EVALUATING TOURISM AMBASSADORS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN LISTENING AND READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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Abstract

Youth tourism ambassadors serve as front-line liaisons promoting regional cultural heritage, yet their specific receptive English capabilities remain under-examined. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative design, this study evaluated the English for Tourism receptive competence of nine purposively sampled youth tourism ambassadors in Demak Regency, Central Java. Data were gathered through an exploratory diagnostic task taken from CEFR B1-referenced assessment materials, comprising a 10-item fill-in-the-blank listening subtest (completed after two audio playbacks) and a 6-item True/False reading subtest based on an informational travel guide. The quantitative findings revealed overall mean task accuracies of 53% in listening comprehension and 63% in reading comprehension. While participants reliably decoded explicit facts, numerical data, and simple comparative details, item facility analysis exposed acute difficulties on specific assessment items. In listening, performance dropped sharply on items containing rapid phrasal verbs, connected speech, and specialized jargon. In reading, low facility items revealed a heavy reliance on surface-level keyword matching over pragmatic inference, rhetorical understanding, and cross-paragraph discourse tracking. These diagnostic results highlight operational vulnerabilities in processing complex discourse. To address these gaps, the local tourism office should implement targeted English for Specific Purposes modules prioritizing natural speech streams, domain-specific terminology, and higher-order reading strategies, supported by pre-service diagnostic benchmarking.

Keywords: *English for Tourism, Linguistic Competence, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Receptive Competence, Tourism Ambassadors*

Introduction

Situated along the northern coastal lowlands of Central Java, Demak Regency holds a prominent place in Indonesian history and Islamic culture.

These historical and religious destinations draw millions of domestic pilgrims and travelers each year. The success of Demak Regency as a tourist destination depends not only on physical landmarks, but also on the competence of the local workforce who manage services and interact directly with visitors (Pradnyana & Lasmi, 2025).

The formal planning framework for developing Demak's tourism sector is outlined in statutory local regulations. In the Demak Regency Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2025–2029 (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Demak Nomor 5 Tahun 2025, 2025), tourism is prioritized as a primary economic driver to improve regional welfare, support the creative economy, upgrade destination connectivity, and build workforce capacity. This local initiative directly reflects the United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals specifically under SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), with particular emphasis on Target 8.9 to devise and implement policies that promote sustainable tourism, create productive employment, and showcase local culture and regional products.

Within this local policy framework, youth ambassadors chosen through the Mas dan Mbak Duta Wisata pageant serve as the official front-line representatives of Demak Regency. Investigating youth representation, Diani et al. (2024) observed that regional tourism ambassadors act as essential drivers of destination marketing, responsible for building positive regional awareness and attracting visitors through social media and collaborative events. Candra et al. (2022) noted that tourism ambassadors increasingly rely on digital media platforms and virtual presentations to promote regional heritage and local businesses to broader audiences. Because ambassadors function as organizational representatives, Robbins and Judge (2017) pointed out that successful managerial and public-contact performance depends on interpersonal communication skills and the ability to interact smoothly across diverse backgrounds. As Rosana and Kusumawati (2024) emphasized, tourism ambassadors in Demak act as regional brand ambassadors whose personal conduct, communication, and educational outreach to the public directly shape the region's positive image. Ambassadors need strong

receptive language competence to process complex inquiries, interpret historical texts, and accurately comprehend the diverse linguistic input from international visitors before transmitting clear, welcoming messages.

The connection between foreign language skills and destination success has been examined extensively in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Tourism (EfT). As Kanca (2024) emphasized in a qualitative study of tourism practitioners, foreign language ability is a vital asset that improves visitor satisfaction, increases job opportunities, and elevates destination competitiveness. While prior literature heavily emphasizes oral performance, underlying receptive proficiency remains the bedrock of communicative competence. In an empirical survey of 77 tourism employees in Saudi Arabia, Al-Malki et al. (2022) found that listening represented a massive portion of professional communicative demands, particularly when decoding visitors' questions about local attractions. Kholidi et al. (2022) surveyed 50 tourism employees in Selangor, Malaysia, and reported that aural-listening proficiency was a primary requirement for understanding client needs, processing travel itineraries, and managing customer inquiries. In an investigation of coastal tourism workers on Gili Labak, Ijabah and Amrullah (2023) established that listening comprehension was the most urgent prerequisite skill for accurate guest handling.

These information-processing needs are equally evident across hospitality education and community tourism settings. When evaluating hotel trainees, Kanah et al. (2019) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and concluded that practical comprehension of client needs was a dominant factor in satisfying industry stakeholders. In vocational programs, Idris and Modjo (2025) identified a clear mismatch between standard classroom grammar drills and actual industry demands, noting that graduates often struggle with auditory customer service cues and technical vocabulary recognition. Investigating higher education students, Kusumastiti et al. (2021) observed that reading informational texts and understanding complex regional literature occur frequently during internships, serving as essential components for interactive workplace competence.

Studies exploring tour guiding show very similar practical language comprehension needs. Herienda et al. (2024) surveyed tour guides at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, Indonesia and found that limited English vocabulary and poor listening comprehension of diverse foreign accents hindered the quality of cultural interpretations given to international visitors. In an assessment of coastal tour guides in Simeulue, Oktavinanda et al. (2022) demonstrated that comprehension represents a vital skill for deciphering foreign tourist requests regarding local marine attractions, yet guides report substantial difficulties due to limited vocabulary recognition. When examining community-based tourism in Bedono Village, Demak, Narolita and Putri (2025) reported that local guiding groups showed a strong desire to master English for foreign tourist interactions, specifically requesting targeted comprehension training over passive grammar instruction. To improve local community capacity, Miolo et al. (2025) designed a "Language Village" model in Tomini Bay, showing that contextual situational inputs significantly improve the linguistic confidence of local tourism operators. Looking at heritage sites in Thailand, Namtapi (2022) evaluated tourism personnel in Ayutthaya and found that staff often struggle with reading specialized architectural vocabulary and comprehending unfamiliar foreign accents during listening tasks. Araminta and Halimi (2020) demonstrated that high school students in Kepulauan Seribu require task-based, localized English materials rooted in familiar regional geography to lower anxiety and build receptive literacy fluency.

While existing ESP research extensively addresses receptive skills, previous empirical assessments have primarily examined frontline hotel staff, servers, travel agents, and site tour guides using self-reported surveys or qualitative interviews centered on routine transactional tasks like processing reservations or handling local guest inquiries (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Herienda et al., 2024; Kholidi et al., 2022; Oktavinanda et al., 2022). In contrast, tourism ambassadors occupy a distinct operational role centered on high-level regional branding, diplomatic hosting, official presentations, and media campaigns for diverse audiences. Evaluating listening and reading

comprehension as separate macro-skills is therefore critical due to their distinct operational functions: listening demands real-time auditory processing of unpredictable foreign accents and spontaneous live Q&A input, whereas reading requires visual processing of static, specialized texts such as regional history archives, policy documents, and press releases to ensure factual accuracy prior to public dissemination.

Furthermore, despite the acknowledged importance of receptive proficiency in hospitality, limited empirical focus has evaluated these distinct competencies among youth ambassadors in emerging cultural and religious heritage destinations like Demak Regency. Addressing these omissions, Narolita et al. (2026) documented that the English for Tourism needs of Demak's tourism ambassadors are directly tied to their specific promotional duties and field contexts. In line with strategic human resource management, which posits that workforce effectiveness requires systematic training needs assessments aligned with organizational goals (Mathis & Jackson, 2008), this study aims to examine the English for Tourism (EfT) competence of tourism ambassadors in Demak Regency across listening and reading comprehension. Specifically, this study evaluates their current proficiency in these two core macro-skills.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to systematically assess the English for Tourism (EfT) receptive competence, specifically listening and reading comprehension, of nine active tourism ambassadors of Demak Regency (six males, three females; aged 16–19 years). A quantitative approach was selected to measure language performance and express proficiency through standardized numerical indicators (Creswell, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to intentionally recruit subjects based on their formal status as official tourism and cultural liaisons for Demak Regency (Sugiyono, 2025). Prior to data collection, formal institutional permission was obtained from the Demak Regency Tourism Office and Paguyuban Mas dan Mbak Kabupaten Demak (Pamade). Informed consent was secured from

all adult participants, while informed consent from parents or legal guardians, along with participant assent, was obtained for participants under 18 years of age in accordance with ethical research standards.

The research instrument comprised an English Competency Task taken from British Council CEFR Level B1 materials (*A Travel Guide | LearnEnglish*, n.d.; *Theme Parks | LearnEnglish Teens*, n.d.), structured as an exploratory diagnostic assessment. The listening subtest evaluated aural comprehension of international tourism facilities using a fill-in-the-blank format completed after two audio playbacks, while the reading subtest assessed textual comprehension of a destination travel guide through a True/False format. These task-based subtests were designed as targeted contextual indicators to identify specific receptive performance patterns.

Findings and Discussions

The listening comprehension subtest evaluated the receptive competence of nine tourism ambassadors across 10 fill-in-the-blank items taken from British Council CEFR Level B1 assessment materials. Each correctly retrieved item received 1 point, with a total maximum score of 10 points. The complete item-by-item performance data, total raw scores, percentage scores, and item accuracy indices are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Item-by-Item Listening Assessment Results (TA01–TA09)

Respondent Code	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10	Total Correct	Score (%)
TA01	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	6	60 %
TA02	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	8	80 %
TA03	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	6	60 %
TA04	Incorrect	Incorrect	Incorrect	Incorrect	Incorrect	Incorrect	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect	1	10 %
TA05	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	5	50 %
TA06	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	7	70 %
TA07	Incorrect	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	4	40 %
TA08	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	6	60 %
TA09	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Correct	Incorrect	Incorrect	5	50 %

Item Accuracy	**11%**	**78%**	**78%**	**11%**	**89%**	**11%**	**78%**	**100 %**	**11%**	**67%**	**Mean:**	**53 %**

Participant performance revealed an average listening score of 53% (Mean $= 5.33$ out of 10, $SD = 1.94$). Individual achievement spanned a wide range, extending from a minimum score of 10% (TA04; 1 correct item) to a peak of 80% (TA02; 8 correct items). Five participants (TA01, TA02, TA03, TA06, and TA08) achieved scores equal to or exceeding 60%, whereas four participants (TA04, TA05, TA07, and TA09) scored at or below the 50% threshold.

An analysis of item facility indices reveals a distinct bifurcated pattern across the assessment tasks, separating items into high-success items and acute difficulty items in Table 2.

Table 2. Facility Breakdown of Listening Comprehension Items

Facility Category	Item Number	Target Key / Phrase	Correct Responses (n=9)	Accuracy (%)
High Facility Items (67% – 100%)	Item 8	"More exciting"	9/9	100%
	Item 5	"wingcoaster"	8/9	89%
	Item 2	"adventure rides"	7/9	78%
	Item 3	"17" / "seventeen"	7/9	78%
	Item 7	"you're flying" / "flying"	7/9	78%
	Item 10	"marine animals"	6/9	67%
Low Facility (11%)	Item 1	"adventure parks"	1/9	11%
	Item 4	"animatronic"	1/9	11%
	Item 6	"stick out"	1/9	11%
	Item 9	"magic sweets and things"	1/9	11%

Participants performed well on concrete keywords, numbers, and visually primed terms (Items 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10), with accuracy ranging from 67% to 100% due to clear conversational cues, prominent phonetic stress, and pre-task vocabulary support. In contrast, comprehension dropped sharply to just 11% on Items 1, 4, 6, and 9, where success depended on processing unfamiliar technical vocabulary ("animatronic"), connected phrasal verbs ("stick out"), and longer colloquial phrases ("magic sweets and things") that proved difficult to catch in rapid and natural speech.

Empirically, Demak Regency's tourism ambassadors achieved an overall mean task accuracy of 53% on the listening subtest, with substantial

difficulty observed on Items 1, 4, 6, and 9 (11% accuracy each). A wide performance disparity emerged across the cohort, ranging from 10% (TA04) to 80% (TA02). These scores represent percentage accuracy on the administered diagnostic tasks. This baseline indicates that while ambassadors can reliably retrieve isolated facts, main destination themes, and basic comparative statements, they face clear operational limitations when processing continuous discourse.

As a hypothesized explanation, the acute difficulty on Items 1, 4, 6, and 9 likely stemmed from a combination of unfamiliar vocabulary and connected-speech processing, triggered by the presence of idiomatic expressions, rapid phrasal verbs (*stick out*), and specialized jargon (*animatronic*), alongside individual variations in perceptual processing.

These findings align with prior ESP and English for Tourism research (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Herienda et al., 2024; Idris & Modjo, 2025), which highlights that receptive auditory demands in public-contact tourism roles frequently break down when staff encounter unscripted input, diverse accents, and rapid colloquial speech. However, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that these listening vulnerabilities extend specifically to youth tourism ambassadors, a high-level representational group whose promotional workflow requires real-time processing of complex and spontaneous inquiries.

These results imply that training programs should transition away from isolated vocabulary drills toward task-based listening interventions that systematically address connected speech, multi-word phrasal verbs, and domain-specific terminology. Methodologically, the broad performance spread within the cohort underscores the necessity of implementing diagnostic pre-service benchmarking to identify individual language support needs before ambassadors undertake public-facing roles

The reading comprehension subtest evaluated the ability of nine official tourism ambassadors to interpret informational tourism discourse. The instrument was taken from British Council CEFR Level B1 materials and consisted of six binary-choice (True/False) items based on a Bangkok

destination travel guide. Each correct response received one point, with a total possible score of 6 points. The complete respondent performance matrix, overall percentage accuracy, and individual item facility values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Item-by-Item Reading Comprehension Assessment Results (TA01–TA09)

Respondent Code	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Total Correct	Score (%)
TA01	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA02	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	3	50%
TA03	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA04	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	3	50%
TA05	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA06	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA07	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA08	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
TA09	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE	4	67%
Item Accuracy	**0%**	**100%**	**67%**	**22%**	**100%**	**89%**	**Mean:**	**63%**

Note: Correct answer keys based on the test instrument are: Item 1 = FALSE, Item 2 = FALSE, Item 3 = TRUE, Item 4 = FALSE, Item 5 = TRUE, and Item 6 = FALSE.

The overall mean reading score across the cohort was 63% (Mean = 3.78 out of 6 points). Performance was remarkably uniform across the group: seven out of nine respondents (TA01, TA03, TA05, TA06, TA07, TA08, and TA09) achieved an identical score of 67% (4/6 correct), while two respondents (TA02 and TA04) achieved 50% (3/6 correct). None of the participants achieved full marks, and none scored below 50%.

An evaluation of item accuracy reveals that performance was highly polarized across specific textual decoding demands, as described in Table 4.

Table 4. Item Facility Breakdown and Error Analysis for Reading Comprehension

Facility Category	Item No.	Statement / Target Content	Correct Answer	Correct Responses (n=9)	Accuracy (%)	Performance Pattern & Error Analysis
High-Facility Items	Item 2	"Khao San Road is an authentic Thai area of the city."	FALSE	9/9	100%	All respondents successfully recognized that the guide explicitly describes Khao San Road as "not very Thai."
(89%–100%)						
	Item 5	"Taking the Skytrain is a faster way to see the city than going by taxi."	TRUE	9/9	100%	Participants readily identified the explicit contrast between taxi traffic jams and the Skytrain as a "fast, cheap way to travel."
	Item 6	"You need to choose where to eat carefully, as not everywhere is good."	FALSE	8/9	89%	Eight respondents successfully rejected the claim based on the text noting delicious street food

						is available "everywhere" (only TA02 erred).
Moderate-Facility Item (67%)	Item 3	"Phra Kanong is further away from the main tourist sites than Khao San Road is."	TRUE	6/9	67%	Six respondents confirmed this relation (TA01, TA02, TA03, TA05, TA07, TA08), while TA04, TA06, and TA09 failed to integrate comparative details across separate paragraphs.
Low-Facility Items (0%–22%)	Item 1	"One night is enough time to see Bangkok."	FALSE	0/9	0%	All nine respondents relied on surface keyword matching ("spend at least one night") and overlooked the rhetorical prompt "Why not make it a longer stay?"
	Item 4	"The river boat taxis often get stuck in traffic too."	FALSE	2/9	22%	Only TA06 and TA09 answered correctly. Seven respondents experienced negative transfer from preceding sentences describing road gridlock, missing that river boats serve as an alternative.

The reading assessment indicates that Demak Regency's tourism ambassadors achieved an overall mean task accuracy of 63% on the B1-referenced reading materials. Perfect performance on Items 2 and 5 (100% accuracy each) demonstrates that participants can reliably perform literal lexical scanning and factual verification when texts feature explicit negative markers ("not very Thai") or direct contrasts ("taxi... stuck in traffic" vs. "Skytrain is a fast... way"). Conversely, the zero-facility result on Item 1 (0%) and widespread errors on Item 4 (22%) reveal acute difficulties on tasks requiring deeper discourse processing.

The systematic errors on Items 1 and 4 likely stem from surface-level keyword dependency and limited pragmatic and discourse-level inference. On Item 1, participants appears to have relied on isolated keyword matching ("spend at least one night") rather than processing the communicative intent of the surrounding rhetorical question ("Why not make it a longer stay?"). On Item 4, errors suggest challenges in tracking cohesive referents and maintaining context across paragraph structures when evaluating transportation modalities.

These findings align with existing ESP and higher education reading literature (Kusumastiti et al., 2021; Namtapi, 2022), which notes that language learners in tourism and vocational domains frequently struggle

when navigating complex regional literature, cohesive markers, and implicit text structures. However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating how keyword-matching heuristics specifically compromise the reading efficiency of youth tourism ambassadors, who must visually process static cultural policy, regional history archives, and promotional copy with high precision before public communication.

These results also demonstrate that instructional interventions for tourism ambassadors must extend beyond literal vocabulary building toward higher-order reading strategies. Training curricula should emphasize pragmatic inference, discourse tracking, and critical textual analysis to ensure ambassadors can accurately interpret complex promotional materials without being misled by isolated keywords.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the receptive English performance of youth tourism ambassadors in Demak Regency using task-based B1-referenced materials, yielding mean task accuracies of 53% in listening and 63% in reading. While participants reliably decoded explicit facts and simple comparative details, the results indicate acute difficulties with specific assessment items. In listening, performance dropped on items featuring rapid phrasal verbs, connected speech, and specialized vocabulary. In reading, low item accuracy revealed a reliance on surface-level keyword matching over pragmatic inference and discourse tracking.

To address these language gaps, the Demak Regency Tourism Office (*Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Demak*) should consider developing targeted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules. Training interventions should focus on task-based listening with natural speech streams and domain-specific terminology, as well as reading strategies centered on pragmatic inference and discourse tracking beyond literal keyword matching. Additionally, implementing pre-service diagnostic benchmarking can help identify individual support needs prior to public duties. Future research should evaluate larger multi-regional cohorts, assess

productive modalities (speaking and writing), and test whether targeted ESP training directly improves real-world communicative performance.

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