

English Communication Competence of Nature Tourism Guides in Indonesia: Challenges, Needs, and Development Strategies

*Communication
Competence of
Tour Guides*

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ABSTRACT

Nature tourism is one of Indonesia's most strategic tourism assets because the country offers diverse landscapes, biodiversity, marine resources, forests, mountains, waterfalls, national parks, geoparks, and rural ecotourism destinations. As international tourist mobility continues to recover and grow, the role of nature tourism guides becomes increasingly important. They are not only responsible for accompanying visitors but also for interpreting natural attractions, explaining ecological and cultural meanings, ensuring safety, mediating intercultural interaction, and representing the quality of Indonesian tourism services. In this context, English communication competence is a central professional requirement. However, many nature tourism guides still experience difficulties in using English effectively, especially when explaining biodiversity, giving safety instructions, responding to spontaneous questions, handling complaints, and communicating with tourists from different cultural backgrounds. This article aims to analyze the English communication competence of nature tourism guides in Indonesia, identify the main challenges they face, map their English training needs, and propose development strategies for strengthening their professional competence. Using a conceptual and literature-based approach, this article integrates perspectives from English for Specific Purposes, communicative competence, intercultural communication, tourism service quality, and sustainable tourism. The analysis suggests that the English competence required by nature tourism guides must go beyond general conversational ability. It should include functional guiding English, environmental interpretation, storytelling, intercultural sensitivity, safety communication, emergency communication, and digital communication. The article proposes an integrated development model consisting of needs-based curriculum design, field simulation, micro-guiding practice, mentoring, certification, digital learning, and collaboration among tourism offices, guide associations, universities, destination managers, and local communities. The study contributes to the discussion on tourism human resource development and offers practical recommendations for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of Indonesian nature tourism.

Keywords: English communication competence; nature tourism guides; English for tourism; ecotourism; intercultural communication; Indonesia; sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as one of the world's most attractive tourism destinations due to its natural beauty, cultural diversity, tropical landscapes, and rich biodiversity. The country has a wide range of nature-based attractions, including mountains, beaches, marine parks, forests, waterfalls, lakes, caves, geoparks, conservation areas, and national parks. These attractions create strong opportunities for the development of nature tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, marine tourism, and

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rural tourism. In many destinations, tourists are not merely seeking visual enjoyment but also authentic, educational, and meaningful experiences. They want to understand the ecological value of the destination, the uniqueness of local culture, the story behind landscapes, and the responsible behavior expected in sensitive natural environments.

The recovery of international tourism after the pandemic has increased the urgency of improving tourism service quality. BPS-Statistics Indonesia reported that international visitor arrivals reached 1.42 million in June 2025, representing an 18.20 percent year-on-year increase; cumulatively, January–June 2025 arrivals reached 7.05 million, up 9.44 percent compared with the same period in 2024. The same BPS release also noted that the main foreign visitor markets in June 2025 included Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia. These trends indicate that tourism human resources must be prepared to communicate with visitors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Since English often functions as a lingua franca in international tourism, the ability of tour guides to communicate effectively in English becomes a key factor in the quality of tourist experience.

In nature tourism, the guide's role is especially complex. A nature tourism guide does not simply provide directions or basic information. The guide must interpret nature, explain local ecology, communicate safety procedures, manage group behavior, answer technical questions, and connect tourists with local communities. Guides often become the “voice” of the destination. Their explanations can influence tourists' understanding of conservation, their respect for local culture, and their willingness to support sustainable tourism practices. Therefore, English communication competence among nature tourism guides is not only a linguistic issue but also a professional, managerial, cultural, and environmental issue.

Recent studies in Indonesia have begun to highlight the importance of English communication in the tourism sector. For example, studies on English communication among tour guides emphasize that specialized tourism vocabulary, discourse structuring, pragmatic competence, and confidence are important in guiding performance, while lack of specialized vocabulary and language anxiety can weaken the quality of tourist engagement. Other studies also show that tourism human resources in some Indonesian destinations may still demonstrate basic functional English limited to greetings and routine service expressions. These findings suggest a gap between the growing demands of international tourism and the actual English competence of tourism workers in destination areas.

The issue becomes more specific and urgent in nature tourism. Unlike urban or heritage tourism, nature tourism often requires guides to explain ecological processes, biodiversity, climate conditions, conservation rules, environmental ethics, trail safety, wildlife behavior, marine safety, and emergency procedures. These topics require not only general English proficiency but also technical vocabulary, interpretive ability, situational awareness, and intercultural competence. A guide who can speak English casually may still struggle to explain the difference between endemic and invasive species, describe the ecological role of mangroves, give a safety briefing before trekking, or warn tourists about dangerous currents, slippery trails, or wildlife interaction rules.

Therefore, this article argues that English communication competence for nature tourism guides in Indonesia should be understood as a multidimensional professional competence. It involves linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, intercultural competence, and environmental interpretation competence. The development of such competence requires a systematic strategy involving curriculum design, training, mentoring, certification, digital learning, and institutional collaboration.

This article is structured as follows. The first section introduces the background, urgency, research problem, and objectives. The second section discusses the theoretical foundation, including communicative competence, English for Specific Purposes, English for tourism, nature tourism guiding, intercultural communication, and service quality. The third section explains the methodological approach. The fourth section presents the

analysis of challenges, needs, and development strategies. The final section provides conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Although Indonesia has strong potential in nature tourism, the quality of human resources remains an important challenge. Nature tourism destinations are often located outside major urban centers, where access to formal English training may be limited. Many local guides possess strong local knowledge, environmental familiarity, and practical guiding experience, but they may not have sufficient English competence to communicate that knowledge effectively to international tourists. This creates a mismatch between local expertise and global communication demands.

Several practical problems can be identified. First, many guides are able to conduct simple conversations in English but struggle to deliver structured explanations about nature, ecology, culture, and safety. Second, guides may have limited vocabulary related to flora, fauna, conservation, geology, trekking, marine tourism, and environmental ethics. Third, guides may experience difficulty understanding various accents of international tourists. Fourth, guides may lack confidence when answering spontaneous questions or dealing with unexpected situations. Fifth, English training programs for guides are often general and classroom-based, while the real needs of nature tourism guides are highly contextual and field-based.

Another problem is the lack of integration between language training and professional guiding competence. English communication for nature tourism should not be separated from guiding skills, interpretation skills, safety management, and intercultural awareness. However, in many cases, training programs focus on grammar, memorized expressions, or general conversation. These programs may not adequately prepare guides for real interactions in nature-based destinations.

Based on these issues, this article addresses four main questions:

1. What forms of English communication competence are required by nature tourism guides in Indonesia?
2. What challenges do nature tourism guides face when communicating in English with international tourists?
3. What English training needs should be prioritized for nature tourism guides?
4. What development strategies can strengthen the English communication competence of nature tourism guides in Indonesia?

The general objective of this article is to develop a comprehensive academic discussion on English communication competence among nature tourism guides in Indonesia. Specifically, the article aims to:

1. Analyze the dimensions of English communication competence needed by nature tourism guides.
2. Identify linguistic, psychological, cultural, institutional, and contextual challenges in English communication.
3. Map the training needs of nature tourism guides in relation to English for nature tourism guiding.
4. Propose integrated development strategies for improving English communication competence.
5. Provide theoretical and practical implications for tourism human resource development in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in real communication contexts. It is broader than grammatical knowledge because successful communication requires the speaker not only to master linguistic rules but also to understand how language is used according to context, purpose, audience, and sociocultural norms (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). A person may know grammar rules but still fail to communicate effectively if they cannot adjust language to context,

organize messages clearly, understand cultural expectations, or overcome communication breakdowns (Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990).

In the context of tour guiding, communicative competence includes several components. First, linguistic competence refers to the ability to use vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and sentence structure appropriately (Canale & Swain, 1980). Second, sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language according to social context, politeness norms, tourist expectations, and cultural differences (Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 2002). Third, discourse competence refers to the ability to organize information into coherent explanations, stories, briefings, and responses (Canale, 1983). Fourth, strategic competence refers to the ability to solve communication problems, such as paraphrasing unfamiliar words, using gestures, asking for clarification, or checking tourist understanding (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995).

For nature tourism guides, communicative competence is especially important because communication often occurs in dynamic environments. Guides may need to speak while walking, hiking, snorkeling, boating, observing wildlife, or managing groups in crowded and risky areas. Communication is not always conducted in a quiet classroom-like setting; it may take place in forests, mountains, beaches, caves, boats, or conservation areas. Therefore, guides must be able to communicate clearly, concisely, and confidently under real field conditions, since the quality of guide communication strongly influences tourist experience, interpretation quality, and perceived service professionalism (Cohen, 1985; Ap & Wong, 2001; Weiler & Black, 2015).

English for Specific Purposes and English for Tourism

English for Specific Purposes is an approach to language learning that focuses on the specific needs of learners in a particular field or profession (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). English for tourism is one branch of ESP that emphasizes language use in tourism services, hospitality, travel, guiding, destination promotion, and intercultural interaction (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012).

English for tourism differs from general English because it requires specific vocabulary, functions, and communicative situations. For tour guides, English is used to welcome tourists, introduce destinations, explain itineraries, describe attractions, tell stories, provide directions, give warnings, answer questions, manage complaints, and close tours (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Prachanant, 2012). In nature tourism, the scope becomes even more specialized because guides need English related to ecology, geography, conservation, safety, local wisdom, environmental rules, and sustainable tourism (Fennell, 2015; Weiler & Black, 2015).

For example, a nature tourism guide may need to explain terms such as “endemic species,” “protected area,” “coral reef,” “mangrove ecosystem,” “volcanic landscape,” “trail difficulty,” “conservation zone,” “waste management,” “wildlife disturbance,” and “carrying capacity.” These terms are rarely covered in general English courses. Therefore, English training for nature tourism guides must be designed based on real occupational tasks, authentic communicative situations, and the specific linguistic needs of the tourism workplace (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Nature Tourism and Ecotourism

Nature tourism refers to tourism activities that rely on natural attractions as the main motivation for travel. It includes visits to mountains, forests, beaches, rivers, waterfalls, lakes, caves, wildlife habitats, marine parks, and conservation areas (Fennell, 2015; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2013). Ecotourism is a more specific form of nature tourism that emphasizes conservation, education, community participation, and sustainable management (Honey, 2008; Fennell, 2015).

In ecotourism, interpretation is central. Tourists are expected not only to see nature but also to understand it. This means that guides must be able to transform natural objects into meaningful experiences. A tree becomes more than a tree when the guide explains its ecological function, cultural meaning, medicinal use, or conservation status. A coral reef becomes more meaningful when the guide explains its biodiversity, threats, and

responsible snorkeling behavior. This is consistent with the concept of environmental interpretation, which emphasizes that interpretation should reveal meanings and relationships rather than merely present factual information (Tilden, 1957; Ham, 1992; Moscardo, 1998).

Thus, English competence in nature tourism is closely connected with environmental interpretation. Guides must translate ecological knowledge into accessible language for tourists. They must simplify complex information without losing accuracy. They must also motivate tourists to behave responsibly, such as avoiding littering, staying on trails, not touching coral, not feeding wildlife, and respecting local customs. In this regard, interpretation delivered through effective communication can strengthen tourist awareness, encourage responsible behavior, and support sustainable tourism outcomes (Moscardo, 1998; Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011; Weiler & Black, 2015).

The Role of Nature Tourism Guides

Nature tourism guides perform multiple roles. They are information providers, interpreters, cultural mediators, safety managers, group leaders, destination ambassadors, and conservation educators (Cohen, 1985; Ap & Wong, 2001; Weiler & Black, 2015). Their communication affects tourist satisfaction, destination image, and the perceived professionalism of tourism services.

As information providers, guides deliver facts about the destination. As interpreters, they connect facts with meaning. As cultural mediators, they explain local customs and prevent misunderstandings. As safety managers, they communicate risks and procedures. As group leaders, they maintain discipline, timing, and group cohesion. As destination ambassadors, they shape tourist perceptions of the destination and the host country (Cohen, 1985; Pond, 1993; Weiler & Black, 2015).

These roles require advanced communication competence. A guide who provides inaccurate, unclear, or uninteresting explanations may reduce tourist satisfaction. A guide who cannot explain safety procedures may increase risk. A guide who lacks intercultural sensitivity may unintentionally create discomfort. Therefore, guide competence has direct implications for service quality, tourist experience, destination image, and sustainable destination management (Ap & Wong, 2001; Huang, Hsu, & Chan, 2010; Weiler & Black, 2015).

Intercultural Communication in Nature Tourism

International tourists come from diverse cultural backgrounds. They may differ in communication style, expectations, humor, personal space, environmental awareness, time orientation, and attitudes toward authority (Reisinger & Turner, 2003; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Tour guides must be able to recognize these differences and communicate appropriately.

Intercultural communication is particularly important in nature tourism because tourists may interact with local communities, sacred natural sites, traditional practices, and conservation rules. Misunderstandings can occur when tourists do not understand local norms or when guides cannot explain them effectively in English. Intercultural competence includes the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures through awareness, respect, openness, adaptability, empathy, and cultural self-reflection (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

Intercultural competence includes awareness, respect, adaptability, empathy, and the ability to explain cultural meanings without stereotyping. For example, when visiting a waterfall considered sacred by local communities, a guide must explain appropriate behavior politely and clearly. When tourists ask sensitive questions about local beliefs, the guide must respond respectfully. When tourists behave inappropriately, the guide must correct them without creating conflict. These abilities are essential because tour guides often act as cultural brokers who mediate interactions between tourists, local communities, and destination environments (Cohen, 1985; Reisinger & Turner, 2003; Weiler & Black, 2015).

English Communication and Service Quality

Service quality in tourism is strongly influenced by communication. Tourists evaluate not only physical attractions but also the clarity of information, responsiveness of staff, emotional warmth, reliability, and ability to solve problems (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). English communication contributes to all these dimensions because it enables guides to provide information, reduce uncertainty, respond to tourist needs, and create a sense of safety and hospitality. A guide with strong English communication skills can make tourists feel welcomed, safe, informed, and emotionally connected to the destination. Conversely, weak communication may create confusion, anxiety, dissatisfaction, and misunderstanding. In tourism service encounters, communication quality is closely related to tourist satisfaction, perceived value, and behavioral intention (Huang et al., 2010; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2011).

In nature tourism, communication quality can also influence environmental behavior. Tourists are more likely to follow conservation rules when they understand the reasons behind them. For example, saying “Do not step on coral” may be less effective than explaining that coral is a living organism that grows slowly and can die when touched or stepped on. Therefore, English communication is not only about service but also about education and sustainability. Effective interpretation can encourage tourists to develop environmental awareness and adopt responsible behavior during and after the tourism experience (Moscardo, 1998; Ballantyne et al., 2011; Fennell, 2015).

METHOD

This article uses a conceptual and literature-based approach. It synthesizes relevant academic concepts, recent studies, and tourism development issues to construct an analytical framework for understanding English communication competence among nature tourism guides in Indonesia. The article does not report primary field data; rather, it develops a structured academic argument that may serve as a basis for future empirical research.

The conceptual approach is appropriate for three reasons. First, the topic requires integration of multiple fields, including applied linguistics, tourism studies, ecotourism, service management, and human resource development. Second, the issue is still developing, especially in relation to nature tourism guides in Indonesia. Third, a conceptual article can propose a model and strategic framework that can later be tested empirically. The analysis was conducted through several steps. First, the article identifies the professional tasks of nature tourism guides. Second, it maps the English communication functions required in those tasks. Third, it identifies common challenges based on literature and contextual reasoning. Fourth, it formulates training needs based on the gap between required competence and existing challenges. Fifth, it proposes development strategies that involve individual, institutional, technological, and policy levels.

The article uses the following analytical categories:

1. **Competence dimensions:** linguistic, discourse, strategic, intercultural, interpretive, safety, and digital communication competence.
2. **Challenges:** vocabulary limitation, pronunciation, listening difficulty, lack of confidence, limited training access, cultural misunderstanding, and lack of certification.
3. **Needs:** English for guiding, English for environmental interpretation, English for safety briefing, English for storytelling, English for emergency response, and intercultural communication.
4. **Strategies:** needs-based training, simulation, mentoring, certification, digital learning, institutional collaboration, and continuous evaluation.

RESULTS

Required English Communication Competence for Nature Tourism Guides

The English communication competence required by nature tourism guides in Indonesia can be grouped into seven dimensions: linguistic competence, functional guiding competence, environmental interpretation competence, intercultural competence, safety communication competence, strategic competence, and digital communication competence.

Linguistic competence is the foundation of communication. It includes vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and listening comprehension. For nature tourism guides, vocabulary is especially important because they must explain specific natural objects and processes. They need words related to landscapes, flora, fauna, weather, trails, conservation, marine life, and local culture.

However, linguistic competence should not be understood only as grammatical accuracy. In guiding practice, fluency, clarity, and comprehensibility are often more important than perfect grammar. Tourists generally expect guides to explain clearly and confidently. Minor grammatical errors may be acceptable if the message is understandable. Therefore, training should prioritize communicative effectiveness rather than grammar perfection.

Pronunciation also matters because unclear pronunciation may lead to misunderstanding, especially in safety instructions. For example, words such as “steep,” “slippery,” “current,” “reef,” “venomous,” “restricted,” and “emergency” must be pronounced clearly. Listening comprehension is equally important because tourists may come from different countries and speak English with different accents. Guides must be trained to understand various accents and to ask for clarification politely.

Functional guiding competence refers to the ability to use English for specific guiding tasks. These tasks include greeting tourists, introducing oneself, explaining the itinerary, giving directions, managing time, explaining rules, describing attractions, answering questions, handling complaints, and closing the tour.

For example, a guide should be able to say:

- “Before we start the trek, I will explain the route, estimated duration, and safety rules.”
- “Please stay on the marked trail because this area is part of a conservation zone.”
- “This plant is commonly used by local communities for traditional medicine.”
- “The waterfall is beautiful, but the rocks are slippery, so please walk slowly.”
- “Let me explain why this forest is important for water conservation.”

These examples show that guiding English is highly functional. It must be practiced through realistic scenarios rather than memorized from textbooks.

Environmental interpretation is one of the most important competences for nature tourism guides. It refers to the ability to explain natural phenomena in a meaningful and engaging way. Interpretation is different from simply giving information. Information tells tourists what something is; interpretation helps tourists understand why it matters. For example, instead of saying, “This is a mangrove forest,” an interpretive guide may say, “This mangrove forest protects the coastline from erosion, provides habitat for young fish, and supports the livelihood of local communities. When we protect mangroves, we also protect the sea and the people who depend on it.”

This kind of explanation requires English vocabulary, ecological understanding, storytelling ability, and audience awareness. The guide must adjust explanations according to tourist background. Some tourists may be scientists or nature enthusiasts who expect detailed explanations, while others may prefer simple and engaging stories. Therefore, guides need flexible communication strategies.

Nature tourism guides must be able to communicate across cultures. This includes greeting tourists appropriately, understanding different expectations, avoiding offensive language, explaining local customs, and managing sensitive situations. In many Indonesian nature destinations, tourism is closely connected with local traditions, sacred places, community norms, and customary rules. Guides must explain these aspects in English in a respectful and understandable way.

Intercultural competence also includes the ability to read tourist behavior. Some tourists may be very direct when asking questions or expressing dissatisfaction. Others

may be indirect. Some tourists may expect detailed schedules, while others may prefer flexibility. Some may be highly environmentally conscious, while others may need more guidance on responsible behavior. The guide's ability to adapt communication style can improve tourist satisfaction and reduce conflict.

Safety is a critical issue in nature tourism. Activities such as trekking, hiking, snorkeling, diving, rafting, caving, wildlife observation, and waterfall visits involve risks. Guides must be able to explain safety rules clearly in English. They must give instructions before, during, and after the activity. They must also communicate effectively in emergency situations. Safety communication includes explaining physical risks, weather conditions, equipment use, group procedures, emergency signals, prohibited behavior, and first-aid responses. For example, before trekking, a guide may need to explain trail difficulty, hydration, footwear, slippery paths, wildlife risks, and group pacing. Before snorkeling, a guide may need to explain currents, coral protection, mask use, life jackets, and buddy systems.

Weak English communication in safety contexts may create serious consequences. Therefore, safety-related English should be a priority in guide training. Guides should practice short, clear, and direct instructions. They should also learn how to check tourist understanding, for example by asking, "Is everything clear?" or "Could you please repeat the emergency signal?"

Strategic competence refers to the ability to solve communication problems. Guides may forget certain English terms, face unfamiliar tourist questions, or misunderstand tourist accents. In such situations, they need strategies to maintain communication. Useful strategies include paraphrasing, using simpler words, giving examples, using gestures, showing pictures, using translation apps appropriately, asking tourists to repeat, confirming understanding, and admitting uncertainty honestly. For example, if a guide does not know the English name of a local plant, the guide can say, "The local name of this plant is 'X.' It is used by local people to reduce fever. I am not sure about the scientific English name, but I can show you the information later." This kind of honesty is better than giving inaccurate information. Strategic competence helps guides remain professional even when their English is not perfect.

Digital communication is increasingly important in tourism. Guides may interact with tourists before and after the trip through WhatsApp, email, social media, booking platforms, or destination websites. They may need to send itineraries, answer questions, confirm schedules, explain preparation requirements, share safety reminders, or ask for reviews. Digital English differs from spoken English. It requires concise, polite, and clear written communication. For example, a guide may need to write: "Please bring comfortable trekking shoes, a raincoat, drinking water, and a small backpack. The trail may be slippery if it rains." Digital competence also includes using translation tools responsibly, preparing digital glossaries, and sharing educational content about conservation.

Main Challenges Faced by Nature Tourism Guides

Limited Technical Vocabulary. One of the most common challenges is limited technical vocabulary. Many guides know basic English expressions but struggle with terms related to biodiversity, geology, conservation, weather, safety, and local culture. As a result, they may oversimplify explanations or avoid deeper discussion. This problem has also been observed in Indonesian tourism communication research, where lack of specialized tourism vocabulary can weaken the richness of cultural and destination narratives. In nature tourism, vocabulary limitation can reduce the educational value of the tour. Tourists may ask questions such as: "Is this species endemic?" "What causes this volcanic formation?" "How does this ecosystem support local livelihoods?" "Why are visitors not allowed to swim in this area?" If the guide lacks vocabulary, the explanation may become vague or incomplete.

Difficulty Understanding Tourist Accents. International tourists speak English with different accents, including Australian, British, American, Indian, Singaporean, European, and other varieties of English. Guides who are only familiar with classroom

English may find it difficult to understand these accents. This can lead to miscommunication, embarrassment, or reduced confidence. Listening difficulties are often more challenging than speaking difficulties. A guide may be able to deliver a memorized explanation but struggle when tourists ask spontaneous questions. Therefore, English training should include exposure to different accents and real tourist conversations.

Lack of Confidence and Language Anxiety. Many guides experience language anxiety. They may worry about making grammar mistakes, mispronouncing words, or being judged by foreign tourists. This anxiety can reduce fluency and make communication less natural. Confidence is especially important because guides must speak in front of groups, manage interactions, and respond quickly. Language anxiety may be caused by limited practice, negative past experiences, lack of feedback, or excessive focus on grammar accuracy. Training programs should create supportive environments where guides can practice without fear of embarrassment. Role-play, peer feedback, and repeated simulation can help build confidence.

Limited Access to Contextual Training. Many English courses are not designed specifically for nature tourism guides. General English courses may teach grammar, daily conversation, or business English, but they may not cover safety briefing, environmental interpretation, guiding scenarios, or tourist complaint handling. As a result, guides may not find the training relevant to their work. Contextual training is especially needed in destinations outside major cities. Local guides may have limited access to professional trainers, language centers, or tourism schools. Therefore, training models should be flexible, community-based, and supported by digital learning materials.

Weak Integration between Local Knowledge and English Expression. Many local guides possess rich knowledge about nature, culture, local myths, traditional medicine, community practices, and environmental changes. However, they may not know how to express this knowledge in English. This creates a gap between knowledge ownership and communication ability. For example, a guide may know the local names of plants and their uses but not the English terms. A guide may understand local conservation rules but struggle to explain them persuasively. Therefore, English training should begin with local knowledge and help guides translate that knowledge into clear English explanations.

Intercultural Misunderstanding. Cultural differences can create misunderstanding. Tourists may ask questions that local communities consider sensitive. They may behave in ways that are acceptable in their culture but inappropriate in local contexts. Guides must mediate these situations. Without sufficient English and intercultural competence, guides may find it difficult to correct tourist behavior politely. For example, in certain destinations, tourists may need to dress modestly, avoid entering sacred areas, ask permission before taking photos, or follow customary rules. The guide must explain these rules not as restrictions but as part of respect for local culture. This requires polite and persuasive English.

Lack of Standardized Assessment and Certification. Another challenge is the limited availability of standardized assessment for English communication competence in nature tourism guiding. General tour guide certification may assess guiding knowledge and professional ethics, but English competence may not be evaluated in a detailed and task-based manner. Without clear standards, it is difficult to measure guide readiness, identify training needs, and ensure consistent service quality. A competency-based assessment should include real guiding tasks, such as delivering a nature explanation, conducting a safety briefing, answering tourist questions, handling complaints, and explaining conservation rules. Assessment should focus on communicative effectiveness, not only grammar accuracy.

English Training Needs of Nature Tourism Guides

Based on the challenges above, the English training needs of nature tourism guides can be classified into several areas.

English for Nature Interpretation. Guides need training in explaining natural attractions in English. This includes vocabulary and expressions for describing landscapes, plants, animals, ecosystems, conservation issues, environmental threats, and local ecological knowledge. Training should help guides create short, medium, and long explanations depending on tourist interest and available time. For example, guides should be able to explain: the ecological function of mangroves; the importance of coral reefs; the meaning of endemic species; the role of forests in water conservation; the formation of volcanic landscapes; and the importance of waste management in natural areas.

English for Safety Briefing. Safety briefing is a priority. Guides need ready-to-use expressions for explaining rules, risks, procedures, and emergency responses. Training should include scenarios such as trekking, hiking, snorkeling, boating, rafting, caving, and waterfall visits. Examples of safety expressions include: “Please stay with the group at all times.”; “The trail is steep and slippery, so please walk carefully.”; “Do not touch the coral or marine animals.” And “If you feel tired, please tell me immediately.” And “In case of emergency, please follow my instructions.” Safety English should be simple, direct, and repeated when necessary.

English for Storytelling. Tourists enjoy stories. Storytelling can make nature tourism more memorable. Guides need training to structure stories in English, connect local myths with ecological facts, and create emotional engagement. Storytelling can include local legends, historical changes, community traditions, conservation struggles, and personal experiences. A good story has a clear beginning, development, and message. For example, when explaining a forest, a guide may tell a story about how local communities protected the area from illegal logging. This story can create appreciation and encourage responsible behavior.

English for Question-and-Answer Interaction. Tourists often ask spontaneous questions. Guides need to practice answering questions clearly and honestly. They also need strategies for handling questions they cannot answer. Training should include common tourist questions about nature, culture, safety, facilities, weather, food, transportation, and local life. Guides should learn expressions such as: “That is an interesting question.” “Based on local knowledge, this plant is used for;”; “I am not completely sure about the scientific name, but the local name is...”; “Let me explain it in a simple way.” And “I can check the information and tell you later.”

English for Complaint Handling. Complaints may occur due to weather changes, delays, physical difficulty, unclear expectations, or facility limitations. Guides need polite expressions to acknowledge concerns, apologize when appropriate, explain situations, and offer solutions. Examples include: “I understand your concern.”; “I am sorry for the inconvenience.”; “The weather changed suddenly, so we need to adjust the route for safety.”; “Let me offer an alternative option.” And “Thank you for your patience and understanding.” Complaint handling requires not only English but also emotional intelligence.

English for Emergency Communication. Emergency situations require clear and calm communication. Guides should be trained to communicate with tourists, local authorities, medical personnel, and destination managers. They need vocabulary related to injuries, symptoms, first aid, evacuation, location, and emergency contacts. Examples include: “Please stay calm.”; “We need to move to a safer area.”; “He has a sprained ankle.”; “She feels dizzy and needs assistance.” And “Please call the emergency contact and explain our location.” Emergency communication training should be practical and scenario-based.

Intercultural English. Guides need English expressions for explaining local customs, asking tourists to follow rules, and preventing cultural misunderstanding. This includes polite requests, soft warnings, and respectful explanations. Examples include: “In this village, visitors are expected to dress modestly as a sign of respect.”; “This area is considered sacred by the local community, so we are not allowed to enter.”; “Please ask

permission before taking photos of local residents.”; “This rule helps protect both the environment and local traditions.”

Proposed Development Strategies

Needs-Based Curriculum Design. The first strategy is to design English training based on the real needs of nature tourism guides. Training should begin with a needs analysis involving guides, tourists, destination managers, local communities, and tourism offices. The curriculum should be organized around guiding tasks, not grammar chapters. A needs-based curriculum may include modules such as: Welcoming and introducing tours., Explaining itineraries and destination rules, Describing natural attractions, Interpreting flora, fauna, and ecosystems, Giving safety briefings, Managing tourist questions, Handling complaints, Communicating in emergencies, Explaining local culture and customs and Using digital English for tourism communication.

Field-Based Simulation. English training should not be limited to classrooms. Guides need field-based simulation in real or simulated destinations. They should practice giving explanations on trails, at viewpoints, near waterfalls, in mangrove areas, on boats, or in conservation zones. Field simulation helps guides connect language with real objects and situations. For example, instead of memorizing vocabulary about forests, guides can practice explaining actual trees, soil, animals, and conservation signs. This method is more meaningful and practical.

Micro-Guiding Practice. Micro-guiding is a short guiding practice in which guides deliver a five- to ten-minute explanation in English. This technique allows repeated practice and feedback. Each guide can practice one specific topic, such as explaining a waterfall, giving a safety briefing, describing a plant, or telling a local story. Trainers and peers can provide feedback on clarity, pronunciation, vocabulary, body language, structure, and tourist engagement. Over time, micro-guiding can improve confidence and fluency.

Development of Localized English Glossaries. Each destination should develop a localized English glossary. The glossary should include local names, Indonesian names, English names, scientific names if available, and simple explanations. For example, a national park can create a glossary of local plants, animals, trails, cultural sites, safety terms, and conservation rules. This strategy helps guides translate local knowledge into English. It also ensures consistency and accuracy in destination interpretation.

Story Bank for Nature Tourism. Destinations can develop a “story bank” containing short stories about nature, culture, conservation, local communities, history, and myths. These stories can be written in simple English and adapted by guides. A story bank helps guides move beyond factual explanation and create emotional engagement. Stories should be accurate, respectful, and approved by local communities when they involve cultural or sacred elements. This prevents misrepresentation and supports community-based tourism.

Mentoring by Senior Guides. Mentoring is important because many guiding skills are learned through experience. Senior guides with strong English competence can mentor junior guides. Mentoring can include shadowing, joint guiding, feedback sessions, and discussion of difficult tourist interactions. Mentoring also supports professional identity. Junior guides can learn not only language but also ethics, leadership, humor, improvisation, and destination knowledge.

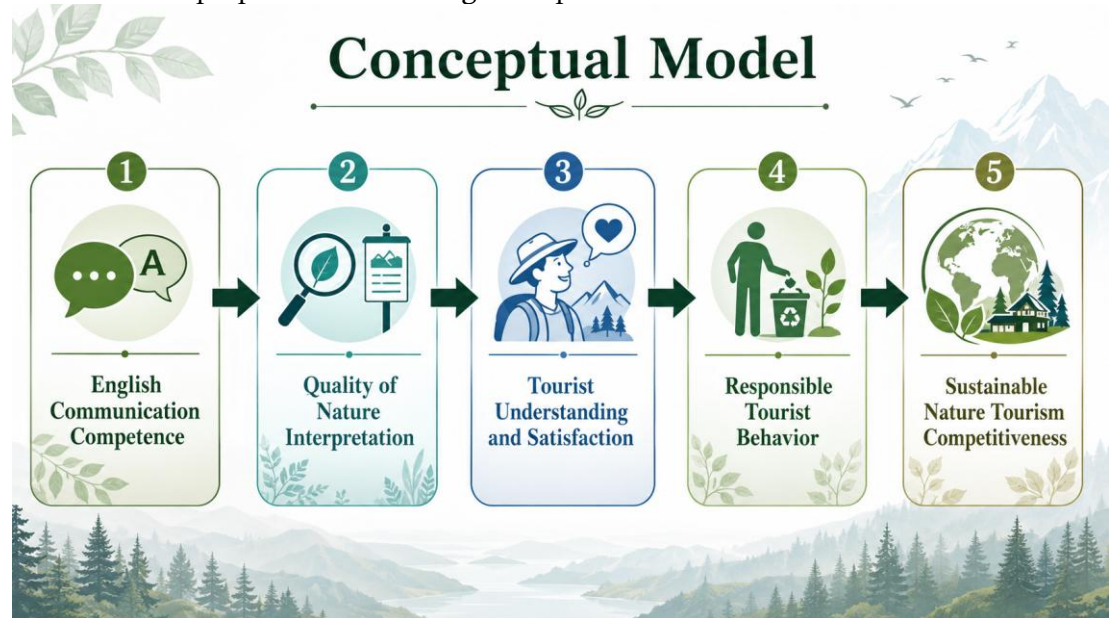
Certification and Competency-Based Assessment. English competence should be assessed using task-based performance tests. Instead of only written tests, guides should be evaluated through real guiding tasks. The assessment may include: Delivering a destination introduction, Explaining a natural object, Giving a safety briefing, Answering tourist questions, Handling a complaint, Explaining conservation rules, Communicating an emergency situation. Assessment criteria should include clarity, accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, appropriateness, confidence, and ability to manage interaction. Certification can motivate guides and provide assurance to tourists and destination managers.

Digital Learning Support. Digital learning can help overcome geographic limitations. Guides can access audio materials, video simulations, mobile glossaries, pronunciation practice, and online mentoring. Short video lessons can be designed around real guiding situations. For example, a digital module may include: video of a safety briefing; audio examples of different tourist accents; vocabulary flashcards; sample tour scripts; quizzes on conservation terms; role-play prompts; feedback from trainers. Digital learning should complement field practice, not replace it.

Collaboration among Stakeholders. Improving English competence requires collaboration. Tourism offices can provide policy support and funding. Universities can design training modules and conduct research. Guide associations can mobilize participants and maintain professional standards. Destination managers can provide field practice locations. Local communities can validate cultural content. Private tourism businesses can provide market insights and internship opportunities. This collaborative model ensures that English training is relevant, sustainable, and connected to destination development.

Proposed Conceptual Model

This article proposes the following conceptual model:



The model suggests that English communication competence affects not only service quality but also tourist understanding and environmental behavior. When guides communicate effectively, tourists better understand the meaning of the destination, appreciate conservation, follow rules, and feel satisfied. This contributes to the competitiveness and sustainability of nature tourism destinations.

The model also includes four supporting factors:

1. Training Quality: relevance, practicality, simulation, feedback.
2. Institutional Support: certification, funding, policy, professional standards.
3. Local Knowledge Integration: ecological, cultural, and community-based knowledge.
4. Digital Learning: flexible access to materials and continuous practice.

Practical Framework for Training Implementation

A practical training program for nature tourism guides can be implemented in four stages.

Stage 1: Needs Analysis

The first stage is to identify guide needs. Data can be collected through interviews, questionnaires, observation, tourist feedback, and discussion with destination managers. The needs analysis should answer the following questions:

- What English tasks do guides perform most often?
- What situations are most difficult?
- What vocabulary is most needed?
- What tourist questions are most common?
- What safety instructions must be explained?
- What cultural rules must be communicated?
- What level of English do guides currently have?

Stage 2: Module Development

Based on the needs analysis, training modules should be developed. Each module should include vocabulary, expressions, model dialogues, guiding scripts, role-play activities, pronunciation practice, and field tasks. For example, a module on “English for Waterfall Guiding” may include vocabulary such as waterfall, current, slippery rocks, viewpoint, swimming area, restricted zone, and erosion. It may also include a sample safety briefing and a storytelling activity about local myths.

Stage 3: Training Delivery

Training should combine classroom learning, field simulation, group discussion, micro-guiding, peer feedback, and digital practice. The trainer should focus on communication performance, not only written exercises.

A possible training schedule includes:

- Day 1: Basic guiding English and self-introduction.
- Day 2: Destination explanation and storytelling.
- Day 3: Nature interpretation and conservation vocabulary.
- Day 4: Safety briefing and emergency communication.
- Day 5: Field simulation and performance assessment.

Stage 4: Evaluation and Follow-Up

Evaluation should measure improvement in communication performance. It can include pre-test and post-test speaking assessment, tourist feedback, trainer observation, and self-reflection. Follow-up activities may include monthly practice sessions, online discussion groups, mentoring, and advanced certification.

DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that English communication competence for nature tourism guides is a multidimensional professional competence. It cannot be reduced to grammar knowledge or general conversation. Nature tourism guides need English for specific guiding tasks, ecological explanation, safety management, intercultural mediation, and tourist engagement.

This finding supports the argument that English training for tourism workers should be based on real occupational needs. In the context of Indonesian nature tourism, the training must be localized because each destination has unique ecological and cultural characteristics. A guide in a mangrove area needs different vocabulary from a guide in a volcano destination. A guide in a marine park needs different safety expressions from a guide in a mountain trekking destination.

The discussion also highlights the importance of integrating local knowledge with English expression. Many Indonesian guides possess valuable local knowledge, but this knowledge must be transformed into communicable English narratives. Therefore, English training should not position local guides as empty learners who lack knowledge. Instead, training should recognize them as knowledge holders who need linguistic tools to communicate their knowledge to international audiences.

Another important point is the role of English communication in sustainable tourism. In nature tourism, guides influence tourist behavior. Clear explanations can encourage tourists to respect conservation rules, reduce environmental damage, and appreciate local communities. Thus, English competence supports not only tourist satisfaction but also environmental protection.

The article also suggests that training should address psychological barriers. Confidence, anxiety, and willingness to communicate are crucial. Guides may know

English but hesitate to use it. Therefore, training must provide repeated practice, positive feedback, and real-life simulations. The goal is not to produce perfect English speakers but effective tourism communicators.

Institutional support is also essential. Individual guides cannot improve competence without access to training, materials, assessment, and professional networks. Tourism offices, universities, guide associations, and destination managers should collaborate to create sustainable training ecosystems. Certification can provide motivation and quality assurance, but it must be practical and accessible.

Finally, digital technology offers new opportunities. Mobile learning, digital glossaries, pronunciation videos, and online mentoring can support guides in remote destinations. However, digital tools should be adapted to local conditions, including internet access, digital literacy, and guide availability.

Theoretical Implications

This article contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends the concept of English for tourism by focusing specifically on nature tourism guiding. While many discussions of tourism English focus on hotels, travel agencies, or general tour guiding, this article emphasizes the specialized communication needs of nature tourism guides.

Second, the article integrates communicative competence with environmental interpretation. It argues that nature tourism guides need not only linguistic competence but also the ability to interpret ecological and cultural meanings. This expands the understanding of professional communication in tourism.

Third, the article connects English communication competence with sustainable tourism. It shows that guide communication can influence tourist behavior, conservation awareness, and destination sustainability. Therefore, language competence should be considered part of sustainable tourism human resource development.

Fourth, the article proposes a conceptual model linking English communication competence, interpretation quality, tourist satisfaction, responsible behavior, and destination competitiveness. This model can be tested in future empirical research.

Practical Implications

The article offers several practical implications.

First, tourism training institutions should design English courses specifically for nature tourism guides. General English courses are not sufficient. Training should include real guiding scenarios, destination-specific vocabulary, safety communication, and storytelling.

Second, destination managers should develop English interpretation materials, such as glossaries, story banks, safety scripts, and conservation messages. These materials can help guides deliver consistent and accurate explanations.

Third, guide associations should provide continuous professional development programs. Regular workshops, peer learning, mentoring, and certification can improve guide professionalism.

Fourth, local governments should support English competence development as part of tourism quality improvement. Budget allocation, partnerships with universities, and integration with destination development programs are necessary.

Fifth, universities can contribute through community service, applied research, curriculum development, and student involvement. English education, tourism, and management programs can collaborate to support local guide training.

Policy Implications

From a policy perspective, English communication competence should be included in tourism human resource development programs. Local and national tourism authorities can develop competency standards for nature tourism guides. These standards should include:

1. Basic English communication.
2. English for guiding functions.
3. English for nature interpretation.
4. English for safety and emergency communication.

5. Intercultural communication.
6. Digital communication.
7. Ethical and sustainable tourism communication.

Policy support should also ensure that training is accessible to local guides, including those in rural and remote destinations. Certification should not become a barrier for local participation but should function as a tool for improvement and recognition.

Limitations

This article has several limitations. First, it is conceptual and literature-based, so it does not present primary empirical data from nature tourism guides. Second, the discussion is general to Indonesia and does not focus on one specific destination. Third, the article does not measure the actual English proficiency level of guides. Fourth, the proposed model has not yet been statistically tested. Despite these limitations, the article provides a foundation for future empirical research and practical program development.

Future Research Directions

Future research can develop this topic in several directions. First, researchers can conduct surveys to measure the English communication competence of nature tourism guides in specific destinations such as national parks, geoparks, marine parks, or ecotourism villages. Second, qualitative studies can explore guide experiences, tourist perceptions, and destination manager expectations. Third, experimental studies can test the effectiveness of English training modules for nature tourism guides. Fourth, comparative studies can examine differences between certified and non-certified guides, urban and rural guides, or different types of nature tourism. Fifth, researchers can develop and validate a measurement scale for English communication competence in nature tourism guiding. Future research may also examine the relationship between guide English competence, tourist satisfaction, responsible tourist behavior, and destination loyalty. Such studies would provide stronger empirical evidence for the strategic importance of English competence in sustainable tourism development.

CONCLUSION

English communication competence is a crucial professional requirement for nature tourism guides in Indonesia. As international tourist arrivals continue to grow, guides must be able to communicate effectively with visitors from different countries and cultural backgrounds. In nature tourism, English competence is not limited to general conversation. It includes the ability to explain natural attractions, interpret ecological and cultural meanings, give safety instructions, answer questions, handle complaints, communicate emergencies, and promote responsible tourist behavior.

The main challenges faced by nature tourism guides include limited technical vocabulary, difficulty understanding tourist accents, lack of confidence, limited access to contextual training, weak integration between local knowledge and English expression, intercultural misunderstanding, and lack of standardized assessment. These challenges show that English training must be practical, contextual, and based on real guiding tasks.

The article proposes several development strategies, including needs-based curriculum design, field-based simulation, micro-guiding practice, localized English glossaries, story banks, mentoring, competency-based certification, digital learning, and stakeholder collaboration. These strategies can strengthen guide professionalism, improve tourist satisfaction, support conservation education, and enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian nature tourism.

Ultimately, improving English communication competence among nature tourism guides is not only a language development agenda. It is part of a broader strategy to build high-quality, sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive tourism in Indonesia.

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