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Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges Among Pedicab Drivers and Vendors with Foreign Tourists in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

In the context of globalization, English plays a pivotal role, particularly in the tourism industry, where daily interactions with foreign visitors are common. This study investigates the motivations, challenges, and efforts of pedicab drivers and vendors when communicating with foreign tourists at the Tsunami Museum and Ulee Lheue Port in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through interviews with eight respondents: four pedicab drivers and four vendors. This study's findings reveal that pedicab drivers and vendors have a complex use of English, reflecting their motivations, challenges, and efforts to improve their language skills. The respondents expressed a strong desire to engage with foreign tourists, promote their products, and conduct tours, often motivated by positive interactions. However, they faced significant challenges, such as word recall, understanding foreign accents, and unfamiliar vocabulary, often relying on basic English or Indonesian for communication. To address these issues, they are making efforts to enhance their English proficiency through interactions with tourists and peers, demonstrating a commitment to improving communication and better serving their customers. The study emphasizes the need for improved language support in the tourism sector and offers

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valuable insights for educators. It accentuates the importance of increasing students' awareness of English's practical relevance, especially for those pursuing careers in tourism and other globalized fields.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, pedicab drivers, foreigners, tourism, vendors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a significant economic driver in many countries since it is a ubiquitous industry that is continually developing and highly dynamic (Zadeh Bazargani & Kiliç, 2021). The World Tourism Organization (2019) reported that global revenue from international tourists rose from 811 billion US dollars in 2005 to 1.65 trillion US dollars in 2018, whereas the total number of international tourists' arrivals climbed from 823 million in 2005 to 1.4 billion in 2018. Likewise, tourism is an important industry in Aceh, Indonesia, renowned for its historical heritage and landmarks. According to Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh (Aceh Central Statistical Agency), in 2022, more than 327.458 tourists from other countries visited Banda Aceh, which makes this city the highest tourist destination in Aceh. This situation brings about interactions between foreign visitors and local service providers, such as street vendors and pedicab drivers, as a daily occurrence that may influence the tourists' experiences. As a result, the pedicab drivers and vendors are demanded to have some basic English skills, especially in speaking, to attract foreign customers and generate more income by providing quality services, as emphasized by Giri and Boonrattanakittibhumi (2021) and Mesquita (2021) that having English proficiency is vital for the locals in tourism-related areas worldwide. This circumstance is likely to contribute to the economic development of the local communities (Malini et al., 2022).

Research on English for tourism presents a range of issues. In Japan, it has been found that there are difficulties in communicating with the locals owing to language barriers (Fujita, 2019). The author further highlighted that this is especially true when it comes to listening to and speaking English, which highlights the cross-cultural elements of communication as a problem. In another study, Haarhoff and Hass (2019) examined the link between tourist satisfaction and the locals' foreign language skills in a tourist spot in South Africa. They revealed that due to poor English skills, the tourists experienced dissatisfaction, misunderstandings, and even frustration. According to Zegers and Auron (2022), these cross-cultural communication problems stem from the complexity of culture, including how people use a language in communication. Therefore, the role of language and multicultural awareness are essential in improving cross-cultural communication (Unachukwu et al., 2023). Despite its importance, the existing literature investigating cross-cultural communication challenges in the field of tourism, particularly among pedicab drivers and vendors, is surprisingly scant, and this study seeks to address this gap.

Drawing from the background of the study above, three research questions for this study are formulated as follows:

1. What are the reasons for pedicab drivers and vendors around tourist destinations in Banda Aceh to use English when they meet foreign tourists?
2. What are the obstacles that pedicab drivers and vendors often experience when communicating in English with foreign tourists around tourist destinations in Banda Aceh?
3. What are the efforts that pedicab drivers and vendors put in to improve their English when communicating with foreign tourists around tourist destinations in Banda Aceh?

This research seeks to explore cross-cultural communication challenges faced by the respondents when communicating with foreign tourists. Therefore, it aims to offer pedagogical insights to increase students' motivation and awareness regarding the importance and need of English in today's world and for job prospects, particularly in the fields of tourism and hospitality. It is also expected to provide English teachers with a better understanding of the tourist industry's potential and provide students with relevant knowledge and skills through engaging teaching materials in English for tourism. Furthermore, teachers are expected to have the necessary skills to serve as facilitators and mentors, inspiring students to succeed in the ever-evolving global tourism industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Importance of English-Speaking Skills in Tourism Industry

In English for Tourism studies, the importance and impact of English skills in tourism-related areas have been well-documented. [Malini et al. \(2022\)](#), for instance, analyzed the local tourist industry's English demands to provide a need analysis of hotel and restaurant staff in Bali. They found out that English speaking is the most needed skill for most employees for having basic conversations with and giving information to tourists. In an earlier study, [Bury and Oka \(2017\)](#) explored the perspectives of students at a Japanese university on the importance of English in the tourism and hospitality industries. They suggested that communicative skills, confidence, English listening, and speaking were most essential to pupils. They further proposed that English for Tourism and Hospitality courses should include elements that primarily emphasize these skills, without neglecting the importance of English reading and writing, which were also considered significant.

Previous research also pointed out several key issues regarding the use of English in a tourism setting, including the use of incorrect terminology, the struggle to comprehend foreign accents, insufficient vocabulary, and a lack of grammatical proficiency ([Fujita, 2019](#); [Malini et al., 2022](#)). In addition, [Lee and Lee \(2023\)](#) assessed Korean tourists' perceptions of English as a lingua franca (ELF) to weigh a better understanding of the ELF phenomenon in tourist areas. Their finding indicated that the use of English as a means of communication in tourist places is seen as a chance for personal and societal growth. However, it raised concerns about unjust linguistic power dynamics and linguistic hegemony. These findings draw attention among tourism stakeholders to meet the needs of the global tourist business, which requires improved English language competencies, while also paying attention to the cultural implications of the use of English as an ELF in tourism destinations.

2.2 Issues on Cross-cultural Communication in Tourism

Cross-cultural communication plays an essential role in the global tourism sector and serves as a crucial platform for direct communication between different cultures, leading to the exchange of values and experiences (Azarova et al., 2019). According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013), cross-cultural communication refers to the situation in which individuals from a range of cultural backgrounds interact with one another, whether it be in person or at a distance. Spoken and written language, body language, and the language of etiquette and protocol are all potential components of this communication (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013).

The existing research on cross-cultural communication is extensive and is conducted in many different disciplines (see Sabre & Mohandas, 2023; Unachukwu et al., 2023; Wulandari, 2023; Zegers & Auron, 2022). These studies mainly focus on examining the barriers faced by the respondents and their strategies for cross-cultural communication. In the field of tourism, in particular, research on this matter has yielded several key issues. Luka (2023) examined the challenges of intergenerational and intercultural communication in tourist and hospitality businesses, specifically focusing on issues related to language barriers and differing communication styles. Her findings validate that generational disparities have influenced the communication process. Nevertheless, people's conduct was mostly shaped by their cultural background and languages, and the bulk of disagreements were caused by cultural differences rather than generational gaps (Luka, 2023). In an earlier study, Cheok et al. (2015) highlighted that cultural friction in the hospitality business is driven by disparities in socioeconomic conditions, power dynamics, and control, which in turn impact cross-cultural service interplays. This study further uncovered that both visitors and service providers employ various strategies to assert power and establish dominance in their interactions, such as subjective essentialism and stereotyping, in order to accomplish their objectives (Cheok et al., 2015).

Tackling the challenges that arise from cross-cultural communication is crucial to improving customer satisfaction and guaranteeing the success of enterprises in the tourist industry. Recent research has suggested several approaches to address the challenges of cross-cultural communication in the tourism industry. These approaches include enhancing the quality of text translations for cultural tourism, enhancing the efficiency of communication regarding cultural tourism, and cultivating tourism talents to improve intercultural communication skills (Yibing, 2021). Additionally, the provision of cross-cultural awareness training to service providers and the promotion of cross-cultural understanding among staff have been identified as essential measures (Cheok et al., 2015).

2.3 The Role of Pedicab Drivers and Vendors in Tourism

Situated in the most western part of Indonesia, Aceh has a rich cultural legacy, particularly the city of Banda Aceh. The support for tourism growth in Aceh, which is characterized by Islamic law and culture, is influenced by the socio-demographic characteristics and cultural structure of the local communities (Kayat et al., 2015). Different expectations about manners, gestures, and ways to communicate are only a few of the unique issues that Aceh's cultural background brings, and they may impact interactions between residents and visitors.

Therefore, the tourism sector in Aceh offers an invaluable perspective for analyzing cross-cultural communication, especially when it comes to the crucial roles played by vendors and pedicab drivers. According to [Setiawan \(2021\)](#), pedicab drivers and vendors are likely to gather in crowded places, such as tourist destinations, to look for greater opportunities to sell their services. Additionally, [Ariefianto and Hilmi \(2019\)](#) stated that vendors located near tourist destinations play a significant role in determining the success of regional tourism destination development. Both studies underline that support from these local professions is needed to flourish sustainable tourism. Thus, this present study contributes to the limited research in this area, providing educators with insights to promote cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness in developing a variety of teaching resources, such as textbooks, worksheets, and digital content in English language teaching, especially English for tourism.

3. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, as it aimed to delve into the reasons, obstacles, and efforts of pedicab drivers and vendors in communicating with foreign tourists. To gain an in-depth exploration of the subject ([Cohen et al., 2011](#)), this research was conducted through individual semi-structured and open-ended interviews at two tourist destinations in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, namely Ulee Lheue Port and Tsunami Museum, which are well-known and among the most recommended places in Banda Aceh ([Wonderful Indonesia, n.d.](#)). The subjects of this research are four pedicab drivers and four vendors. To elaborate, PD1, PD2, VD1, and VD2 are from the Tsunami Museum, and PD3, PD4, VD3, and VD4 are from Ulee Lheue Port.

There are 15 basic questions in the interview, adapted from [Nabilla \(2019\)](#). In the first part of the interview, the researchers asked about the perceptions of respondents about using English while communicating with foreign tourists. In the second part, the obstacles that they experienced while communicating with foreign tourists were inquired. Finally, in the third part, they were interrogated about their efforts to improve their English skills. The individual interviews were carried out in the respondents' mother tongue, Acehnese or Indonesian, and lasted around 30 to 60 minutes. They were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English.

The data were analyzed using the analysis steps proposed by [Creswell \(2013\)](#). This process included organizing the data, describing, categorizing, interpreting, and representing the report. Before beginning the coding process, the researchers carried out their own independent reading of the transcripts and became familiar with them. The data were coded by the lead author, then the others reviewed and made any necessary adjustments to the codes. Following this step, the researchers worked together to develop, characterize, and label the categories through the process of reaching a consensus.

4. RESULTS

This section presents findings in response to the three research questions regarding English use by pedicab drivers and vendors in Banda Aceh's tourist

destinations. The results highlight their motivations for using English, the challenges encountered in communication with foreign tourists, and the efforts made to improve their English proficiency, offering a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in tourist interactions.

4.1 Motivations for Using English

In response to the first research question, English was found to be very important for both pedicab drivers and vendors. However, each respondent had different reasons for using the English language. Here are some of the reasons:

4.1.1 To offer products

A respondent, VD1, a vendor in the Tsunami Museum, explained that she enjoys English and that when she used it to offer her products, foreigners who were previously uninterested in purchasing what she was selling became interested.

- (1) I like to use English because when I'm using it, foreigners who are at first not interested in buying our products become interested. But if we can't speak English, how can we communicate with foreigners? How can we call them to visit our shop? If we have been asked about our product's price, how can we tell them? That's why English is important to me. (VD1)

VD1 explained that another reason she uses English is because she sells in a tourist destination where tourists visit daily. However, due to her limited English proficiency, she speaks slowly when communicating with foreigners.

- (2) Because I sell near the entrance of the museum, I want to talk to them, but because I'm not used to it, I can't communicate with them. So, I usually just speak slowly to them. (VD1)

Another vendor respondent, VD2, expressed a similar view to VD1. Both stated that their reason for using English is their work in tourist destinations and their desire to offer products to tourists. However, both VD2 and VD1 have limited proficiency in English. As a result, VD2 also speaks only a few words in English.

- (3) I'm interested. Like as I said earlier, we sell in areas where foreigners often come. So, we sell while we offer our products to the buyers. If we want to offer our products to foreigners but we can't talk to them, how can we offer it, right? (VD2)

The vendor at Ulee Lheue Port, VD3, explained that he had no formal education in English. However, he expressed an interest in the language. When a foreigner arrives, he attempts to offer his products in English to facilitate understanding. However, his English is very basic, and at times, he resorts to speaking Indonesian with the foreign tourists.

- (4) I'm interested. If a foreigner comes, we have to serve them in English. But we can't. I can't speak English, so I just speak with them in Indonesian. I just speak the language that we can, I usually just speak the basic English conversation. (VD3)

VD3 mentioned that he can speak a little English, having learned from other foreigners and pedicab drivers who frequent the area where he works. When he

encounters a foreign tourist, he often asks his pedicab driver friends to communicate with the foreigner on his behalf.

- (5) I was taught by the foreigners and pedicab drivers who hang out at my shop. (V3)
- (6) Sometimes I ask for help from the pedicab drivers who are good at English. Many pedicab drivers can speak English in here. (V3)

Another vendor, VD4, gave a similar response to VD3. He expressed interest in learning English because it allows him to attract foreign customers to his shop. However, due to his lack of formal education, VD4 struggles with the language and feels limited in what he can do to improve his English skills.

- (7) I'm actually interested, but I can't speak English. I was interested because I can call foreigners to come to us, to my shop. But since I can't, what can I do. (VD4)

VD4 gave a similar response to VD3. When he encounters a foreigner and cannot understand them, VD4 asks his friend, a pedicab driver, to communicate on his behalf. VD4 also mentioned that he is unable to speak English.

- (8) At most, I'll call my friend, ask him to sit next to the foreigner, and he is the one who spoke to that foreigner. (VD4)

VD4's first encounter with English occurred after the 2004 tsunami when many foreigners from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) arrived. Although he did not formally learn the language, he observed the foreigners and engaged in conversation with them when they had no one else to talk to.

- (9) After tsunami, there were many NGO's [Non Governmental Organization] people that came here. We didn't learn English, we usually just followed them. If they didn't have friends to talk to, we talked to them instead. (VD4)

4.1.2 *To tour foreigners around the city*

PD3 explained that he is very interested in using English in his work because it allows him to serve foreign tourists, engage with them while they wait for the ferry to Sabang, and offer tours around tourist destinations in Banda Aceh.

- (10) I am interested, as I said earlier. With English, it is easier for us to talk to foreign tourists. So, by using English we can serve them, can entertain them. If they arrive at 8 am and the ship is no longer in port, we can lobby them until they wait for the next ship at 2 pm. We can explain about tsunami sites, we can take them for a tour, so they don't get bored. Like promoting tourism in Banda Aceh. (PD3)

PD3's interest in learning English began after he met two kind female foreign tourists who did not speak Indonesian, while he lacked English proficiency. He felt it was a missed opportunity not to show them around Banda Aceh due to this language barrier.

- (11) The first time I learned English was...when I was excited to meet two female tourists, they were very nice. They didn't speak Indonesian; I didn't speak English. So, at that time we had a conversation like a deaf person. But I was comfortable with them. After getting to know them...we went to eat and drink but couldn't communicate with each other. That's when I felt "it's a shame

if I can't take them touring around" so that's when I learned English, especially when I was in high school. My motivation is from them, from tourists like that. (PD3)

PD3's interest in using English in his work stemmed from his positive experiences with friendly foreign tourists, motivating him to improve his English skills to offer tours and explanations about Banda Aceh.

4.1.3 Enhancing knowledge to prevent miscommunication

Another pedicab driver at Ulee Lheue Port, PD4, stated that he uses English to enhance his knowledge and prevent future miscommunications with foreigners.

(12) Just to increase knowledge. So that there is no misunderstanding between foreigners and pedicab drivers when negotiating. (PD4)

PD4 explained that his desire to improve his English proficiency stemmed from a previous misunderstanding with a foreigner. During this incident, he intended to communicate that the fare was B but mistakenly stated A. As a result, when the fare of B was charged, the foreigner insisted on the price of A and felt that they had been scammed. Consequently, PD4 aims to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

(13) I've had an incident. So, this foreigner, if we say A, they demand A. Our English is not that good, so we say what should be B becomes A. We pedicab drivers, I'm sorry to say, we lack education; just graduating from high school is already great. It's better if we give them the look of "this is the fare" in clear English so that there's no more quarreling. (PD4)

PD4 stated that his lack of formal education contributed to his insufficient English proficiency, which led to misunderstandings with foreigners.

4.2 Challenges Encountered in Communication with Foreign Tourists

The respondents recognized the importance of English in their work. This section outlines the obstacles they faced in their work. The following are some of the challenges encountered by the respondents.

4.2.1 Word recall difficulties

At the Tsunami Museum, PD1 explained that his obstacles include forgetting English words, experiencing a decline in hearing due to his old age, and occasionally encountering unfamiliar vocabulary used by foreigners.

(14) I don't understand what the foreigners are saying anymore. I'm already old, so I've forgotten a lot of English words. I also can't hear what the foreigners are saying clearly. (PD1)

A vendor at the Tsunami Museum, VD1, reported that she experienced difficulty when she wished to engage in further conversation with a foreigner but forgot the English terms she needed, limiting her ability to communicate effectively.

- (15) The difficulty is sometimes when we want to talk to them or ask them questions, we forget and don't know what to say anymore. We want to talk; I like to talk to the foreigners. Because I sell near the entrance of the museum, I want to talk to them. But because I can't and I'm not used to speaking in English. (VD1)

VD1 finds it challenging to communicate with foreigners due to her lack of familiarity with speaking English, which often leads her to forget the words she intends to use during interactions.

- (16) They asked, "How much?" in English, then I answered "ten thousand" in English. I wanted to ask them "from where" but I forgot the words, I didn't know how to use those words in English. So, my obstacle is because I'm not used to speaking English. (VD1)

4.2.2 *Challenges in understanding foreigners*

VD3 at Ulee Lheue Port stated that the obstacle he faced was difficulty in understanding what the foreigner was saying.

- (17) When they talk to us, it's hard and difficult to understand what they're saying. (VD3)

VD3 clarified that it was not merely a lack of understanding of English; rather, he had no knowledge of the language at all.

- (18) It's not that I don't understand, but I really don't know how to speak in English. (VD3)

In the interview, VD3 explained that he did not attend school and therefore had not learned English. This lack of education contributes to his difficulty in communicating with foreigners, as he has no understanding of their conversations.

4.2.3 *Speech speed and accents*

Another challenge PD1 encountered was his unfamiliarity with the accents used by foreigners, as well as the fact that some of the words they employed were entirely new to him, making communication particularly difficult.

- (19) My obstacles are mostly the accents, and they use words that I've never heard of. Then there are also those who speak fast; it's hard for me to understand. (PD1)

PD2 also encountered challenges, noting that English tourists spoke too quickly, whereas ASEAN tourists spoke at a more manageable pace. Additionally, PD2 remarked that the accents of English tourists were often quite strong.

- (20) The obstacle is the English tourist. They speak the language too fast. For ASEAN tourists, they do not speak that fast. England speaks too fast, like our people when speaking Acehnese. Sometimes we also don't understand. The English accent is too thick. (PD2)

Another difficulty VD1 encountered was the speed at which foreigners spoke. When they spoke too quickly, she became confused; however, if they spoke slowly, she was able to understand their messages.

- (21) Because sometimes the tourists speak too fast. But if they speak slowly and they say that they are from Italy or Japan, then we understand, so we don't get confused anymore. (VD1)

VD2 was also experiencing the same issue. She noted that the foreigners' accents posed a challenge for her, and that speaking speed and slang were her most significant obstacles. In such instances, VD2 typically requests that the foreigners speak more slowly.

- (22) The accent, especially on average, of the foreigners when they speak is very fast. It's natural because it's their language. Usually if they talk fast, I request, "Can you slow down?" (VD2)
- (23) The accent makes me confused, especially the foreigners who speak in their slang. I don't know the slang of the foreigners. (VD2)

Another pedicab driver at Ulee Lheue Port, PD4, stated that the foreigners' accents also presented an obstacle for him. He added that he lacked a basic understanding of English and therefore needed to learn the language.

- (24) The accent. Because we can't speak English, whether we want to or not because we are dealing with foreigners, we should know some English. That's the obstacle because we don't have basic English. (PD4)

PD4 also noted that foreigners have different pronunciations, which can lead to confusion, especially with words he seldom encounters. However, some of his fellow pedicab drivers can comprehend the words that PD4 finds unfamiliar.

- (25) Because English has so many variations of pronunciations from different countries, such as England and Russia. They use English but their accent is Russian. (PD4)
- (26) Most of the words that are said are words that we rarely hear, it's a bit unfamiliar. But sometimes when they talk in English, there are those of us who are pedicab drivers who understand what they are talking about. (PD4)

4.2.4 Communication challenges with non-English speaking foreigners

PD3 explained that the obstacles he faced depended on the foreigners themselves. He provided examples of tourists from countries such as France or Spain, noting that elderly tourists from these regions typically do not speak English. Consequently, PD3 found it challenging to communicate with tourists from those countries.

- (27) What makes it difficult for me, well sometimes it depends on the tourist. If it's a French tourist, sometimes when I pick them up, they can't speak English. But some of them can speak a little bit, that's my obstacle. If we can master several languages, it's better, even English alone is enough. Old Foreigners from French, and Spanish who are 50 and above, they never use English. They don't like it, they can't speak English, their English at most three or four words. (PD3)

4.2.5 Lack of opportunities for English practice

PD3 stated that one of the obstacles he encountered while learning English was the lack of friends to converse with for practice. He explained that he consistently sought opportunities to practice communication to maintain fluency and become more comfortable speaking in English.

- (28) The obstacle was the first time I learned English. The obstacle if we didn't have friends to talk. If I practice talking to my friends who don't speak English, they will take it as a joke. I tried to find foreigners, and with my friends I talked to those who knew English. Conversation is always necessary, the main thing. To train our courage, to train us to get used to speaking so we don't forget the words. (PD3)

4.3 Efforts to Improve English Proficiency

The respondents recognized the importance of English in their work and encountered various individual obstacles. The following points illustrate their efforts to improve their English language skills.

4.3.1 Note-taking and memorization

VD1 expressed a desire to learn and improve her English skills. However, she was not interested in engaging in long-term study; her primary goal was to interact directly with foreigners without probing into theoretical aspects of the language.

- (29) I would like to improve my English if someone wants to teach me. (VD1)
- (30) If I want to learn, I don't want it to be too long. I just want to be able to say who this is, and from where, instead of learning theoretically from the beginning.

When VD1 first began selling at the Tsunami Museum, a foreigner approached her. As she was unable to respond to the foreigner's questions at that time, VD 1 took it upon herself to learn the necessary English phrases when she returned home. She would write down key phrases, such as 'Rp10.000', in English, and refer to her notes if she encountered the foreigner again.

- (31) When I was just selling in here (Tsunami Museum), a foreigner came and asked, "How much?", I was confused about how to answer. I went home and tried to learn it with my child and asked, "How much is this? Ten thousand is how much in English, twenty thousand is how much, one hundred thousand is how much?". I'll write it down, I'll bring it when I'm working, I'll see the notes if there are any tourists. (VD1)

VD2's response reflects a common dilemma faced by individuals balancing personal aspirations with practical responsibilities. As she has grown older, her priorities have shifted primarily toward financial stability and supporting her family. While she expresses a desire to learn English, this aspiration is hindered by time constraints related to her work and familial obligations.

- (32) I don't have any interest in learning more about English right now. I'm old, and my only focus now is on making money for my family. The motivation to study again is there, it's just that the time is not there anymore. (VD2)

To communicate effectively with foreigners, VD2 employs a similar approach to that of VD1. She writes down essential information in English, such as the currency amount and the total cost of goods purchased, and then memorizes this information.

- (33) Most of the time I take notes like how much is ten thousand rupiah in English; for example, fried meatballs in six pieces will be five thousand rupiah. I wrote it down and memorized it.

4.3.2 Engaging in conversations with foreigners

PD3 at Ulee Lheue Port explained that he enhances his English skills primarily through direct conversations with foreigners. He emphasized that the presence of tourists is crucial for his practice, as it provides him with the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue.

- (34) If there are some foreigners, which obviously can exceed our target to keep studying, but if there are no foreigners, who do I want to talk to? If there are foreigners, like this, I sit with them and talk about “this ship is no longer available right now, at 4 o’clock it gets back here, let’s go around to see the Kapal Apung (floating ship)” like that every day. Every day we meet, every day we communicate, if there are no foreigners then we can’t talk to them and practice. (PD3)

During high school, PD3 developed an interest in English. He did not attend any tutoring sessions and instead was self-taught, utilizing resources such as dictionaries to read and memorize vocabulary.

- (35) How long does it take for me to learn English? That’s the thing I don’t know. Since high school, grade three, I have been learning English. I like English. I don’t have any tutoring; I learn it myself. I read the dictionary, wrote it down, put it in my pocket, and then while sitting, I memorized it, like mineral water in English, for example. (PD3)

Currently, PD3 continues to learn English primarily through interactions with foreigners, focusing on conversational skills.

- (36) For now, I always study when I meet visitors, I just have conversations every day. (PD3)

4.3.3 Seeking assistance from friends

PD4 stated that he learns English using his phone, reading dictionaries, and inviting friends who are proficient in the language. He also consults his fellow pedicab drivers regarding aspects he finds difficult to understand.

- (37) Open my cell phone or while at home read the dictionary or ask someone who understands English. That means we talk about what we don’t understand, then we ask them. We don’t need to be detailed in basic English language; the important thing is to be able to communicate with tourists. (PD4)

PD4 took English lessons when he was around 13 or 14 years old. However, he no longer has time for formal English lessons. Currently, PD4 primarily relies on his friends to help him with aspects of the language he finds difficult to understand.

- (38) I used to take tutoring. But that time I was about 13 or 14 years old, still in junior high school. For now, there is none, meaning to specifically learn English, I don’t have it anymore. I mostly ask friends about words that I don’t know. (PD4)

VD3 improves his English through interactions with foreigners and fellow pedicab drivers who visit his shop. This informal learning environment enables him to practice conversational English. It helps boost his confidence and communication skills with tourists while encouraging a supportive community that enhances his professional growth in tourism.

(39) I was taught by the foreigners and pedicab drivers who hang out at my place. (VD3)

VD4 depends on a fellow pedicab driver to help communicate with foreign tourists. By inviting his friend to join the conversation, he effectively addresses language challenges, improving interactions with visitors and encouraging teamwork among local drivers to enhance their service.

(40) At most, I'll call my pedicab driver friend, ask him to sit next to the foreigner, and he'll do the conversation. (VD4)

5. DISCUSSION

To date, there has been inadequate research on the interactions between pedicab drivers and vendors with foreign visitors, though research has agreed on the significance of English proficiency among residents in tourist areas (Malini et al., 2022; Mesquita, 2021). The present research offers insights about the reasons, obstacles, and efforts of the respondents when they communicate with foreign tourists in tourist destinations in Banda Aceh.

The interviews regarding the reasons that cause pedicab drivers and vendors to use English in their work were conducted in the Tsunami Museum and Ulee Lheue Port as an attempt to answer the first research question in this study. The data suggests that the respondents have different reasons to use English in their work. The most common reason was to be able to serve foreigners with their service, followed by the next reasons which are easier to gain sustenance and to avoid miscommunication. It can be postulated that the respondents intend to serve foreigners because they can be their other income source apart from local visitors. These results are in line with other findings showing that being able to use English brings benefits to the locals, such as drawing in foreign customers and delivering high-quality services that lead to increasing incomes (Giri & Boonrattanakittibhumi, 2021; Malini et al., 2022; Mesquita, 2021). Interestingly, the data revealed the respondents tried to use English to avoid losing their customers due to miscommunication. This finding lends empirical support to Luka's (2023) study that language barriers and distinct communication style might affect the communication process in the field of tourism and hospitality.

Nevertheless, the respondents' use of English in the two places shows differences. At the Tsunami Museum, vendors are more dominant in speaking English, while at the Ulee Lheue Port, pedicab drivers are the dominant speakers. As noticed by the researchers, at Ulee Lheue Port, there was a lack of interaction between foreigners and vendors because foreigners who had gotten off the ship rarely wanted to sit at the vendors' stalls. Usually, the foreigners are immediately picked up by the pedicab drivers and there is no prolonged stay at the port. Consequently, there are more interactions between foreigners and pedicab drivers than with vendors in such a place. As for the Tsunami Museum, the foreigners who came there intended to see the area and stay longer. They spent a significant amount of time looking around the Tsunami Museum and grabbed the merchants' snacks and goods there. For this reason, the dominant speakers in both areas are contrasting.

With regard to the respondents' obstacles, it was found that when the foreigners spoke too fast and used thick accents, then communication between the two parties became difficult. Accordingly, both pedicab drivers and vendors need to pay close

attention to the foreigners' talk to be able to understand and serve them. This is corroborated by Fujita's (2019) study that difficulties in understanding foreign accents have been a concerning issue in tourism areas. Moreover, given that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it is expected that many obstacles are faced when using this language (Rahayu, 2020). Some of the obstacles are from the foreigners as previously mentioned, while others stem from the respondents themselves such as starting to forget words or regretting not caring about learning English back then (Fujita, 2019). Despite these challenges, however, the results contradict the claims of Lee and Lee (2023) that language hegemony and unfair linguistic power dynamics might emerge as a result of the use of English in tourist destinations. The findings indicate positive attitudes of the respondents towards English use as they are not willing to be left behind by other pedicab drivers and vendors who are trying to handle their obstacles and attract more customers, especially foreigners. Thus, this study calls for educators to enhance students' motivation and awareness about the significance and need of English in the contemporary world and for career opportunities, specifically in the tourism and hospitality industry.

According to the results, the respondents dealt with the obstacles that they faced in a variety of ways. The most effort made includes taking notes and memorizing them or even calling their friends to talk to the foreigners. Although most respondents did not learn English from formal education, they improved their skills by self-taught for the sake of being able to serve foreigners and sell their products or services. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be formal education or English language training for these pedicab drivers and vendors so that their English skills are more organized and look more professional (Cheok et al., 2015).

6. CONCLUSION

The findings from this study reveal a complex English language use among pedicab drivers and vendors in Banda Aceh's tourist destinations, addressing their motivations, challenges, and efforts to enhance their proficiency. Respondents indicated a strong motivation to use English primarily to engage with foreign tourists, promote products, and provide tours, with experiences such as positive interactions with tourists spurring their desire to learn the language. However, they faced significant challenges, including difficulties with word recall, understanding foreign accents, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Many respondents acknowledged their limited proficiency, often relying on basic English or resorting to Indonesian for communication. In response, they are making concerted efforts to improve their English skills, including learning from interactions with tourists and peers, and expressing a genuine interest in enhancing their communication capabilities to prevent misunderstandings and better serve their customers. These findings show the importance of English in facilitating successful interactions in a tourism context while highlighting the need for further language support and training for these workers.

Despite the contributions of this study to the field of English language teaching, particularly in English for tourism, it has several limitations due to time constraints. Future research should consider increasing the number of respondents and employing additional data collection instruments, such as surveys and observations, to explore how these professions can be better supported in communicating with foreigners.

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