

THE PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DEVELOPING STRATEGIC COMPETENCE IN TOURISM EDUCATION

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Abstract. The present study examines the pedagogical significance of developing strategic competence among tourism students. The ability to communicate effectively in tourism-related contexts requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the capacity to overcome communication difficulties, negotiate meaning, adapt messages to interlocutors and maintain interaction in unpredictable professional situations. The study employs qualitative content analysis and comparative synthesis of theoretical models of communicative competence and research related to communication in tourism education. The findings identify compensatory, interactional, regulatory and goal-oriented functions of strategic competence. The study argues that professionally oriented role plays, situational tasks, case studies, simulations and reflective activities create appropriate pedagogical conditions for developing students' strategic behaviour. A five-stage instructional sequence consisting of awareness raising, modelling, guided practice, professional simulation and reflection is proposed. Developing strategic competence can prepare tourism students to manage communication breakdowns, respond flexibly to tourists' needs and participate more confidently in intercultural professional interaction.

Keywords: strategic competence, tourism education, communication strategies, communicative competence, professional communication, tourism students, pedagogical conditions.

Introduction. The contemporary tourism industry is characterised by continuous interaction between service providers and people representing different linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds. Tourism professionals are expected to provide information, explain routes and services, respond to complaints, negotiate alternative solutions and resolve misunderstandings. Consequently, communication in tourism cannot be reduced to the grammatically correct production of sentences. It also involves listening, interpreting intentions, adapting messages, using non-verbal resources and selecting appropriate strategies in accordance with a professional situation. Communication skills have been recognised as an essential component of professional performance in tourism. Research indicates that oral, written, listening, non-verbal and digital communication skills jointly contribute to the quality of tourism services and tourists' experiences. Tourism students therefore need opportunities to develop not only their linguistic repertoire but also their capacity to use available resources strategically in real-life communication.

A tourism employee may face situations in which a foreign tourist does not understand an explanation, a planned route is unexpectedly changed, a reservation error occurs or a customer expresses dissatisfaction. In such circumstances, insufficient vocabulary or grammatical knowledge should not necessarily result in the termination of communication. A strategically competent speaker can paraphrase the message, provide an example, use gestures, request clarification, confirm understanding or suggest an alternative solution. Strategic competence is therefore particularly relevant to tourism education because professional interaction in this field is dynamic, service-oriented and frequently unpredictable. Its

development can enable students to manage communication difficulties while preserving the professional purpose and interpersonal quality of an interaction.

Literature Review. The concept of strategic competence was initially developed within theories of communicative competence. Canale and Swain considered communication to involve more than grammatical knowledge and included strategic competence as one of its principal components. They defined it through verbal and non-verbal strategies employed to compensate for communication breakdowns caused by performance difficulties or insufficient linguistic competence. In this conceptualisation, strategies such as paraphrasing, role adjustment and non-verbal communication allow a speaker to continue interaction despite limited language resources. The model proposed by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell further emphasises the central role of strategic competence. Their pedagogically oriented framework consists of linguistic, sociocultural, actional, discourse and strategic competences. Strategic competence surrounds and interacts with the other components because it enables speakers to negotiate messages, resolve communication problems and compensate for limitations in their underlying competencies. Thus, strategic competence is not an isolated linguistic skill; it regulates the practical use of linguistic, discourse and sociocultural knowledge.

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell classify communication strategies into several groups. Avoidance or reduction strategies involve changing or abandoning a message; achievement or compensatory strategies include circumlocution, approximation, restructuring, gestures and code-switching; stalling strategies help speakers gain time; self-monitoring strategies involve repair and reformulation; and interactional strategies include requests for repetition, clarification and confirmation. This classification demonstrates that strategic competence covers both individual problem solving and the collaborative negotiation of meaning.

Dörnyei and Scott broadened the understanding of communication strategies by treating them as potentially intentional attempts to manage language-related problems during communication. They also distinguished between strategies that solve immediate communication problems and strategies that improve communicative effectiveness. From this perspective, strategic competence is not limited to compensating for inadequate vocabulary. It includes deliberate planning and the selection of procedures that help speakers achieve communicative goals.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages presents strategic language use through the processes of planning, execution, monitoring and repair. Production strategies include planning, compensating and self-correction, while interaction strategies include turn-taking, co-operation and asking for clarification. Compensating may involve paraphrasing, defining a missing concept or supporting speech with gestures. Monitoring and repair include reformulating an unsuccessful message, correcting misunderstandings and changing a communicative tactic. The CEFR interpretation is especially applicable to tourism communication. Obtaining services, providing directions, communicating by telephone, managing goal-oriented interaction and responding to requests all require speakers to use communication strategies. Asking for clarification, for example, allows professionals to check customer requirements before offering a service, whereas paraphrasing enables them to explain unfamiliar cultural objects, local customs or travel procedures to international visitors. Studies in tourism education confirm the importance of practical communicative preparation.

Kostić Bobanović and Gržinić argue that communication skills are fundamental to hospitality and tourism performance and that English communication adds professional value to students' education. A study involving tourism students at Hanoi Open University also identified a need for more practical activities in which learners use English to address problems resembling real-life professional situations.

Ho's investigation of communicative language teaching in Tourism English similarly demonstrated the pedagogical relevance of interactive language use. The study involved written and oral assessments, questionnaires and focus-group interviews with tourism undergraduates and found that communicative teaching supported students' competence and confidence. These findings support the view that tourism language education should include professionally meaningful interaction rather than focus exclusively on vocabulary and grammatical exercises.

Nevertheless, much of the existing tourism education literature addresses communicative competence as a broad construct. The specific functions, instructional stages and pedagogical conditions for developing strategic competence require further conceptual clarification. The present study addresses this need by synthesising communicative competence theory with the professional communication requirements of tourism students.

Research Methodology. The present study employed a qualitative theoretical research design aimed at examining the pedagogical significance of developing strategic competence among tourism students. The research was based on the analysis, comparison and synthesis of scientific literature related to communicative competence, communication strategies, professional communication and foreign-language instruction in tourism education. Foundational models of communicative competence, including the approaches proposed by Canale and Swain, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell, as well as the strategic language-use principles presented in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, were analysed in order to clarify the conceptual content and functional characteristics of strategic competence. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which communication strategies enable learners to compensate for linguistic limitations, negotiate meaning, regulate interaction and achieve communicative goals in professional contexts. The selection of scientific sources was guided by their relevance to the theoretical interpretation of strategic competence, their pedagogical applicability to foreign-language teaching and their connection with professional communication in the tourism sector. Studies addressing communicative preparation, interactive language teaching and practical task design in tourism education were also examined. Through comparative analysis, common and distinctive features of different theoretical perspectives were identified, while content analysis was used to classify the principal functions of strategic competence and determine their relevance to tourism-related communication. The findings obtained from the literature were subsequently synthesised to identify the pedagogical conditions, instructional methods and learning activities that may support the development of strategic competence among tourism students. Since the research was theoretical in nature, it did not involve an experimental intervention or quantitative measurement; instead, its conclusions were derived from the systematic interpretation and generalisation of existing scholarly approaches.

Results. The results of the theoretical analysis demonstrate that strategic competence performs several interconnected functions in the professional preparation of tourism students.

First, it serves a compensatory function by enabling learners to continue communication when their linguistic resources are insufficient. In such situations, students may use paraphrasing, approximation, circumlocution, restructuring, exemplification, gestures or visual support to express the intended meaning. This ability is particularly important in tourism communication, where professionals are frequently required to explain unfamiliar services, destinations, cultural practices or travel procedures to foreign visitors. Strategic competence therefore reduces students' dependence on memorised vocabulary and helps them maintain interaction even when they cannot immediately recall an appropriate word or expression. The analysis also shows that strategic competence has an important interactional function. Tourism communication involves the joint construction of meaning between the service provider and the customer; therefore, students need to learn how to request repetition, ask for clarification, confirm information and check whether the interlocutor has understood the message correctly. Such strategies help prevent misunderstandings related to reservations, routes, accommodation, schedules and customer preferences. At the same time, they contribute to professional politeness because they demonstrate attentiveness to the tourist's needs and willingness to ensure accurate communication. Another significant result is related to the regulatory and reflective role of strategic competence. Students who possess this competence are able to plan their communication, monitor the effectiveness of their speech, identify misunderstandings and modify their communicative behaviour when necessary. For example, if an explanation is too complex or technical, the speaker may simplify the message, provide additional examples or reorganise the information. If the interlocutor misinterprets the message, the student may reformulate it rather than merely repeat the same statement. This process develops conscious control over communication and encourages learners to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of their own strategic choices. Furthermore, strategic competence performs a goal-oriented and adaptive function. Professional communication in tourism is normally directed towards a specific practical outcome, such as providing information, resolving a complaint, completing a booking, recommending a service or offering an alternative solution. In order to achieve these goals, students must take into account the interlocutor's age, cultural background, language proficiency, emotional state and individual needs. The same tourism product or service may therefore require different forms of explanation depending on the customer. The ability to adapt the message and select an appropriate communication strategy contributes to more personalised and effective service.

The analysis further indicates that strategic competence develops most successfully when students are engaged in professionally meaningful learning activities. Role plays, case studies, situational tasks, problem-solving activities and professional simulations provide opportunities to apply communication strategies in contexts similar to real tourism practice. However, the effectiveness of these activities depends on several pedagogical conditions. Students should first become aware of different communication strategies and understand their functions. Teachers should demonstrate how these strategies can be applied in realistic situations, after which students need guided practice supported by prompts, models and appropriate language resources. Gradually, learners should be given greater independence in selecting and applying strategies during complex professional situations. Reflection, self-assessment and peer feedback should then be used to help students evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions and identify alternative solutions.

On the basis of the analysed literature, the development of strategic competence may be organised as a sequential instructional process that moves from awareness raising and teacher modelling to guided practice, independent professional simulation and reflective evaluation. Such an approach allows students to progress from recognising communication strategies to using them consciously, flexibly and independently. The overall findings therefore suggest that the systematic development of strategic competence can strengthen students' communicative confidence, problem-solving ability, adaptability and readiness to participate in intercultural professional interaction within the tourism sector.

Discussion. The findings of the study show that strategic competence should be regarded as an important component of professional communicative competence in tourism education. It connects students' linguistic knowledge with their ability to act effectively in real and unpredictable communicative situations. Tourism students may possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, but they may still experience difficulties when a tourist misunderstands an explanation, expresses dissatisfaction, requests additional information or requires an immediate alternative solution. In such cases, strategic competence enables students to maintain communication and achieve the intended professional goal. The results also indicate that strategic competence is broader than the ability to compensate for limited vocabulary. It includes planning communication, selecting an appropriate strategy, monitoring the interlocutor's reaction, identifying misunderstandings and modifying the message when necessary. Therefore, the development of this competence should be integrated with linguistic, sociocultural and professional preparation. Students need to understand not only what to say, but also how, when and in what form a particular message should be communicated. Professionally oriented role plays, case studies, problem-solving tasks and simulations are particularly useful for developing strategic competence. These activities expose students to realistic tourism-related situations and require them to make independent communicative decisions. For example, handling a customer complaint, explaining a change in a travel programme, resolving a reservation problem or assisting a tourist who does not understand local procedures can encourage students to use clarification, paraphrasing, confirmation and negotiation strategies.

However, the effectiveness of such activities depends on systematic instructional support. Students should first be introduced to the functions of communication strategies and observe examples of their appropriate use. Guided practice should then help them apply these strategies in relatively controlled situations. At later stages, students should independently manage more complex professional scenarios and reflect on the effectiveness of their choices. Self-assessment, peer feedback and teacher comments are essential because they help learners identify successful strategies, recognise weaknesses and consider alternative forms of communication.

Thus, strategic competence should be developed through a gradual and professionally oriented instructional process. Such an approach can transform students from passive users of memorised expressions into flexible communicators capable of responding appropriately to changing professional circumstances.

Conclusion. Strategic competence has considerable pedagogical significance in the professional preparation of tourism students. It enables learners to overcome linguistic and communicative difficulties, negotiate meaning, regulate interaction and adapt their messages

to tourists' individual needs. These abilities are especially important in tourism, where communication is service-oriented, intercultural and often unpredictable. The development of strategic competence requires the systematic use of interactive and professionally relevant learning activities. Role plays, situational tasks, case studies, simulations and reflective exercises provide students with opportunities to apply communication strategies in contexts that resemble real tourism practice. Their effectiveness increases when instruction includes awareness raising, teacher modelling, guided practice, independent performance and reflective evaluation. Consequently, integrating strategic competence into tourism education can improve students' communicative confidence, adaptability, decision-making ability and readiness for intercultural professional interaction. It can also contribute to the preparation of competent tourism specialists who are able to maintain effective communication and provide appropriate solutions in various service-related situations.

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