

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
 Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 46-62, April 2022
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.4.3>
 Received Feb 28, 2022; Revised Apr 13, 2022; Accepted Apr 18, 2022

Comparative Determination of Communicative Competence of Saudi Students of English for Tourism and Hospitality (SSETH) to Develop ESP Course Content

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Abstract. Development of tailor-made indigenous teaching content, after assessing the target learners' needs and proficiency, is necessary to address to specific needs of specific learners, ensure optimum learning and motivation. This quantitative investigation attempted to determine the communicative competence of SSETH in English language skills to develop indigenous teaching content. A Likert-scale questionnaire was developed and administered to 289 participants to record their perceived proficiency in English language skills and sub-skills. Independent-samples T-test was run to generate descriptive statistics and determine whether any significant differences existed in their perceived proficiency level. The results revealed medium low English language proficiency by the participants. SSETH reported comparatively higher proficiency in the productive skills of writing and speaking as compared to the receptive skills of listening and writing. The cohort from College of Tourism and Hospitality, Taif (CTHT) reported slightly higher competence as compared to their counterparts from College of Tourism and Hospitality, Madinah (CTHM). Comparative results generated by Independent-

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samples T-test rejected the null hypotheses as no statistically significant differences were found in the perceived communicative competence of both groups. It is recommended that various stake holders should work in close coordination to develop and implement indigenous teaching content which should be periodically assessed and modified to suit the changing ESP needs of SSETH. This procedure may be followed as a model for other disciplines to develop indigenous teaching material.

Keywords: comparative determination; tourism and hospitality; communicative competence; ESP course content

1. Introduction

Tourism is a thriving industry which is currently promoted by various countries to strengthen their economies and provide business opportunities to their people. The magnitude of its scope is evident as “UN World Tourism Organization predicts that by 2030, the number of international tourists will increase to 1.8 billion” (Alisher, 2015, p. 58). Trickle-down effect of this industry is all encompassing. Bora (2011) highlighted the role of this industry in promoting economy of a country and reported that “tourism has several multiplier effects and has the potential to benefit all sections of society” (p. 13). Several studies reported its positive role in developing the economies of many countries worldwide (Fujita, 2020; Rahman, 2016). Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has prioritized tourism sector in an effort to broaden the economic base instead of mainly oil-dependent economies and the tourism sector is considered a source of income as well as to diversify the national economy and provide employment to their youth (Alhowaish, 2016).

Saudi Arabia set ambitious targets to promote tourism sector through national and international partnerships and Ministry of Tourism, Saudi Arabia (n.d.) initiated ‘the tourist investment fund’ with an enormous capital of ‘15 billion Saudi riyals’. Saudi Vision 2030 is a futuristic map to strengthen and diversify Saudi economy through investing in multiple mega projects. Tourism related goals include increasing tourism industry share in national GDP from 3% to 10%, achieving target of 1.6 million jobs by adding additional one million jobs in the tourism sector and ‘attracting 100 million local and international visits annually by 2030’ (Ministry of Tourism, Saudi Arabia (n.d.)). Serious efforts are manifested in the Travel and Tourism Competitive Report (2017) which stated that Saudi Arabia significantly outperformed the remaining GCC countries in promoting five UNESCO World Heritage sites and thousands of historical sites to attract local and international tourists. NEOM, AMAALA, Red Sea Project and Qiddiyah are part of ambitious six giga-projects which is Saudi Arabia’s \$7 trillion development plan. This plan epitomizes Saudi vision 2030 to transform Saudi economy to show ‘the nation’s geographical wealth, cultural heritage and hospitality, economic ambitions and aspirations for environmental conservation’ (Kane & Al-Khudair, 2021).

Prachanant (2012) stated that tourism workforce requires to interact with tourists who speak different languages. Therefore, a properly trained workforce is needed in the tourism industry to interact efficiently with international tourists.

This mutual communication is supposed to be done in a language which is commonly used as a lingua franca. English language acquired the status of a common language for mutual communication and widely used in “international affairs, trade and commerce, tourism and so on” (Rahman, 2016, p. 43). A growing mass of research reported that tourism industry cannot sustain and progress without trained and skilled tourism workforce that is proficient in English language and communicative skills (Tanković et al., 2021; Robles, 2019; Bury & Oka, 2017; Dhiman, 2012; Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011; Chen et al., 2011).

2. Statement of the Problem

Bobanovic and Grznic (2011) pointed out that it is mandatory to use a common language to maintain effective communication between tourism work force and international tourists from around the globe. It is unavoidable to execute a comprehensive plan to offer specialised courses of English for tourism to enable Saudi tourism workforce efficiently communicate with their target clients (Kim et al., 2017; Yasmin et al., 2016). Technical and vocational training corporation (TVTC) initiated a large-scale program to equip Saudi aspirants in the field of tourism and hospitality with technical and communicative skills. Several technical colleges have been established in various regions of Saudi Arabia which offer English for tourism courses to equip SSETH with the required English language proficiency and communicative competence to meet the challenge. Several studies revealed that English language proficiency of Saudi students is quite low as compared to their international counterparts (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Alrabai, 2016a; Al-Seghayer, 2014). ‘EF Education’ conducted a large-scale investigation and English language proficiency of 2.3 million non-native speakers from hundred countries was measured and Saudi students were placed on 98th position as mentioned in EF EPI 2019 annual report of English proficiency Index (Arab News, 2019). This poor English language proficiency of Saudi students is a major hurdle in achieving ambitious tourism targets set in Saudi vision 2030. There is an urgent need to undertake a coordinated effort including all stake holders to devise a comprehensive plan to upgrade English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. Colleges of tourism and hospitality situated in various regions of Saudi Arabia are teaching general English or ready-made English for tourism courses available in the market. These courses do not seem to cater for the specific needs of SSETH. Tailor-made indigenous teaching content, based on comprehensive needs analysis and current English language proficiency of SSETH, is needed to fill this gap and address to the target needs of SSETH efficiently (Al-Malki et al., 2022). This investigation aimed to identify proficiency level of Saudi students studying at colleges of tourism and hospitality situated in Taif and Madinah as no such study has been done in Saudi Arabia to the best knowledge of the researchers.

3. Literature Review

3.1 English for Specific Purposes

Dudley-Evans (2001) stated that ESP is “a separate branch of English Language Teaching” (p. 131) which is different from general English language courses. General English language courses are meant to teach presumed fundamentals of English whereas ESP courses are developed based on target situation analysis (TSA) and present situation analysis (PSA) of the target population. ESP courses

target the specific English language needs of the students' academic or professional purposes (Liu & Zhang, 2020; Al-Khatib, 2015; Johns & Price, 2014). Johns and Price (2014) identified this approach as "a pedagogical movement in applied linguistics" (p. 471) and it is presently a well-established and widely used approach in English language teaching to satisfy specific needs of learners (Anthony, 2018). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) informed that variable characteristics of ESP include planning English language courses for specific disciplines, applying different pedagogical procedures than general English, targeting university undergraduates or on-job trainees and designing them for intermediate and advanced level students. ESP course may be grouped in various pedagogical categories based on the target learners' academic, occupational or professional needs and are developed and "tailored to the specific learning and language use needs and goals of the identified groups of students" (Johns & Price, 2014, p. 206). An inevitable feature of all ESP courses is to follow standard procedure of assessing needs of the target population before developing tailor-made teaching content (Liu & Zhang, 2020; Robles, 2019). Tailor-made teaching content facilitate EFL learners to "maintain their interest and enjoyment in learning English" (Alqarni, 2021, p. 73).

3.2 Needs Assessment

Needs assessment (NA) is the foremost and primary component of ESP that "distinguishes ESP from general English" (Liu & Zhang, 2020, p. 207). General English courses target "the presumed fundamentals of the language" whereas specialized ESP courses are developed through "a careful assessment of a particular group's specific language learning needs and target situation" (Johns & Price, 2014, p. 472). A growing mass of research has offered a valuable insight into the fact that NA is "the corner stone of ESP" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 122), "the key defining feature of ESP" and always "the first step for ESP" (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 133). Brown (2009) stated that development of specialized teaching content is the major target of NA which "satisfies the language learning and teaching requirements of the students and teachers within the context of particular institution(s) involved" (p. 269). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlighted the role of ESP in English language teaching as "the irreducible minimum" (p. 53) and it was also regarded as "a key instrument" (West, 1994, p. 2) for any serious attempt of ESP material development. Johns and Price-Machada (2001) concluded that "[In] every genuine ESP course, needs assessment is obligatory, and in many programs, an ongoing needs assessment is integral to curriculum design and evaluation" (p. 49).

TSA and PSA are critical components of NA. TSA covers "necessities, lacks and wants, and asking questions about the target situation and participants' attitudes towards it" (Liu & Zhang, 2020, p. 207). TSA provides an umbrella term for identifying various language skills and sub-skills to cope up with the target situation. PSA or deficiency analysis "seeks to establish what learners are like at the beginning of the course" and attempts to identify the "students' current level of proficiency including lacks" (Elsaid Mohammed & Nur, 2018, p. 54). This includes the learners' "weakness and strength in language, skills, and learning experience" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 125). It is further elaborated that PSA also investigates the learners' ability to use the target language and their

ambitions and motivation to learn as well (Hossain, 2013; Duddley-Evans & John, 2009). Identification of PSA is an initial step in developing tailor-made teaching content because it “seeks to ascertain what the students are akin to at the start of their language course, looking into their strengths and weaknesses” (Rahman, 2015, p. 27). Noor (2019) also expressed that PSA involves ‘fundamental variables’ which should be addressed in the beginning of needs analysis. In conclusion, PSA is the corner stone of NA and identifies the “discrepancy between necessity and what the students have already known concerning with the subject and related with their current skills and performance” (Yundayani, 2018, p. 120).

4. Research Design

4.1 Methodology

This large-scale survey research employed the quantitative paradigm to identify communicative competence of SSETH in various English language skills and sub-skills. The researchers used a Likert-scale strongly agree to strongly disagree questionnaire to collect data from SETS studying at College of Tourism and Hospitality, Taif (CTHT) and College of Tourism and Hospitality, Madinah (CTHM). Survey research was selected for this investigation because the target population consisted of large number of students. Dörnyei (2007) suggested that a survey is an efficient and cheap instrument to collect data from large populations.

4.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were set for this comparative investigation:

1. What is the proficiency level of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM in various English language skills?
2. What is the proficiency level of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM in various English language sub-skills?
3. Are there any differences in the proficiency of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM in various English language skills?
4. Do SSETH from CTHT and CTHM differ in their in various English language sub-skills?

4.3 Research Hypotheses

This quantitative survey research attempted to test the following null hypotheses:

- H0 1. There does not exist any statistically significant differences in the proficiency level of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM in various English language skills?
- H0 2. There does not exist any statistically significant differences in the proficiency level of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM in various English language skills?

4.4 Instrumentation

Relevant research studies were thoroughly reviewed to develop a survey instrument to gather data (Liu & Zhang, 2020; Yundayani, 2018; Yasmin et al., 2016; Javid & Khan, 2013; Rahim & Tazijan, 2011). The researchers constructed a Likert-scale strongly agree to strongly disagree survey to elicit responses of the

participants related to their perceived communicative competence in various English language skills and sub-skills. The initial version of the survey, along with the title, research questions and hypotheses set for the study, was sent to three professors of applied linguistics for their feedback to achieve content validity. The feedback was incorporated in the final version of the survey. The final version of the questionnaire was translated into Arabic language to generate authentic responses. It was assumed that the participants were not proficient enough in English language to understand survey in English language and record their responses. The translated version of the survey was administered to 27 SSETH from CTHT to determine reliability of the survey. Pearson correlation matrix was calculated for the data generated through the pilot study and high Cronbach's alpha coefficient (.932) was achieved.

4.5 Participants

The participants of this survey were randomly selected SSETH studying English for tourism and hospitality courses at CTHT and CTHM. Total number of respondents to the survey were two hundred eighty-nine (n=289) and the details are given below:

Table 1: Number of the participants

No	Participants	Number
1	SSETH from CTHT	184
2	SSETH from CTHM	105
3	Total	289

4.6 Ethical considerations

The researchers submitted the final English and translated versions of the survey to Taif University ethical committee for their permission to conduct the investigation. Permission was granted and a letter (42-137) was issued. The researchers wrote a request letter to Taif University vice president to issue official requests to the deans of CTHT and CTHM to facilitate the data collection procedure. Separate letters were issued to the deans of both colleges. The participants of the investigation were ensured that their information and data would be kept confidential and used only for this survey.

4.7 Data Collection

The researchers uploaded the Arabic version of the questionnaire on 'Google Forms' and link was shared with the participants of the study to record their responses.

4.8 Data Analysis

Independent-sample T-test was run to calculate descriptive analyses and comparative means. Descriptive analyses were used to determine the communicative competence of the participants and P value was considered to determine whether any statistically significant differences existed in the communicative competence of SSETH from CTHT and CTHM.

5. Results

Table 2: Current level of communicative competence in language skills?

No	Language Skills	Group	n	M	p value
1	Listening skills	CTHT	184	2.7174	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.6190	
2	Speaking skills	CTHT	184	2.9022	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.8381	
3	Reading Skills	CTHT	184	2.6304	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5238	
4	Writing skills	CTHT	184	2.7228	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.6476	

Table 2 presents descriptive analyses of the participants' perceived proficiency level in various English language skills and sub-skills. Speaking skills were ranked at the top followed by writing skills. The participants reported low competence in listening skills and reading skills which were assigned 3rd and 4th position with medium low mean values. Furthermore, no item of this category showed statistically significant difference in their perceived proficiency of various English language skills; though, SSETH from CTHT reported slightly higher mean values in all items than SSETH from CTHM. SETS assigned comparatively higher proficiency in productive skills as compared to receptive skills.

Table 3: Current level of communicative competence in listening sub-skills

No	Listening and understanding..	Group	n	m	p value
1	the tourists' personal details.	CTHT	184	2.7391	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4952	
2	reservation details.	CTHT	184	2.7446	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5905	
3	the tourists' demands.	CTHT	184	2.7772	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5619	
4	the tourists' instructions.	CTHT	184	2.7717	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5333	
5	the tourists' complaints.	CTHT	184	2.8587	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4857	
6	the tourists' feedback.	CTHT	184	2.8696	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5429	
7	the tourists' suggestions.	CTHT	184	2.8859	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5619	
8	major English language accents.	CTHT	184	2.7446	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5429	

The participants assigned medium to medium low preferences to all sub-skills of listening. The highest competence was reported for listening and understanding to the tourists' suggestions and feedback. Understanding the tourists' demands

remained the 3rd most preferred item. Slightly low mean values were recorded for listening and understanding the tourists' instructions. The descriptive analyses revealed that the participants of this survey were least proficient in understanding personal details of their clients. Comprehending major English language accents was also allocated extremely low mean values. Similarly, listening and recording reservation details also received low mean. The remaining 2 items of this table received medium low preferences. Comparative analyses generated by independent-sample T-test showed that statistically significant differences existed in their perceived proficiency of listening and understanding the tourists' complaints.

Table 4: Current level of communicative competence in speaking sub-skills

No	Questionnaire items	Group	n	m	p value
1	Greeting and bidding farewell to tourists	CTHT	184	3.1957	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	3.1524	
2	Apologizing & presenting excuses	CTHT	184	3.1087	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	3.0476	
3	Giving directions Helping tourists with directions	CTHT	184	2.8859	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.7143	
4	Explaining social etiquettes	CTHT	184	2.7609	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4857	
5	Offering help	CTHT	184	3.0163	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.7714	
6	Suggesting and advising	CTHT	184	2.7717	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5143	
7	Guiding tourists about tourist attractions	CTHT	184	2.7826	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5143	
8	Providing trip details	CTHT	184	2.7174	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4667	
9	Asking about tourists' requirements	CTHT	184	2.7174	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.3714	
10	Asking for feedback	CTHT	184	2.5978	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.3905	
11	Asking for suggestions	CTHT	184	2.7174	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4476	
12	Describing places to tourists	CTHT	184	2.7337	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.6190	
13	Interacting with intelligible pronunciation	CTHT	184	2.8152	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5714	

Comparative descriptive analyses of various speaking sub-skills generated through independent samples T-test are presented in table 4. Medium high to medium low mean values were assigned to these sub-skills which indicate that the participants considered this area challenging as other English language sub-skills. 'Greeting and bidding farewell' and 'apologising and presenting excuses' were reported the most preferred items respectively. The participants revealed

that they had medium level of proficiency in 'offering help' and 'helping tourists with directions'. The sub-skills in which the least proficiency was reported were asking the tourists for feedback, requirements and suggestions respectively. Both groups saw eye to eye to each other in reporting their proficiency in speaking sub-skills as only one item out of thirteen exhibited statistically significant difference as calculated by the comparative analyses. The results showed that SSETH were rather weaker in speaking sub-skills which are related to interacting with tourists at the end of their trips.

Table 5: Current level of communicative competence in reading sub-skills

No	Reading and understanding..	Group	n	M	p value
1	Social media messages	CTHT	184	2.8424	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5905	
2	tourists' emails	CTHT	184	2.8641	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5905	
3	tourists' requests and enquiries	CTHT	184	2.8315	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5524	
4	tourists' feedback	CTHT	184	2.8315	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5333	
5	tourists' instructions	CTHT	184	2.8967	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5238	
6	advertisements	CTHT	184	2.8967	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5429	
7	tourist attraction web sites	CTHT	184	2.8750	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.5429	
8	sign boards and notice boards	CTHT	184	2.9402	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.6095	
9	Pamphlets and booklets	CTHT	184	2.8315	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4476	

The results presented in table 5 showed that SSETH from CTHT reported higher proficiency in all reading sub-skills as compared to their counterparts from CTHM. There were only two items, i.e., reading and understanding instructions, pamphlets and booklets which bore statistically significant differences in their perceived proficiency. The highest mean was assigned to understanding sign boards and notice boards followed by understanding advertisements. Understanding tourists' emails received the third highest mean. As far the least preferred reading sub-skill was concerned, understanding pamphlets and booklets was allocated the lowest mean. The next preferred items were understanding tourists' requests, enquiries and feedback. An interesting finding is that the participants from CTHT allotted 2.83 to all the least preferred items whereas SSETH from CTHM assigned medium low mean values.

Table 6: Current level of communicative competence in writing sub-skills

No	Writing	Group	n	M	p value
1	social media messages	CTHT	184	2.8641	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4952	
2	emails	CTHT	184	2.8315	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4095	
3	while listening	CTHT	184	2.7391	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.2095	
4	instructions	CTHT	184	2.7609	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.3524	
5	descriptions	CTHT	184	2.7446	p < 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.2762	
6	answers to queries	CTHT	184	2.6576	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.3619	
7	Reports	CTHT	184	2.5543	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.2381	
8	proposals	CTHT	184	2.5380	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.2762	
9	power point presentations	CTHT	184	2.6576	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4571	
10	social media advertisements	CTHT	184	2.6413	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.4095	
11	trip itineraries	CTHT	184	2.6522	p > 0.05
		CTHM	105	2.2952	

Table 6 details the results related to perceived proficiency of both groups in writing sub-skills and the participants have assigned lower means as compared to all other categories. Average mean score of SSETH from CTHT remained the highest in all items of this section than their counterparts' proficiency. An important finding is that five items of this category bore statistically significant differences in the perceived proficiency level of both groups in writing sub-skills. 'Writing social media messages' remained at the top followed by 'writing emails' and 'instructions'. The results highlighted that the participants were extremely weak in 'writing reports'. The other least preferred items were 'writing while listening' and 'writing proposals'.

6. Discussion

The participants of this investigation reported medium to medium low proficiency in English language skills and sub-skills with slightly higher proficiency in productive skills as compared to the receptive skills. This seems that frequent use of social media with their international acquaintances help them improve their speaking and writing skills. The findings are partially in line with Moattarian and Tahririan (2014) who investigated all stake holders and reported that tourism management graduates in Iran had weak communicative competence. They suggested that indigenous teaching materials should be designed with special emphasis on enhancing communicative skills. Similar findings have been revealed by Lin et al. (2014) as well. Several studies which

were conducted in Saudi Arabia disclosed that Saudi EFL learners were found weak in all English language skills which confirm the findings of this investigation (Alrabai, 2016b; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Alsamadani & Ibnian, 2015; Javid et al., 2013; Alrahaili, 2013; Al-Khairy, 2013a etc.). Alhawsawi (2013) and Rajab (2013) supported the results of this study and stated that English language proficiency of Saudi students remained unsatisfactory even after serious efforts by Saudi government in this regard. One possible reason of low English proficiency level of Saudi EFL students, including the ones in the field of tourism, is extensive use of Arabic language with their teachers and class fellows instead of English language (Alhawsawi, 2013; Alshammari, 2011).

The results of this study revealed medium low communicative competence of SSETH in listening and speaking sub-skills. In line with the results of this study, Prachanant (2012) found that employees of tourism industry faced problems in understanding accent of their clients. Ahmad (2014) and Al-Seghayer (2014) concluded that frequent use of audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods is one major cause of weak listening skills. They mentioned that teachers teach through explicit rules and discrete skills instead of providing facilitative atmosphere in the classrooms to practice oral skills. Similar findings were reported by several studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and reported low proficiency in listening skills among medical undergraduates (Javid, 2018; Aljumah, 2011). Alrabai (2015) reported that "Saudi EFL learners usually have problems developing the productive skill of speaking" (p. 10). Rahman and Deviyanti (2018) found a significant correlation between EFL learners' motivation and their communicative competence. This lack of the required competence in speaking sub-skills is for obvious reason "that Saudi EFL students rarely speak in English with each other" (Rahman & Deviyanti, 2018, p. 220). In line with the results of this perceptive study, Alharbi (2015) stated that Saudi EFL learners prefer to interact in Arabic language which deprive them of the opportunities to have the required speaking practice with their teachers and class mates inside classrooms. There is a need to emphasize on this component in developing teaching content because tourism workforce has to constantly and actively interact with their clients orally. Al-ma'shy (2011) concluded that inappropriate textbooks and untrained teachers were the main reasons behind weak speaking skills of Saudi secondary school learners. Several other studies in different academic contexts of Saudi Arabia highlighted that Saudi EFL learners have serious issues in speaking skills (Bawazir, 2019; Eissa, 2019; Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2016).

The results indicate that SSETH recorded medium proficiency in reading skills with slightly higher level of comprehension when they read short sentences or phrases as compared to reading extended texts. Frequent use of social media with their international contacts seems to be the reason in this regard. Both groups exhibited weaknesses in understanding their clients' feedback and instructions which is an important task to maintain clients' loyalty. All items of this category received medium mean values of less than 3 indicating that reading sub-skills should be given priority in developing teaching content for SSETH.

Like all other skills, SSETH disclosed their weakness in various writing sub-skills as well. Al-rabai (2016b) disclosed that Saudi EFL learners face “serious problems in their academic writing because of weaknesses with using appropriate lexical items and grammar; organizing ideas; spelling; and using prepositions, irregular verbs, articles, punctuation, suffixes and prefixes” (p. 11). Alharbi and Alqefari (2021) also supported the findings of this study and informed that Saudi EFL learners have challenges in academic writing. Similar findings were presented by Javid et al. (2013) who investigated 194 Saudi EFL learners from Taif University. Confirming the results of the present study, Al-Khairi (2013b) announced that Saudi English-major learners faced problems in writing extended paragraphs. He reported that they commit mistakes in vocabulary, punctuation, prepositions, verbs etc. The findings of this survey also found that the participants faced problems in writing reports, proposals and tip itineraries. It seems that frequent use of social media enabled the participants to achieve comparatively higher proficiency in writing short texts but had problems in writing longer texts. Aljafen (2013) also declared that Saudi EFL students feel anxious during the process of writing.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this perceptive study reported medium low English language proficiency among SSETH. It was found that their communicative competence is low as they lack in all English language skills and sub-skills. Slightly higher proficiency level was recorded in productive skills of writing and speaking but the situation is rather worse in receptive skills of listening and reading. As far oral skills were concerned, the participants perceived understanding the tourists’ personal details and different accents as the most problematic. Similarly, the identified problematic areas of speaking sub-skills remained asking for tourists’ feedback, suggestions and requirements. Reading and understanding booklets and pamphlets remained the most challenging sub-skills followed by understanding the clients’ feedback and instructions. The participants declared that writing proposals, reports and answering questions posed maximum challenge. It was also revealed that the participants from CHTT exhibited comparatively higher proficiency level as compared to their counterparts from CIHM but the results rejected the null hypotheses as the comparative analyses recorded statistically significant differences in very few questionnaire items.

There is no denying of the fact that ready-made teaching content cannot fulfil their specific needs and seems inappropriate to teach Saudi tourism workforce who have specific needs and are much less proficient in various English language skills and sub-skills. Therefore, development of tailor-made teaching content is unavoidable based on the TSA and PSA. SSETH were found a mixed-ability EFL learners and need to be handled accordingly. It is also recommended that the students need to be divided and taught in different groups according to their proficiency level in English language. It is also extremely important that close coordination should be ensured among different colleges of tourism and hospitality situated in different regions of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, NA is an on-going process and tailor-made indigenously developed teaching content should be periodically assessed and modified to suit the recent needs of the

students. This is recommended that similar investigation may be conducted in the field of science and other disciplines to identify competence in the relevant areas.

8. Limitation and Future Studies

This investigation involved SSETH from two colleges. It is suggested that tourism workforce presently serving in the field should also be investigated in future studies to assess their proficiency in various English language skills and sub-skills to develop ESP courses for them as well.

Contribution/Originality: This comparative investigation aims to determine the communicative competence of SSETH to develop tailor-made ESP course content. Standardized procedure was followed to identify English for tourism and hospitality communicative competence of SSETH in various skills and sub-skills of English language to ensure efficient and effective teaching.

Funding: This study is financially supported by Saudi Ministry of Higher Education and Deanship of Scientific Research, Taif University under the 'Group Project Number, 1-441-94.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgements: All researchers contributed equally to the conception, execution and report writing of this investigation.

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