

CHALLENGES IN INTRODUCING ENGLISH IN A PREDOMINANTLY INDONESIAN TRAVEL AGENCY: INTERNSHIP INSIGHTS

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini menyelidiki tantangan yang dihadapi oleh PT Patra Jaya Humairah, sebuah biro perjalanan di Medan, Indonesia, dalam upayanya untuk mengintegrasikan bahasa Inggris ke dalam operasinya, khususnya dalam konteks pariwisata domestik. Tantangan utama yang diidentifikasi termasuk kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang terbatas di antara para staf, kurangnya penekanan pada bahasa Inggris karena dominasi klien Indonesia, sumber daya bahasa Inggris yang tidak mencukupi, dan kendala waktu selama komunikasi yang mendesak. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, peserta magang dari Departemen Sastra Inggris memainkan peran penting dengan menerjemahkan dokumen, memfasilitasi komunikasi dengan klien asing, dan membuat materi promosi dalam dua bahasa. Kontribusi mereka secara signifikan meningkatkan kesiapan staf dan menyoroti pentingnya bahasa Inggris dalam industri pariwisata. Program PKL ini menjadi contoh bagaimana mahasiswa PKL dapat secara efektif mendukung agen perjalanan dalam mengatasi hambatan bahasa dan meningkatkan strategi pemasaran internasional.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris, Agen Perjalanan, PKL.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges encountered by PT Patra Jaya Humairah, a travel agency in Medan, Indonesia, in its efforts to integrate English into its operations, particularly in the context of domestic tourism. The primary challenges identified include limited English proficiency among staff, a lack of emphasis on English due to the predominance of Indonesian clients, insufficient English resources, and time constraints during urgent communications. To address these issues, interns from the Department of English Literature played a crucial role by translating documents, facilitating communication with foreign clients, and creating bilingual promotional materials. Their contributions significantly improved staff readiness and highlighted the importance of English in the tourism industry. The internship program exemplifies how student interns can effectively support travel agencies in overcoming language barriers and enhancing international marketing strategies.

Keywords: English Language, Travel Agency, Internship.

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, English has emerged as a critical international language, particularly within the tourism industry, where effective communication is essential for attracting international clients and establishing global partnerships. The current status of English as an international language or global language is recognized by its wide use in range of politics, diplomacy, international trade and industry, commerce, science and technology and popular culture. (Crystal in Lauder, 2008:12). According to da Silva et al., (2021), English proficiency plays a strategic role in facilitating cross-cultural interactions, particularly in the tourism sector.

As (Damayanti, 2019) highlights, English plays six pivotal roles in the tourism sector: as a communicative/interactive tool, integrative medium, lingua franca, relationship builder, economic driver, and functional language. Proficiency in English enables tourism stakeholders to effectively interact with international visitors, understand their needs, and

deliver satisfactory services, thus enhancing the overall travel experience. The teaching of English in Indonesia may face challenges in the near future as the demand for English in workplaces, especially in the tourism industry, is expected to rise, requiring tourism workers to communicate effectively with foreigners. (Suprina & Rahayu, 2017).

In tourism, language plays a crucial role in conveying information to both local and international tourists about different aspects of travel destinations. (Salim et al., 2012). However, many Indonesian travel agencies predominantly use the Indonesian language, which caters to domestic tourists but creates challenges in engaging with foreign clients and international stakeholders. According to the findings published in the Jurnal ADMA (2023), English proficiency is vital for tourism managers to build awareness and improve the quality of their services. This reliance on Indonesian often aligns with the immediate needs of most clients but limits the agencies' ability to extend their reach to global audiences or foster meaningful collaborations with international partners. (Maricar et al., 2024).

Small to medium-sized travel agencies, in particular, face significant barriers in adopting English due to limited resources and a shortage of proficient staff. Equipping organizations with individuals skilled in English communication can strengthen their competitive edge in the global marketplace. Student interns, with their English expertise, can support agencies by translating documents, facilitating direct communication with foreign clients, and developing promotional materials aimed at international audiences.

Many things can be an impetus to travel either because of economic, social, cultural, political, religious, health interests, or because of other activities such as, just want to know, add experience or to learn (Ofni Rumbiak et al., 2024). North Sumatera is a province in Indonesia with a predominantly Muslim population, where performing the Hajj is a religious obligation for Muslims worldwide who are financially and physically capable. PT Patra Jaya Humairah is one of the Hajj and Umrah travel agencies.. At PT Patra Jaya Humairah, located on Jalan AH Nasution, Medan, North Sumatra, these challenges are particularly evident. This travel agency primarily serves domestic tourists, yet it has the potential to expand its reach internationally with enhanced English communication strategies. As 6th-semester English Literature students from Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Medan, researchers undertook internships at PT Patra Jaya Humairah to address these linguistic gaps. Through our involvement, researchers contributed by assisting in English translations, improving communication with foreign clients, and crafting promotional materials designed for an international audience.

This research only focuses on the obstacles faced by PT Patra Jaya Humairah, Humairah Tour and Travel, which is more precisely in its office. This study examines the challenges faced by Indonesian travel agencies, including PT Patra Jaya Humairah, in incorporating English into their operations and explores the significant contributions of student internships in overcoming these barriers. By shedding light on this dynamic, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the tourism industry's evolving linguistic demands and propose practical strategies for travel companies striving to meet these needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to explore the challenges of using English in PT. Patra Jaya Hummairah, a travel agency in Medan, Indonesia. According to (Moleong, 2011) qualitative research prioritises process over outcome. Qualitative research methods collect and analyse non-numerical data, such as text, images, and observations. This type of qualitative research which tends to use analysis, process and

subject perspective as the more highlighted part. The type of research conducted in this study is descriptive qualitative. Thus the results of this study contain data analysis that is telling, describing, giving, analysing, and interpreting.

According to (Creswell, 2017), the sources of data for qualitative research can come from many sources including documentation, interviews, observation, audiovisual records, and physical artefacts. The data were collected during a one-month internship through observations, interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on how employees communicated daily, especially with foreign clients and when using English materials. Semi-structured interviews were done with five employees and one manager to learn about their experiences and difficulties with English. Documents like brochures and marketing materials were also studied to see how English was used in written communication. The data were analyzed by finding common themes, such as language barriers, lack of training, and customer satisfaction. Although the study is based on one agency, it gives useful insights into the difficulties of using English in Indonesia's tourism industry.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges in using English

Based on observations and interviews, several challenges were identified in integrating English into PT. Patra Jaya Hummairah's operations. One of the main issues is the limited English proficiency among staff members. Many employees lack confidence in using English, both in speaking and writing. This often leads to difficulties when interacting with foreign clients. Some employees struggle to understand questions from international tourists, while others hesitate to respond due to fear of making mistakes. As a result, communication is often ineffective, and employees tend to avoid using English unless absolutely necessary.

Another challenge is the company's focus on domestic clients, which reduces the priority of using English in daily operations. Agency primarily serves domestic tourists, with foreign clients making up less than 5% of the total customers. However, during our one-month internship at PT. Patra Jaya Hummairah, we did not record any foreign clients booking travel services. This suggests that the actual number of international customers may be even lower or nearly nonexistent. Since most of the agency's customers are Indonesian tourists, English is rarely needed. Employees are not encouraged to practice or improve their English skills because the demand for it is low. This situation creates a cycle where the lack of English usage leads to stagnation in employees' language abilities, making it even more difficult when they do need to use English. The absence of supporting materials further complicates the situation. The company does not have standardized English resources such as bilingual brochures, communication guides, or translated promotional documents. This lack of reference materials makes it challenging for employees to communicate effectively with foreign clients. Without a proper English guide, employees often rely on their limited knowledge or use online translation tools, which may result in inaccurate or unclear information. Astawa and Wijaya (2024) highlight that in the globalized tourism industry, professionals need not only English proficiency but also cultural competence to bridge communication gaps and cater to diverse client needs effectively. This underscores the importance of equipping staff with both linguistic skills and cultural awareness to improve service quality for international clients.

Time pressure is another major issue when employees are suddenly required to use English. In certain situations, such as handling urgent bookings from foreign clients or communicating with international partners, employees must quickly adapt and respond in

English. However, because they are not accustomed to using the language regularly, they often feel stressed and struggle to communicate effectively. This results in delays or miscommunication, which can affect customer satisfaction and the company's professional image.

Addressing the Challenges Through Internship Programs

During the internship at PT. Patra Jaya Humairah, interns played a key role in assisting with English-related tasks. One of their main contributions was translating important documents such as itineraries, brochures, and emails. Since the agency lacked standardized English materials, these translations were useful for handling occasional foreign client inquiries and professional communication with international partners. In some cases, interns also helped staff draft English responses to ensure clarity and professionalism.

Interns also supported direct communication with foreign clients and business partners, even though such interactions were rare. When needed, they acted as intermediaries, helping staff explain travel packages, answer inquiries, or provide basic customer assistance in English. Additionally, they contributed to improving promotional materials by creating bilingual brochures, which made the agency more prepared in case of future international client opportunities. Beyond document translation and communication assistance, interns provided informal English guidance to staff. They introduced simple phrases vocabulary and customer service expressions to help employees feel more confident in case they needed to interact in English. As Richards and Renandya (in Sugono, 2002) state, basic vocabulary is the main element in language proficiency which is the basis of all language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. While English was not a daily necessity for the agency, these contributions helped improve the staff's readiness and provided useful resources that could benefit the company in the long run.

The Impact of Internship

The internship program had a positive impact on PT Patra Jaya Humairah. The agency saw improvements in speaking English, develop marketing materials for international audiences, and handle inquiries in English. Moreover, the staff became more aware of the importance of English proficiency in the tourism industry and showed increased interest in improving their language skills. Internship experiences at PT Patra Jaya Humairah demonstrate that student interns can offer valuable support by providing translation services, facilitating communication, and contributing to the development of international marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION

The internship program demonstrated a practical solution to these challenges, as student interns from the Department of English Literature provided essential support in translation, communication, and the development of bilingual marketing materials. Their contributions not only improved the staff's English skills but also raised awareness of the importance of English proficiency in the tourism industry. Addressing the linguistic barriers faced by travel agencies like PT Patra Jaya Humairah is crucial for expanding their reach and improving service quality. By investing in English language training and leveraging the support of student interns, these agencies can enhance their competitiveness and better serve both domestic and international clients.

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