



Needs analysis of professionalism in tourism education: Students' perceptions in vocational higher education

Peni Arianita Wardani^{*1}, Muhamad Farhan², Nodistya Septian Indrastana³, Nur Afni Rachman⁴, Meiga Rahmanita⁵, Mutika Andadari⁶

^{1,2,6,7}*Tourism Destination Study Program, Language, Communication, and Tourism Department, Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia*

^{3,5}*English Study Program, Language, Communication, and Tourism Department, Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia*

⁴*Media Production Study Program, Language, Communication, and Tourism Department, Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia*

*Corresponding email: peni.aw@polije.ac.id

Abstract

Professionalism is a cornerstone of success in the tourism industry, underscoring the need for targeted skill development among students pursuing tourism-related education. Recognising this, Politeknik Negeri Jember (Polije) launched the Edu tourism teaching factory. This innovative initiative integrates Tourism Destination Study Program students into real-world industry environments, fostering professionalism through experiential learning. This effort aligns with Polije's outcome-based education framework, emphasising the production of industry-ready graduates. A critical component of this initiative is the development of structured teaching materials that address the specific aspects of professionalism required in the tourism sector. However, identifying these components necessitates comprehensive research into students' perceptions and industry needs. Grounded in the context of global tourism, where professionalism directly impacts service quality and customer satisfaction, this qualitative study explores the requirements for teaching materials that promote professionalism. Using simple random sampling, 125 students were surveyed, complemented by interviews with program managers, Edu tourism administrators, and student representatives. The Miles and Huberman technique was employed for data analysis, integrating triangulated survey and interview data. Key findings revealed that students prioritise politeness, communication skills, and respect, followed by attention to detail, helpfulness, and consideration. Preferred teaching tools include bilingual video tutorials on service excellence, reflecting the industry's global nature. This study has significant implications for global tourism education and practice. It addresses the critical need to standardise professionalism training. By aligning teaching materials with real-world industry demands, this



research supports enhancing service standards and fostering a globally competitive tourism workforce.

Keywords: *Need analysis, Student's perception, Tourism professionalism, Teaching materials*

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a service industry that offers tourists unique and memorable experiences (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Achieving this requires competent and professional human resources, which is integral to sustainable human resource management (SHRM). Professionalism among human resources is pivotal in delivering high-quality services, ensuring tourist satisfaction, and fostering sustainable tourism practices (Baum & Ndiuini, 2020; Modi, 2024). Professional behaviour enhances comfort and security for tourists and serves as a tangible demonstration of environmental and sociocultural respect.

The cultivation of professional attitudes in human resources necessitates the active involvement of higher education institutions in producing graduates who meet industry demands. Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has emerged as an effective strategy for enhancing graduate professionalism (Zhang & Fan, 2019). OBE focuses on developing the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that align with the graduate profiles targeted by study programs (Hidayat et al., 2023) In the context of vocational higher education (PTV), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology advocates OBE implementation through the Teaching Factory (TEFA) learning model (Khoiron, 2016). Integrating industry practices into the educational framework, the TEFA model effectively nurtures professional attitudes through practical, hands-on experiences.

Politeknik Negeri Jember (Polije), a state vocational college, holds a significant role in fostering professional attitudes and skills among its students. Committed to producing job-ready, competent, and professional graduates, Polije has established the Teaching Factory (TEFA) as a dual-purpose entity serving as both a business unit and a practical learning platform. TEFA operations span various sectors, including coffee production, bakeries, smart greenhouses, seed centres, feedlots, and nurseries, demonstrating unique strengths and considerable growth potential.

Building on this foundation, Polije has introduced the Edu tourism teaching factory initiative, which integrates on-campus tourism management with practical learning experiences for D4 Tourism Destination students. This initiative offers campus tour packages that allow visitors to explore and learn from Polije's leading TEFA units, seamlessly blending education with tourism in a professional context.



To ensure the success of Edu tourism teaching factory, developing teaching materials tailored to tourism services is crucial. These resources guide operational and learning activities and enhance student comprehension of theoretical and practical concepts. Teaching materials are critical in structuring content and providing practical examples, improving learning outcomes (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024b, 2024a). By simplifying complex concepts and offering precise applications, these resources help students achieve their learning competencies more effectively (Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2023; Ribosa & Duran, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024).

A critical factor in the success of such initiatives lies in developing and implementing teaching materials that align with students' needs and industry demands. Research consistently highlights the importance of aligning educational content with students' perceptions to foster engagement, enhance learning outcomes, and prepare them for real-world challenges in the tourism sector. Students' perceptions of teaching materials underscore the need for practical and relevant content. For example, research by Armawan underscores the importance of well-designed teaching materials, revealing that students in English for Tours and Travel courses respond positively to content focused on tourism facilities and services. It indicates that relevant and practical teaching materials significantly benefit their learning process and future career readiness (Armawan, 2024).

Understanding students' awareness of tourism impacts is also vital for curriculum design. Nghiêm-Phú's study on Vietnamese university students highlights their sensitivity to the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of tourism, suggesting that teaching materials should incorporate these themes to foster critical thinking and ethical awareness (Nghiêm-Phú et al., 2024). This approach is supported by Zhong et al., who stress the importance of designing materials that connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications to improve learning gains in tourism education (Zhong et al., 2023).

Polije's Edu tourism teaching factory initiative reflects these principles by allowing students to engage in industry-relevant activities while leveraging teaching materials to address practical skills and broader industry insights. Integrating innovative tools (Schott & Marshall, 2018) and culturally enriched content (Andini & Andriani, 2024) further enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the educational experience. Edu tourism teaching factory exemplifies a model for preparing students for the dynamic and multifaceted tourism sector by aligning teaching materials with student perceptions and industry demands.

In addition, research addressing challenges in vocational tourism education still needs to be improved, particularly in areas related to the Teaching Factory (TEFA) model. Existing studies on TEFA in vocational higher education predominantly focus on the development of learning models (Wulandari & Sudiyatno, 2019), management



frameworks (Wahjusaputri et al., 2019), and the outcomes of TEFA-based learning (Imran et al., 2024; Perdana, 2019). However, more attention should be paid to students' perceptions as primary users of the TEFA model. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into student perspectives better to align educational practices with their expectations and industry requirements.

This study investigates students' perceptions of the need for teaching materials that enhance professionalism in the tourism industry, specifically within the operational context of the Edu Tourism Teaching Factory (TEFA) initiative. The research focuses on three key areas: students' understanding of professionalism in tourism work, the attributes that should be embedded in teaching materials, and their preferences for participating in Edu tourism teaching factory activities. These findings will inform the development of teaching materials to guide students in effectively serving tourists professionally at Edu tourism teaching factory.

This study has significant implications for global tourism education and practice. It addresses the critical need to standardise professionalism training. By aligning teaching materials with real-world industry demands, this research supports efforts to enhance service standards and foster a globally competitive tourism workforce. Furthermore, it addresses a notable research gap concerning the perceptions of tourism students in vocational colleges, particularly those utilising the Teaching Factory as an educational model. The outcomes of this research are expected to support the development of adequate, practical teaching resources, strengthening vocational education's role in producing highly skilled professionals for the tourism sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Professionalism in the tourism industry

Professionalism in the tourism sector is increasingly recognised as crucial for industry growth and sustainability. As tourism becomes more complex and competitive, the demand for skilled professionals capable of navigating this evolving landscape has risen. Professionalism involves the technical skills required for various roles, ethical standards, commitment to service, and ongoing professional development, all of which contribute to improving tourism experiences. A key element of tourism professionalism is the need for a solid educational framework to prepare future professionals. Mulyani highlights the role of professionalism in fostering the growth of tourism destinations where skilled professionals are essential for effective development (Mulyani, 2023).

Self-efficacy and professional engagement are also crucial for tourism development. Nursiani et al. discuss how increased professionalism positively impacts self-development and sector growth, suggesting that engaged professionals improve industry



quality and its image (Nursiani et al., 2023). Additionally, professional identity plays a significant role in student engagement. Chen's research shows that a solid professional identity correlates with higher academic self-efficacy and learning engagement, which are crucial for future success in the tourism industry (Chen et al., 2022). It underscores the importance of fostering professional identity early in education to prepare students for the demands of the workforce. As the industry continues to evolve, developing a skilled, knowledgeable, and ethically grounded workforce will be essential for its growth and the quality of its experiences.

2.2. The role of teaching materials to deliver professionalism among students

Teaching materials play a crucial role in fostering professionalism among students by shaping their knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and professional identities. This synthesis examines how different teaching methods and materials contribute to the development of professionalism, particularly in medical and educational contexts. A key element in teaching professionalism is diverse teaching methods catering to different learning preferences. Dhikale et al. highlight the effectiveness of small group discussions and role modelling in medical education. They argue that interactive methods, such as case-based learning and video clips, provide a safe environment for students to reflect on professional behaviours and ethical issues (Dhikale et al., 2020). This is supported by Mossop and Cobb, who stress the importance of integrated curricula that combine reflective skills with early clinical experiences to offer meaningful learning opportunities (Mossop & Cobb, 2013). These approaches deepen students' understanding of professionalism and engage them in the learning process.

Collaborative teaching formats like team teaching also positively influence students' professional identities. Backer's research shows that team teaching, particularly when paired with mentorship, helps student teachers develop a multidimensional professional identity (De Backer et al., 2023). This collaborative approach allows students to share diverse perspectives and enrich their understanding of professionalism. Kesselheim et al. also note that the absence of formal curricula in medical education can hinder the teaching of professionalism, emphasising the need for experiential learning and collaboration among educators to create a comprehensive professional curriculum (Kesselheim et al., 2012).

Reflective practice is another critical aspect of teaching professionalism. Gordon et al. argue that incorporating explicit learning activities focused on communication skills, emotional intelligence, and teamwork is essential for instilling professionalism in students (Gordon et al., 2021). Educators help students internalise professional values and behaviours by embedding reflective practices in the curriculum. As Riley and Kumar noted, role modelling plays a vital role in teaching professionalism. They emphasise the importance of early clinical contact and positive role models in socialising students into the medical profession (Riley & Kumar, 2012). However, they caution that negative role models can undermine the effectiveness of other teaching methods. It highlights the need



for educators to model professional behaviours and create a supportive environment for developing professional identities.

In conclusion, teaching materials are essential for promoting professionalism among students. By integrating diverse teaching methods, fostering collaborative learning, and emphasising reflective practices, educators can help students understand and embody the professional values required in their fields.

2.3. The role of students' perceptions toward teaching material development

Students' perceptions are crucial in shaping the development of tourism professionalism teaching materials, directly influencing engagement, motivation, and preparedness for professional roles in the tourism sector. Understanding these perceptions is essential for educators and curriculum developers to create effective teaching materials that align with industry needs. A key factor in shaping students' perceptions is their professional identity. Research shows that a strong professional identity among tourism students is linked to higher levels of learning engagement, which is vital for their future careers (Yu et al., 2021). This suggests that teaching materials should not only provide theoretical knowledge but also help students develop their professional identity through practical experiences. Integrating internships, hands-on training, and collaborative projects with industry partners can bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements, enhancing students' workforce readiness (Raj & Sharma, 2023).

The perception of sustainability in tourism education is also increasingly important. Studies indicate that curricula focused on sustainability concepts improve students' understanding of social and environmental responsibilities (Arrobas et al., 2020). This aligns with the growing demand for tourism professionals committed to sustainable practices. Teaching materials that emphasise sustainability can positively influence students' perceptions and better prepare them for the ethical challenges they may encounter in their careers (Akinci et al., 2018). Educational tourism, as a pedagogical approach, further enhances students' learning experiences. By organising tourism-related activities that serve educational purposes, educators can help students develop key competencies while engaging them in meaningful learning experiences (Dembovska et al., 2016). This approach ensures that curricula are not only informative but also transformative, making students' education more relevant to their future professional roles.

Moreover, students' perceptions of the quality and relevance of their education can significantly affect their motivation and career aspirations. Research shows that students' expectations and perceptions of their educational experiences are critical in shaping their motivation to pursue careers in tourism (Akinci et al., 2017). As a result, it is important for educators to regularly assess and adjust teaching materials based on student feedback to meet the evolving needs of the tourism industry and students' career goals.



In conclusion, students' perceptions are integral to the development of tourism professionalism teaching materials. By understanding and incorporating these perceptions into curriculum design, educators can improve student engagement, foster professional identity, promote sustainability, and better prepare students for successful careers in the tourism sector. Ongoing collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders is essential to ensure that teaching materials remain relevant and effective in meeting the dynamic demands of the tourism industry.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology to provide a precise and detailed depiction of students' perceptions. The selection of this approach, alongside specific tools such as the Likert scale for surveys and open-ended questions for interviews, is geared towards capturing nuanced insights into students' subjective experiences. Data collection is facilitated through observations, in-depth interviews, and surveys. The Likert scale is mainly used to assess students' perceptions of various attributes quantitatively. The use of Likert Scale aims to facilitate the measurement of student perception (Pranatawijaya et al., 2019; Suasapha, 2020).

The development of these tools included rigorous pre-testing to ensure reliability and validity. For instance, the interview guide was carefully crafted and reviewed with experts in educational tourism to align the questions closely with the research objectives. Similarly, the survey design was pre-tested with a small group of students to refine questions and scale responses for clarity and impact.

The sample for in-depth interviews includes critical stakeholders such as the manager of the tourism destination study program and the coordinator of Edu tourism TEFA, along with five representative students. Surveys were administered to a random sample of students from the same program, selected through simple random sampling. The sample size of 125 respondents was calculated using the Yamane formula to balance comprehensive data collection and a manageable sample size (Sugiyono, 2020).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman method, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, unnecessary data are eliminated, and the remaining information is organised into categories. This categorisation facilitates a structured display of data as descriptive statistics, which aids in the clear and concise derivation of conclusions.

Regarding data validity, the study briefly mentions checking processes but needs more extensive details on applying techniques such as triangulation, member checking,



or peer debriefing. These methods are crucial for enhancing the credibility and validity of qualitative research findings by providing multiple perspectives on the data.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Student's perception of professionalism attributes importance

Tourism professionalism includes attention, helpfulness, respect, politeness, consideration, and communication skills. Students were asked to assess these aspects as attributes of professionalism in tourism work. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Student's perception of professionalism attributes importance

Attribute	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Attention	44.8%	48.8%	6.4%	0	0
Helpfulness	41.6%	52%	6.4%	0	0
Respectful	26.4%	44%	22.4%	5.6%	1.6%
Politeness	74.4%	24.8%	0.8%	0	0
Consideration	57.6%	39.2%	3.2%	0	0
Communication Skill	62.4%	36%	1.6%	0	0

Table 1 reveals that approximately 50% of students regard politeness, communication skills, and consideration as necessary, while the remaining respondents categorise these traits as important to neutral. Politeness, a critical element of professionalism in tourism, is considered very important by most students. It is because politeness not only contributes to creating a sense of safety and comfort for tourists but also plays a crucial role in mitigating behaviours that could result in sexual or non-sexual harassment. These findings underscore the vital role of politeness in the tourism sector.

Communication skills are similarly regarded as essential, as they are integral to effectively conveying information, addressing complaints, and delivering services. Proficient communication builds a positive impression and enhances tourist satisfaction, ultimately impacting the retention of repeat visitors. Furthermore, consideration, including demonstrating care for tourists' needs, is essential. For example, helping beyond the basic service can create a positive impression, influencing tourists to return.

Most students generally perceive attention, helpfulness, and respect as necessary, with a subset rating them as essential or neutral. Specifically, attention is regarded as significant by 48.8% of respondents, helpfulness by 52%, and respect by 44%. Attention involves listening to tourists' needs; helpfulness entails going beyond basic expectations to assist; and respect refers to treating tourists with dignity and acknowledging cultural differences. While necessary, these attributes complement the previously discussed traits



of politeness, communication skills, and consideration, which are necessary throughout the tourist experience. These skills should be maintained from the initial encounter to the conclusion of the interaction under all conditions. In contrast, attention, helpfulness, and respect are needed in specific circumstances (Deale & Lee, 2021; Mekoth et al., 2023).

4.2. Student's perception of professionalism in teaching materials

Appropriate teaching materials are needed to improve students' professionalism and prepare them for Edu tourism teaching factory operational activities. Therefore, the creation of teaching materials needs to be based on the needs of students as users of teaching materials and Edu tourism teaching factory. Students were asked to assess the need for teaching materials to improve professionalism in tourism work, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Student's Perception of Professionalism Teaching Materials

Attribute	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The need of teaching materials	39.2%	55.2%	5.6%	0	0
service excellent tutorial video	32.8%	56.8%	10.4%	0	0
Using bilingual	37.6%	52%	9.6%	0.8%	0
Duration +/- 15 minute	17.6%	46.4%	32.8%	3.2	0

Table 2 shows that 55.2% of students agreed that teaching materials are essential for enhancing professionalism in tourism work. A further 39.2% strongly agreed, while 5.6% remained neutral. Those who agreed emphasised that teaching materials guide training communication and attitudes when interacting with tourists. However, they noted that direct, hands-on experience through internships at tourism destinations is more effective in fostering professionalism through habituation.

For teaching materials to be practical and targeted, it is crucial to develop instructional resources such as video tutorials focused on excellent service delivery. This approach garnered agreement from 56.8% of students, 32.8% strongly agreed, and 10.4% remained neutral. When linked to student involvement in Edu tourism TEFA operations, these video tutorials are a practical guide for students or staff in receiving and serving tourists.

The use of bilingual language in the video tutorials was also recommended. Fifty-two percent of students agreed, 37.6% strongly agreed, 9.6% neutral, and 0.8% disagreed. Students argued that while Indonesian is preferred, especially since most prospective



tourists in Edu tourism TEFA come from within the country, mastery of the Indonesian language should be emphasised among students. Currently, some students need help communicating in Indonesian due to the dominance of regional languages. However, incorporating English, mainly through subtitles, is also crucial, as English proficiency is vital in international tourism contexts. Early exposure to foreign languages like English will ensure students are better prepared for global tourism interactions.

4.3. Student's involvement in Edu tourism teaching factory operational activities

The Edu tourism teaching factory was initiated to meet the learning needs of students. As a learning medium, students were involved in operational activities to train industrial skills. The function of the teaching factory itself is to bring the factory to the campus environment. Edu tourism teaching factory is planned to accommodate campus tour packages. At least four types of jobs could involve students: front office, back office, housekeeping, and tour guide. Students are asked to choose one of the four jobs. The results are shown in Figure 1.

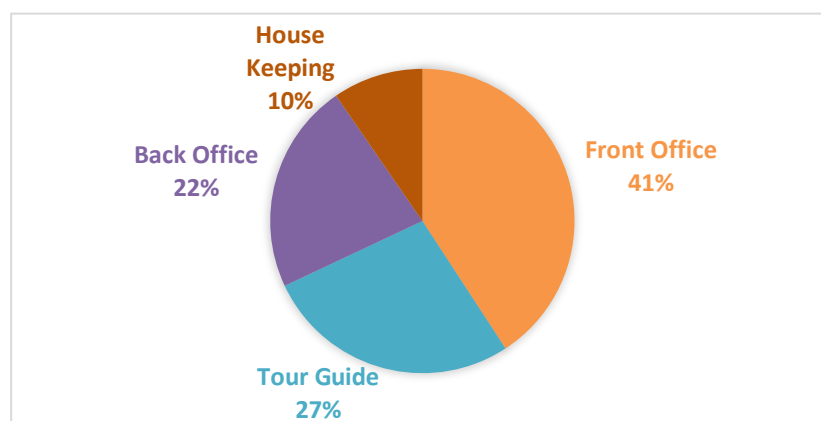


Figure 1. Student's Preference towards Involvement in Edu tourism TEFA Operation

The questionnaire results reveal that 41% of students are involved in front office work, 27% as tour guides, 22% in the back office, and 10% in housekeeping. Those who chose front office positions consider this role to have the most direct contact with prospective and current tourists, making it essential to demonstrate professional attributes. As the frontline of Edu tourism TEFA, the front office handles reservations, addresses complaints, and serves as an information hub. Given these responsibilities, the professionalism of front office staff is critical in shaping tourists' initial impressions and overall satisfaction.

Tour guides account for 27% of students and are similarly vital to the tourist experience. Their role, which directly influences the comfort and satisfaction of tourists, requires a professional attitude and strong interpersonal skills. Tour guides lead the tour,



provide valuable information, and enhance the overall visitor experience. A tour guide's performance, encompassing soft and hard skills, directly impacts tourists' perceptions and likelihood of returning (Ahmed Kamel, 2021; Jević, 2022). Tour guides are often described as the "soul of tourism" (Bahang et al., 2018), as their ability to engage tourists, convey historical and cultural significance, and manage group dynamics can transform a standard tour into a memorable experience. This dynamic role underscores the need for a professional demeanour that fosters positive interactions with tourists.

In contrast, students who choose back-office roles are often interested in gaining managerial experience, such as financial management, stakeholder engagement, and human resources. While these roles may not involve direct or intensive interaction with tourists, they still require a strong professional attitude. Attributes such as politeness, attention, respect, consideration, helpfulness, and practical communication skills are necessary to ensure smooth internal operations and foster positive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders (Mekoth et al., 2023). These interpersonal skills create a supportive work culture and prepare students to meet industry standards.

Similarly, housekeeping students, who make up 10% of respondents, focus on room arrangement, maintenance, and cleanliness. Though housekeeping may not require direct contact with tourists, a professional attitude is still essential. Students in this role must uphold the standards of cleanliness and comfort that contribute to guest satisfaction. The professional qualities underpinning positive guest interactions are equally important in ensuring that behind-the-scenes operations run smoothly, ultimately enhancing the overall guest experience.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings highlight the importance of politeness, communication skills, and consideration in tourism. These attributes are essential for enhancing the tourist experience, tearing professionalism, and building positive relationships with visitors and colleagues. Politeness plays a pivotal role in creating a sense of safety and comfort. At the same time, effective communication ensures smooth interactions, addresses tourist concerns, and contributes to overall satisfaction, which is vital for repeat business. Consideration, demonstrated through attentive service and responsiveness to tourists' needs, further strengthens the tourism experience and promotes customer loyalty.

Additionally, the study underscores the complementary roles of attention, helpfulness, and respect in specific contexts. Although these attributes may not always be required, they are essential in situations that demand personalised attention and a higher level of engagement. The literature further reinforces these findings, stressing the importance of integrating soft skills into tourism education to prepare future professionals. Effective communication, cultural competence, and a professional



demeanour are all crucial for navigating the dynamic and diverse nature of the tourism industry.

The results of this study will be the basis for teaching materials to improve tourism work professionalism that can be implemented in Edu tourism TEFA. Teaching materials can be developed as excellent service for short- to medium-duration videos and equipped with a guide using bilinguals. In addition, a study of student perceptions of the need for teaching materials will strengthen the body of knowledge in tourism education.

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