

## Digital Literacy and Competences in the Field of Tourism and Hospitality in English Language Teaching in the Third Millennium

Brankica Bojovich<sup>1</sup>[0009-0009-0279-7686]

<sup>1</sup> University Mediterranean, Faculty of Tourism, Montenegro  
brankicaboj@gmail.com

**Abstract.** This study investigates the extent of digital literacy among students specializing in Tourism and Hospitality, highlighting the critical necessity of acquiring advanced digital skills to sustain competitiveness within a digitally-driven, multilingual labor market. The theoretical framework underpinning this research incorporates the utilization of the Internet, websites, and various online tools that facilitate the introduction of innovative methodologies and resources in the specialized context of English language instruction.

To examine whether modern digital tools contribute to the development of digital competences, mixed-methods research was employed. Data were collected from approximately 150 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Tourism at the University of Mediterranean during the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. The data collection instruments included online questionnaires (Google Forms), semi-structured interviews, as well as follow-up communication via email, short message service (SMS), phone calls and Viber calls.

The data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS and Excel) and thematic coding to identify patterns in digital literacy and English language use. The analysis draws on prior research (Bojovich, 2016; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Kwok, 2023) and focuses on three key aspects: (1) students' mastery of the four language skills in English, (2) their digital literacy within the context of Tourism and Hospitality and (3) the digital competences required in this professional field. Particular attention is paid to the practical application of English as a lingua franca in tourism marketing, reflecting current industry needs.

The findings indicate that digital tools play a significant role in shaping students' language acquisition and digital skills. Moreover, the results suggest a paradigmatic shift in teaching practices due to the growing integration of digital technologies. These changes call for an adaptation of pedagogical strategies to better prepare students for the evolving demands of the tourism and hospitality sectors. This study is an empirical investigation that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development of digital literacy among Tourism and Hospitality students.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy, Digital competence, English for Specific Purposes.

### 1 Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is undergoing rapid digital transformation, significantly influencing how professionals interact with international guests and

Research Paper  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46793/eLearning2025.245B>  
Part of ISBN: 978-86-89755-37-4



© 2025 Copyright for this paper by its authors.  
Use permitted under Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

manage day-to-day operations. English, as the global lingua franca, remains the dominant medium of communication, especially in online environments.[1] Consequently, mastering both English language and digital competencies has become essential for tourism professionals who aim to thrive in a technology-driven and globally competitive market.

Kwok [2] in the article "Tech-Savvy Tourism: Trends and Innovations" published in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, examines the transformative impact of digital technologies on the tourism and hospitality sector. The study emphasizes the evolving role of technology, from a supportive tool to a central enabler of market competitiveness by facilitating data collection and enabling personalized service offerings. Moreover, the article highlights how technological advancements have shifted power toward consumers, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions and actively participate in the co-creation of value.

In this context, ESP for tourism must cover both language skills and digital literacy. This can be more effectively achieved by referencing models like DigComp, which provide a framework for digital competences. This is in line with the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp), which outlines essential digital competencies for both personal and professional development. According to DigComp, students should be proficient in the use of digital tools, content creation, and communication. Our study found that the majority of students scored above the basic proficiency level in these areas, although there were variations based on their previous exposure to digital tools and English.

The evolving nature of the tourism sector demands that professionals operate fluently within digital ecosystems, from booking platforms and social media to CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems<sup>1</sup> and live chat support tools.

This study explores how students of tourism and hospitality develop digital literacy and English language competencies, examining the effectiveness of integrating digital tools into language instruction.

This study also examines linguistic interference between English and Serbian/Montenegrin in digital contexts, with over 60 lexemes identified from communication via Viber, phone, and Zoom.

Additionally, the study contributes to the discourse on the role of digital technology in facilitating lexical borrowing and English language acquisition. It underscores both the benefits and drawbacks of technological influence on language interference, particularly among students, whose growing dependence on online communication is increasingly reflected in their lexical choices and everyday discourse.

The essence of the social and communicative aspect of the Internet lies in the interconnection of participants within an online community, where the central activities include communication, information exchange, and interaction. Participants establish an entire network of social relations through both synchronous and asynchronous communication, thereby creating an online social and public sphere.[3]

---

<sup>1</sup> CRM is a system (software) that companies use to: track customer contacts – including name, phone number, email address, and history of previous communication, manage sales processes – identifying potential customers, tracking who has purchased, and monitoring customer interest, analyze customer behavior – understanding what they searched for, when, and how often, improve customer support – by providing faster solutions since all client information is already stored in the system.

Moreover, student networks are monitored due to the use of anglicized vocabulary. [4] Numerous anglicized examples from the student corpus are the following translated or transcribed into their English equivalents such as Instagram, to hate (hejtovati), to reset (resetovati), to update (apdejtovati), to install (instalirati), and web (veb), mail (mejl), blog (blog), clip (klip), cyber (sajber), videophone (videofon), spam (spem), inbox (inboks), smartphone (smartfon), connection (konekcija), application (aplikacija), implementation (implementacija), attachment (atačment), to attach (atačovati), to download (daunlodovati), to upload (aploudovati), input (input), online (onlajn), to chat (četovati), notification (notifikacija), navigation (navigacija), password (pasvord), camera (kamera), game (gejm), Viber (vajber), Zoom (zum), player (plejer), Bluetooth (blutut), Wi-Fi (vaj faj), channel (kanal), chip (čip), antivirus program (antivirusni program), backup (bek ap), browser (brouzer), to create a program (kreirati program), to delete (dilitovati), desktop (desktop), display (displej), driver (drajver), file (fajl), filter (filter), gadget (gadžet), to generate (generisati), header (heder), folder (folder), host (host), interface (interfejs), to install (instalirati), provider (provajder), link (link), log (log), menu (meni), media (media), mouse (maus), offline (oflajn), online (onlajn), option (opcija), system (sistem), screenshot (skrinšotovati).

Words are, therefore, an instrument through which we acquire knowledge of the language and culture of a foreign country. At the same time, by learning foreign words, the student expands the meanings of words in their native language, thereby gaining a better understanding of the concepts those words express. Thus, knowledge of vocabulary plays an important role in mastering a language.[5]

Digital communication includes selfies, various posts, and explanations covering both general and professional topics. Communication takes place through emails, Zoom meetings, online and Viber social groups, blogs, and video clips. Digitalization as a process is interesting to students, especially to those who have access to new or cutting-edge technological trends.

## 2 Methods

This empirical study adopts a mixed-methods approach to assess the digital and linguistic competencies of students specializing in tourism and hospitality. The research was conducted at the Faculty of Tourism, University of Mediterranean, during the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. The innovation of this study is based on a clear data setup and analysis methods, as well as the participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis, in order to achieve the research results.

**Table 1.** Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Category	Description
Data Collection Instruments	Online questionnaires (Google Forms), Semi-structured interviews
Data Analysis Tools	Follow-up communication: email, SMS, phone calls, and Viber calls

Analysis Methods	SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) <sup>2</sup> - Microsoft Excel
Focus of Analysis	Statistical analysis (quantitative data) - Thematic coding (qualitative data)

Approximately 150 undergraduate students enrolled in tourism and hospitality programs participated in the study.

Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms to gather quantitative information, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative insights. Follow-up communication was carried out using email, SMS, phone calls, and Viber. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel, with a focus on frequency, percentage, and correlation analysis. SPSS facilitated data entry, management, analysis, and visualization through its user-friendly interface. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic coding, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and categories related to students' use of English and digital tools.

### 3 Results and discussion

**Table 2. 1. Research Results (n = 150)**

Digital Tool	% of Students Using Frequently
Google Docs	87%
Microsoft Teams	68%
Zoom	75%
Canva	52%
ChatGPT / AI Tools	61%

**Table 3. Self-Assessment of Digital Competences**

Competence Level	% of Students
<u>High</u>	39%
<u>Medium</u>	51%
<u>Low</u>	10%

#### Use of English in Digital Contexts

- 78% of students reported frequent use of English when using digital tools.
- 65% stated that digital technology helped them improve their understanding of English.
- 22% reported feeling insecure when using English in online communication.

#### Identified Themes (from Thematic Coding of Interviews)

- Increased Digital Autonomy: Students reported that online tools enabled more effective learning management.

<sup>2</sup> SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a software package used for statistical data analysis. It is used in various fields such as social sciences, business and many others for processing, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative data

- Language Barriers: A number of students mentioned difficulties using more complex English terms in digital environments.
- Positive Perception of AI Tools: Most participants felt that tools like ChatGPT made research and writing tasks easier and more efficient.

The results of this study highlight the essential role that digital tools and English language proficiency play in the daily tasks of tourism and hospitality students. The integration of technology into their educational process significantly influences their vocabulary, communication strategies, and the development of digital literacy.

From the online questionnaires, 61% of students reported that they use digital platforms for learning purposes, such as online courses and educational videos, and 74% stated that they frequently engage in social media communication related to their field of study. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube emerged as key tools for gathering information about the latest tourism trends, destination marketing, and industry news. The highest frequency of English usage was noted in online interactions with tourists, where 56% of students indicated that English was their primary language for communication.

In contrast, 52% of respondents acknowledged that they have encountered difficulties in understanding specific tourism-related terms, especially those linked to digital services (e.g., booking engine, virtual tour, customer engagement platform). Students reported that they often rely on online dictionaries or machine translation tools (e.g., Cambridge online dictionary, Trados, Lingue, Google) to overcome these language barriers. This reliance on technology aligns with the study by Coyle et al. [6] which emphasized that students in technical fields frequently face challenges in understanding discipline-specific terminology in English, particularly when it is associated with emerging digital technologies.

When asked to evaluate their own digital competences, 39% of students rated themselves as highly competent, while a majority of 51% identified their skill level as moderate, indicating that most students are still developing their digital competencies. Only 10% considered themselves to have low digital skills. This distribution suggests that the majority of students possess a functional level of digital literacy, with a significant portion exhibiting advanced skills. These findings support the idea that exposure to digital tools contributes to the enhancement of digital competences.

Also, the study highlighted cases of code-switching and translanguaging, i.e. the practice of mixing English with Serbian/Montenegrin in digital communication. For instance, students would often use English technical terms such as update, subscribe or click, while continuing their communication in Serbian/Montenegrin. This phenomenon suggests that digital competence, in the context of tourism, encourages students to blend linguistic elements from both languages. Furthermore, the use of anglicisms seems to be increasing, especially in informal communication on platforms such as Viber and WhatsApp.

The integration of digital communication tools into the curriculum was shown to have a positive impact on students' professional development. They feel more confident in their ability to handle digital marketing tasks (e.g., creating content for social media), use CRM software, and engage in e-commerce transactions. Additionally, many students reported an increase in their interest in digital entrepreneurship, as they saw the practical benefits of using digital tools for personal branding and promoting tourism services online.

### 3.1 English Language Use in Digital Environments

James Paul Gee and Elisabeth Hayes explore how digital media are reshaping not only the way we use language but also how we learn. They argue that digital technologies such as video games, social media, and online communities have created new forms of literacy and learning that differ significantly from traditional schooling.[7]

English plays a key role in students' digital experiences. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents reported frequent use of English when interacting with digital tools and platforms, especially those with no localized language options. Moreover, 65% stated that their exposure to English through digital environments has contributed to improved comprehension and vocabulary.

Despite this, 22% of students reported feeling insecure when using English in online communication, particularly in professional or academic contexts. This points to the need for continued language support in higher education, especially in programs that rely heavily on digital resources and international communication

### 3.2 Thematic Insights from Interviews

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and follow-up communication revealed several themes:

- Increased Digital Autonomy: Students noted that modern tools allowed them to manage their learning more independently, organize their schedules, and access diverse learning resources.
- Language Barriers: Some students, particularly those with lower English proficiency, expressed challenges in understanding specialized terminology or navigating platforms available only in English.
- Positive Attitudes Toward AI Tools: Many participants viewed AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, as helpful companions in the learning process, offering assistance with writing, clarification of concepts, and even translation.

Overall, the data suggest that modern digital tools play a significant role in enhancing both digital competences and English language proficiency among students. However, challenges related to language confidence and digital literacy gaps still persist for a minority of users. These findings underline the importance of integrating digital skills and English language support into university curricula, particularly in programs preparing students for the global tourism industry.

The above mentioned findings are categorized into three core areas: (1) students' English language proficiency, (2) their digital literacy in the tourism context, and (3) the intersection of digital tools and language use.

(1) Students' English language proficiency The majority of students demonstrated functional English proficiency, particularly in reading and listening. However, speaking and writing skills varied, especially in formal or professional settings. Common challenges included limited vocabulary for tourism-specific contexts and lack of confidence in spoken interactions.

(2) their digital literacy in the tourism context Students showed high familiarity with basic digital tools such as booking websites (e.g. Booking.com, TripAdvisor), social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook), and communication tools (WhatsApp, email).

However, their usage was often limited to consumer roles rather than professional applications. CRM systems and POS (Point of Sale) software were less familiar, indicating a gap in industry-specific digital training. (3) the intersection of digital tools and language use It refers to the integration of language and digital skills. Students who actively engaged in e-learning platforms (e.g. Coursera, Udemy, Alison) reported improved digital and language skills. Many noted that using English-language tools (e.g. Google Maps, virtual tours, chatbots) helped them acquire vocabulary and functional expressions in a practical context.

#### 4 **Concluding remarks**

The results confirm the interdependence of digital and linguistic competencies in the tourism and hospitality industry. While students demonstrate moderate proficiency in both domains, the integration of English language instruction with digital tools remains inconsistent.

The current findings call for a pedagogical shift toward more integrated ESP curricula that reflect real-world digital interactions. Role-playing in simulated environments (e.g. hotel reception, virtual customer service) and tasks involving online content creation (e.g. writing reviews, responding to emails) could enhance both language and digital skills.

Challenges such as outdated curricula, lack of access to digital tools, and limited opportunities for real-world practice remain significant. The fear of making mistakes in English, especially in public or digital contexts, hinders active participation. Institutions must adopt blended learning models, incorporate industry software into instruction, and foster confidence-building strategies.

This study highlights the critical role of digital literacy and English language proficiency in preparing future professionals for the tourism and hospitality industry. Students must be equipped not only with academic knowledge but also with practical, industry-relevant skills. Digital tools significantly enhance language acquisition and professional readiness, integrated instruction leads to better learning outcomes and greater student engagement, there is a need for curriculum reform that reflects the digital transformation of tourism, and e-learning platforms offer scalable solutions for ongoing professional development.

Additionally, the study highlights the growing use of anglicized vocabulary in online communication, especially among students in tourism and hospitality, where English terms are often integrated into everyday digital interactions, reflecting both industry trends and the influence of globalized communication norms. Moreover, student communication networks are increasingly monitored due to the frequent use of anglicized vocabulary. Numerous examples from the student corpus illustrate this trend, with English words either directly borrowed or phonetically transcribed into the local language. In the overall analysis, the frequent presence of anglicized vocabulary was observed, indicating that many English-origin terms have become fully integrated into everyday language use among students.[8]

Despite the advancements, there are still challenges in overcoming language barriers, especially concerning industry-specific terminology. Students' increasing

reliance on digital tools and English for Specific Purposes reflects the growing importance of digital literacy as a core skill in tourism education.

This study also emphasizes the need for targeted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses that combine linguistic knowledge with digital competence to help future professionals navigate the complexities of the modern digital environment. It suggests that further research should investigate how emerging technologies, such as AI tools and virtual assistants, can be integrated into tourism education to further enhance both language learning and digital skill development.

**Disclosure of Interests.** The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

## References

1. Bojovich, B., Osnovi translatologije, Filološki fakultet Nikšić, Univerzitet Crne Gore. pp. 118-125 (2016). [1]
2. Bojovich, B., Models of translation procedures in the processing of specific cultural terms in Comprehensive Serbian-English dictionary, Srpski jezik, vol.28, Beograd, pp. 371-386 (2023). [8]
3. Coyle, D., Holmes, B., & King, L. Towards the European Digital Competence Framework: A Report of the European Commission's DigComp Framework Working Group. European Commission. (2017). [6]
4. Filipović, J., Vučo, J., & Đurić, Lj. Rano učenje stranih jezika u Srbiji. Inovacije u nastavi, 19(2), Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Učiteljski fakultet. pp. 113–124 (2006). [5]
5. Gee, J.P. & Hayes, E.R., Language and Learning in the Digital Age. Routledge. (2011). [7]
6. Habermas J., The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1991).[3]
7. Hornby, M. S., The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints? Springer. (2006). [4]
8. Kwok, L., Tech-Savvy Tourism: Trends and Innovations, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, Emerald Publishing Limited (2023). [2]