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Factors Influencing Tourism English Vocabulary Learning and Strategy Use Among Third-Year English-Major Students: A Qualitative Case Study at Thanh Do University

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Abstract: *Tourism English vocabulary is essential for English-major students preparing for careers in the tourism industry. However, learning specialized vocabulary can be challenging due to its complexity and limited use in everyday communication. This study investigated the factors influencing tourism English vocabulary learning and the learning strategies employed by third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University, Vietnam. Using a qualitative case-study approach, data were collected through written reflections and semi-structured interviews with eleven students and analyzed thematically. The findings identified five influencing factors: career-oriented motivation, complex nature of tourism vocabulary, teacher-guided learning and classroom activities, access to learning resources and technology, and lack of authentic practice opportunities. Four vocabulary learning strategies were also revealed: memory-based learning, contextual and communicative learning, technology-mediated learning, and multimedia-based learning. Practical implications are offered for lecturers, curriculum developers, and educational institutions seeking to enhance tourism English vocabulary instruction and learning.*

Keywords: *English-major students; ESP; qualitative study; tourism English vocabulary; vocabulary learning strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognized as a fundamental component of second language acquisition because it enables learners to comprehend texts, participate in communication, and develop other language skills. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, vocabulary plays an even more critical role in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, where learners are expected to master discipline-specific terminology alongside general language competence. For students preparing for tourism-related careers, tourism English vocabulary serves as a core resource for professional communication, customer service, tour guiding, and intercultural interaction. Consequently, understanding how students learn tourism-related vocabulary has become an important concern in both language education and tourism education.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that vocabulary learning is influenced by a combination of learner-related and contextual factors. From a language learning perspective, Oxford (1990) argues that successful language learners actively employ various learning strategies, including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. This perspective suggests that vocabulary acquisition is not merely a matter of exposure but also depends on how learners approach, organize, and practice lexical knowledge. As a result, research on vocabulary learning has increasingly shifted from examining linguistic outcomes alone to investigating learners' experiences, motivations, and learning behaviors.

Within the tourism sector, the significance of specialized vocabulary has been emphasized by numerous studies. Prachanant (2012) identified vocabulary competence as a key requirement in tourism-related occupations, highlighting the professional demands placed on future tourism practitioners. Extending this perspective, Li (2017) demonstrated that learners' motivation substantially influences tourism vocabulary achievement, particularly when learning activities are connected to authentic workplace situations. While both studies underscore the importance of tourism vocabulary for professional development, they approach the issue from different angles: Prachanant (2012) focuses on occupational needs, whereas Li (2017) emphasizes learner motivation. Taken together, these studies suggest that tourism vocabulary learning is shaped by both external professional demands and internal learner factors. However, neither study provides detailed insights into how learners themselves experience and navigate the process of acquiring tourism-specific vocabulary.

Research on tourism vocabulary instruction has produced mixed yet complementary findings. Ashurov (2025) demonstrated that scaffolded instruction enhances students' understanding and retention of tourism terminology through structured learning support. Similarly, Frank (2022) argued for the systematic integration of tourism terminology into university language courses to strengthen professional communication skills. Although both studies advocate pedagogical interventions, their primary focus remains on instructional design and teacher-led practices. Consequently, relatively little is known about

how learners perceive these instructional supports or which aspects of classroom experiences they consider most beneficial for vocabulary development.

Another strand of research has focused on the nature of tourism vocabulary and learning materials. Corpus-based studies by Wahyuningsih and Mahsar (2024) and Veerachaisantikul et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of authentic lexical input and contextually relevant vocabulary selection in tourism education. Their findings suggest that vocabulary instruction becomes more effective when learners encounter frequently used terminology in realistic professional contexts. In contrast, Claria and Warmadewi (2020) identified substantial difficulties among ESP learners, particularly in understanding specialized terminology and applying vocabulary appropriately in communication. Together, these studies reveal a tension between the professional demands of tourism English and the challenges learners face in mastering specialized lexical knowledge.

The role of learning environments has also received considerable attention. Hidayati et al. (2023) found that motivation, exposure to tourism-related communication, and learning opportunities significantly influence English performance. Similar findings were reported in Vietnam by Tang and Nguyen (2025), who highlighted the importance of learning motivation, classroom interaction, self-study habits, and access to learning resources in supporting tourism students' language development. These studies suggest that vocabulary learning is shaped not only by individual effort but also by the educational and social contexts in which learners operate.

In the Vietnamese context, research has increasingly examined English for Tourism education. Dieu and Dan (2023) found that students commonly employ strategies such as note-taking, vocabulary memorization, contextual learning, and peer interaction when studying tourism-related English. Meanwhile, Tran (2024) emphasized the importance of authentic tourism situations and intercultural communication activities in developing learners' professional competence. Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the role of technology in vocabulary learning. Pham et al. (2024) found that AI-assisted tools can enhance learner engagement, autonomy, and motivation through immediate feedback and personalized learning opportunities. This finding represents a shift from earlier strategy-oriented research, which primarily emphasized memorization, note-taking, and contextual learning (Oxford, 1990; Dieu & Dan, 2023). Nevertheless, existing studies have largely examined technology-enhanced vocabulary learning in general EFL contexts. The specific ways in which students utilize AI tools to support tourism English vocabulary learning remain underexplored.

Despite growing interest in tourism English education, three important gaps remain. First, previous international studies have primarily examined tourism vocabulary from the perspectives of needs analysis, instructional design, corpus development, and learning outcomes, with relatively limited attention paid to learners' lived experiences and perceptions. Second, although Vietnamese studies have investigated tourism English instruction, learning strategies, and technology-assisted language learning, research focusing specifically on tourism English vocabulary learning among English-major students remains scarce. Third, most existing studies tend to investigate either influencing

factors or learning strategies separately, often using quantitative approaches. Consequently, little is known about how these factors and strategies interact within students' actual learning experiences. Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore both the factors influencing tourism English vocabulary learning and the vocabulary learning strategies employed by third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates tourism English vocabulary learning among third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University. Specifically, it seeks to answer two research questions (RQs):

- (1) What factors influence tourism English vocabulary learning among third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University?
- (2) What vocabulary learning strategies are commonly used by third-year English-major students when learning tourism English vocabulary at Thanh Do University?

By examining students' reflections and experiences, this study contributes to the growing body of research on ESP vocabulary learning in higher education. The findings are expected to inform pedagogical practices by helping lecturers design more contextually relevant vocabulary instruction, assisting curriculum developers in selecting authentic tourism-related learning materials, and guiding institutions in integrating digital and AI-assisted tools into vocabulary learning environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the factors influencing tourism English vocabulary learning and the vocabulary learning strategies used by third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, the study sought to answer two research questions concerning the factors affecting tourism English vocabulary learning and the vocabulary learning strategies commonly employed by students.

The study was conducted at Thanh Do University, Vietnam. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding tourism English vocabulary learning. The inclusion criteria required participants to (1) be third-year English-major students, (2) have completed or be currently enrolled in tourism-related English courses, (3) possess prior experience learning tourism English vocabulary, and (4) voluntarily agree to participate in the study. Third-year students were selected because they had already completed a substantial number of English language courses and had accumulated sufficient experience with both general ESP instruction.

The participants consisted of eleven third-year English-major students. At the time of data collection, they were approximately 20-21 years old. Based on self-assessment, most

participants reported an English proficiency level of approximately B1+ according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The final sample size was considered appropriate for an in-depth qualitative investigation, allowing the researchers to obtain detailed and information-rich accounts of students' experiences and perceptions.

In addition to their general English studies, the participants had been exposed to tourism-related English through specialized courses focusing on English for Tourism. One of the principal coursebooks used in these courses was *English for International Tourism: Pre-Intermediate* (Dubicka & O'Keeffe, 2003), published by Longman. The textbook introduces students to a wide range of tourism-related vocabulary and communicative functions commonly used in the tourism and hospitality industry, including tour guiding, tourist attractions, hotel services, travel arrangements, customer service, and cultural tourism. Furthermore, the coursebook incorporates communicative activities such as role-plays, discussions, case studies, and tourism-based scenarios that allow students to practice vocabulary in simulated professional contexts. Consequently, the participants possessed sufficient experience with tourism English vocabulary to provide meaningful insights into the research topic.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms (e.g., S1, S2, S3) were used throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced.

Research Instruments

Two qualitative instruments were employed for data collection: written reflections and semi-structured interviews. The use of multiple instruments enabled methodological triangulation and provided a more comprehensive understanding of students' tourism English vocabulary learning experiences.

The first instrument was a written reflection form administered through Google Forms. The reflection consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to explore students' perceptions of tourism English vocabulary, learning motivation, learning difficulties, vocabulary learning strategies, use of technology and AI-assisted tools, learning experiences, and suggestions for improving tourism vocabulary instruction. Written reflections were selected because they provide participants with opportunities to express their experiences and opinions in a reflective, less pressured, and self-paced environment.

The reflection questions were developed based on themes identified in previous studies. Specifically, the questions addressed the importance of tourism vocabulary and learning motivation (Prachanant, 2012; Li, 2017), vocabulary learning difficulties (Claria & Warmadewi, 2020; Hidayati et al., 2023), vocabulary learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Dieu & Dan, 2023), technology-assisted learning (Pham et al., 2024), and the influence of learning environment and teacher support (Tang & Nguyen, 2025; Tran, 2024). Additional questions explored students' personal learning experiences and recommendations for improving tourism vocabulary instruction (Frank, 2022; Ashurov, 2025).

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of fifteen open-ended questions. The interviews aimed to obtain richer and more detailed information regarding students' experiences and to further explore issues emerging from the written reflections. The interview questions focused on students' perceptions of tourism vocabulary, learning motivation, learning difficulties, vocabulary learning strategies, classroom experiences, teacher support, learning materials, technology-assisted learning, and recommendations for improving tourism vocabulary learning.

The interview protocol was likewise developed based on theoretical and empirical foundations identified in the literature review. Questions concerning the importance of tourism vocabulary and learning motivation were informed by Prachanant (2012) and Li (2017). Questions related to learning difficulties drew upon the findings of Claria and Warmadewi (2020) and Hidayati et al. (2023). Items exploring vocabulary learning strategies were guided by Oxford's (1990) language learning strategy framework and the work of Dieu and Dan (2023). Questions addressing teacher support, classroom activities, and learning resources were informed by Tran (2024), Frank (2022), and Ashurov (2025). Finally, questions concerning technology-assisted vocabulary learning were developed based on Pham et al. (2024), who highlighted the increasing role of AI-assisted tools in vocabulary acquisition.

Before the main study, both instruments underwent pilot testing with two third-year English-major students who shared characteristics similar to those of the target participants but were not included in the final sample. The pilot study aimed to evaluate the clarity, appropriateness, comprehensibility, and relevance of the questions. Feedback from the pilot participants indicated that several questions required simpler wording, clearer bilingual explanations, and more specific prompts. Based on these comments, minor revisions were made to improve clarity, consistency, and ease of understanding. The pilot process contributed to strengthening the content validity and practical usability of the instruments.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a four-week period and consisted of two consecutive stages.

In the first stage, the written reflection form was distributed electronically via Google Forms. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After providing informed consent, participants completed the reflection form independently and submitted their responses online. They were given one week to complete the task, allowing sufficient time for thoughtful reflection and detailed responses.

In the second stage, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted through Zoom. Online interviews were selected because they provided flexibility in scheduling and facilitated audio recording for subsequent analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 25-30 minutes and was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure that participants could express their thoughts comfortably and in greater depth.

With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded. Following data collection, the recordings were transcribed using TurboScribe, an AI-assisted transcription platform. The researchers subsequently reviewed each transcript manually while listening to the original recordings to verify transcription accuracy, correct potential errors, and ensure that participants' intended meanings were accurately represented. The verified transcripts, together with the written reflections, constituted the primary dataset for analysis.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data obtained from the written reflections and interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the dataset through repeated reading of all written reflections and interview transcripts. Second, meaningful segments of data were assigned initial codes. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories and preliminary themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence within themes and clear distinctions between themes. Fifth, each theme was clearly defined and named. Finally, the themes were organized and presented in the findings section with representative participant quotations.

The coding process combined inductive and deductive elements. Initial codes emerged directly from participants' responses while being informed by concepts identified in previous research. During the coding process, the researchers initially generated codes directly from participants' Vietnamese responses to preserve the original meanings expressed by the participants. For example, statements referring to future employment opportunities, professional aspirations, and tourism-related careers were initially coded as "cơ hội việc làm trong tương lai" [future employment opportunities], "mong muốn trở thành hướng dẫn viên du lịch" [desire to become a tour guide], and "định hướng nghề nghiệp" [career orientation]. These related codes were subsequently grouped into the broader theme of *Career-oriented Motivation*. Similarly, references to ChatGPT, Quizlet, online dictionaries, and digital learning applications were coded separately and subsequently synthesized into the theme *Technology-mediated Learning*. This iterative coding process allowed the themes to remain grounded in the data while maintaining connections with the existing literature.

Through this analytical process, five themes were identified regarding factors influencing tourism English vocabulary learning: *Career-oriented Motivation*, *Complex Nature of Tourism Vocabulary*, *Teacher-guided Learning and Classroom Activities*, *Access to Learning Resources and Technology*, and *Lack of Authentic Practice Opportunities*. Four additional themes emerged concerning vocabulary learning strategies: *Memory-based Learning*, *Contextual and Communicative Learning*, *Technology-mediated Learning*, and *Multimedia-based Learning*.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by combining written reflections and semi-structured interviews as complementary data sources. Dependability was enhanced through pilot testing and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting data

collection, coding, and theme development procedures. Confirmability was addressed through systematic comparisons between raw data, codes, and emerging themes to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than researchers' assumptions. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, research instruments, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings.

In addition, transcript verification was conducted through careful comparison between the original interview recordings and the AI-generated transcripts. Representative participant quotations were included in the findings section to provide direct evidence for the identified themes and to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the interpretations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings generated from the thematic analysis of 11 written reflections and 11 semi-structured interviews conducted with third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis procedure, the data were coded, categorized, and organized into themes corresponding to the two RQs. To enhance transparency, representative quotations are presented in the original Vietnamese followed by English translations. Rather than merely reporting participants' experiences, the discussion critically relates the findings to previous studies and theoretical perspectives on vocabulary learning, ESP, and tourism English education.

1. Factors Influencing Tourism English Vocabulary Learning (RQ1)

Five major themes emerged from the data: (1) *Career-oriented Motivation*, (2) *Complex Nature of Tourism Vocabulary*, (3) *Teacher-guided Learning and Classroom Activities*, (4) *Access to Learning Resources and Technology*, and (5) *Lack of Authentic Practice Opportunities*. Table 1 summarizes the themes, their descriptions, and representative evidence extracted from participants' reflections and interviews.

Table 1. Themes Influencing Tourism English Vocabulary Learning

Theme	Description	Representative Evidence
Career-oriented Motivation	Students learn tourism vocabulary to prepare for future careers and professional communication.	Future employment, tour guiding, cultural promotion
Complex Nature of Tourism Vocabulary	Tourism terminology is specialized, context-dependent, and difficult to retain.	Technical terms, multiple meanings, low frequency of use

Teacher-guided Learning and Classroom Activities	Classroom interaction facilitates learning.	Role-plays, simulations, discussions
Access to Learning Resources and Technology	Coursebooks and learning materials support vocabulary development.	Structured input and thematic organization
Lack of Authentic Practice Opportunities	Limited English exposure outside class restricts vocabulary use and retention.	Lack of English-speaking environment

The five themes identified in this study suggest that tourism English vocabulary learning is influenced by a combination of learner-related and contextual factors. Consistent with ESP perspectives and vocabulary learning research, vocabulary acquisition appears to be shaped not only by learners' motivation and learning strategies but also by instructional support, learning resources, and opportunities for authentic language use. Rather than operating independently, these factors interact dynamically and collectively influence students' tourism vocabulary development. The findings therefore support the view that vocabulary learning is a socially situated and context-dependent process rather than a purely cognitive activity (Oxford, 1990).

a. Career-oriented Motivation

Career-related aspirations emerged as the strongest motivational factor influencing tourism English vocabulary learning. Students consistently associated vocabulary acquisition with employment opportunities in tourism, hospitality, travel agencies, and tour guiding. Unlike general English vocabulary learning, tourism vocabulary was perceived as directly connected to occupational success and professional identity.

One participant wrote: “Động lực lớn nhất thúc đẩy tôi kiên trì học tập chính là hoài bão nghề nghiệp sau khi tốt nghiệp.” [My ultimate career aspiration upon graduation is the greatest driving force behind my persistence in learning.] (S7, Written reflection)

Similarly, another participant explained: “Động lực của mình là mong muốn trở thành một hướng dẫn viên du lịch chuyên nghiệp và có nhiều cơ hội làm việc hơn trong tương lai.” [My main motivation stems from the desire to become a professional tour guide and to unlock better career prospects in the future.] (S10, Interview)

A further participant emphasized the cultural dimension of learning tourism vocabulary: “Động lực lớn nhất của mình là cơ hội nghề nghiệp trong tương lai và mình mong muốn có công việc ổn định trong môi trường năng động, có cơ hội giới thiệu văn hóa Việt Nam đến bạn bè quốc tế.” [My biggest drivers are future career opportunities and the stability of working in a dynamic environment, where I can have the chance to introduce Vietnamese culture to international friends.] (S5, Interview)

These findings reinforce Li's (2017) argument that motivation significantly predicts achievement in tourism English vocabulary learning. From an ESP perspective, learners are more likely to invest effort in vocabulary acquisition when they perceive a direct

relationship between language learning and future professional needs. The participants in the present study viewed tourism vocabulary as a form of professional capital that could improve employment opportunities, career advancement, and workplace communication. Interestingly, students' motivation was not limited to economic or occupational goals. Several participants also expressed a desire to introduce Vietnamese culture to international visitors, suggesting that tourism vocabulary learning is connected to intercultural communication and professional identity formation. Unlike Li (2017), who primarily emphasized learning achievement, the present study reveals that tourism vocabulary learning is also shaped by learners' aspirations to become competent tourism professionals and cultural representatives. This finding extends previous research by highlighting the multidimensional nature of motivation in ESP vocabulary learning.

b. Complex Nature of Tourism Vocabulary

Another major challenge identified by participants was the specialized and context-dependent nature of tourism vocabulary. Participants frequently described tourism terminology as difficult because it encompasses vocabulary from multiple specialized domains, including hospitality, aviation, transportation, destination management, and tour operations.

One participant stated: “Khó khăn lớn nhất là ghi nhớ và phân biệt các thuật ngữ thuộc nhiều lĩnh vực khác nhau như hàng không, khách sạn hay điều hành tour.” [The greatest challenge is memorizing and distinguishing jargon across diverse sectors, such as aviation, hospitality, and tour operations.] (S7, Interview)

Another participant noted: “Nhiều từ còn thay đổi ý nghĩa khi được sử dụng trong những ngữ cảnh chuyên ngành.” [Many words shift in meaning depending on the specific specialized context in which they are used.] (S5, Interview)

Similarly, one student explained: “Mình sẽ phải có rất nhiều từ vựng liên quan tới địa điểm đó... mình không sử dụng thường xuyên thế nên rất khó để ghi nhớ.” [I need a vast vocabulary specific to each location; however, since I do not use these terms regularly, long-term retention becomes extremely difficult.] (S11, Interview)

These findings corroborate Claria and Warmadewi's (2020) observation that ESP learners often experience difficulties with specialized terminology and contextual language use. However, the present study suggests that the challenge extends beyond the technical nature of tourism vocabulary itself. Students perceived tourism vocabulary as cognitively demanding because many terms are context-dependent, industry-specific, and rarely encountered outside tourism-related settings. From a vocabulary acquisition perspective, limited exposure reduces opportunities for repeated retrieval and contextual reinforcement, both of which are essential for long-term retention. This finding complements corpus-based studies by Veerachaisantikul et al. (2025) and Wahyuningsih and Mahsar (2024), which emphasize the specialized and domain-specific nature of tourism vocabulary. The results, therefore, indicate that vocabulary difficulty is not solely a linguistic issue but also an environmental one, shaped by the frequency and authenticity of learners' exposure to tourism-related language.

c. Teacher-guided Learning and Classroom Activities

Instructional support emerged as an important factor shaping students' tourism vocabulary development. Participants consistently reported that interactive classroom activities facilitated vocabulary acquisition and improved retention. Activities such as role-playing, simulations, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks enabled students to experience vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

One participant reported: “Các bài tập đóng vai xử lý tình huống phát sinh của du khách thực sự mang lại hiệu quả lớn.” [Role-play exercises focused on handling unexpected tourist scenarios have proven highly effective.] (S7, Written reflection)

Another student stated: “Giảng viên và các hoạt động như đóng vai, xử lý tình huống trên lớp giúp mình nhớ những từ mới rất nhanh.” [The lecturers, combined with in-class activities like role-plays and situational problem-solving, help me internalize new words very rapidly.] (S6, Interview)

Similarly: “Những buổi thảo luận nhóm như role play hay xử lý tình huống giúp mình hiểu rõ hơn cách sử dụng từ vựng trong thực tế.” [Group discussions, such as role-playing and handling scenarios, give me a clearer understanding of how to apply vocabulary in real-world situations.] (S5, Interview)

These findings support Tran's (2024) argument that authentic tourism situations facilitate ESP learning and align with Ashurov's (2025) scaffolding approach, which emphasizes guided support and gradual progression toward independent language use. However, the present study provides additional insight into why such activities are effective. Students perceived role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks as valuable because they enabled them to apply vocabulary in meaningful communicative contexts rather than merely memorizing isolated lexical items. This finding is consistent with constructivist views of learning, which suggest that knowledge is developed through interaction, experience, and contextualized practice. The findings therefore indicate that classroom activities play a dual role in tourism vocabulary learning by supporting both vocabulary retention and communicative competence development.

d. Access to Learning Resources and Technology

The data further highlighted the important role of learning resources and technological support in tourism vocabulary development. Students generally appreciated the availability of textbooks, handouts, and digital materials, particularly because they provided structured exposure to tourism vocabulary. Several participants specifically referred to the coursebook *English for International Tourism: Pre-Intermediate* (Dubicka & O'Keeffe, 2003), which is used in their tourism-related courses.

One participant stated: “Giáo trình cung cấp nhiều từ vựng liên quan đến ngành du lịch và được sắp xếp theo từng chủ đề cụ thể. Điều này giúp tôi dễ học và dễ áp dụng vào thực tế hơn.” [The textbook provides a wealth of tourism-related vocabulary categorized into specific themes, making it easier for me to acquire and apply in practice.] (S4, Interview)

Another participant commented: “Nếu như không có giáo trình và tài liệu học tập đó thì bản thân mình sẽ không biết học theo lộ trình như thế nào.” [Without those textbooks and learning materials, I would find myself completely lost without a structured learning pathway.] (S11, Interview)

However, some students expressed a desire for more contemporary and authentic content: “Nếu giáo trình có thể giảm tải bớt phần lý thuyết và cập nhật liên tục các xu hướng mới thì sẽ thiết thực hơn.” [It would be much more practical if the coursebook reduced theoretical content and continuously updated current industry trends.] (S7, Written reflection)

These findings partially support corpus-based studies by Veerachaisantikul et al. (2025) and Wahyuningsih and Mahsar (2024), which emphasize the importance of authentic lexical input in tourism education. While students appreciated the structured organization of textbooks and learning materials, they simultaneously recognized the limitations of static resources in a rapidly evolving tourism industry. The findings suggest that effective tourism vocabulary learning requires a balance between systematic vocabulary instruction and exposure to authentic industry discourse. Consequently, coursebooks may provide a useful foundation for vocabulary learning, but they should be supplemented with contemporary tourism resources that reflect current professional practices and communication needs. This observation highlights the importance of curriculum responsiveness in ESP education.

e. Lack of Authentic Practice Opportunities

Participants frequently reported that limited authentic language use outside the classroom hindered their vocabulary development.

One participant explained: “Tôi chưa có nhiều cơ hội thực hành giao tiếp thực tế nên đôi khi còn lúng túng khi sử dụng.” [Due to the lack of real-world communicative practice, I still experience occasional hesitancy when using the language.] (S2, Written reflection)

Another participant stated: “Từ vựng du lịch khó ghi nhớ và phản xạ trong giao tiếp thực tế vì những thuật ngữ này không xuất hiện nhiều trong cuộc sống hàng ngày.” [Tourism vocabulary is tough to retain and recall instantly in actual conversation because these specialized terms rarely appear in daily life.] (S5, Interview)

Likewise: “Xung quanh mình bạn bè tất cả mọi người đều sử dụng tiếng Việt nên mình cũng không luyện được phản xạ tiếng Anh.” [Everyone around me, including my friends, speaks Vietnamese, so I do not really have opportunities to develop my English reflexes.] (S11, Interview).

This finding supports Hidayati et al. (2023), who found that language exposure and communicative environments significantly influence English learning outcomes. However, whereas Hidayati et al. focused primarily on geographical differences between tourist and non-tourist areas, the present study highlights a more immediate educational challenge: the scarcity of authentic opportunities for students to use tourism English in their daily lives. As a result, vocabulary learning remains largely classroom-dependent, limiting

opportunities for meaningful practice, retrieval, and communicative application. The findings suggest that vocabulary knowledge may remain passive unless learners are provided with regular opportunities to use tourism terminology in authentic or simulated professional contexts. Therefore, exposure and practice appear to be equally important components of tourism vocabulary development.

Taken together, the findings indicate that tourism English vocabulary learning cannot be explained by a single factor. Instead, it emerges from the interaction between learner motivation, the characteristics of tourism terminology, instructional support, learning resources, and opportunities for authentic communication. This finding supports socio-cognitive perspectives on language learning, which view vocabulary acquisition as a process shaped by both individual agency and environmental conditions. The results further suggest that improving tourism vocabulary learning requires pedagogical interventions that address multiple dimensions simultaneously rather than focusing exclusively on vocabulary memorization.

2. Tourism English Vocabulary Learning Strategies (RQ2)

Analysis of the data revealed four major strategy categories: (1) *Memory-based Learning Strategies*, (2) *Contextual and Communicative Learning Strategies*, (3) *Technology-mediated Learning Strategies*, and (4) *Multimedia-based Learning Strategies*. Table 2 presents an overview of the identified strategy themes and typical examples reported by participants.

Table 2. Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Participants

Strategy Theme	Description	Typical Examples
Memory-based Learning	Learning through repetition, association, and recall techniques	Flashcards, repetition, visual associations
Contextual and Communicative Learning	Learning through meaningful language use	Sentence construction, role-plays, situational practice
Technology-mediated Learning	Learning supported by digital and AI tools	ChatGPT, Quizlet, online dictionaries
Multimedia-based Learning	Learning through audio-visual materials	YouTube videos, travel vlogs, films, TikTok

The strategy themes reveal that students do not rely on a single approach when learning tourism English vocabulary. Instead, they combine traditional vocabulary learning techniques with contextualized and technology-enhanced practices. This finding reflects contemporary perspectives on vocabulary learning, which emphasize strategic flexibility and learner autonomy. The identified strategies demonstrate how students actively adapt their learning behaviors to meet the demands of specialized tourism vocabulary.

a. Memory-based Learning Strategies

The first strategy category involved memory-based techniques. Students frequently relied on flashcards, repetition, and visual associations to retain tourism vocabulary.

One participant explained: “Chiến lược học từ vựng bằng flashcard thông qua app Quizlet kích thích khả năng tư duy bằng hình ảnh và sự liên tưởng của não bộ.” [The strategy of learning vocabulary via flashcards on the Quizlet app stimulates visual thinking and cognitive associations.] (S7, Written reflection)

Another participant stated: “Học bằng flashcard trên Quizlet là phương pháp hiệu quả nhất vì nó giúp việc ôn tập trở nên thú vị hơn và dễ ghi nhớ hơn.” [Studying with flashcards on Quizlet is the most rewarding method because it makes revision more engaging and retention much easier.] (S5, Interview)

These findings align closely with Oxford’s (1990) memory strategy framework, which emphasizes repetition, association, and retrieval as mechanisms for vocabulary retention. However, unlike the traditional memory strategies described in earlier studies, participants in the present study increasingly relied on digital applications such as Quizlet to support vocabulary review and practice. This suggests that memory-based learning remains important but is being transformed through technology. Rather than replacing traditional memorization techniques, digital tools appear to enhance their efficiency and accessibility.

b. Contextual and Communicative Learning Strategies

The second strategy theme highlighted contextual and communicative approaches to vocabulary learning, which participants frequently described as their most effective approach.

One participant stated: “Học từ vựng thông qua ngữ cảnh và các tình huống thực tế là hiệu quả nhất vì nó giúp mình hiểu rõ cách sử dụng từ và ghi nhớ lâu hơn.” [Acquiring vocabulary through context and authentic situations yields the best results, as it helps me master word usage and fosters deeper memorization.] (S10, Interview)

Another participant explained: “Học bằng flashcards kết hợp với đặt câu là hiệu quả nhất vì giúp tôi ghi nhớ từ lâu hơn và biết cách sử dụng từ trong thực tế.” [Combining flashcards with sentence construction is highly effective, helping me retain words longer and understand how to use them in practice.] (S2, Written reflection)

These findings support Oxford’s (1990) cognitive learning strategies and are consistent with Prachanant’s (2012) emphasis on authentic language use in tourism communication. More importantly, the results suggest that students increasingly recognize that vocabulary knowledge involves not only understanding word meanings but also knowing how and when words should be used appropriately in professional contexts. This finding reflects current views of vocabulary competence, which emphasize the importance of contextualized and communicative knowledge rather than isolated lexical knowledge. Therefore, contextual learning appears to facilitate both vocabulary retention and professional language development.

c. Technology-mediated Learning Strategies

The third theme, concerning the use of technology-mediated learning strategies, emerged as one of the most distinctive findings of the study. Participants frequently

reported using ChatGPT, online dictionaries, and other digital tools to support vocabulary learning.

One participant explained: “ChatGPT đóng vai trò như một người bạn đồng hành tương tác giúp tôi tạo ra các kịch bản hội thoại mẫu để kiểm tra ngữ cảnh sử dụng từ.” [ChatGPT serves as an interactive companion, helping me generate sample conversational scripts to verify the appropriate context of word usage.] (S7, Written reflection)

Another participant stated: “Mình thường sử dụng Duolingo để luyện tập giao tiếp.” [I frequently utilize Duolingo as a tool to practice my communication skills.] (S5, Interview)

Similarly: “Khi không hiểu từ vựng thì mình sẽ hỏi ChatGPT. Hay là không có bài tập thì mình sẽ nhờ ChatGPT tạo ra các bài tập.” [Whenever I struggle with vocabulary, I turn to ChatGPT. When I need practice, I ask ChatGPT to generate exercises for me.] (S11, Interview)

These findings strongly support Pham et al. (2024), who reported that AI-assisted tools enhance learner engagement, autonomy, and vocabulary learning effectiveness. Nevertheless, the current study provides a more detailed understanding of how AI is used in tourism vocabulary learning. Rather than functioning merely as reference tools, applications such as ChatGPT were frequently described as interactive learning partners capable of generating dialogues, explaining vocabulary usage, providing contextualized examples, and creating personalized exercises. This suggests a shift from technology-assisted learning toward AI-assisted vocabulary learning, where learners engage in continuous interaction with intelligent systems. Such a finding reflects broader developments in higher education, in which artificial intelligence increasingly supports individualized, self-directed, and adaptive language learning.

d. Multimedia-based Learning Strategies

The final strategy theme focused on the use of multimedia resources for vocabulary learning. Students reported learning tourism vocabulary through videos, travel vlogs, films, and social media content.

One participant stated: “Chiến lược học hiệu quả nhất là học qua các video tình huống thực tế bởi vì nó giúp mình nhớ được tình huống, ngữ cảnh phát âm của người bản xứ.” [The most powerful strategy is learning through real-life situational videos because it helps me remember the situation and the pronunciation context of native speakers.] (S6, Interview)

Another participant noted: “Xem những video trên YouTube là hiệu quả nhất. Tại vì nó kích thích cái não mình để kiểu mình cảm giác hứng thú hơn.” [Watching YouTube videos is the most effective approach for me because it stimulates my brain and keeps me more genuinely engaged.] (S1, Interview)

These findings suggest that multimedia resources facilitate vocabulary learning by combining visual, auditory, and contextual input. Unlike traditional textbook-based instruction, videos, travel vlogs, and social media content expose learners to authentic pronunciation, natural language use, and realistic tourism-related situations. The findings

therefore support the growing recognition that vocabulary learning benefits from multimodal input. In addition, multimedia resources appear to increase learner engagement and motivation, which may contribute to deeper processing and more durable vocabulary retention.

Overall, the findings suggest that students employ a combination of traditional and technology-enhanced vocabulary learning strategies. While memory-based strategies remain important for initial vocabulary retention, contextual and communicative learning appears to play a central role in transforming lexical knowledge into practical communicative competence. The prominence of AI-assisted learning further indicates that vocabulary learning in contemporary higher education is becoming increasingly personalized, interactive, and technology-driven. Compared with earlier studies that emphasized memorization and note-taking strategies, the present findings suggest a gradual shift toward more autonomous, digitally supported, and learner-centered approaches to ESP vocabulary learning.

3. Pedagogical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several implications for English language teaching and curriculum development in tourism-related ESP programs.

First, lecturers should adopt more contextualized and communicative approaches to vocabulary instruction. Since students perceived role-plays, simulations, and tourism-related scenarios as effective learning experiences, vocabulary teaching should focus on meaningful language use rather than isolated memorization. Such activities may help students develop both lexical knowledge and communicative competence in professional contexts.

Second, curriculum developers should ensure that tourism English materials remain relevant to current industry practices. While coursebooks provide structured vocabulary input, they should be supplemented with authentic resources such as tourism websites, promotional materials, travel blogs, and real-world case studies to expose learners to contemporary tourism discourse.

Third, the findings highlight the growing role of AI-assisted learning in vocabulary development. Given the widespread use of ChatGPT and other digital tools among participants, educators may consider integrating AI-supported activities into ESP courses while providing appropriate guidance on effective and responsible use.

Finally, higher education institutions should expand opportunities for authentic language use through internships, industry partnerships, tourism projects, and interactions with international visitors. Such experiences may help students transfer classroom vocabulary knowledge to real-world communication and enhance long-term vocabulary retention.

Overall, effective tourism vocabulary instruction should combine contextualized pedagogy, authentic learning materials, AI-supported learning opportunities, and meaningful communicative practice.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors influencing tourism English vocabulary learning and the vocabulary learning strategies employed by third-year English-major students at Thanh Do University. Through thematic analysis of written reflections and semi-structured interviews, the findings revealed that tourism vocabulary learning is shaped by a complex interaction between learner-related and contextual factors. Five major influencing factors were identified, namely career-oriented motivation, complex nature of tourism vocabulary, teacher-guided learning and classroom activities, access to learning resources and technology, and the lack of authentic practice opportunities. Among these factors, career-oriented motivation emerged as the strongest driving force, while the specialized and context-dependent nature of tourism terminology represented the most significant learning challenge.

The study also found that students adopted a variety of vocabulary learning strategies rather than relying on a single approach. Four major strategy categories were identified: memory-based learning, contextual and communicative learning, technology-mediated learning, and multimedia-based learning. Notably, contextual learning and AI-assisted learning emerged as particularly prominent approaches, reflecting a shift toward more interactive, technology-enhanced, and learner-centered vocabulary learning practices.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends previous research on ESP vocabulary learning by demonstrating how motivation, learning environment, and technology interact in shaping tourism vocabulary acquisition within a Vietnamese higher education context. The findings also highlight the growing role of AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, as both learning resources and interactive learning partners in vocabulary development.

Pedagogically, the findings provide useful implications for English language teaching, ESP curriculum development, and technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction in higher education. They underscore the importance of contextualized learning, authentic communicative practice, and the effective integration of digital tools to support tourism English vocabulary development.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of third-year English-major students from a single institution, which may limit the transferability of the findings. Future research could involve larger samples across different universities, employ mixed-methods designs, or examine the effectiveness of specific AI-assisted tools and instructional interventions in enhancing tourism English vocabulary learning.

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