



Cross-Cultural Communication in Tourism: Challenges and Strategies for Local Guides in Alor

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the challenges and cross-cultural communication strategies faced by local tour guides in Alor, a region rich in cultural diversity and tourist destinations. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to local tour guides at various main destinations. The results indicate that language differences, cultural values, and tourist expectations are the primary challenges in cross-cultural communication. To overcome these challenges, the tour guides implement strategies such as learning foreign languages, cultural adaptation, and strengthening interpersonal skills. This study highlights the importance of cross-cultural communication training for local guides as an effort to enhance tourist experiences and support the sustainable development of tourism in Alor.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Tourism, Local Guides, Challenges, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a rapidly growing global industry that significantly impacts the economies of many countries. One of the factors driving the growth of this sector is the increasingly intensive intercultural interaction through travel (Putri, 2022). In this context, cross-cultural communication plays a very important role, both in ensuring a satisfying travel experience for tourists and in maintaining the sustainability and harmony of relationships between tourists and local communities (Mumtaz, 2024). Tour guides, as the main link between local culture and foreign tourists, have a crucial role in bridging these cultural differences. They are not only responsible for providing accurate and engaging information but must also be capable of overcoming language barriers, differing norms, and expectations, which often present challenges in cross-cultural communication.

According to Pakpahan (2024), local tour guides, who often become the first face of a tourist destination for international visitors, face various communication challenges. They must be able to adapt to the diverse cultural backgrounds of tourists, as well as deal with language obstacles and differences in interaction styles. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, damage the destination's image, and reduce tourist satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential for tour guides to master effective cross-cultural communication skills (Susilowardhani & Wiastuti, 2015). Moreover, understanding how to communicate with different cultures is a competency that local guides must possess in today's global tourism industry.

Many studies discuss cross-cultural communication in a general context, including those by Mudrik & Fawwaz (2024) and Rudianto & Harahap (2015), but very few of these studies explain the communication challenges and strategies faced by local tour guides, especially in Indonesia. This study aims to fill the gap

in the literature by exploring the cross-cultural communication challenges encountered by local tour guides in Indonesian tourist destinations, as well as the strategies they use to address them. The research also seeks to provide practical recommendations that can help tour guides improve their cross-cultural communication skills.

Through this study, it is hoped that valuable insights will be gained not only to enhance the performance of tour guides but also to enrich the literature on cross-cultural communication in tourism. Additionally, this research will contribute practically to designing training and development programs for tour guides, which can strengthen Indonesia's tourism sector as a welcoming and attractive international destination. Given the important role of tour guides in shaping tourists' experiences, this study holds significant importance for the development of more sustainable and inclusive tourism.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. According to Yunus (2010), a case study research describes the object being studied and portrays itself in depth/detail/completely to obtain a comprehensive picture of the object (wholeness), meaning that the data collected in the study is examined as an integrated whole. The purpose is to explore the challenges and intercultural communication strategies faced by local tour guides in Indonesia. This research was conducted at a destination located in Alor Regency, which has a diverse culture and a wide range of tourist backgrounds.

The participants of this study consisted of 10-15 local tour guides who have at least two years of experience guiding international tourists. The selection criteria for participants were based on the frequency of their interactions with tourists from various countries, enabling them to provide relevant information regarding the dynamics of intercultural communication they encounter in their daily work.

The data collection technique in this study involved distributing questionnaires via Google Drive. These questionnaires were designed to gather information related to the tour guides' experiences in facing intercultural communication challenges, as well as the strategies they use to overcome existing barriers. The use of online questionnaires allows flexibility for participants to fill out the forms at their convenience in terms of time and place while maintaining the quality of the data obtained.

This method is expected to provide in-depth insights into the intercultural communication challenges faced by local tour guides and the effective strategies that can be applied to improve the quality of interactions with international tourists.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on questionnaires completed by 12 local tour guides in Alor, several main themes emerged that describe the challenges and strategies in cross-cultural communication. The primary challenge faced by the tour guides is the language barrier and difficulty in understanding the cultural nuances of international tourists. Local tour guides in Indonesia, especially in international tourist destinations such as Bali and Labuan Bajo, often interact with tourists from various countries with different languages and cultures. This increases the complexity of communication because the guides must be able to convey information in a way that is easily understood by tourists who are not always fluent in Indonesian or English.

As many as 75% of respondents in this study revealed that language is the biggest obstacle in communicating with international tourists. Tour guides who do not master foreign languages, especially English, often find it difficult to explain tourist attractions, local history, and culture in an accurate and easily understandable manner. Additionally, for tourists who do not speak Indonesian, communication difficulties can hinder effective interaction, which in turn may affect their satisfaction with the tourism experience.

Even tourists who speak English do not always have the same proficiency level. Local tour guides may have basic English skills but struggle with language nuances such as accents or slang, adding to the challenge. For example, tourists from countries with accents or speaking styles that differ greatly from

standard English can affect the guides' understanding, and vice versa. This creates difficulties in establishing smooth communication.

Furthermore, difficulty in understanding cultural nuances is often a challenge for tour guides. Every culture has different values, norms, and communication styles. What is considered polite or common in Indonesian culture may differ from the tourists' cultures. For instance, tourists from Western countries may be accustomed to speaking directly or more openly, while tourists from Asian countries might be more cautious in expressing opinions or disagreement. This can lead to misunderstandings from both the guides and tourists.

Some guides also reported misunderstandings in conveying information. These misunderstandings can occur both in language and cultural interpretation. For example, when guides explain local traditions or customs to tourists who do not understand the cultural context, confusion may arise. If the explanation is not delivered clearly or within the appropriate context, tourists may receive inaccurate information or even feel unappreciated. This can impact the tourist experience, reduce their satisfaction, and influence their perception of the destination and the services provided by the tour guides.

Difficulties in overcoming language and cultural differences can ultimately affect the performance of the tour guides themselves. If these challenges are not well managed, frustration may arise for both guides and tourists, which can affect the quality of interaction and overall tourism experience. Therefore, it is important for tour guides to have strong cross-cultural communication skills and understand various techniques to reduce language and cultural barriers in their interactions.

The communication strategies used by tour guides vary greatly and are adapted to the need for effective communication with international tourists. One main strategy applied is the use of body language. Tour guides use body language as an important non-verbal communication tool to overcome existing language barriers. Hand gestures, facial expressions, and posture are used to emphasize the message being conveyed and help explain information that may be difficult to understand through words alone. Body language becomes especially vital when verbal language misunderstandings occur.

Moreover, English serves as the dominant communication tool for many tour guides, especially with international tourists who do not speak Indonesian. About 80% of the guides involved in this study reported that they often use English as the primary language to interact with tourists from countries such as Australia, Europe, and America. Using English allows guides to bridge language differences and ensure that messages are clearly understood by tourists from diverse backgrounds.

However, guides who are not fluent in English face additional communication challenges. In these cases, body language again plays a significant role in facilitating communication. Guides with limited English proficiency use expressive facial expressions, hand movements, or even visual aids such as pictures or maps to describe places or tourist attractions. This helps tourists more easily grasp the information despite language limitations.

In addition, tour guides tend to adjust their speaking style to make it easier for tourists from various cultures to understand. For example, some guides reported speaking more slowly and using simple sentences to facilitate communication, especially with tourists who may not be fluent in English or come from very different cultural backgrounds. Guides also learn to adjust their intonation and expressions according to the cultural characteristics of the tourists they encounter. For instance, for tourists from more formal cultures, guides may speak more politely and use more formal language. Meanwhile, for more casual tourists, guides might adopt a more familiar and relaxed speaking style.

Overall, the use of body language, English, and visual aids are strategies that enable tour guides to overcome cross-cultural communication barriers, improve tourists' understanding, and provide a more satisfying tourism experience. The combination of these strategies also shows that tour guides in international tourist areas rely not only on verbal skills but also on adaptability and creativity in communication.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that cross-cultural communication challenges are one of the main issues faced by tour guides in performing their duties. One of the biggest challenges identified is language

difficulty, which often serves as a primary barrier in communication between guides and international tourists. This shows that verbal communication alone, whether in Indonesian or English, is often insufficient to overcome the differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds between guides and tourists. Many guides expressed that although they can communicate well in English, not all tourists fully understand or absorb information in the same way.

These difficulties also encompass differences in cultural nuances and ways of thinking, which can lead to misinterpretations or inconsistencies in information delivery. For example, certain concepts or terms commonly used in Indonesian culture may be unfamiliar or even difficult to understand for tourists from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, verbal communication alone is often not effective enough to explain information in depth or to create a satisfying experience for tourists.

This study aligns with previous research findings that highlight the importance of non-verbal aspects in cross-cultural communication to support understanding between individuals from different cultures. For example, body language such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact are essential communication tools, especially when language barriers occur. Damanhouri (2018) argues that in intercultural interactions, body language functions as a supportive tool that helps overcome language difficulties, convey feelings or intentions that cannot be expressed verbally, and foster better relationships between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

For instance, tour guides interacting with tourists from countries who are not fluent in English or Indonesian may rely on body gestures to indicate directions or explain more complex matters. This is very effective in strengthening tourists' understanding of the information provided. In this context, non-verbal communication not only helps guides overcome language barriers but also serves as a way to express warmth, friendliness, or empathy, which are important parts of a satisfying tourism experience.

The use of English as an additional communication tool in the context of international tourism shows that tour guides at popular tourist destinations have developed foreign language competence as one of their key skills. This competence becomes particularly crucial since international tourists often do not speak Indonesian, making English the lingua franca in many interactions within the global tourism industry. This is consistent with the theory proposed by Mujib (2008), who emphasized that the ability to communicate in a foreign language is key to overcoming language barriers often encountered in cross-cultural interactions. Byram also asserts that a person with foreign language competence not only overcomes communication issues related to language differences but also understands and appreciates different cultural nuances, which is vital in the context of international tourism.

However, despite English being the main tool for communicating with international tourists, this study found that not all tour guides possess adequate English skills to communicate effectively. This factor is particularly evident among guides with limited English proficiency, which can hinder their ability to deliver clear and accurate information. Limitations in foreign language mastery lead to the increased use of body language and visual aids as alternatives when language skills are insufficient to explain information to tourists.

Body language, including gestures, facial expressions, and physical signals, becomes a crucial non-verbal communication tool in such situations. Visual aids such as pictures, maps, and other multimedia are also used to clarify information and assist tourists in understanding the tourism context being explained. The use of these tools is especially useful when language proficiency is less than optimal. This shows that although foreign language competence is essential, non-verbal communication skills such as body language and the use of visual aids also play an important supporting role in the success of cross-cultural communication, which in turn affects tourist satisfaction and the success of tour guides in carrying out their duties.

Strategies implemented by tour guides, such as using body language, English, and adapting communication styles, are vital efforts to overcome the limitations of cross-cultural communication. In international tourism contexts, cultural and linguistic differences can be major barriers to communication between local guides and international tourists. Therefore, tour guides must utilize flexible communication strategies that are acceptable across diverse cultures. One primary strategy is body language, which includes the use of facial expressions, hand movements, and posture to clarify intentions or emphasize the

information conveyed. Body language becomes particularly important when language gaps impede understanding because physical gestures are universal and can be understood by people from various cultures.

In addition, the use of English is also a key strategy. English is often used as the main language of interaction internationally, although not all tour guides master English perfectly. Therefore, guides tend to use simple and clear English, speak more slowly, or choose words that are easier to understand by tourists who are not fluent in English. Guides with good English skills can more easily explain information about destinations, history, and local culture, which in turn enhances the quality of the tourist experience.

Beyond body language and English, adapting communication styles is another very important strategy. This refers to the guides' ability to adjust the way they speak or interact based on the cultural background of the tourists. For example, a guide may speak more formally or use more polite terms when interacting with tourists from cultures that value higher politeness, such as Japanese tourists, while with tourists from countries that prefer more relaxed communication, the guide may speak more familiarly or informally. Adapting communication styles also includes adjustments in tone of voice, speaking speed, and appropriate use of humor according to the tourists' cultural habits.

Tour guides who successfully adapt to the needs of international tourists tend to be more successful in building good relationships with them, which is very important for creating a satisfying tourism experience. When guides can communicate clearly, effectively, and in line with tourists' cultural expectations, a more positive relationship is formed, leading to higher tourist satisfaction. This satisfaction is critical for the guide's reputation, as positive reviews from tourists enhance their credibility and can attract more tourists in the future.

These strategies align closely with the communicative competence theory proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). This theory emphasizes the importance of a person's ability to adjust their communication according to cultural context and social situations. In the context of tour guiding, the ability to modify speech, adapt non-verbal expressions, and use language that tourists from different cultural backgrounds can understand is a clear example of communicative competence. Tour guides with high communicative competence are able to build more effective and meaningful interactions with international tourists, ultimately contributing to a more positive tourism experience.

Challenges in cross-cultural communication for tour guides are not only related to the use of communication tools such as body language and gestures but also cultural factors that can influence mutual understanding between guides and tourists. Dependence on body language and gestures can be a significant limitation because the same symbols or movements may have very different meanings in different cultures. For example, hand movements or facial expressions used by guides to explain something to tourists from Europe or America may not be interpreted the same way by tourists from East Asia, who have very different communication styles. This indicates that although body language is an important communication tool, it cannot fully replace the need for clear and accurate verbal communication, especially in situations that require detailed information.

Furthermore, limited English proficiency among some tour guides is also a hindrance factor. Although many guides use English as a second language, not all have sufficient English skills to communicate fluently and handle more technical questions or doubts from international tourists. This can lead to miscommunication, resulting in tourist dissatisfaction or even misunderstandings that damage the reputation of guides or tourism agencies.

The lack of training in language and cross-cultural communication is a problem found in this study. Tour guides often receive only basic training related to their guiding skills but lack sufficient specialized training on cross-cultural communication and effective language use. Meanwhile, the modern tourism world is increasingly globally connected, with tourists coming from various countries with diverse cultural backgrounds. Without adequate training, guides may struggle to understand and respond effectively to these differences, which can affect the quality of service they provide.

Therefore, more intensive cross-cultural communication training is essential. Tour guides need to be equipped not only with knowledge about local tourism but also with effective communication strategies for interacting with international tourists. Such training should include improving English competence so that

guides can speak more confidently and fluently with tourists from various countries. Additionally, training should cover understanding cultural differences such as speech styles, social norms, and cultural values held by tourists from specific countries. This will help guides be more sensitive to tourist expectations and needs, reduce the chances of misunderstandings, and improve the quality of interactions.

With ongoing training and enhanced cross-cultural communication competence, tour guides will be better prepared to face existing challenges and provide a more satisfying experience for international tourists. This will not only increase tourist satisfaction but also improve the reputation of tourism destinations and the guides themselves, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of Indonesia's tourism industry.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that local tour guides in Indonesia face significant challenges in cross-cultural communication, despite having developed various effective strategies such as the use of body language and English. Although both tools are useful for interacting with international tourists, reliance on body language can become a limitation, especially when dealing with tourists from vastly different cultures. Furthermore, a lack of fluency in English also affects the quality of communication, thereby increasing the risk of misunderstandings.

The lack of specialized training in cross-cultural communication and language skills is a major issue identified in this research. Therefore, it is recommended that tour guides receive ongoing training that not only focuses on improving English proficiency but also deepens their understanding of the cultural nuances among tourists from various countries. With more intensive training in cross-cultural communication, tour guides can enhance their skills, reduce communication barriers, and ultimately improve the quality of interactions with international tourists. This will contribute to a more satisfying travel experience for tourists, as well as strengthen the reputation and sustainability of the tourism industry in Indonesia.

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