

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

English plays an important role in the tourism industry as a means of communication between tourism workers and international visitors. Through English, tourism workers can provide information, explain tourist attractions, answer visitors' questions, and offer better services to tourists from different countries. As tourism continues to develop, the demand for tourism personnel who possess adequate English communication skills has increased. Therefore, English proficiency has become one of the essential competencies that tourism students need to develop during their vocational education.

Among various professions in the tourism industry, tour guides are expected to communicate effectively because they interact directly with tourists. Tour guides are responsible for introducing tourist destinations, explaining cultural and historical information, and ensuring that visitors have meaningful experiences during their visits. To perform these responsibilities successfully, tour guides need adequate English communication skills. Therefore, English learning is considered important for tourism students, especially those who are preparing for careers related to tour guiding activities. Previous studies have reported that vocational students often experience difficulties in using English, such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, speaking anxiety, and lack of confidence (Wulandari, 2019; Sari, 2021). Furthermore, Ratminingsih et al. (2018) found that tourism learners needed practical speaking experiences that reflected real workplace situations. These findings indicate that English communication remains a challenge for many students in tourism-related learning contexts.

Vocational high schools (SMK) that offer tourism programs are expected to prepare students with practical skills relevant to the needs of the tourism industry. One of these skills is the ability to communicate in English during tour guiding activities. Through tour guiding practice, students have opportunities to apply English in authentic situations, such as introducing tourist destinations, delivering information, and interacting with others. However, many students still face challenges when using English during these activities.

Difficulties related to vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and speaking anxiety may affect students' ability to communicate effectively and influence their performance during tour guiding practice.

Students' perceptions toward the use of English in tour guiding activities are important because perceptions can influence students' motivation, participation, and learning experiences. In addition, speaking confidence is an important factor that supports successful communication during tour guiding activities. Students who feel confident are generally more willing to express their ideas, interact with others, and perform speaking tasks effectively. On the other hand, students who lack confidence may hesitate to communicate because they are afraid of making mistakes or being evaluated negatively by others. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions and speaking confidence is important for supporting effective English learning in tourism education.

Based on the background described above, this study was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang, a vocational school that offers a tourism program and provides learning activities related to tour guiding and English communication. Previous studies have examined students' perceptions of English learning, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and speaking confidence in various educational contexts. Recent studies also indicate that positive perceptions and speaking confidence play important roles in enhancing students' participation and communication performance in English learning (Alzahrani, 2022; Nisa & Sari, 2023). However, most previous studies have focused on general English learning, blended learning environments, or ESP courses, while limited attention has been given to the use of English in tour guiding activities within vocational tourism education. In addition, studies investigating students' perceptions and speaking confidence simultaneously in the context of English for Tour Guiding remain scarce, particularly in vocational schools in East Nusa Tenggara. This gap highlights the need for further research to explore how students perceive the use of English in tour guiding activities and how confident they feel when using English in tourism-related communication. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions toward the use of English in tour guiding activities and to describe their speaking confidence when using English for tour guiding at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang. The findings of this study are expected to

contribute to the understanding of English learning in vocational tourism education and provide practical insights for improving tourism-related English instruction.

1.2 Research Problems

1. How do Twelfth-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang perceive the use of English in tour guiding?
2. What are students' perceptions of their speaking confidence in using English for tour guiding activities?

1.3 Aims of Study

1. To explore and analyze Twelfth-grade students' perceptions of English for tour guiding at SMK Negeri 1 Kupang.
2. To explore students' perceptions of their speaking confidence in using English for tour guiding activities.

1.4 Significance of Study

1.4.1 Implication

This study contributes This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of students' perceptions by providing empirical evidence that supports Walgito's (2010) theory, particularly the cognitive, affective, and conative aspects, in the context of English for Tour Guiding activities. The findings reveal that students develop positive perceptions toward English as an essential communication tool in tourism-related contexts, suggesting that authentic learning experiences positively influence their knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, this study strengthens the concept of speaking confidence proposed by Brown (2007) and Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), highlighting that language competence, authentic speaking experiences, emotional readiness, and willingness to communicate play significant roles in enhancing students' confidence in using English. The results also reinforce the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) introduced by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), emphasizing the importance of aligning English instruction with learners' future professional needs through authentic tourism-related communication activities. Therefore, this study

provides both theoretical and pedagogical implications by demonstrating that contextualized English learning can effectively foster positive perceptions, improve speaking confidence, and better prepare vocational students for communication in the tourism industry.

1.4.2 Application

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical benefits for the following parties:

1. For English Teachers

The findings may help English teachers understand students' perceptions toward the use of English in tour guiding activities and the factors influencing their speaking confidence. The results can be used as a reference for designing more engaging and confidence-building learning activities in tourism-related English classes.

2. For Students

The findings may increase students' awareness of the importance of English in tour guiding activities and encourage them to improve their speaking skills and confidence when communicating in English.

3. For Vocational Schools

The findings may provide useful information for vocational schools, particularly tourism programs, in developing learning strategies and activities that better support students' English communication skills and professional preparation for the tourism industry.

4. For Future Researchers

This research can serve as a valuable reference for other researchers for further research.