

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Typology of English Language Exercises for Developing Soft Skills in The Hospitality Sector

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Abstract

This article develops a typology of English language exercises aimed at fostering soft skills required in the hospitality sector. Due to the service-oriented nature of tourism and hospitality, foreign language teaching must simultaneously develop communicative, emotional-intellectual, problem-solving, teamwork and intercultural competences. The paper systematizes exercise types within an ESP/ETP approach and offers recommendations for practical lesson design, ensuring that English training supports both linguistic proficiency and soft skills relevant to real workplace communication.

KEY WORDS

soft skills; hospitality; ESP/ETP; English language exercises; communicative competence; role-plays; problem situations; intercultural communication; service discourse.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector is a complex system of services based on direct interaction with clients, rapid context-sensitive decision-making, emotional stability, and teamwork. Therefore, for professionals working in this field, not only occupational “hard skills”, but also such soft skills as communicativeness, empathy, adaptability, problem-solving, time management, positive attitude and service ethics become decisive. International research likewise demonstrates that service quality and customer satisfaction largely depend on employees’ personal and social skills.

Teaching English for tourism and hospitality purposes (ETP/EHP) is part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and is organized on the basis of real work-related discourse and professional situations that students are likely to encounter. The ESP/ETP approach relies on authentic materials, tasks oriented to professional duties, situational communication and

reflection. However, in practice ETP lessons often remain limited to lexico-grammatical preparation and do not systematically target the development of social-psychological skills (soft skills) that are required in service discourse. From this perspective, designing English exercises in integration with soft skills is essential.

The aim of this article is to develop a theoretically and practically grounded typology of English language exercises that promote soft skills in the hospitality sector, and to justify their didactic functions and roles in the lesson process.

Theoretical foundations: integrating soft skills and language teaching in hospitality

Soft skills are a set of social, emotional and communicative abilities that enable successful performance in interpersonal and professional activities. In hospitality, their role is particularly strong because the sector belongs to the “people–

people” type of service industry. EHL Hospitality Insights, for example, identifies soft skills such as managing problematic situations, establishing positive customer relations and motivating teams as core elements of professional performance in the sector. Other researchers note that in tourism and hospitality education soft skills should not be taught as a separate “add-on” module, but rather developed gradually through interdisciplinary integration.

The methodological basis for developing soft skills in language teaching is formed by the communicative approach, experiential learning, task-based language teaching (TBLT) and the modelling of professional discourse. In this framework, language is viewed not only as a linguistic object, but also as a tool for displaying personal and social competences in professional communication. ETP courses are designed to combine language and occupational skills by simulating real work situations.

Criteria for constructing the typology

In classifying English language exercises for hospitality students with a focus on soft skills, the following criteria are taken as central:

1. Relevance to professional context (authenticity):

The exercise should reflect a real service situation (e.g. check-in, complaint handling, concierge briefing).

2. Degree of social interactivity:

The exercise should require the learner to engage in cooperation, negotiation and teamwork.

3. Centrality of soft skills:

The immediate aim should not be merely repetition of language forms, but the demonstration and development of a specific soft skill.

4. Presence of reflection and assessment:

The exercise should include a final stage with self-assessment, peer feedback and drawing conclusions.

5. Alignment with CEFR/ESP competencies:

The level of language and the demands of professional discourse should correspond to CEFR descriptors and ESP objectives.

Based on these criteria, the exercises are grouped into the following seven types.

Typology of English language exercises for developing soft skills in hospitality

Service communication exercises

Targeted soft skills: politeness, active listening, customer-oriented speech, clarity and empathy in interaction.

Typical subtypes:

- **Dialogical drills (service scripts):**

Short service dialogues structured around a “greeting–offering help–clarifying–closing” sequence, practiced in roles.

- **Politeness rephrasing tasks:**

Transforming direct, imperative statements into polite service language (e.g. “Give me your passport” → “Could I please see your passport?”).

- **Intonation and paralinguistic practice:**

Saying the same sentence with different intonations and discussing how this changes the guest’s perception.

These exercises help to automatize standard speech formulas frequently used in hospitality discourse and to develop the ability to construct service-oriented, polite communication.

Empathy and emotional intelligence exercises

Targeted soft skills: empathy, emotional resilience, stress management, positive attitude.

Typical subtypes:

- **“In the guest’s shoes” reflective writing:**

Students describe, in English, a situation in which they felt uncomfortable as a guest, and then write how a staff member should respond empathetically.

- **Emotion-labeling role cards:**

In role-play, each student receives a card indicating a hidden emotional state (anxious, angry, tired guest), and the partner tries to identify this state based on the language used.

- **De-escalation phrases practice:**

Practicing phrases used to calm down difficult situations in complaint or escalation contexts.

Such exercises teach students to recognize the guest’s emotional state and to adapt their communication strategy accordingly. In hospitality, empathy and stress management are key elements of service quality.

Problem-solving and conflict management exercises

Targeted soft skills: problem-solving, critical thinking, negotiation, responsibility.

Typical subtypes:

- Complaint-handling simulations:

Role-plays based on guest complaints (unclean room, delayed transfer, wrong restaurant order), followed by analysis of “best practice” responses.

- Case study discussions:

Group work on real hospitality cases with the task of developing a solution and defending it in English.

- Decision-tree tasks:

Choosing between alternative response strategies (options A–B–C) depending on the situation.

Role-plays and case analyses have repeatedly been shown to be effective tools for developing professional communication and soft skills among tourism students.

Teamwork and leadership exercises

Targeted soft skills: cooperation, task distribution, leadership, responsible communication.

Typical subtypes:

- Team service projects:

Mini-projects such as “Hotel service improvement pitch” or “Tour package design”, where roles (manager, receptionist, marketing officer) are distributed and the final product is presented in English.

- Information-gap group tasks:

Each team member has part of the information and the group must reconstruct the complete service process through English communication.

- Peer-feedback workshops:

Groups assess each other’s service dialogue or presentation and provide constructive feedback.

Team-based exercises prepare hospitality students for real workplace dynamics and collaborative service delivery.

Intercultural and pragmatic competence exercises

Targeted soft skills: tolerance, adaptability, intercultural sensitivity, pragmatic appropriateness.

Typical subtypes:

- Cultural incident tasks:

Discussion of “delicate” situations with guests from different cultural backgrounds (personal space, dietary requirements, religious restrictions), and development of appropriate English responses.

- Discourse-repair drills:

Correcting linguistically correct but pragmatically inappropriate utterances.

- Storytelling as a guide:

Practicing tour guiding narratives while avoiding stereotypes and choosing culturally neutral, respectful language.

Tourism discourse inevitably unfolds in an intercultural space; therefore, language exercises must explicitly address intercultural pragmatics.

Self-management and professionalism exercises

Targeted soft skills: time management, discipline, self-control, adherence to service standards.

Typical subtypes:

- Shift-planning tasks:

Creating and justifying, in English, a work schedule for a “busy day at the hotel”, prioritizing tasks.

- Professional email/chat etiquette:

Writing concise and clear messages to guests in a professional tone via email or chat.

- Self-assessment checklists:

After each lesson, students assess themselves using a “Service professionalism” rubric.

In modern hospitality, digital communication and professional conduct have become key indicators of service quality; these exercises support the development of corresponding habits.

Digital and multimodal communication exercises

Targeted soft skills: media literacy, rapid written communication, creativity.

Typical subtypes:

- Digital role-plays (chat-based):

Simulated online booking conversations and responses to

guest questions on social media.

- Video-scenario production:

Students create short videos on “good vs. bad service” and then analyze language use and soft skills demonstration.

- VR/360° tour commentary:

Preparing engaging, guest-oriented commentary in English based on a virtual tour video.

These exercises strengthen students’ readiness for modern digital formats of service communication in hospitality.

Conclusion

In the hospitality sector, the effectiveness of English language education is determined not only by the acquisition of linguistic forms, but also by the extent to which students can use the language to display and develop soft skills required in real service situations. Within an ESP/ETP approach, classifying exercises into such categories as service communication, empathy, problem-solving, teamwork, intercultural pragmatics, professional self-management and digital communication brings clarity to lesson design and helps teachers make targeted methodological choices.

This typology, on the one hand, increases students’ preparedness for professional discourse and, on the other hand, enhances their L2 motivation and supports their development as service-oriented personalities. Future research is recommended to experimentally test this typology in the context of hospitality education in Uzbekistan and to develop detailed assessment criteria for evaluating both language outcomes and soft skills.

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