

*Preliminary communication*

## **TOURISM AS AN ECONOMIC DRIVE THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN DEVELOPING EMERGING DESTINATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

It is a global tendency for local communities to rely on the opportunities that come with tourism, as this is often a main draw in the economic growth, especially in emerging destinations. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of the English language as a global lingua franca that contributes significantly towards the economic growth of these destinations. The focus is on the tight relationship between the English language and tourism, as further study on the aspect of marketing, communication and services highlights the idea that English proficiency ensures and enhances competitiveness, along with a destination's global visibility. The case study provided for the exploration on the given topic demonstrates how English language adoption and its proper implementation by businesses, hospitality workers and tour guides has improved the satisfaction of tourists within developing areas, which in turn has increased their income generation, and opened new economic avenues. However, the paper also aims to portray all the challenges that are brought due to limited specialized English education, and it addresses the risks of cultural homogenization. Investing in English training would harness the full potential of sustainable tourism, and the paper offers practical recommendations on how to implement that.

Key words: tourism, language training, economic growth, emerging destinations, English proficiency

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### **INTRODUCTION**

For many nations tourism has played a significant catalyst for creating new opportunities within the realm of business, increasing employment, stimulating regional development as well as cultural exchange. In developing countries like Bulgaria for example, tourism is essential for promoting more remote areas of the country in addition to which it plays a key role in economic diversification. Underdeveloped nations, though typically associated with high tourism potential, rely greatly on their ability to effectively communicate in order to appeal to the much larger global tourism market which is dominated in large part by the English language as the widely accepted form of communication. An objective of these emerging nations is to increase their appeal to the growing number of international visitors, which is increasingly linked to English language proficiency.

The function of the English language as a global lingua franca is most noticeable within the tourism space, being a key function of marketing and customer service in addition to being the most commonly used language within online platforms. The ability to communicate effectively in English is essential for tour guides, hotel staff and digital marketing teams to ensure service quality and allow effective engagement with tourists. Online booking

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platforms such as Trip Advisor, Booking.com and Airbnb require the ability to write properly in English to promote venues. Therefore, English proficiency is quickly becoming a major factor in a nation's ability to compete in an ever-growing international tourism market and its ability to capitalize early on global tourism trends.

In Bulgaria, where tourism is an essential sector, understanding how English language expertise directly enables economic growth is crucial for forming future policy and investment. While many urban areas and coastal regions have been able to adapt in their adoption of the English language as a way to engage with the rising number of tourists each year, many rural and remote areas of the country still struggle to access adequate English education and digital tools which limits their ability to benefit and grow.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Tourism and Economic Growth

Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis, abbreviated as TLGH is part of well-established academic research that proves the significance of the relationship between tourism and economic growth. This hypothesis defines tourism as vital for the expansion of economy and forging economic stability. TLGH suggests that tourism contributes greatly to the exchange of foreign earnings, new and growing opportunities for employment, along with infrastructure development, which would lead to broader growth in terms of economy.

The TLGH was analyzed with the help of roughly one hundred empirical studies, that served as comprehensive review in Pablo-Romero and Molina (2013), where evidence was derived to support the idea that tourism is considered to have a crucial role in the promotion of economic growth, as in particular this is valid for countries that invest in tourism infrastructure. These findings are strengthened in Seghir et.al (2015), where with the help of dynamic panel data approach, forty-nine countries are examined. The results absolutely prove and highlight the positive correlation between the performance in economical aspect and tourism spending, as this is especially true for emerging countries.

Tang and Tan (2015) concludes the theory that economic growth is effectively stimulated when tourism development is present. The research focuses on results from Malaysia, where a definite vital economic driver is tourism. Brida, Cortes-Jimenez, and Pulina (2016) support similar findings where the role of tourism marketing is emphasized along with infrastructure as part of the driving expansion in emerging markets. Once again with the help of panel data analysis Lee and Chang (2018) determine that tourism has a huge contribution to non-OECD countries' economic development.

Supported by Aslan (2016), the TLGH proves on country level, as in the case in Turkey, that economic growth is in tight relation with the sustainable tourism that has been developed. The research clearly identifies that well-done policy interventions and promotional strategies would bring greater contribution from tourism towards the economy and its positive development. Collectively the examined studies identify tourism as a crucial pillar for economic diversification in emerging markets. Hence, less developed regions could grow better interest in the tourism sector when the right promotion is initiated, that would bring even more economic opportunities for the entire country or region.

### The Role of Language in Tourism

There is no doubt that an essential role in the industry of tourism plays international language, that would serve as a bridge between local stakeholders and international tourist. In a world of globalization English has been defined as the lingua franca of tourism that helps the communication on international level. Studies highlight the idea that proficiency in English language makes certain destinations more proffered, as tourist feel safer on places where they could be well-understood. In addition to that, cultural inheritance and importance is easily comprehended by tourist when presented in English. The effectiveness of marketing, service experience and overall tourist satisfaction in many cases is tightly linked to the language.

Daher (2020) enhances the idea that there is a growing demand in terms of English training among hospitality workers, where the English plays a key factor of the experience that tourists will have. When specialized English is provided for people who are employed as either tour guides, front desk staff, or marketing professionals, would help even not so popularized destinations to be find attractive and ensure better chance for future development in the tourism industry.

Nickerson et al (2019) has been involved in studying deeply the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the sector of tourism and hospitality. Courses that have been specifically tailored to suit the industry, by suggesting vocabulary and useful phrases were emphasized as part of the ESP. Trip Advisor and Booking have been part of a study made by Diaz-Cintas (2018) where digital marketing and English are the main priority, as it is highlighted that emerging destinations are heavily relying on English to be promoted and given better chance for development.

Nowadays, English has become not just a tool to communicate internationally face to face, but also it has been the effective instrument that digital marketing uses to promote tourism and various destinations, giving opportunities for improvement in these regions. On the other hand, if English is not properly used certain destinations would be limited when it comes to destination's visibility in global markets.

### Emerging Destinations and Globalization

Globalization has brought the rise of emerging tourism destinations, as many of the travelers are attracted to experience something that is authentic, and regions that not overcrowded are also often preferred. Unfortunately, many of these destinations lack the visibility and infrastructure to be recognized as desired tourist locations. It is crucial for such places to work on effective global communication and strategic marketing, that would contribute to tourism growth and have positive economic results.

The appeal of lesser-known areas was based in the changed direction of tourism expectations and preferences in terms of cultural heritage, tourism that aims to focus on nature-based experience. Dimitrova and Ivanov (2017) designed their research to examine emerging tourism in the areas of Eastern Europe. It is suggested that Bulgaria has the potential to offer rural areas that would be seen as attractive tourist destinations, but limited marketing efforts are challenging this to become a reality. Moreover, language barrier and limited opportunities for studying English in these regions make it almost impossible for those places to become recognizable and desired tourist destinations.

Richard (2018) states that globalization has managed to reshape the tourism landscape, which leads to adopting international standards as at the same time local identities are preserved. He promotes the idea that the global tourism map would start recognizing certain places once a proper campaign that involves well-adjusted English is presented. Milano et al. (2020) underpins that the promotion of English as the primary language for tourist attractions would make it easier for such destination to become easily identifiable in a short period of time.

Emerging destinations strictly rely on global visibility when it comes to successful promotion. Both infrastructure development and effective communication strategies would ensure better results and achieved goals. English language training and vast English use in promoting certain places should be seen as a priority.

#### Tourism and Economic Growth in Bulgaria

The GDP of Bulgaria has been linked to various income streams, but tourism plays a vital role in its formation. Not only the GDP is influenced positively, but also employment rates and regional development. The Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis is applicable in terms of Bulgaria, as tourism has been defined as catalyst for economic diversification. This is supported by a report where according to the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, the sector contributes with 11.5 % to the GDP, with potential to grow way further in these results.

Ivanov and Webster (2007) provide relatively early evidence on how entering the EU have impacted the tourism in Bulgaria. However, the focus is a bit shifted in their research as they suggest that it would be vital for the tourism sector to receive funding from foreign direct investments (FDI). This is primary for the region of the Black Sea. On contrast recent studies Dimitrova and Ivanov (2017) examine the importance of promoting rural areas in the tourism sector, as this would be one of the few strategies that could help local communities to experience better economy and employment rates.

## **2.METHODOLOGY**

### Research Design

This study implements a combinational approach utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods to broadly analyze the role of English language education in emerging nations with tourism-driven economies. The case study focuses on analyzing a selection of emerging tourism markets such as Rwanda, Vietnam, Morocco and several regions in Southeast Asia. It examines in detail the contribution of English language skills to tourism development and its influence on economic expansion. These destinations are becoming increasingly more appealing to international tourists due to their ongoing efforts to integrate English as a tool for communication within the tourism space and were therefore obvious candidates for the study.

### Mixed-Method Approach

The study applies both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the events:

1. Qualitative Analysis

Interviews with tourism stakeholders (e.g., local business owners, tourism board officials, tour guides, hospitality managers and policymakers) provide insights into the practical challenges and opportunities associated with English language training in the tourism space.

The interviews focus on three core topics:

The availability of English language training programs pertaining to tourism professionals, and the quality of these programs

Customer satisfaction and business performance and its correlation to English language adoption

Perceptions of the importance of English with regards to increasing the number of new international visitors.

## 2. Quantitative Analysis

Tourism development metrics are stored and evaluated to analyze the relationship between English language proficiency and core economic markers such as employment in the tourism sector, tourist arrivals, and income generated from tourism

Sources of data include official statistics from national tourism boards, organizations such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Bank reports on tourism development and economic performance in emerging markets

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

### 1. Data Collection

Primary Data: Semi-structured interviews with tourism professionals and stakeholders facilitating the collection of data in the designated case study areas.

Secondary Data: Acquired from tourism industry statistics, published reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, and government databases.

Tourism growth data (e.g., tourism-related employment rates, annual tourist arrivals, contribution of tourism to GDP) is composed from reliable sources such as the UNWTO, World Bank, and national tourism authorities of the individual countries.

### 2. Data Analysis

Qualitative Data: The implementation of thematic analysis is vital in identifying recurring patterns and themes within interview transcripts. The gathered data is then categorized into key areas such as the observed importance of specialized English training and its role in tourism marketing, as well as the challenges and implementation of English training programs.

Quantitative Data: Expressive and inferential statistical methods are used to analyze tourism growth metrics, targeting correlations between English language proficiency levels and economic indicators related to tourism. The statistical analysis endeavors to confirm the qualitative conclusions and provide empirical evidence of the connection between language education and tourism-led development.

## 3. Case Studies: The Role of English Proficiency in Bulgaria's Tourism Sector

The global tourism market would need strong English proficiency to be present for Bulgaria. The tourism in Bulgaria relies heavily on English to promote its cultural heritage,

resorts in Black Sea, along with other rural attractions. English is the force that creates safe tourism environment and attracts people from all over the world. Bulgaria offers various types of tourism, coastal, rural and urban cultural tourism, as for each one of these categories English is vital.

#### Rural Tourism: English-Speaking Guides

Regions like the Rhodope Mountains and the Rose Valley attract visitors seeking authentic experiences. English-speaking guides improve tourist satisfaction and act as cultural ambassadors. English-language materials and EU-supported training programs have also made rural destinations more accessible to international travelers.

Regions such as the Rhodope Mountains or the Rose Valley have become a huge attraction for international tourism, as many look for authentic experience. English-speaking guides, hotel staff and product oriented English presentations (in Rose Valley) would improve the satisfaction with tourists. EU has also supported the development of rural areas, by creating English-language materials that present these destinations.

#### Black Sea Coast: Digital Marketing and English

Black Sea is the most recognized Bulgarian destination. Hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, bars and other entertainment places have employed people who have high level of English, as this makes Black Sea a popular destination, where language barrier is not a problem if you speak English. Also, it becomes a preferred place for native English speakers.

#### Urban Tourism in Sofia and Plovdiv

Sofia and Plovdiv have become key cultural tourism hubs. Initiatives like Plovdiv's European Capital of Culture (2019) promoted bilingual materials, boosting the city's international visibility. English-speaking staff at local businesses help connect with global audiences, enhancing tourist engagement.

Plovdiv and Sofia are also well-recognized places that tourists like to visit them. Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and it offers many tourist attractions where English is not an issue. Plovdiv was pronounced as the European Capital of Culture in 2019, and since then it has become a hotspot for foreigners. Printed English materials and well-educated staff that speaks advanced English is easily reachable.

#### Economic Impact

- Hospitality: Hotels with English-speaking staff achieve higher ratings and guest satisfaction.
- Transportation: English-trained staff improve services, reducing misunderstandings and increasing repeat visits.
- Local Businesses: Artisans and shop owners expand their customer base through English communication, leading to higher sales.

Regions with better English proficiency report higher tourism revenue, highlighting its economic value.

#### Challenges

- Rural Education Gaps: Critically low level of English, making it almost impossible for local tourism to survive.

- Digital Divide: Some rural destinations lack internet access, limiting online promotion.
- Cultural Risks: Over-standardization for international tourists can dilute local identity.

#### Recommendations

1. Expand Community Language Training in rural areas through partnerships with universities and international organizations.
2. Enhance Digital Literacy with workshops on e-marketing and online engagement.
3. Culturally Sensitive Language Programs that preserve local identity while improving English skills.

#### Summary

English proficiency is what contributes to the tourism growth and makes Bulgaria a popular tourist destination. Investments in language education, computer and digital skills and promotion of cultural treasures would allow Bulgaria to remain competitive while preserving its unique heritage.

#### CONCLUSION

The study has shown the substantial role of English language proficiency in the enhancement of tourism-driven economic growth in Bulgaria. The detailed findings of the studies conducted throughout urban areas such as Sofia and Plovdiv as well as coastal and rural areas, reveal a consistent and positive correlation between the performance of the tourism sector and skillful English language implementation. Competence and proficiency in the English language among local business owners as well as tourism professionals has resulted in increased customer satisfaction, improved communication with tourists and a measurable increase in tourism-related income.

English speaking tour guides and businesses offering English language services have reaped the benefit from increased engagement with foreign visitors and wider market access, especially in rural areas, where tourism is a growing source of economic diversification. In similar fashion, the use of English in digital marketing and online booking platforms has played a crucial role in raising the region's international profile and attracting more tourists, as seen on the Black Sea coast. Urban areas like Sofia and Plovdiv have distinguished themselves as vibrant and must-visit destinations for foreign travelers by utilizing English-language communication through their cultural tourism programs.

Despite growth and an ever-present goal to improve, many challenges persist. While many urban centers have benefited immensely from their English training programs and greater resources, the same cannot be said for a multitude of rural communities which lack the necessary infrastructure and funds to provide comprehensive language education. Another obstacle remains the digital divide, often preventing smaller tourism workers from taking advantage of online platforms and tools which primarily operate in English. The ever-present risk of cultural homogenization is another serious concern, where the increasing supremacy of English may dilute local traditions and cultural expressions in favor of appealing to a global audience using standardized tourism experiences.

### Policy Implications

Considering the economic importance of the tourism sector to Bulgaria, various policy measures should be prioritized to boost the potential of English language education in tourism while addressing the current challenges.

#### Increase Access to English Language Education in Rural Areas:

Policy proposals should concentrate particularly on rural and underdeveloped areas, by expanding community-based English language training programs. To ensure that these efforts are sustainable and reach the communities that need them most, promoting partnerships with EU-funded programs, NGOs, and private sector organizations is vital.

#### Integration of Vocational Education with Language Training

Vocational education and training should be an integral part within English language training programs for tourism professionals. To ensure that trainees acquire practical language skills tailored to their specific industry, specialized courses focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should be of highest priority, such as English for hospitality, transportation and customer service.

#### Promote E-Marketing and Digital Literacy Skills:

In order to remain competitive on a global scale, workshops and training programs focusing on social media management, customer engagement on international platforms and e-marketing in English will help local operators reach broader audiences. Digital Marketing strategy and English proficiency are essential for local business owners and tourism professionals due to the increasing use of online platforms for tourism promotion.

#### Culturally Sensitive Language Education:

The preservation and promotion of local cultural identities should be included in the design of language training programs while improving communication skills. To ensure that local culture remains a fundamental part of the tourism experience, integrating elements of Bulgarian folklore, traditions and history into the English language curricula can help provide a more authentic travel experience for visitors.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Despite the comprehensive analysis of the impact of English language proficiency on Bulgaria's tourism sector provided by this study, further investigation is warranted in several areas. Long-term economic impact of language training programs should be monitored in future inquiries to verify how these initiatives contribute to sustainable tourism growth.

Additionally, valuable insights for enhancing Bulgaria's tourism strategies could be formulated from comparative studies addressing similar language-related challenges found within other Eastern European nations and emerging destinations. Assisting policymakers in the development of targeted interventions to support local businesses could be achieved through research into the role of digital marketing in English for small and medium-sized



tourism companies. Finally, investigating how English proficiency improves maintainable tourism models—with a focus on community-based tourism and eco-tourism—could promote strategies for progressing responsible and inclusive tourism development.

#### Conclusion Summary

In conclusion, English language proficiency is a crucial enabler of tourism-driven economic growth in Bulgaria. Bulgaria can further improve its effectiveness in the global tourism market by investing in language education, culturally aware communication strategies and digital literacy, while ensuring that local communities benefit economically. To safeguard a successful path forward will require a coordinated effort from educators, industry stakeholders and policymakers to provide reasonable access to education and digital tools that will empower local communities to flourish in the evolving global tourism landscape.

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