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English Speaking Ability Of Local Guides And Porters In Interacting With Foreign Hikers At The Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area

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Abstrak

Kemampuan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris sangat penting bagi pemandu (guide) dan porter yang bekerja di Kawasan Ekowisata Gunung Rinjani karena mereka berinteraksi langsung dengan pendaki asing dari berbagai negara. Meskipun bahasa Inggris penting dalam pekerjaan sehari-hari mereka, sebagian besar pemandu dan porter memperoleh kemampuan bahasa Inggris melalui pengalaman praktis dan bukan melalui pendidikan bahasa formal. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris pemandu dan porter, mengidentifikasi kesulitan yang mereka hadapi saat berkomunikasi dengan pendaki asing, dan mendeskripsikan strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi kesulitan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian dilakukan di Kawasan Ekowisata Gunung Rinjani, dengan pemandu dan porter sebagai partisipan penelitian. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi naturalistik, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para partisipan secara umum menunjukkan tingkat kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris fungsional yang memungkinkan mereka berkomunikasi secara efektif dalam situasi pendakian umum. Namun, mereka mengalami beberapa tantangan, termasuk kosakata yang terbatas pada topik budaya yang tidak dikenal, ketidakakuratan tata bahasa, kesulitan pelafalan, dan kurangnya pemahaman saat menghadapi ucapan yang cepat atau beraksen. Untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, partisipan mengandalkan ungkapan sederhana dan berulang, gerakan non-verbal, alih kode, dan pembelajaran berdasarkan pengalaman berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris, pemandu dan porter, pendaki asing, ekowisata, deskriptif kualitatif.

Abstract

The ability to communicate in English is essential for guides and porters working in the Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area

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because they interact directly with foreign hikers from various countries. Despite the importance of English in their daily work, most guides and porters acquire their English skills through practical experience rather than formal language education. Therefore, this study aimed to describe the English speaking ability of guides and porters, identify the difficulties they encountered when communicating with foreign hikers, and describe the strategies they used to overcome those difficulties. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. The research was conducted in the Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area, with guides and porters serving as the research participants. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the participants generally demonstrated a functional level of English speaking ability that enabled them to communicate effectively in common trekking situations. However, they experienced several challenges, including limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation difficulties, and a lack of confidence when discussing unfamiliar topics. To overcome these challenges, the participants relied on simple and repetitive expressions, gestures, code-switching, and continuous learning through direct interaction with foreign hikers. Overall, although their English proficiency remained limited in terms of accuracy and complexity, their communication skills were sufficient to support effective interaction with foreign hikers in the Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area.

Keywords: English Speaking Ability, Guides and Porters, Foreign Hikers, Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area, Qualitative Descriptive Research.

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language that plays a crucial role in international communication, particularly in sectors that involve cross-cultural interaction such as tourism. In the context of globalization, the ability to communicate in English is no longer considered an additional skill, but rather a fundamental requirement, especially for individuals working in tourism destinations that attract international visitors. This condition is highly relevant in Indonesia, a country known for its rich natural and cultural tourism, where communication between local communities and foreign tourists frequently occurs.

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One of the prominent tourist destinations in Indonesia is Mount Rinjani, located in Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara Province. As an ecotourism area, Mount Rinjani attracts a significant number of foreign hikers every year. Based on data from the Balai Taman Nasional Gunung Rinjani (BTNGR), the number of international visitors to Mount Rinjani has reached more than 50,000 per year, coming from various countries with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this context, local communities, particularly guides and porters, play an essential role as the primary actors who interact directly with these foreign visitors.

However, despite the high frequency of interaction, many guides and porters still face challenges in using English effectively. Their speaking ability is often limited in terms of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Unlike formal language learners in classroom settings, these workers have largely acquired their English through informal, experiential exposure during daily interactions on the trail, which tends to produce uneven and unsystematic language development. These limitations may lead to misunderstandings, reduced service quality, and in extreme cases, compromised hiker safety on the mountain trail.

Previous studies on English communication in Indonesian tourism settings have mostly focused on urban destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta, and cultural heritage sites, with limited attention to real-life interaction in ecotourism contexts such as Mount Rinjani. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a study that specifically investigates English speaking ability in the context of mountain ecotourism. Therefore, this study aims to describe the English speaking ability of guides and porters, identify the difficulties they encounter, and explore the communication strategies they use while interacting with foreign hikers in the Mount Rinjani Ecotourism Area.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the English speaking ability of local guides and porters in their natural working environment. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem through data collected in natural settings. The research was conducted in the Mount Rinjani National Park ecotourism area, specifically focusing on the Sembalun trekking basecamp in East Lombok Regency.

The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling technique. The participants consisted of ten individuals: five trekking guides (G1-G5) and five porters (P1-P5) who were actively working at Mount Rinjani and had regular, direct exposure to English communication with foreign hikers. Data were collected over four days during the peak trekking season through three primary techniques: naturalistic observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation.

Data analysis in this research followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three interrelated and cyclical stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, data triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement were rigorously applied throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

English Speaking Ability of Guides and Porters

The findings revealed that guides generally possess a wider trekking-related vocabulary than porters due to their diverse communicative responsibilities, such as explaining routes and delivering safety briefings. Porters, whose interactions are more task-oriented, tend to use basic, functional vocabulary (e.g., "water," "rest," "food"). Regarding pronunciation, intelligibility varies, but participants are generally understood despite the influence of their local L1 accent. Difficulties primarily arise when foreign hikers speak rapidly or with varied native accents.

In terms of grammar, participants demonstrated a practical orientation. Concerns about grammatical accuracy were more prominent among some guides, whereas porters typically prioritized meaning over grammatical form, simplifying structures when communicating. This pattern aligns with the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) perspective, prioritizing communicative needs over general grammatical perfection. Fluency levels were directly correlated with occupational experience; experienced guides displayed greater automaticity, whereas nervousness or lexical retrieval delays occasionally reduced the fluency of less experienced workers.

Communication Difficulties

Vocabulary limitations emerged as a primary challenge, particularly when conversations shifted from routine trekking logistics to unfamiliar topics, such as personal backgrounds or local Sasak cultural practices. While participants rarely viewed grammatical mistakes as communication failures, they acknowledged that long, complex sentences often led to confusion and a loss of confidence. Pronunciation difficulties were evident when encountering unfamiliar English words, but these rarely caused severe misunderstandings.

Listening comprehension posed a significant hurdle, especially when foreign hikers spoke quickly, used idiomatic expressions, or introduced unexpected topics. In such instances, both guides and porters often struggled to process the spoken message accurately and had to rely heavily on situational contexts and non-verbal cues to infer meaning.

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Communication Strategies

To overcome their linguistic limitations, guides and porters actively employed several practical communication strategies. The primary strategy identified was direct experiential learning through repetitive listening and imitation (shadowing). Participants carefully observed how foreign hikers pronounced words and structured phrases, later imitating these expressions with other tourists to organically expand their vocabulary.

When facing severe vocabulary or structural constraints, participants heavily utilized compensation strategies, particularly non-verbal communication. Pointing, facial expressions, and demonstrating physical movements effectively bridged communication gaps. Additionally, participants frequently employed sentence simplification and code-switching, stripping sentences down to core nouns and verbs (e.g., stating "You tired? Rest here five minutes"). Affectively, they masked speaking anxiety by adopting a highly welcoming and friendly attitude, utilizing humor, and offering mutual peer support during group treks.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Local guides and porters in the Mount Rinjani ecotourism area generally possess a functional but limited level of oral English proficiency. While their skills are sufficient to handle basic operational trekking communication, they face notable difficulties related to grammatical accuracy, complex vocabulary, and comprehension of diverse foreign accents. The success of their interactions relies heavily on adaptive communication strategies, including gestures, message simplification, and continuous experiential learning on the job.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that local authorities (such as Balai Taman Nasional Gunung Rinjani) and educational institutions collaborate to provide tailored English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training. Such programs should focus on practical speaking fluency, listening comprehension for diverse accents, safety protocols, and basic cultural explanations, rather than formal grammar rules. Furthermore, providing bilingual field guidebooks would serve as a practical reference to support the daily workflow of these vital ecotourism workers.

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