and resolving conflicts relate to handling disagreements constructively (Tanković et al., 2021). The fourth important one is empathy, which enables tourism staff to understand others’ feelings and maintain good relationships (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022). This construct has been labeled differently across studies. Tanković et al. (2021) described it as demonstrating emotional self-control, whereas Sheldon et al. (2008) described it as emotional intelligence. Fifthly, adaptability and flexibility refer to the ability to adjust to changing situations and diverse environments (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022; Tanković et al., 2021). The sixth important soft skill is time management, which means managing workload and priorities effectively (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022).

Besides the six overlapping highly rated soft skills mentioned in the two studies, five additional soft skills were rated highly from students’ perspectives in the survey of Radovanović & Mitrović (2022) and other studies (Robles, 2012; Sheldon et al., 2008). The seventh important soft skill is information skills, including the ability to combine relevant

information from multiple sources, to identify and use appropriate sources of information, and to apply obtained information to new and broader contexts (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022). Eighth, presentation skills are the abilities to deliver effective presentations and to select and use visual aids to support arguments (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022). The next one is cultural adaptability, including abilities to work in a culturally diverse work environment, to consider cultural barriers in communications, and to understand and demonstrate cultural awareness in dealing with others (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022). Critical thinking and problem-solving are grouped into a skill that refers to abilities to identify key features of a problem and consider multiple factors, to generate potential options, and to implement solutions proactively (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022). Finally, decision-making is the ability to identify all relevant facts for making a decision and to consider multiple alternatives before deciding (Radovanović & Mitrović, 2022).

2.5. The need to integrate soft skills into English for Tourism courses

Namjildorj (2025) concluded that soft skills are not adequately integrated into the curriculum. She also found that university programs examined in her research place greater emphasis on hard or technical skills than on soft skills. Therefore, students at universities in Mongolia still lack competencies in soft skills that employers expect. Consequently, she suggested that universities in Mongolia should incorporate soft skills more effectively into their curricula and adopt appropriate methods to help students acquire them (Namjildorj, 2025). Other researchers also recommended that soft skills should be integrated into universities' curricula (Succi and Canovi, 2019, as cited in Tanković et al., 2021)

Robles (2012) proposed three ways of training soft skills at universities. The first way is to “create a separate university course which would include the development of soft skills as its primary objective.” This approach may be the least practical because it may require changing the structure of the curriculum. The second way is to “include soft skills training as an integral part of other courses.” Nevertheless, this approach may cause difficulties for the lecturers because of the overwhelming content load in these courses. The third way is to “include soft skills as an integral component of the language courses”. According to Robles (2012), the third approach is the most suitable option because language courses require learners to communicate in different forms. Moreover, many English teaching materials ask students to practice soft skills and the ability to communicate effectively (Robles, 2012).

Radovanović & Mitrović (2022) showed in their research results that English for Health Tourism (EHT) courses helped their students develop their soft skills. In a similar view, Tanković et al. (2021) proposed embedding soft skills in EFT courses to prepare future tourism employees. Tevdovska (2015) recommended developing soft skills through English-course activities such as task-based and problem-solving activities, group discussions and debates, oral and poster presentations, role plays and dialogues, and professional writing tasks.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methods

In this study, with the primary purpose of investigating learners' points of view about the importance of soft skills that they can acquire during EFT for their future careers in tourism, the authors aimed to clarify the following questions:

1. *How do students perceive the significance of soft skills to their major?*
2. *How do students perceive the necessity of integrating soft skills into English for Tourism courses?*
3. *To what extent do students perceive the contribution of current English modules to the development of soft skills?*
4. *How do students perceive the necessity of incorporating learning activities into English courses for tourism?*

3.2. Instrument Development and Content Validity

To answer the four questions, the writers employed a quantitative research method using a questionnaire. Content validity was established through a review of relevant literature and the adaptation of an existing questionnaire developed by Radovanović and Mitrović (2022). The selection of the soft skills examined in this study was based on previous research on soft skills in tourism and language education, particularly the studies of Radovanović and Mitrović (2022), Tanković et al. (2021), Robles (2012), and Sheldon et al. (2008). Radovanović & Mitrović (2022) classified 32 statements describing personal qualities and competencies into 12 soft skills. The items were reviewed in relation to the objectives of the present study and the context of EFT courses at UFM.

The questionnaire included two parts. The first part was designed to find out the characteristics of the respondents. The second part asked respondents to identify which soft skills are most important to integrate into EFT, the contribution of EFT courses to the development of each soft skill, and what activities should be organized to improve their soft skills.

The authors designed the questionnaire in Vietnamese on Google Forms and then shared the link with the participants via email or Zalo from the beginning of April to April 30, 2026. They used the same tool to collect responses in an online spreadsheet and to summarize the results.

3.3. Sampling and Participants

The writers used purposive convenience sampling to select participants who met the target-population criteria. This sampling approach was used because the study specifically focused on learners and recent graduates with experience in tourism-related English courses at UFM. The participants in this study were current tourism students and recent graduates at UFM, who belonged to the cohorts from 2022 to 2025. The tourism program typically lasts four years. However, some could complete their studies in three to three and a half years. Therefore, the 2022–2025 cohorts were considered appropriate for capturing both current students and recent graduates.

A total of 118 participants responded to the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire.

4. Findings

4.1. Participants' personal information

As presented in Table 1, females made up over two-thirds of the sample (67.8%), whereas males accounted for about one-third (32.2%). In terms of age distribution, the majority of

participants were between 21 and 23 years old (43%), while those aged 18 to 20 represented a smaller proportion (30.5%); participants aged 24 and above made up the smallest percentage (26.3%). More than half of the participants were juniors (50.8%), while graduates made up one-fourth (26.3%). Freshmen (8.5%), sophomores (2.5%), and seniors (11.9%), however, accounted for lower proportions. Regarding academic majors, Tourism and Travel Service Management was the most prevalent major, accounting for 76.3% of the participants. In contrast, the remaining respondents (23.7%) were distributed across other majors, including Hotel Management, Restaurant Management, Tourism, and Event Management. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Personal Information of the Participants

Category	Group	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	80	67.8%
	Male	38	32.2%
Age	18–20	36	30.5%
	21–23	51	43.2%
	24+	31	26.3%
	First year student	10	8.5%
	Second year student	3	2.5%
	Third year student	60	50.8%
Academic year	Fourth year student	14	11.9%
	Graduate	31	26.3%
Major	Tourism & Travel Service Management	90	76.3%
	Other majors (Hotel Administration, Restaurant Administration, Tourism, Events Management)	28	23.7%

4.2.Students' perception of the significance of soft skills to their tourism major

Table 2 presents the tourism learners' perceptions of the significance of different soft skills to their major in terms of percentage distribution and mean scores. It is noticeable that all skills had relatively high values, with mean scores ranging from 4.1 to 4.5. Of all 12 skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, cultural adaptability/cultural competence, verbal communication, adaptability and flexibility, time management, and information searching and processing skills were reported at the highest mean score (M=4.5 for all), meaning that those skills played vital roles in tourism. These were followed by teamwork, conflict management, and presentation skills (M=4.4). Other skills, including decision-making and non-verbal communication skills, also received high ratings (M=4.3). Although empathy was reported at a slightly lower mean score (M=4.1), the evaluation was still positive overall.

Additionally, the standard deviation values ranged from 0.68 to 0.80. This means that there was a relatively low dispersion of responses, and the participants had a high consensus level on the perceived importance of these soft skills to their major.

Table 2: *Learners' perception towards the significance of soft skills in their tourism major*
(Note. $n = 118$)

Skill	Mean Score	S.D
Decision-making	4.3	0.78
Critical thinking & problem-solving	4.5	0.70
Teamwork	4.4	0.77
Conflict management	4.4	0.70
Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	4.5	0.69
Empathy	4.1	0.79
Verbal communication	4.5	0.78
Non-verbal communication	4.3	0.73
Adaptability & flexibility	4.5	0.69
Time management	4.5	0.71
Presentation skills	4.4	0.80
Information searching & processing skills	4.5	0.68

4.3.Students' perception of the necessity of integrating soft skills in EFT courses.

Overall, the participants perceived the necessity of integrating soft skills into English courses for tourism as necessary to very necessary, with mean scores ranging from 3.72 to 4.38 (*see Table 3*). Specifically, presentation skills ($M=4.38$), information searching & processing skills ($M=4.32$), verbal communication ($M=4.28$), critical thinking & problem-solving ($M=4.28$), cultural adaptability/cultural competence ($M=4.26$), adaptability & flexibility ($M=4.21$), time management ($M=4.01$), and non-verbal communication ($M=4.01$) were rated at the highest level. Meanwhile, empathy ($M=3.72$), decision-making ($M = 3.75$), conflict management ($M=3.93$), and teamwork ($M = 3.99$) had lower mean scores but were still perceived as necessary. In addition, the values for standard deviation for all skills were relatively low (0.81–1.07), further

suggesting the respondents' perceptions of the necessity of integrating these skills in the English courses for tourism were generally consistent.

Table 3: *Students' perceptions of the necessity of integrating the soft skills into EFT Courses*
(Note. $n = 118$)

Skills	Mean	SD
Cognitive skills		
Decision-making	3.75	0.91
Critical thinking & problem-solving	4.28	0.9
Interpersonal skills		
Teamwork	3.99	0.96
Conflict management	3.93	0.94
Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	4.26	1.05
Empathy	3.72	0.89
Verbal communication	4.28	1.02
Non-verbal communication	4.01	0.91
Workplace skills		
Adaptability & flexibility	4.21	1.07
Time management	4.01	0.81
Presentation skills	4.38	0.88
Information searching & processing skills	4.32	0.87

4.4. Students' perception of the contribution of current English modules to the development of soft skills.

As presented in Table 4, the students overall perceived that the current English modules for tourism positively contributed to the development of all twelve soft skills, with all mean scores ranging from 3.6 to 4.2. Regarding cognitive skills, critical thinking and problem-solving ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.92$) received a higher rating than decision-making ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.02$).

In terms of interpersonal skills, cultural adaptability/cultural competence ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.89$) and verbal communication ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.94$) were reported at the highest ratings, followed by teamwork ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.92$) and non-verbal communication ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.99$). Conflict management and empathy received lower ratings, both with a mean score of 3.70. Among workplace skills, presentation skills and information searching and processing skills were rated the highest ($M = 4.20$), while adaptability and flexibility ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.92$) and time management ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.99$) were reported at lower ratings.

Overall, the results reveal that the students perceived the current English modules contributed more strongly to the development of presentation, information searching and processing, cultural adaptability, verbal communication, and teamwork, while relatively lower contributions were found for the remaining skills, including decision-making, conflict management, and empathy.

Table 4: *Students' perception of the contribution of current English modules to the development of soft skills. (Note. $n = 118$)*

Skills	Mean	SD
Cognitive skills		
Decision-making	3.6	1.02
Critical thinking & problem-solving	3.9	0.92
Interpersonal skills		
Teamwork	4.0	0.92
Conflict management	3.7	1.05
Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	4.1	0.89
Empathy	3.7	1.03
Verbal communication	4.1	0.94
Non-verbal communication	3.9	0.99
Workplace skills		
Adaptability & flexibility	3.9	0.92
Time management	3.8	0.99
Presentation skills	4.2	0.87

Information searching & processing skills	4.2	0.84
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4.5.Differences between perceived importance of soft skills to tourism major and the contribution of EFT to their development

To further examine the differences between students' perceived importance of the soft skills to their majors and the contribution of EFT to their development, paired-samples t-tests were conducted. As shown in Table 5, the perceived importance was found to be greatly higher than perceived contribution for 11 out of 12 soft skills ($p \leq .001$). The effect sizes ranged from small to moderate, with Cohen's d_z values ranging from 0.31 to 0.69, meaning that there were statistically significant differences. Particularly, conflict management ($M_{diff} = 0.75$, $t(117) = 7.50$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.69$) showed the largest difference. This was followed by time management ($M_{diff} = 0.68$, $t(117) = 6.60$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.61$), decision-making ($M_{diff} = 0.66$, $t(117) = 6.06$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.56$), and critical thinking and problem-solving ($M_{diff} = 0.61$, $t(117) = 6.29$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.58$), and adaptability and flexibility ($M_{diff} = 0.58$, $t(117) = 6.26$, $p < .001$, $d_z = 0.58$). In addition, the skills including cultural adaptability/cultural competence ($M_{diff} = 0.42$, $d_z = 0.46$), empathy ($M_{diff} = 0.41$, $d_z = 0.42$), non-verbal communication ($M_{diff} = 0.39$, $d_z = 0.42$), verbal communication ($M_{diff} = 0.36$, $d_z = 0.41$), teamwork ($M_{diff} = 0.35$, $d_z = 0.36$), and information searching and processing skills ($M_{diff} = 0.27$, $d_z = 0.31$) showed statistically significant differences with relatively small effect sizes. However, the difference for presentation skills ($M_{diff} = 0.15$, $t(117) = 1.78$, $p = .077$, $d_z = 0.16$) was observed with the smallest value and was not statistically significant.

Overall, these findings suggest there is statistical evidence of a gap between students' perceived importance of the soft skills to their major and the contribution of current EFT to the development of most of the soft skills examined except presentation skills.

Table 5: *Paired-samples comparisons between perceived importance of soft skills and perceived contribution of current English modules*

Soft skills	Perceived Importance M (SD)	Perceived Contribution M (SD)	Mean difference	95% CI	$t(117)$	p	Cohen's d_z
Decision-making	4.31 (0.78)	3.64 (1.02)	0.66	[0.45, 0.88]	6.06	< .001	0.56
Critical thinking & problem-solving	4.53 (0.70)	3.92 (0.92)	0.61	[0.42, 0.80]	6.29	< .001	0.58
Teamwork	4.39 (0.77)	4.04 (0.92)	0.35	[0.17, 0.52]	3.95	< .001	0.36
Conflict management	4.43 (0.70)	3.69 (1.05)	0.75	[0.55, 0.94]	7.5	< .001	0.69

Cultural adaptability/ competence	4.52 (0.69)	4.09 (0.89)	0.42	[0.26, 0.59]	5.01	< .001	0.46
Empathy	4.14 (0.79)	3.73 (1.03)	0.41	[0.23, 0.58]	4.55	< .001	0.42
Verbal communication	4.50 (0.78)	4.14 (0.94)	0.36	[0.20, 0.52]	4.43	< .001	0.41
Non-verbal communication	4.28 (0.73)	3.89 (0.99)	0.39	[0.22, 0.56]	4.53	< .001	0.42
Adaptability & flexibility	4.53 (0.69)	3.95 (0.92)	0.58	[0.40, 0.77]	6.26	< .001	0.58
Time management	4.50 (0.71)	3.82 (0.99)	0.68	[0.47, 0.88]	6.6	< .001	0.61
Presentation skills	4.40 (0.80)	4.25 (0.87)	0.15	[-0.02, 0.32]	1.78	0.077	0.16
Information searching & processing	4.50 (0.68)	4.23 (0.84)	0.27	[0.11, 0.43]	3.33	0.001	0.31

4.6.Students' perception of the necessity of applying learning activities into English courses for tourism

Overall, all proposed activities received high levels of agreement, with mean scores ranging from 4.11 to 4.32 (see Table 6). This suggests that participants perceived every activity as important to integrate in English for Tourism courses.

Among the eight activities, situation analysis and problem-solving received the highest mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.82$), followed by simulating customer complaints and conflict resolution ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.86$) and role-playing professional tourism scenarios ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.83$). Other highly rated activities included presentations in English ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.82$), intercultural communication practice ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.84$), and group discussions in English ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.83$).

Table 6: *Students' perception of the necessity of applying learning activities into courses for tourism. (Note. $n = 118$)*

Activities	Mean Score	SD
Group Discussions in English	4.19	0.83

Presentations in English	4.24	0.82
Role-playing Professional Tourism Scenarios	4.29	0.83
Simulating Customer Complaint and Conflict Resolution	4.3	0.86
Group Projects in English	4.12	0.9
Intercultural Communication Practice	4.23	0.84
Situation Analysis and Problem Solving	4.32	0.82
Self-assessment and Peer Feedback among Students	4.11	0.85

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that tourism students and recent graduates placed considerable importance on a wide range of soft skills related to their academic and future professional contexts. All twelve skills received high ratings, with strong perceptions of critical thinking and problem-solving, cultural adaptability/cultural competence, verbal communication, adaptability and flexibility, time management, and information searching and processing skills. These findings are in line with previous studies highlighting the significance of soft skills in tourism. Tanković et al. (2021) emphasized that tourism students and tourists regarded oral communication skills as essential in the tourism industry, while Robles (2012) found that communication, flexibility, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and other non-technical competencies were important skills that employers expected of employees. Likewise, Sheldon et al. (2008) suggested that critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, cross-cultural competence, and communication were among the competencies necessary in tourism education.

The participants also showed strong support for integrating soft skills into EFT courses. Specifically, presentation skills, information searching and processing, verbal communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, and cultural adaptability/cultural competence were rated relatively highly. This finding lends support to Robles (2012), who recommended the potential of language courses to combine language development with communication skills, problem-solving, teamwork, and other soft skills. Thus, EFT may be a suitable context for integrating language learning with workplace competencies relevant to the tourism industry.

Regarding the contribution of current English modules to the development of soft skills, the participants generally perceived that these modules positively contributed to the development of all 12 skills, although the contribution levels varied. Higher contributions were found for presentation skills, information searching and processing, verbal communication, cultural adaptability/cultural competence, and teamwork, while decision-making, conflict management, and empathy received relatively lower ratings of perceived contribution. These findings are partly consistent with Radovanović and Mitrović (2022), who reported the positive contribution of EFT courses to the development of verbal communication and cultural adaptation. This pattern shows that the current English modules may provide better support for

developing communication and presentation skills than for developing some cognitive and interpersonal skills. However, these results only reflect the participants' perceptions of the modules' contribution rather than objectively measured development of these skills.

Noticeably, the findings also revealed a gap between the perceived importance of soft skills to the participants' major and the perceived contribution of the EFT courses to the development of these skills. Relatively large effect sizes were found for conflict management ($dz = .69$), time management ($dz = .61$), critical thinking and problem-solving ($dz = .58$), adaptability and flexibility ($dz = .58$), and decision-making ($dz = .56$). Conversely, there was a small and non-significant difference in presentation skills ($dz = .16$, $p = .077$). These findings are partly in line with Radovanović and Mitrović (2022), who reported that English courses contributed to the development of decision-making and conflict management to a moderate extent. However, the present findings reflect only the participants' perceived importance-contribution gap and should not be regarded as direct evidence suggesting that current EFT courses are ineffective in developing soft skills.

In terms of the suggested learning activities, students strongly supported authentic and workplace-oriented activities, with situation analysis and problem-solving, customer-complaint simulations, and professional role plays receiving the highest ratings. This finding lends support to Tevdovska (2015), who emphasized that problem-solving tasks, discussions, presentations, and role plays were useful activities for integrating soft skills into English instruction. Although the ratings for these activities in this study were quite high, they merely reflect the participants' perceived necessity and preferences and should not be considered evidence for their actual effectiveness. Therefore, there should be further intervention-based research to examine whether such activities actually improve tourism students' soft skills in a measurable way.

In addition, the findings should be interpreted with some methodological limitations. First, the study sample was distributed unevenly, with third-year students constituting more than half of the respondents (50.8%) and the students majoring in Tourism and Travel Service Management accounting for 76.3%. Thus, the findings may predominantly reflect the perceptions of these groups. Besides, tourism students' and recent graduates' perceptions were analyzed together, while there may be potential differences in academic years, graduation status, and majors that also need to be examined. Future research should employ a larger sample with a more balanced distribution and consider possible differences that may exist among these research subgroups.

Finally, since all data were collected through a self-report survey at one point in time, the findings may be affected by common-method and social desirability biases. Students may tend to rate soft skills and learning activities that are considered necessary or desirable in professional contexts. Therefore, further research should combine students' self-report perceptions with in-depth interviews, performance-based assessments, class observations, and evaluations from teachers and employers in the field of tourism.

Overall, the findings showed that tourism students and recent graduates strongly supported integrating soft skills into English for Tourism courses, particularly through authentic, interactive, and workplace-oriented learning opportunities. However, further

research is needed to determine the actual effectiveness of such activities in developing soft skills.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

The tourism industry has expanded in size and influence on other industries, along with the advancement of technology. To catch up with the fast-growing competitive tourism labor market, each tourism employee needs to acquire a balance of hard skills and soft skills. However, many entry-level tourism employees may only recognize too late that they lack the necessary soft skills to survive in their jobs. The aim of this study was to investigate learners' points of view about the necessity of incorporating soft skills into EFT for their future careers in tourism. The findings demonstrated that students clearly recognized the importance of soft skills for both their academic learning and future professional success. All twelve soft skills investigated were perceived as important to very important, with adaptability and flexibility, critical thinking, and problem-solving as the highest priorities. Students strongly supported embedding soft skills into EFT. They considered presentation skills, information searching and processing, verbal communication, critical thinking, and intercultural competence as the most appropriate competencies to be developed through English instruction. Although the current English modules positively contributed to developing soft skills, the level of contribution remained only moderate. That means there is still a lot of room for EFT contributions to the development of soft skills through authentic classroom activities.

Generally, the findings support the integration of soft skills into EFT to improve graduates' employability and prepare them better for the rapidly changing tourism industry.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the writers recommend that curriculum developers systematically embed soft-skill development into EFT course learning outcomes, teaching content, classroom activities, and assessment. Instead of treating soft skills as separate topics, they should be integrated alongside language objectives to provide balanced development of linguistic competence and employability skills. The performance assessment should be applied in EFT courses. This study is limited to the perceptions of current and recent tourism graduates at UFM. Future research should expand the scope by including tourism employees, tourism employers, and EFT teachers from multiple universities and tourism institutions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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N.T.X.C.; Writing—Review & Editing, D.Q.D. and N.T.X.C. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not required because the study involved an anonymous and voluntary survey and collected no sensitive personal information.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors employed ChatGPT (OpenAI) only for language editing purposes including checking punctuation, spelling and grammar, improving clarity and refining academic expression. All ChatGPT-supported revisions were carefully reviewed and verified by the authors. The authors hold full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and content of the manuscript.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

TOURISM STUDENTS' AND RECENT GRADUATES' PERCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATING SOFT SKILLS INTO ENGLISH FOR TOURISM COURSES

Purpose of the Survey

This survey aims to identify the soft skills that should be integrated into English courses for tourism students at the University of Finance – Marketing (UFM), thereby providing insights for improving the curriculum and teaching practices.

Instructions

Please select the option that best reflects your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers. All information collected will be used for research purposes and will be kept confidential.

SECTION A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. Age

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–20
- ☐ 21–23
- ☐ 24 or above

3. Current academic status

- ☐ First-year student
- ☐ Second-year student
- ☐ Third-year student

☐ Fourth-year student

☐ Graduate

4. Major/Specialization

☐ Tourism and Travel Service Management

☐ Hotel Management

☐ Restaurant Management

☐ Tourism

☐ Other: _____

SECTION B. SOFT SKILLS FOR TOURISM STUDENTS

Question 1. *In your opinion, how important are the following skills for tourism students?*

(1 = Not important, 5 = Very important)

No.	Skill	1	2	3	4	5
1	Decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Critical thinking and problem-solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Teamwork	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Conflict management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Empathy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Non-verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Adaptability and flexibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Time management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Presentation skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Information searching and processing skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question 2. *In your opinion, to what extent should the following skills be integrated into English courses?*

(1 = Not necessary, 5 = Very necessary)

No.	Skill	1	2	3	4	5
1	Decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Critical thinking and problem-solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Teamwork	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Conflict management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Empathy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Non-verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Adaptability and flexibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Time management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Presentation skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12	Information searching and processing skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Question 3. *In your opinion, to what extent do the current English courses help develop the following skills?*

(1 = Not at all, 5 = To a great extent)

No.	Skill	1	2	3	4	5
1	Decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Critical thinking and problem-solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Teamwork	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Conflict management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Cultural adaptability / Cultural competence	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Empathy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Non-verbal communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Adaptability and flexibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Time management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Presentation skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Information searching and processing skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question 4. *In your opinion, to what extent should the following activities be increased in English courses to develop soft skills for tourism students?*

(1 = Not necessary, 5 = Very necessary)

No.	Activity	1	2	3	4	5
1	Group discussions in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Presentations in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Role-plays of tourism-related professional situations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Role-playing Professional Tourism Scenarios	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Group projects in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Intercultural communication practice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Situation Analysis and Problem Solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Self-assessment and peer feedback among students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐