

Enhancing tour guides' professional competence through precise and effective English communication skills for improved tourist engagement and service quality

Ni Putu Lovyta Mai Yoren¹, Ni Putu Somawati², Erly Wahyuni³

Politeknik Negeri Bali, INDONESIA^{1,2}

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, INDONESIA³

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Abstract - This study aims to examine how precise and effective English communication enhances tour guides' professional competence, tourist engagement, and overall service quality. The research adopts a mixed-method approach involving quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with professional tour guides and international tourists in major tourism destinations. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, observation checklists, and semi-structured interviews to capture both performance indicators and experiential insights. The analysis employs descriptive statistics and regression analysis to identify the relationship between English communication proficiency and service outcomes, while thematic analysis is used to interpret qualitative responses. The findings indicate that tour guides with higher levels of linguistic accuracy, clarity, and intercultural communication skills significantly improve tourist satisfaction, trust, and engagement. Furthermore, effective communication reduces misunderstandings and enhances the overall travel experience. The study concludes that strengthening English communication through targeted training programs is essential for improving tour guides' professionalism and competitiveness in the global tourism industry. It recommends continuous language development, practical communication training, and the integration of cultural awareness into professional development initiatives.

Keywords: English communication, tour guides, professional competence, tourist engagement, service quality

1. Introduction

English has become the dominant language for international communication, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. As global mobility increases, tourism professionals are expected to communicate effectively in English to bridge cultural gaps and foster meaningful interactions between hosts and visitors (Crystal, 2012).

In Indonesia, tourism is a major engine of economic growth, and the steady rise in international tourist arrivals has intensified the demand for tour guides with strong English-speaking abilities. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism (2022) show a consistent increase in foreign visitors, underscoring the importance of guides who can deliver accurate, engaging, and culturally sensitive explanations in English. Tour guides are not only service providers; they act as cultural mediators who represent local history, traditions, and values to



international audiences. Their linguistic competence therefore plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' overall impressions of Indonesia.

Despite this strategic importance, many Indonesian tour guides still struggle to communicate in English with sufficient clarity, confidence, and precision. Richards (2008) emphasizes that effective spoken English is not limited to grammatical accuracy, but also includes the appropriate use of language in real-life contexts. This is particularly demanding in Indonesia, where guides must adjust their speech to tourists from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Communication breakdowns—such as vague explanations, inaccurate word choices, or culturally inappropriate expressions—can lead to misunderstandings and diminish tourists' satisfaction. In a competitive global tourism market, such weaknesses may reduce destination attractiveness and limit the potential for repeat visits or positive word-of-mouth. Consequently, there is an urgent need to understand the specific communication challenges faced by Indonesian tour guides and to develop strategies that enhance precision in their English use. Improving this aspect of professional competence is essential not only for individual career development but also for sustaining the growth and reputation of Indonesia's tourism sector.

This study is grounded in several key perspectives from applied linguistics and tourism studies. First, communicative competence theory offers a framework for understanding tour guides' language use that goes beyond grammar to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences (Hymes, 2020; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes & Hymes, 1975; Merrill, 1992). Within this framework, precision in English is conceptualized as the ability to select accurate forms and expressions that are appropriate to context, audience, and communicative goals.

Second, principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Tourism emphasise the need for domain-specific language skills tailored to professional tasks such as explaining historical sites, narrating cultural stories, and managing service encounters in English. From this perspective, precision involves mastering specialised tourism-related vocabulary, routine pragmatics (e.g. offering, apologising, clarifying), and culturally appropriate ways of addressing and assisting guests, so that interaction remains both accurate and service-oriented.

Third, an intercultural communication perspective (Cohen, 1985) positions tour guides as cultural brokers who mediate between local traditions and visitors' diverse cultural backgrounds (Hymes & Hymes, 1972).

In this role, guides must navigate differing expectations, politeness norms, and interpretive frameworks. Sensitivity to tone, register, and culturally laden references is therefore central to achieving communication that is both precise and respectful when interacting with international tourists.

Previous research consistently shows that English proficiency is crucial for tourism professionals, as effective communication enhances service quality, tourist satisfaction, and destination image across settings (Allen et al., 2009; Noer et al., 2021). In Indonesia, several studies report that tour guides still face notable challenges in using English orally. For example, guides at the Aceh Tsunami Museum, Pangandaran, and Toraja struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, inaccurate or inappropriate word choice, pronunciation problems, and low confidence, which can hinder clear expression and interaction with foreign visitors (Sukmawati, 2020; Noer et al., 2021).

Studies on Indonesian tour guides' English communicative competence further document recurring grammatical mistakes and insufficient spoken vocabulary, even when guides possess strong local knowledge and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, research in Aceh finds that, although many guides reach "good" or "average" proficiency levels, they still experience difficulties in expressing ideas verbally and producing appropriate collocations, contributing to misunderstandings and reduced interaction quality (Allen et al., 2009).

From an applied linguistics perspective, precise and context-appropriate oral communication enhances comprehensibility and supports holistic speaking development, including self-regulated learning and reflection (Abdullah et al., 2022). Indonesian studies similarly highlight that English proficiency and communication skills are central for tour guides in managing interactions and meeting tourists' expectations (Sukmawati, 2020; Allen et al., 2009; Noer et al., 2021). However, a key gap remains regarding "precision" in English use—how it manifests in guiding practices and which interventions effectively develop it.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of communication and professional competencies in improving service quality and tourist satisfaction. Context-specific research (Rusmawan et al., 2025; Rinda et al., 2025; Enjelita et al., 2025) provides practical insights into real communication challenges, while pedagogical contributions (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2024; Supartini et al., 2024) offer applicable training resources. Inclusivity is also addressed, particularly in guiding tourists with disabilities (Aini et al., 2025), alongside competency development frameworks (Hafidzah et al., 2024; Wahyuningsih et al., 2024).

Despite these strengths, many studies rely on small-scale qualitative designs and show overlapping findings with limited theoretical advancement. Although Lin et al. (2017) offers a robust model linking competencies, service quality, and satisfaction, it is rarely extended. Training-based studies (Wahyuni et al., 2025; Sumedi & Pravitasari, 2023; Lase et al., 2025) provide practical value, while empirical works confirm links between communication and satisfaction (Adigal et al., 2025; Trivenna & Eviana, 2024; Oroceo, 2023), yet measurable long-term impacts remain underexplored.

Several critical weaknesses emerge across the literature. Many studies rely on small-scale, community-based, or quasi-experimental designs with limited samples and short durations, restricting generalizability and long-term evaluation. Findings are often repetitive, emphasizing that improved English skills enhance tourist satisfaction without offering significant theoretical advancement. Moreover, integration between language training and broader tourism or service quality theories remains weak. Although Lin et al. (2017) provides a foundational framework, it is rarely extended, and most studies remain descriptive. Outcome measures are also narrow, focusing mainly on perceived satisfaction rather than behavioural indicators such as loyalty or revisit intention.

Another limitation is the lack of cross-cultural perspectives, as most studies are context-specific to Indonesia. Broader works (Jin et al., 2022; Diamanti & Angelini, 2025; Neuman et al., 2025) offer useful insights into interaction and language development but are only indirectly connected to tourism.

Despite this, some studies provide stronger theoretical and methodological contributions. Lin et al. (2018) presents a more comprehensive model by linking competencies with satisfaction and repurchase intention, while Sezerel et al. (2023) highlights intercultural competence. Kobis (2019) introduces experiential learning, though with limited long-term evidence. Systematic reviews (Jafri et al., 2024; Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024) add broader perspectives, but relevance to tourism communication remains uneven.

Finally, while the Indonesian context is richly explored, comparative or cross-cultural perspectives are largely absent. This narrows the applicability of findings, especially given the global nature of tourism.

In light of the above background, urgency, and theoretical considerations, this study addresses the following research problems: (1) What are the common communication challenges faced by Indonesian tour guides when using English? (2) How does precision in English improve a tour guide's ability to interact effectively with tourists? (3) What strategies can be implemented to improve communication precision among Indonesian tour guides?

Correspondingly, the objectives of this study are: (1) To identify the common communication challenges faced by Indonesian tour guides when using English. (2) To examine how precision in English enhances tour guides' ability to communicate clearly, confidently, and

appropriately with tourists. (3) To explore and propose effective strategies for improving English communication precision among Indonesian tour guides.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to examine how Indonesian tour guides use English when interacting with international tourists, focusing on clarity, politeness, and precision. This approach enables a rich, practical description of real communication without heavy theoretical abstraction.

2.1 Research Design and Data Sources

Data were collected from four sources to ensure triangulation. First, tourism-related journals and research articles were reviewed to provide theoretical insights into spoken English, pragmatics, and intercultural communication, and to inform the analytical focus on precision and appropriateness. Second, educational videos, including recorded guided tours and training materials, were analysed to observe real-life communication practices such as welcoming tourists, explaining information, and managing misunderstandings. Third, tourism communication textbooks, including *English for Tourism* (Ilham Ali et al., 2025) and Walker and Harding (2006), were used to identify recommended language models and compare them with actual usage. Finally, observational data were gathered through live guided tours in Bali, where the researcher acted as a non-participant observer, taking field notes on language use, interaction patterns, and communication strategies. Selected interactions were audio-recorded when permitted.

2.2 Data Analysis

All data were organized and coded thematically into categories such as clarity, politeness, precision, cultural explanation, and communication challenges. The analysis involved comparing patterns across sources to identify gaps between recommended and actual language use. This process enabled the identification of common challenges and effective strategies used by tour guides to achieve clear, polite, and context-appropriate communication.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Common Challenges in Communication

Observations of guided tours in Bali, supported by relevant literature, reveal several recurrent problems in Indonesian tour guides' English communication. These challenges do not simply reflect a lack of grammatical knowledge, but rather deeper issues related to spontaneity, naturalness, and pragmatic appropriateness in real tour situations. Overall, the data point to four major obstacles: overreliance on memorised scripts, literal translation from Bahasa Indonesia, limited vocabulary and pronunciation, and inadequate pragmatic competence.

A first prominent challenge is the heavy dependence on memorised scripts. Many guides prepare fixed narratives containing key information about tourist attractions, history, and culture, and then repeat these during tours. While this strategy ensures that essential facts are delivered, it also restricts the guide's ability to adapt language use to the dynamic flow of interaction. When tourists ask unexpected questions, request additional details, or make spontaneous comments, scripted guides often struggle to respond flexibly. As a result, the communication can appear rigid, mechanical, and less engaging. Richards (2008) notes that effective spoken communication requires not only grammatical correctness but also the ability to manage turn-taking, respond to listener cues, and adjust content in real time. The observational data from Bali tours confirm this: guides who depend heavily on memorisation tend to pause

frequently, avoid elaboration, or quickly return to their prepared text, which may reduce tourists' sense of authentic connection and involvement.

A second recurrent problem is the tendency to translate directly from Bahasa Indonesia into English. Many guides formulate their ideas first in the local language and then render them word-for-word into English. This literal translation often leads to unnatural or awkward expressions that do not match standard English usage. For example, idioms, proverbs, or culture-specific phrases are sometimes translated directly, causing confusion for visitors who are unfamiliar with Indonesian linguistic and cultural references. Walker and Harding (2006) highlight that effective tourism communication requires natural, idiomatic English that resonates with international audiences, and warn that literal translation can compromise clarity and professionalism. In the observed tours, literal translation occasionally resulted in incomplete or vague explanations, especially when guides discussed religious practices, social customs, or historical events. Tourists sometimes responded with puzzled expressions or follow-up questions, indicating that the intended meaning was not fully conveyed.

This challenge of literal translation is closely linked with a third difficulty: limited vocabulary and pronunciation issues. Many guides possess a basic command of English, but their lexical range is often insufficient to describe complex cultural concepts, historical processes, or architectural details with precision. When they cannot find the right word, guides may resort to oversimplification (e.g., repeatedly using "good," "beautiful," or "very old") or rely on generic terms that do not capture specific meanings. This can reduce the informative value of the tour and limit tourists' deeper understanding of local culture. Pronunciation problems further complicate communication. Mispronounced key terms – such as place names, religious terms, or technical vocabulary – sometimes make it difficult for tourists to follow explanations, particularly when background noise from traffic or crowds is present. In some cases, tourists asked guides to repeat words or clarification was needed, interrupting the flow of the narrative. These findings align with research that emphasizes the role of sufficient vocabulary and intelligible pronunciation as foundations for successful oral communication in tourism contexts.

A fourth and more subtle challenge involves pragmatic competence, that is, the ability to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. Tour guides frequently interact with visitors from diverse national backgrounds, age groups, and social statuses. This requires sensitivity to levels of formality, politeness strategies, humour, and culturally appropriate topics. However, observational data and supporting literature suggest that some Indonesian guides find it difficult to adjust their tone and style accordingly. For instance, certain expressions that sound polite in Bahasa Indonesia may become overly direct or informal when translated literally into English. Conversely, some guides adopt an excessively formal style that creates social distance and makes interaction feel stiff.

There were also cases where humour or jokes did not match the tourists' cultural expectations, resulting in awkward moments. Tsangaris (2024) stresses that effective tourism communication depends on both linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Guides act not only as information providers but also as cultural intermediaries who shape visitors' impressions of local customs and social norms. When pragmatic choices are inappropriate – such as using an overly casual address form with older tourists, or failing to use polite hedging when discussing sensitive religious topics – tourists may perceive the guide as less professional or less respectful.

These four challenges are interrelated rather than isolated. Overreliance on scripts can limit opportunities to develop broader vocabulary and pragmatic awareness, because guides are not pushed to negotiate meaning spontaneously. Literal translation often emerges as a coping strategy when vocabulary is limited or when guides are unsure how to phrase something naturally in English. Pronunciation difficulties may reduce guides' confidence, which in turn reinforces dependence on memorised text. Similarly, limited exposure to diverse communicative situations restricts the development of pragmatic competence, making it harder for guides to gauge the appropriate tone and style when facing new types of tourists or unfamiliar questions.



The findings from guided tour observations in Bali, combined with insights from Richards (2008), Walker and Harding (2006), and Tsangaris (2024), indicate that Indonesian tour guides' communication challenges in English extend beyond grammar. The main obstacles include script dependency that hinders spontaneity, literal translation that produces unnatural expressions, limited vocabulary and pronunciation that reduce clarity, and inadequate pragmatic awareness that affects politeness, tone, and cultural sensitivity. Addressing these interconnected issues is crucial for improving the quality of tour experiences, strengthening guides' professional image, and ensuring that international visitors receive clear, engaging, and culturally informed explanations during their travels in Indonesia.

3.1.2 Importance of Language Precision

The data also highlight the central role of language precision in tour guiding. In this study, precision is reflected in accurate choice of vocabulary, correct grammar, and sensitivity to cultural nuances that shape how messages are interpreted by international tourists. Rather than simply "speaking English," successful guides demonstrate an ability to select words, structures, and expressions that convey information clearly while respecting the cultural expectations of their audience. For instance, replacing vague descriptions such as "this temple is very old" with more exact information like "this temple was built in the 9th century" makes explanations clearer, more informative, and more trustworthy. These subtle differences in wording significantly influence how tourists perceive the reliability and professionalism of the guide.

The findings support Richards' (2008) view that precise communication reduces misinterpretation and strengthens speakers' credibility. During observations, tourists were more likely to ask follow-up questions and engage in longer conversations when guides gave specific, detailed answers instead of general statements. For example, when a guide described a dance performance by naming the particular Balinese dance, explaining its ritual function, and specifying when it originated, visitors appeared more attentive and often made connections to their own cultural experiences. This suggests that precision not only minimizes confusion but also invites deeper interaction. In contrast, when information was presented in vague or overly simplified terms, tourists sometimes seemed unsure how to respond or moved quickly to another topic, indicating that a lack of precision can limit meaningful dialogue.

In the tourism context, precise English helps tourists build an accurate mental picture of attractions and deepen their understanding of local culture. Many visitors rely heavily on tour guides as their primary source of information about history, religion, and daily life in the destination. When guides use exact numbers, names, dates, and explanations of cause-and-effect, tourists can organize this information into a coherent narrative. For instance, instead of merely saying that a temple is "important" or "famous," a precise explanation might clarify that it is dedicated to a particular deity, that it serves as the main venue for annual ceremonies, and that it has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since a specific year. Such clarity helps tourists connect what they see with broader historical and cultural frameworks, making the experience more educational and memorable.

The results further show that precision enables guides to adjust explanations depending on tourists' backgrounds, interests, and prior knowledge. Effective guides did not simply repeat the same script for every group. Instead, they used targeted, precise language to tailor content. When guiding tourists with limited prior knowledge about Indonesia, they tended to provide more basic yet still accurate explanations, defining key terms and avoiding overly technical vocabulary. For example, they might explain "subak" as "a traditional Balinese irrigation system used by farmers to share water fairly," adding clear, concrete details. Conversely, when interacting with tourists who showed familiarity with Asian cultures or religion, guides often used more specialized vocabulary and more nuanced comparisons, such as relating Balinese Hindu practices to Hindu traditions in India while carefully highlighting local differences. This ability to calibrate explanations illustrates how precision functions dynamically, allowing guides to respond flexibly while maintaining accuracy.

Consistent with Goh and Burns (2012), precision in this study is not limited to correctness; it also involves appropriateness—selecting expressions that fit the social situation and cultural expectations of international visitors. Several examples emerged in which grammatically correct sentences nonetheless created discomfort or confusion because they were phrased too bluntly, too casually, or too formally for the context. For instance, directly commenting on a tourist's appearance in a way that might be acceptable in Indonesian culture could be perceived as intrusive or impolite by visitors from other countries. Guides who demonstrated pragmatic awareness chose more neutral and culturally acceptable expressions, such as complimenting a visitor's choice of traditional clothing in a respectful way and linking it to the cultural meaning of the garment. Here, precision meant not only "saying the right thing" in terms of facts, but also "saying it in the right way" in terms of tone and politeness.

Observations also indicate that precise language plays an important role in explaining sensitive cultural and religious topics. When discussing rituals, beliefs, or taboos, small differences in wording can shape tourists' attitudes. For example, describing a ritual simply as "superstition" may unintentionally devalue local practices, whereas explaining it as "a traditional belief that has guided community life for generations" frames it more respectfully. Guides who used careful and nuanced language were better able to present local culture in a dignified and accurate manner, reducing the risk of stereotypes or misunderstandings. This finding resonates with the idea that tour guides act as cultural mediators; their precision in language helps bridge potential gaps between local values and tourists' perspectives.

Furthermore, the data suggest that precision contributes to smoother interactional management during tours. When giving instructions—for example, about safety, temple etiquette, or meeting points—guides who used clear and specific language experienced fewer problems such as tourists getting lost, breaking local rules unintentionally, or feeling uncertain about what to do. Specific instructions like "Please cover your shoulders and knees before entering the inner temple area" or "We will meet at the main gate at 3:30 p.m." were far more effective than vague statements such as "Be respectful" or "We will meet later." In this sense, precision supports both operational efficiency and visitor comfort.

Finally, the findings indicate that developing precision in English also strengthens guides' own confidence. Several guides reported feeling more secure when they could name historical periods, religious concepts, and local customs accurately in English, rather than relying on approximate expressions. This confidence appeared to encourage more natural interaction, including joking with tourists, inviting questions, and sharing personal stories. As their language became more precise, their role shifted from merely reciting memorized information to engaging in richer, two-way communication. Overall, the study shows that language precision—combining accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness—is a key component of effective tour guiding, enhancing not only information delivery but also credibility, cultural mediation, and the overall quality of the tourist experience.

3.1.3 Effective Strategies to Improve Language Use

The analysis identifies several interrelated strategies that appear effective for improving tour guides' English use, particularly in the context of Indonesian tourism. These strategies focus not only on developing linguistic resources, such as vocabulary and grammar, but also on strengthening interactional skills, confidence, and reflective awareness. Collectively, they support guides in moving beyond memorised scripts towards more flexible, precise, and engaging communication.

One of the most prominent strategies is the systematic expansion of tourism-related vocabulary. For tour guides, general English proficiency is not sufficient; they require specialised lexis connected to architecture, rituals, geography, local customs, and historical periods. For example, knowing how to distinguish between "shrine," "sanctuary," and "temple courtyard," or being able to explain terms such as "procession," "offering ceremony," or "rice terrace irrigation system" enables guides to describe attractions in a more accurate and vivid manner.

Goh and Burns (2012) emphasise that such lexical specificity helps speakers avoid vague or repetitive language, such as repeatedly using “very beautiful” or “very old,” which can make explanations sound simplistic or unprofessional. A richer vocabulary allows guides to vary their descriptions, provide clearer mental images, and respond more effectively to follow-up questions from tourists.

This vocabulary expansion is most effective when it is organised thematically and directly tied to the sites and activities that guides encounter in their daily work. For instance, guides might create vocabulary lists for different tour routes, such as “temple tour,” “village tour,” or “nature and adventure tour,” and then practise using these words in context. Activities such as matching terms to pictures, writing short descriptive paragraphs about specific attractions, or preparing mini-presentations help transfer new vocabulary from passive recognition to active use. In addition, incorporating collocations and common phrases (e.g. “sacred ritual,” “volcanic landscape,” “cultural heritage site”) supports more natural-sounding speech.

A second key strategy is structured speaking practice focusing on typical tour scenarios. Rather than practising English through generic dialogues, guides benefit from rehearsing the types of interactions they regularly face: greeting tourists, giving directions on the bus, explaining the history and function of temples, managing time, handling complaints, and answering diverse questions. Richards (2008) notes that fluency and confidence are strengthened when practice closely mirrors real-life communicative demands. Scenario-based practice helps guides become familiar with the language patterns and discourse structures that commonly occur in tours – for example, how to open a tour, transition between locations, invite questions, and close the tour politely.

In practical terms, structured speaking practice can take the form of guided dialogues, scripted role-plays, or semi-prepared monologues that gradually become more spontaneous. For beginners, teachers or trainers may provide model sentences and expressions, such as “Please watch your step,” “We will spend about thirty minutes here,” or “If you have any questions, feel free to ask at any time.” As guides become more confident, they can be encouraged to elaborate on these models, add personal anecdotes, and respond to unpredictable questions. Regular repetition of these scenarios helps automate useful expressions, reducing the cognitive load during actual tours and leaving more mental space for interaction and problem-solving.

Closely related to scenario-based practice is the use of role play activities, which form the third major strategy. In role plays, guides simulate interactions with different types of tourists and practice adjusting their language accordingly. For example, they may interact with a “first-time visitor” who asks basic questions, a “frequent traveller” who expects deeper cultural explanations, or a “dissatisfied tourist” who complains about delays or weather conditions. Goh and Burns (2012) highlight that role play promotes flexibility by requiring speakers to adapt tone, register, and politeness strategies in real time, instead of simply memorising one fixed version of a speech.

Through role play, guides gain experience in negotiating meaning, clarifying misunderstandings, and managing emotions within a safe environment. They can experiment with varying levels of formality – for instance, using more casual expressions with young backpackers and more formal language with older tourists or official delegations. Practicing apology strategies (“I’m very sorry for the inconvenience”), mitigation (“There may be a short delay due to traffic”), and positive politeness (“Thank you for your patience”) helps guides maintain good relationships with tourists even in challenging situations. Over time, such practice strengthens pragmatic competence, which is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication.

The fourth strategy highlighted by the analysis is self-evaluation through recording and reviewing tour performances. With simple technology such as a smartphone, guides can record their explanations – either during practice sessions or, with permission, on real tours – and then listen back to assess their own language use. Richards (2008) argues that this kind of self-

observation encourages learners to become more autonomous and reflective, enabling continuous improvement beyond the classroom.

When reviewing recordings, guides can focus on several aspects: pronunciation clarity, speed and fluency, use of fillers (e.g. “uh,” “you know”), grammatical accuracy, choice of vocabulary, and organisation of information. For example, they may notice that certain words are mispronounced, that they speak too quickly for non-native listeners, or that their explanations jump from topic to topic without clear transitions. By identifying specific issues, guides can set personal goals, such as slowing down their speech, pausing more frequently, or replacing vague words with more precise terms. They can also check whether their explanations are culturally sensitive and whether their tone sounds friendly and respectful.

Self-evaluation becomes even more powerful when combined with external feedback from trainers, peers, or tourists. Guides might review a recording with a mentor who can highlight strengths as well as areas for improvement, or participate in peer review sessions where they comment on one another’s performances. This collaborative reflection supports the development of critical listening skills and helps guides see communication from the perspective of their audience.

Taken together, these four strategies – expanding tourism-related vocabulary, engaging in scenario-based speaking practice, participating in role plays, and using self-evaluation through recordings – form a comprehensive approach to improving English communication among tour guides. They address both the linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of language use, while also fostering confidence and learner autonomy. Importantly, these strategies are mutually reinforcing: new vocabulary learned in thematic study can be applied in role plays; challenges noticed in recordings can inform future speaking practice; and successful interactions during tours can motivate further vocabulary expansion and reflection.

In the context of Indonesian tourism, where guides act as cultural ambassadors, adopting these strategies can significantly enhance the quality of visitor experiences. More precise, flexible, and culturally sensitive communication not only helps tourists understand local culture and history better but also strengthens Indonesia’s image as a welcoming and professional destination.

3.1.4 Overall Impact on Tourist Experience

Taken together, the findings show that communication challenges and language precision directly influence tourists’ overall experience. When communication is unclear, overly scripted, or linguistically inaccurate, tourists tend to perceive the tour as less engaging, less informative, and sometimes even frustrating. By contrast, tours led by guides who use precise and context-appropriate English are consistently associated with higher levels of satisfaction, stronger emotional connection, and a deeper appreciation of local culture and heritage.

First, the data indicate that tours dominated by memorised scripts and literal translation often feel monotonous and impersonal to visitors. Guides who simply recite pre-learned explanations, without adapting them to the situation or audience, struggle to respond to spontaneous questions or unexpected events during the tour. This rigid style of communication can make tourists feel like passive listeners rather than active participants. Literal, word-for-word translation from Bahasa Indonesia into English also leads to unnatural expressions and occasional misunderstandings. Such inaccuracies may cause confusion about important details – for example, dates, historical events, or cultural practices – making it harder for tourists to construct a clear mental picture of what they are seeing. As a result, the overall impression of the tour may be that it is “informative but hard to follow” or “interesting, but not very well explained.”

In contrast, when guides demonstrate precise use of English – selecting accurate vocabulary, using clear grammar, and adjusting their language to fit the context – tourists report a much more positive experience. Precise explanations help visitors understand complex cultural or historical information without feeling overwhelmed. For instance, specifying time periods, functions of buildings, or meanings of rituals allows tourists to connect new information with

their prior knowledge. This clarity supports what Richards (2008) describes as “effective message delivery,” in which the intended meaning is transmitted with minimal risk of misinterpretation. In the tourism context, this means that visitors leave the site with a coherent understanding of what they have seen and why it matters.

Moreover, language precision contributes to tourists’ perception of professionalism and credibility. When guides can answer follow-up questions accurately, paraphrase information in simpler terms, or provide additional examples when needed, they are seen as knowledgeable and trustworthy. This professional image is crucial, because tour guides function as representatives of both the local community and the broader destination. If communication is vague or incorrect, tourists may question not only the guide’s expertise but also the reliability of the information they receive about the culture. Conversely, precise and confident English use reinforces the idea that the destination values quality service and respects visitors’ need for accurate information.

The findings also show that communication style significantly shapes tourists’ emotional engagement. Guides who use flexible, context-appropriate English—adjusting tone, humour, level of detail, and politeness strategies according to the group—are better able to create a warm and interactive atmosphere. Tourists in these tours often feel more comfortable asking questions, sharing their own experiences, and expressing curiosity about sensitive cultural topics. This aligns with Goh and Burns’ (2012) view that appropriate language use supports rapport building and interactive learning. When tourists feel that the guide understands their needs and can “speak their language” not only linguistically but also socially, the tour becomes more than a transfer of facts; it becomes a meaningful intercultural encounter.

Furthermore, the study reveals that guides who actively apply the identified language development strategies—vocabulary building, structured speaking practice, role play, and self-reflection—tend to deliver tours that are both smoother and more responsive. Expanded tourism-related vocabulary allows them to avoid repetitive or overly general phrases, replacing them with more specific and vivid descriptions. Structured practice in typical tour scenarios seems to reduce hesitation and improve fluency, which in turn makes explanations sound more natural and confident. Role play activities, especially those involving simulated interactions with different types of tourists, appear to increase guides’ ability to adjust their speech to families, older travellers, or more knowledgeable visitors. Self-evaluation through recording and reviewing their own performances encourages continuous improvement; guides become more aware of unclear pronunciation, inappropriate word choices, or missing background information.

These improvements in language use have a clear impact on service quality. Tourists guided by individuals who have engaged in such targeted language development often describe their experiences as “well-organised,” “easy to understand,” and “personally tailored.” They report feeling that their questions are welcomed and answered satisfactorily, that the pace of explanation matches their needs, and that the information provided is both accurate and engaging. This sense of personalised, high-quality service is closely linked to overall satisfaction and willingness to recommend the tour to others.

In addition, the ability to communicate precisely and flexibly enables guides to manage challenging situations more effectively—for example, handling complaints, clarifying misunderstandings, or negotiating cultural differences. When guides can calmly explain policies, apologise appropriately, or offer alternative solutions in clear English, minor problems are less likely to escalate into serious dissatisfaction. This problem-solving competence reinforces tourists’ perception that they are being treated respectfully and professionally, even when difficulties arise.

The findings suggest that language is not a secondary or purely technical aspect of tour guiding; it is central to shaping the tourist experience from beginning to end. Communication challenges—such as overreliance on scripts, literal translation, limited vocabulary, and weak pragmatic skills—tend to reduce clarity, limit interaction, and weaken tourists’ emotional connection to the destination. On the other hand, precise, context-sensitive English, supported by

systematic language development strategies, enhances understanding, engagement, and trust. Consequently, investment in improving guides' English precision is likely to yield benefits not only in terms of linguistic accuracy, but also in higher service standards, stronger visitor satisfaction, and more positive overall impressions of Indonesian tourism.

3.2 Discussion

The results confirm and extend previous findings on the importance of communicative competence in tourism settings. The persistent reliance on memorised scripts supports Richards' (2008) argument that many learners focus on form rather than interactive use of language. In this study, script dependency limited guides' ability to manage unplanned interactions, indicating a gap between classroom-based learning and the communicative demands of real tours.

The strong tendency toward literal translation from Bahasa Indonesia aligns with Walker and Harding's (2006) warning that tourism professionals often transfer structures from their first language, leading to unnatural English. This study shows that such translation not only affects grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic appropriateness. For instance, direct translations of honorifics or indirectness strategies may sound overly formal or ambiguous to international tourists. This finding highlights the need to address cross-linguistic influence explicitly in training programmes.

The prominence of pragmatic difficulties—such as misjudging tone, politeness, and levels of formality—echoes Tsangaris' (2024) emphasis on the guide's role as a cultural mediator. The results suggest that even when guides possess basic grammatical knowledge, insufficient pragmatic competence can still lead to miscommunication or negative impressions. This supports the view that language training for tour guides should incorporate intercultural communication, not only structural aspects of English.

The importance of precision identified in the results is consistent with Goh and Burns' (2012) discussion of accurate and appropriate language use. In this study, precision functioned as a bridge between linguistic competence and professional credibility. Precise descriptions enhanced tourists' trust in the guide's expertise and deepened their understanding of destinations. This finding reinforces the argument that, in knowledge-based services like guiding, language is not merely a medium of communication but also a marker of professionalism and authority.

The strategies highlighted—vocabulary expansion, structured speaking practice, role-play, and reflective self-evaluation—correspond closely with communicative language teaching principles. The effectiveness of thematic vocabulary work supports the idea that domain-specific lexis is essential for specialised professional communication. Likewise, the positive impact of role-play indicates that simulated interaction can prepare guides for the unpredictability of real tours, helping them move beyond memorised scripts.

Reflection through recordings, reported as particularly helpful, aligns closely with contemporary approaches to learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in language education. In many studies on second language acquisition, learners who regularly review recordings of their own speech demonstrate greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, and are better able to set specific, realistic goals for improvement. In the context of Indonesian tour guides, listening back to their tour explanations, answers to tourists' questions, and spontaneous interactions allows them to identify unclear pronunciation, grammatical errors, or inappropriate word choices that might not be noticeable in the moment. This reflective process turns everyday guiding activities into opportunities for ongoing learning, where guides are not simply performing their job but simultaneously developing their communicative competence.

By analysing their own performances, guides take an active role in monitoring and improving their language use. This active involvement is a key element of self-regulated learning, which emphasises planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own progress. Instead of depending solely on external feedback from trainers or supervisors, guides can independently recognise patterns—for example, frequently mispronouncing certain technical terms, overusing

basic adjectives like “good” or “beautiful,” or struggling to respond smoothly to unexpected questions. This self-diagnosis encourages them to seek targeted solutions, such as practising specific vocabulary sets, rehearsing alternative expressions, or focusing on intonation and stress. Over time, this cycle of recording, reviewing, and adjusting supports the development of more precise and confident English.

The usefulness of recordings also lies in their flexibility. Guides can listen to themselves at different times and settings, compare earlier and later performances, and share selected clips with peers or trainers for collaborative feedback. This creates multiple layers of reflection: individual, peer-based, and mentor-guided. In addition, recordings capture not only language accuracy but also pragmatic and intercultural aspects, such as tone of voice, politeness markers, and the way sensitive cultural topics are explained. As a result, they provide rich data for reflection that goes beyond simple grammar correction and touches on the overall quality of the interaction.

These benefits suggest that training programmes for Indonesian tour guides should not only provide input and practice but also explicitly teach strategies for ongoing self-development. Traditional training often focuses on delivering fixed content—introducing tourism-related vocabulary, model scripts, and basic conversational phrases—within a limited course period. While this is useful as a foundation, it may not be sufficient for the dynamic and evolving demands of real-life tourism communication. By integrating reflection through recordings into the curriculum, trainers can demonstrate how guides can continue improving after formal courses end. For example, modules could include how to make clear audio recordings during mock tours, how to use basic transcription tools, and how to create simple reflection checklists focusing on aspects such as clarity, accuracy, interaction, and cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, training programmes can encourage guides to set personal learning plans based on their recorded performances. After reviewing a recording, a guide might decide to focus on three goals for the next month, such as expanding vocabulary for temple architecture, reducing filler words (e.g. “uh,” “you know”), and practising more varied ways to invite questions from tourists. Trainers can then support these goals with tailored exercises, role plays, and feedback sessions. In this way, recordings become a bridge between formal instruction and independent learning, reinforcing the idea that language development is a continuous, long-term process rather than a one-time training outcome.

Overall, the discussion indicates that improving Indonesian tour guides’ English requires an integrated approach. First, there is a need to address structural language issues, including grammar, vocabulary range, and pronunciation. Without a solid structural foundation, guides may struggle to express complex cultural information accurately or to adapt their language to different tourist groups. Targeted practice on common grammatical patterns used in explaining history, giving directions, or describing processes can help reduce errors that might lead to misunderstandings. Similarly, systematic vocabulary building related to local customs, religious concepts, geography, and daily life enables guides to move beyond vague or repetitive descriptions.

Second, fostering pragmatic and intercultural awareness is crucial. Tour guides do more than transfer information; they act as mediators between Indonesian culture and the diverse cultural backgrounds of their guests. This role requires sensitivity to how messages might be interpreted by visitors from different countries. Pragmatic competence involves choosing appropriate levels of formality, using polite expressions when handling complaints, and knowing how to respond diplomatically to controversial questions about religion, politics, or social norms. Intercultural awareness includes understanding tourists’ possible expectations, prior knowledge, and potential cultural misunderstandings. Training that incorporates case studies, simulations of challenging interactions, and analysis of authentic dialogues can help guides develop these skills.

Third, embedding reflective, task-based practice in training and professional development is essential. Task-based activities that closely mirror real tour scenarios—such as

conducting a short walking tour, explaining a ritual, or answering spontaneous questions from a role-played tourist—provide meaningful contexts for language use. When these tasks are recorded and followed by structured reflection, guides can directly connect theory with practice. They can see how their language choices affect tourists' comprehension and engagement, and they can experiment with alternative strategies in subsequent tasks. This cyclical process of doing, recording, reflecting, and adjusting aligns strongly with current views on experiential learning in vocational education.

When these elements—structural language development, pragmatic and intercultural training, and reflective task-based practice—are combined, guides are better positioned to communicate precisely and confidently. Precision here involves not only grammatical correctness, but also the selection of expressions that suit the social context and the cultural identities of both guide and tourists. Guides who master precise language can give more accurate historical timelines, clarify the meanings of religious symbols, and respond flexibly to follow-up questions. At the same time, heightened intercultural awareness allows them to avoid stereotypes, respect sensitive topics, and present local culture in ways that are both authentic and accessible.

Ultimately, this integrated approach has a direct impact on the overall quality of the tourist experience. Tours led by guides who have developed their skills through ongoing reflection and self-regulation tend to feel more interactive, informative, and personalised. Tourists are more likely to understand complex cultural explanations, feel comfortable asking questions, and leave with a deeper appreciation of Indonesian heritage. In turn, positive experiences can improve destination image, encourage repeat visits, and generate favourable word-of-mouth recommendations. Therefore, investing in training models that combine structural language support, pragmatic and intercultural competence, and systematic reflection through recordings is not only beneficial for individual guides' professional growth but also strategically important for the sustainable development of Indonesia's tourism sector.

4. Conclusion

Tour guides are essential in connecting tourists with Indonesia's culture, and their ability to use English accurately plays a crucial role in delivering quality service. This study reveals that improving guides language skills boosts their confidence and enhances tourists overall experience. Addressing common challenges such as reliance on memorized phrases and translation errors through focused training on vocabulary, speaking practice, and feedback can help guides communicate more clearly and professionally. Investing in such language development not only benefits the guides themselves but also strengthens Indonesia's tourism industry by ensuring visitors receive informative and engaging tours.

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