



THE STUDENT EMPLOYEES' ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS AT DENPASAR ACADEMY OF TOURISM

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Received: Oct. 24th, 2022 | Accepted: Nov. 7th, 2022 | Published: Nov. 10th, 2022

Permalink/DOI: 10.53356/diparojs.v3i1.68

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the student employees' language English skills at Denpasar Academy of Tourism. Framed within a qualitative design, this study employed observation, survey, and interview as the methods with an observation sheet, a questionnaire, and an interview guide as the instruments to collect the data. It is expected that the working students have the ability to communicate well in English. However, the results of the study showed that the working students' English skills are moderate. Therefore, the students need to maximize their English skills to support them in the work field. Further, this study could be used as a reflection to improve the process of English teaching and learning by upgrading the curriculum and creating an English club.

Key words: English language skills, student employees

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemampuan bahasa Inggris mahasiswa Akademi Pariwisata Denpasar yang sedang bekerja. Akademi Pariwisata Denpasar merupakan salah satu perguruan tinggi pariwisata vokasi di Bali. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini mengaplikasikan metode observasi, survei, dan wawancara dengan lembar observasi, kuesioner, dan pedoman wawancara sebagai instrumen untuk mengumpulkan data. Adapun hal yang diharapkan yakni mahasiswa yang sudah bekerja memiliki kemampuan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris dengan baik. Namun, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan bahasa Inggris mahasiswa tergolong sedang. Oleh karena itu, mahasiswa perlu memaksimalkan kemampuan bahasa Inggrisnya untuk

mendukung mereka di dunia kerja. Penelitian ini dapat digunakan sebagai refleksi untuk meningkatkan proses belajar mengajar bahasa Inggris dengan meningkatkan kurikulum dan membuat klub bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: *kemampuan bahasa Inggris, mahasiswa karyawan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fields that nationally agreed by the society as the icon of Bali. In line with that, communication skill is considered as the core skill needed in the tourism field (Saragih et al., 2022). In this case, English is the significant language used to communicate in the tourism sector. The use of English as international communication language has become the highlight in the tourism field. It is in line with the fact that English is considered as the greatest common language spoken universally (Risadi et al., 2020). Therefore, having the ability to communicate well in English is needed in the tourism sector.

This condition demands the parties in the tourism field to speak English intensively, including the employees. Mantra, Widiastuti, Handayani, and Pramawati (2020) supported that mastering English is a compulsory for tourism employees. It is because employees with effective communication in English tend to give efficient services (Erazo et al., 2019). Besides, the mastery of four basic English skills that is vital in the tourism sector could help in providing information and services (Prihandoko et al., 2019). The same opinion comes from Octi et al. (2020) who state that many national and international tourism companies obligate their staff to speak English to provide good service. A study by Rahayu, Suprina, Amrullah, and Pitchayadejanant (2021) also found that there is a strong relationship between language competency and tourist satisfaction.

The importance of English certainly affected the employment system in the tourism field. In this case, English skills is considered as one of the main requirements when applying for a job in the tourism field (Octi et al., 2020; Rahayu et al., 2019). Therefore, it is common to find in today's situation that many tourism companies put language requirement skills in the recruitment selections. Even, there is also certain company that gradually assess their workers' English ability to give the best service to the customers. Rahayu et al. (2019) has the same opinion, in which graduates from tourism higher education need to be equipped with globalized skills such as language skills. Bagus et al. (2021) added that the employees' improvement in English is needed in line with the importance of communicating effectively.

Ayu et al. (2021) emphasize that English competence is needed in the tourism sector to communicate and compete internationally. Besides, tourism workers have to be able to speak English well to play an active role. As an example, workers who speak good English could attract more visitors because of the effective and efficient services. In line with the importance of English in the tourism field, Denpasar Academy of Tourism as one of the well-known vocational tourism colleges in Bali also prepares the students to face the workplace.

Unfortunately, the preliminary observation and interview done indicated that students and graduates from Denpasar Academy of Tourism showed a relatively low

proficiency in English. The gap between the expectation that students and graduates from Denpasar Academy of Tourism must have English competency and the reality mentioned previously lead to the discussion of this study. Therefore, this study discussed the expectation and reality of the students' English skills and the reasons behind the situation.

In conclusion, this research was done because the researchers found a gap between the expected students' ability in communicating with English and the real situation in the workplace, in which the students perceived relatively low English proficiency at their workplace. To highlight the above background, this research aims to answer the problems that emerged formulated as follows 1) How is the student employees' English skills in Denpasar Academy of Tourism? 2) What are the factors that affected the student employees' English skills in Denpasar Academy of Tourism?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are some previous related studies conducted by other researchers. The first study comes from Rahayu et al. (2019) entitled "Students' Perception on the Importance of English Language Skills in Tourism Sector". This study was done to elaborate students' perception of the importance of English communication skills in a form of descriptive qualitative method. The study proved that English has viewed as important thing for the students in the tourism sector. Therefore, it is important for English curriculum developers to improve the students' English language skills.

It is similar with a study from Khalida and Refnaldi (2020) entitled "Vocational High School Students' Needs on English Speaking Learning Materials for Hospitality

Study Program". This study analyses the needs of vocational high school students in developing English speaking learning material in a form of descriptive survey. It was found that most of the hospitality graduates in a vocational high school work in a local company as the result of lack English communication skill. Therefore, it is expected to develop learning materials that focus on speaking skill with related topic in the workplace.

Another related study comes from Menggo, Suparwa, and Astawa (2019) with title "Hindering Factors in the Achievement of English Communicative Competence in Tourism Academy Students" in a form of descriptive-quantitative study with 30 students and one English lecturer as the respondents. It was found that the factors affected the students' English communicative competence varied from insufficiency of English practice after class with English speaking communities, students' lack of eagerness to practice English in and after class, and lack of parents' endorsement.

Anhar, Gani, and Muslem (2021) conducted research entitled "A Survey of Students' English Proficiency and Their Needs toward English Learning Outcomes at Vocational Colleges". This study was done in a form of qualitative research design. The investigation resulted that the students in the vocational college need transactional English in a specific field for their future profession.

Ayu et al. (2021) also conducted a study with title "The Roles of English in the Development of Tourism and Economy in Indonesia". This study was done to know the roles of English in the development of tourism and economy in Indonesia through interviews and open questionnaires. It was found that employees with good English communication could provide services that are more efficient.

It means English gives a very important role in developing tourism industry.

From the several researchers above, it could be assumed that having a good English competence is important in the tourism field. However, none of the studies above discussed the expectation and the reality happens in the workplace and the factors that affected the students' English skills. Therefore, this study could become a reflection to improve the process of English teaching and learning at Denpasar Academy of Tourism as the setting of this research.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative method in analysing the data. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), qualitative research describes social phenomena that happen naturally. The social phenomenon described in this research was the students' English skills at Denpasar Academy of Tourism. The subjects of this study were the students in the last semester, which is the sixth semester, who are already working. In collecting the data, the researchers used observation, survey, and interview as the methods. Meanwhile, the instruments used were an observation notes, a questionnaire, and an unstructured interview note. The observation was done throughout the time by the researchers and it leads to the survey method. The survey method in the form of a questionnaire was distributed to the subjects through a Google Form. Further, the interview was done to obtain more data and validated certain things.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to know the students employees' English language skills at Denpasar Academy of Tourism and the factors that affected the student employees' English language skills at Denpasar Academy

of Tourism. The data were obtained through observation method, survey method, and interview method towards students in the sixth semester who are already working and willing to be the subject of this research.

The data obtained from the results of observation, questionnaire, and interview done by the researchers toward the subjects indicated that the working students' English skills are classified as moderate. In this case, the observation was done at Denpasar Academy of Tourism toward the subjects and the graduates that leads to the following method, which is the survey method. The survey method was done with a questionnaire distributed toward the students in the sixth semester who have been working and willing to be the subject. To ease the subjects in understanding the context of the questions, the questionnaire was made in Bahasa since it is the subjects' mother language.

The questionnaire resulted several important points about the students' English skills. From the result of the analysis, it was found that most of the students have to deal with customers or guests who speak English. Unfortunately, half of the subjects answered that they do not have sufficient English skills to communicate effectively with customers or guests. The subjects tend to use simple and basic English taught or heard. It is quite in contrast with a statement from Prihandoko et al. (2019) who state that the mastery of four basic English skills is vital in the tourism sector. In line with that, Nishanthi (2018) added that English is a necessity for people in the tourism field. Therefore, students in tourism colleges have to achieve certain job skills and English proficiency Astawa and Ardiasa (2022).

Besides, it was found from the result of the questionnaire that the subjects did not take any English course to support their English

skills. This condition is caused because of some reasons and all of those reasons were interconnected. The reasons varied from the course fee, the limited time have by the subject, and the students' fear to take English course. At Denpasar Academy of Tourism, the subjects varied from different economic backgrounds. Therefore, the students who are already working tend to save their salary for tuition rather than to take an English course.

From the result of the questionnaire, the researchers conducted a depth interview with the subjects to obtain more data as well as validated the data. The interview was done to find out the process of how the students as a worker deal with the customers or guests in English. Besides, the preliminary interview done by the researchers with the practitioners from Denpasar Academy of Tourism indicated that the lack of English communication skills is the major problem faced by the student employees. Thus, the interview was done to know the process of how the student employees deal with customers or guests in English and the reasons behind the lack of students' English skills.

In line with that, the interview indicated that the first reason behind the lack of English skills by the students was the minimum practice of English skills in the academic and non-academic environment. In the context of academic environment, the students' English skills practice is limited to the given time in the class, which is only 2 – 3 hours per week. Therefore, it could not maximize the students' English skills especially speaking skill, as it is the most commonly used skill in the workplace. Saragih et al. (2022) stated that having a good speaking skill is necessary for tourism students whereas the students could apply that skill in the work fields.

In the context of non-academic environment, the students did not practice

their English skills outside the campus with their peers. The students did not even take any additional English course that caused a lack of communication skill. One of the major reasons behind this situation is the students have to work and it caused limited time to practice their English skills. Because of that, the institution could maximize English teaching and learning process to help the students improve their English skills. It could also affect the institution's existence because the graduates will have excellent English skills. Thus, the related parties such as English lecturers and the academic division could arrange the teaching and learning process that emphasizes the students to improve their communication skills in English. The same opinion comes from Prabhu et al. (2015), in which internalizing English needs to be done by the industry, academia, and students. Further, Astawa and Ardiasa (2022) added that the colleges should prepare the most appropriate curriculum and teaching methods to support the students to obtain certain job skills and English proficiency for tourism purposes.

The first reason behind the lack of students' English skills affected the second reason, which is the students' lack of eagerness to practice English. It is also the same with a study from Menggo et al. (2019), in which one of the factors that affected the students' English communicative competence was students' lack of eagerness to practice English in and after class. In fact, having a good English-speaking skill could lead the students to boost their confidence in their workplace (Prabhu et al., 2015). Thus, the lecturer as part of the institution could enhance the students' confidence to practice English. The lecturer could emphasize the importance of English for the students' career as it is supported by a study from Prabhu et al.

(2015) who state that English language communication is very important for the career in hospitality. It is because having a good English communication skill could optimise personal branding, placement, and promotion. Menggo et al. (2019) added that English communicative competence is crucial for tourism students. It is because communicative competence could help the students to gain confidence. Furthermore, Anhar et al. (2021) argued that English communication skills is considered as an essential thing to be prepared.

The interview also resulted the challenge faced by the students in line with the reasons behind the lack of their English skills. The challenge faced by the subjects in their workplace is listening to the customers or guests' order. The customers or guests tend to speak fast that makes the subjects have to re-confirm the order. Sometimes, the subjects misheard or did not understand the meaning because the lack of vocabulary. It is reflected that the communication process is dominated by the use of English language in the tourism field. Therefore, most of the tourism industries recruit employees with a good English communication skill for the purposes of services. The same opinion comes from Zahedpisheh et al. (2017). It is because poor English proficiency and competency could affect the services done by the employee.

The other challenge as the result from the lack of English skills could be seen from the subjects' career path. The lack of English competence inhibits the graduates to expand their career. The interview done by the researcher towards the academicians in Denpasar Academy of Tourism indicated that the graduates faced some troubles in getting the best position at their workplace as the result of lack English proficiency. It is similar to a study by Khalida and Refnaldi (2020)

who found that most of the hospitality graduates in a vocational high school work in a local company as the result of lack English communication skill. A study by Prabhu et al. (2015) emphasizes that English language communication is very important for the career in hospitality. It is because having a good English communication skill could optimise personal branding, placement, and promotion.

In line with that, Rahayu et al. (2021) stated that language competence is referred as soft skill that affects employability. Olivia et al. (2018) added that tourism students with good English competence are considered more employable because the existence of English all around the world. In addition, Putra (2018) stated that people who master English have greater job opportunities than the ones who cannot speak English. Therefore, it emphasizes that one of the reasons behind the stagnant position by the graduates from Denpasar Academy of Tourism is the lack of English competence. In conclusion, tourism students have to learn English in a proper way to function effectively in the tourism field (Erazo et al., 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

From the finding and discussion, it is revealed that the student employees at Denpasar Academy of Tourism need to maximize their English communication skills to support them in the work field. In this case, Denpasar Academy of Tourism as an academic institution could emphasize English skills as it also has the same importance as tourism skills. It is because having good English skills could make students and graduates more employable.

The results of this study could be used as a reflection to improve the process of English teaching and learning at Denpasar

Academy of Tourism. Therefore, this study suggests Denpasar Academy of Tourism to equip the students with a high level of English competency to help them in the workplace by upgrading the curriculum and creating an English club.

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