

The Development of “English Island” as the Main Support of the New Normal Era Tourism Sector in Mentawai Islands

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Abstract. *The tourism sector has become one of the global phenomena that continues to grow and its needs also change. Since the Covid-19 outbreak throughout the world, tourism has also been affected. Based on this phenomena, reforms and even improvements in the quality of tourism are needed, one of which is an increase in English skills in Mentawai Islands. The purpose of this research is to study the English needs of the people in the Mentawai Islands and to develop the island of England as an education program in increasing the global tourism sector in the Mentawai Islands. This type of research is descriptive with a qualitative approach. The data collection techniques used were interviews and observation required in this study. The results show that the English language skills of the people in the Mentawai Islands are still very low so it is difficult to communicate with foreign tourists, this will impact the local economy and also tourism promotion in the Mentawai Island. In addition, English language training in realizing "English Island" is very necessary for the people of the Mentawai Islands. Therefore, the role of the local government and related agencies is needed in developing the English Island program, especially in the New Normal Era so that tourism in the Mentawai Islands will become more global.*

Keywords: *Tourism Sector, English Islands, New Normal Era*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a key economic sector that has grown almost uninterruptedly since 1950. In other words, tourism is one of the important sectors in Indonesia and it is one of the business centers and the largest sources of state revenue. This is in line with what is explained by Fandeli (2001) which states that tourism is a new style of industry capable of producing fast economic growth in providing employment, living standards, and stimulating other productive sectors such as the handicraft industry, souvenirs, lodging, and transportation which are seen as industries. Based on the 2018 Ministry of Tourism's Performance Report, the portion of tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 5.25% and the foreign exchange contribution from the economic sector also continued to increase, even the realization of investment in the tourism sector had reached 80.43% of the target set by the government (CNN Indonesia). Hence, it can be said that tourism has an important role to be a development in Indonesia.

Indonesia's natural wealth is one of the most important attractions in tourism development. In general, it can be seen that Indonesia has a combination of tropical climates where there are 17,508 islands of which 6,000 are uninhabited, and the third-longest coastline in the world after Canada and the European Union. Indonesia is also the largest and most populous archipelago in the world (Juddiseno, 2017). One of the islands of Indonesia which is famous for being beautiful with its very charming beaches in the Mentawai Islands. Mentawai Islands Regency is the only regency in West Sumatra which is an archipelago. Geographically, it is separated from other regencies

in West Sumatra because it is bordered by the sea. Located in the western part of West Sumatra in the waters of the Indian Ocean, it is a group of islands that have the potential for tourism development, especially marine tourism, as a coastal area surrounded by the sea, small islands, the charm of unspoiled forests and specific cultural traditions and type of tectonic island. The role of coastal and marine areas has become an important part of economic development activities in the Mentawai Islands Regency. Since 1998 the Indonesian government has promoted the islands as the Indonesian Marine Tourism Destination (Juddiseno, 2017). The waters of the Mentawai Islands have waves that form beautiful caves and beaches, becoming one of the world's surfing destinations that attract foreign tourists.

Tuapeijat is the capital of the Mentawai Islands Regency, which is the gateway to the islands. In the Regional Development Plan (RKPD), Regional Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMD), and Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPDA), Tuapeijat is included in the tourism development area, especially marine tourism and cultural tourism as one of the regional development priorities. In line with the vision of the Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports of the Mentawai Islands Regency, namely: "Realizing Mentawai as the Main Destination for Exclusive Tourism", the intention is to become a major tourism destination and to make all tourist objects exclusive, organized, managed so that they are of high value. The Mentawai District Government has focused its attention on developing the marine tourism sector because it is a leading sector in development planning. Currently, several areas in the Mentawai Islands Regency have been developed and utilized for marine tourism locations because they have beaches and waves that are good enough for surfing tourism. One of the districts that have the potential to develop marine tourism is Sipora District which has 5 (five) marine tourism objects that have the potential to be developed. Sipora Subdistrict has been stipulated in the RIPPDA for Mentawai Islands Regency in 2011 as one of the tourist destinations and is planned to become marine tourism.

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency for Mentawai Islands Regency in 2013, there were 194 tourist objects in ten districts in the Mentawai Islands Regency which have the potential to be developed, among others; 22 natural panorama tourism objects, 150 marine tourism objects, 9 water source tourism objects, and 13 cultural tourism objects. The type of marine tourism is more dominant, therefore one of the tourism subsectors that is getting serious attention and good management is marine tourism, which has serious potential to be developed for the advancement of the Mentawai region. So far, tourism in this segment is the most attractive to foreign tourists. Activities that can be carried out include beach tourism, surfing, sailing diving/snorkeling, cruising, swimming, and fishing.

Based on this explanation, it can be stated that the Mentawai Islands have excellent tourism potential to attract local tourists and foreign tourists. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, it has had a very significant impact on the development of tourism in the Mentawai Islands. As well known, tourism is one factor that most affected for the first time by the Covid-19 pandemic. Social restriction policies such as travel restrictions and flight cancellation and reduction in frequency, hotel closings have reduced the supply and demand of domestic and international tourism (Christian & Hidayat, 2020). The tourism sector, which has a strategic position for foreign exchange earnings and has an important contribution to employment (Bank Indonesia, 2018), it is predicted that the Coordinating Ministry for the Economy will experience a decline during the pandemic by up to 90% compared to 2019 which reached USD17.4 billion (money.compas.com, 2020).

Foreign tourist visits to Indonesia also fell cumulatively in the period January to June 2020 by 59.96% (3.09 million people) compared to the number of foreign tourist visits in 2019 (7.72 million visits) (BPS, 2020b). This situation is no less different from tourism in the Mentawai Islands. Data owned by the Mentawai Disparpora, the number of travelers in January 2020 was recorded at 30,081 people, then in February it increased by 42,512 people and in March from 1 to 17 March 2020 the number of visitors was 257 people. This data shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has a very significant effect on the arrival of local and foreign tourists.

This phenomenon certainly cannot be ignored continuously, because the tourism sector is expected to be the leading support for regional economic growth by making it one of the priorities in development and becoming one of the main performance indicators of the regional government (Dispanhorbun West Sumatra, 2018). This Covid-19 pandemic can be used as an opportunity to improve, especially in developing tourism in the Mentawai Islands itself.

One of the important aspects of tourism development is the language because the development of the tourism sector in Indonesia must be followed by an increase in resource capacity. In other words, more and more people are absorbed in the tourism sector and are able to improve the lives of Indonesians. Based on this phenomenon, the ability in foreign languages, one of which is English, is needed, especially for people who live in the Mentawai Islands area. However, based on English proficiency, Indonesians are still in the lowest position among other developing countries. EF Education First released the 9th edition of the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) research report in 2019 or studies that measure the level of English proficiency in adults from 100 countries and regions in the world. Indonesia is ranked 61st with a score reduction from 51.58 in 2018 to 50.06 in 2019. Indonesia is still below the average English proficiency in the Asian region (53.00) or ranked 5th under other ASEAN countries such as Singapore with a score (66.82), Philippines (60.04), and Malaysia (58.55) at very high proficiency levels, and Vietnam (51.57) at intermediate proficiency levels.

Meanwhile, a significant increase in English proficiency scores occurred in several regions in Indonesia such as Yogyakarta which outperformed 23 other provinces in Indonesia, as well as Bandung. In 2020, the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) research report that the level of English proficiency in Indonesia is ranked 74st with categorized Low. It can be concluded that the English proficiency of Indonesians is still in the low category. Significantly, in the Mentawai Islands, based on the observations made, the foreign language skills of the people in the Mentawai Islands are very low, even they often use the Mentawai language. This makes it difficult to communicate for local and even foreign tourists with people in the Mentawai Islands who are directly involved in tourism in the Mentawai Islands. Based on this, it can be said that the development of human resources for tourism in the Mentawai Islands is required, one of which is the ability to speak English. This research emphasizes the need for English as the focus of the study because it is associated with the scientific field of researchers who try to see tourism through the lens of language, namely how language can help the region in developing potential the tour goes international especially in. this new normal era. Through this research, it is expected to be able to assist local governments in organizing tourism-based community programs such as the "English Island" Program in Mentawai. Researchers mapped a number of locations that become tourist areas based on the recommendation of the Tourism Office which is assumed to require English language skills as a supporting tool in improving people's lives through strengthening tourism and also assessing English opportunities for the surrounding community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Tourism Development*

Tourism activities are community-based activities, where the resources and uniqueness of the local community as physical and non-physical elements (traditions and culture) contained in the community are the main driving elements of tourism activities themselves (Veen & Song, 2011). Tourism is an activity that involves communities in areas that are tourist destinations. A tourist attraction that can interest to be visited by tourists must meet the requirements for regional development. Yoeti (2017) states several conditions for tourism marketing, including:

- a. The area must have something to see. This means that there must be tourist objects and tourist attractions, which differ from what other regions have. The area has a special charm.

- b. The area must have what is called something to do. Besides being able to be seen and witnessed, recreational facilities must also be provided that can make tourists feel at home for quite a long time.
- c. This area must have what is called something to buy. This means that there must be a shopping mall in the area. Especially the handicrafts of the local community.

It can be concluded that the tourism product is not a real product. This product is a series of services that not only have economic aspects, but also social, psychological, and natural characteristics, although the form of tourism itself is largely influenced by economic behavior. In addition, the participation of local communities related to tourism development in determining the vision, mission, and objectives of tourism development is needed. Tourism development must be able to provide quality job opportunities for local communities. So, it can be concluded that the local community plays a role as host and also an important factor in developing tourism in a tourist area.

2.2 "English Island" English Language Training

English has an important role in tourism because this language is one of the international languages that is used almost all over the world. The use of English in the tourism industry is an important factor because it facilitates communication between tourists and tourists who come from all over the world. This is also in line with what was expressed by Mahmoud (2005) who stated that mastery of the English language for tourism actors is very important. Besides that, English language skills also have an important role in building a career in the tourism industry (Zhang, 2007).

Furthermore, according to Al-Saadi (2015) mastery of English in the world of tourism will have an effect on several related things, such as:

- a. Increase customer satisfaction. English skills enable tourism actors to increase customer satisfaction.
- b. Motivate international tourists. Having the ability to speak English will attract international tourists to come because the communication will be more effective.
- c. Helping to understand the needs of tourists better. With good communication, all the needs and needs of tourists can be understood and overcome.
- d. Helping to understand better other cultures.
- e. Helping to improve the effectiveness of communication both internal and external communications.

3. RESEARCH METHODS/METHODOLOGY

The type of research is a qualitative descriptive study, which is a type of qualitative analysis. According to Alston dan Bowles (2003), this is a study that produces data that appears as words, not numbers, the data may have been collected in various ways (observation, interviews, document digest, tape), and usually processed in approx. Therefore, in this research is a type of qualitative descriptive research using a phenomenological approach to find the meaning of experiences in life to understand the phenomena experienced by the subject. Where data from the phenomenon under study can be collected in various ways, including observation and interviews, both in-depth interviews. In-depth means looking for something deep in order to get a sense of what appears to be straight-forward (easy) actually, potentially more complicated (complicated). Researchers must also plan the truth of events or incidents by in-depth interviewing. The location of this research is in the Mentawai Islands Regency, West Sumatra Province. The sample of this study amounted to 40 people comprising resort administrators and marine tourism administrators who are in the capital city of the Mentawai Islands district, namely Tuapejar which is one of the main islands and is also the most visited by local and foreign tourists. The data collected in this study focuses on the inhibiting factors and supporting factors of the "English Island" development program on the island of Tuapejat. The data analysis technique used by researchers is data analysis in progress or flow (flow model analysis). There are several steps taken in the data analysis technique, namely the data reduction stage, the data presentation stage, and the conclusion stage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia is a country that has a very large and attractive tourism potential to be explored and visited by the world community. The tourism potential is also not only in terms of natural resource wealth but also the diversity of ethnicities and cultures in Indonesia. One island that has a name by the eyes of the world is the Mentawai Islands. The Mentawai Islands are one of the districts in West Sumatra province.

Currently, the Mentawai Islands Regency Government has focused its attention on developing the tourism sector into the main sector in the development of the Mentawai Islands area. In the Regional Short-Term Development Plan (RPJPD), Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) and the annual Renja of Mentawai Islands Regency, tourism is one of the regional development priorities. The vision that the Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports wants to achieve is "Realizing Mentawai as the Main Destination for Exclusive Tourism", which means becoming a major tourism destination and making all tourist objects exclusive, organized, and managed so that they are of high value. One effort of the Mentawai Islands Regency Government is to make policies in the effort to develop tourism in the Mentawai Islands Regency.

One of the policies undertaken is to determine strategic tourism areas in three locations in the Mentawai Islands, namely Mappadegat, Madobag, and Katiet. The purpose of developing tourist destinations in the three locations is to explore the potential of natural and aquatic resources (land and sea) as well as culture, as a vehicle for the development of a Tourism Village by seeking community participation in the design and utilization of its environment (PT.Winaguna Sarana Teknik, 2011). The tourism zoning in the Mentawai Islands is divided into three tourism groups, namely marine tourism, nature tourism, and cultural tourism. The marine tourism group is a tour that has become a major tourist attraction in the Mentawai Islands. The type of marine tourism that can be enjoyed is surfing which is very attractive for foreign tourists, namely world surfers who come to enjoy the potential of the waves. Other marine tourism objects, namely underwater park panoramic tours (snorkeling), fishing tours (fishing), water tours (jet sky, sky water, and longboats), and beach tours. Natural tourism groups are waterfall tours, lake tours, panoramic mountain tours, river tours, and mangrove forest tours, flora and fauna tours, plantation tours, and research tours. Natural attractions in the Mentawai Islands such as the National Park, namely the Siberut National Park Conservation Forest Area. Apart from the advantages of marine tourism and nature tourism, another advantage is cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is also the interest of tourists to enjoy cultural tourism in the Mentawai Islands. The life of the Mentawai people who live in their traditional 'sabalungan' culture. The term sikerei for the adherent community is an interesting thing with cultural tourism. sikerei is a person usually called a dukun, a person who has the expertise to treat using traditional medicines from nature. To become a sikerei there are rituals that must be passed, and tattoos are unique which we can see from a sikerei.

The facilities, supporting infrastructure, and human resources in the Mentawai Islands Regency are generally still very minimal. The attention of various stakeholders towards the development of tourist attraction areas is still lacking, so that area management activities have not been seen and have not been fully explored, and the increase in the optimal utilization of tourism potential is still facing serious problems and its contribution to improving the welfare of the community tends not to be felt.

One of the important factors supporting the development of tourism in the Mentawai Islands is the ability of human resources to communicate using English. Even the results of the observations made, there are still several groups of people who even find it difficult to communicate using Indonesian, because the everyday language used is the Mentawai language. It has to be a concern because English language skills are one of the supporting factors of tourism development in an area. As we know, language as a means of communication plays an important role, because it is an international language. The role of language is indispensable for building social relationships and as a means of communication. The role of English in the tourism sector is to facilitate communication, avoid misunderstandings, strengthen relationships, and create a family atmosphere between tourists and people who are associated with these tourists.

Based on the results of the analysis of the questionnaire data and also the interviews, it can be concluded that 94% of the old islanders who on average work in the tourism sector on the Old Island, such as coast guards, resort guards, and traders have very low English skills. The results of this questionnaire data are also in line with the results of interviews. It is explained that in order to communicate using English, the people in Tuapejat Island use a cellphone to translate it, sometimes even those who want to shop or do not shop because they have difficulty communicating in English, especially for foreign tourists who do not have a guide.

The result of analyzing data from the questionnaire shown that, all agreed to answer that English needs to be trained to them because it is important in supporting their profession which is closely related to beach tourism. In the statement points of readiness to learn English if practiced, 36 informants answered that they were willing to learn, while 4 people answered depending on the circumstances. Those who answer depend on circumstances because of time. If the time allows them to participate in practicing and learning English. Therefore, it can be concluded that the people of Tuapejat Island really need English in supporting tourism.

Furthermore, the results of data analysis also show several factors supporting the community in learning English so that they are able to realize the "English Island" program in the Mentawai Islands, namely:

- a. The public is aware of the importance of the ability to speak English as a factor in tourism development in the Mentawai islands so that this can be an evaluation for the local government to realize the "English Island" program in the Mentawai islands.
- b. People have a high interest in learning English. All participants of this study expressed their willingness if there was a free English training program.

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that English language training or the "English Island" program in the Mentawai Islands is really needed. It can be seen from the facts in the field that language is a supporting factor in developing natural tourism potential in the Mentawai islands. In general, the people at the beach have a lot of hope for the local government to conduct socialization or training in developing English language skills. They agreed that having sufficient English language skills would help their efforts to meet their daily needs and help develop the potential for nature tourism in their area. They also think that the English training that they need is the ability to listen and also speak in English.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on a needs analysis of the development of the "English Island" program in the Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra Province. This research is located on one of the main islands in the Mentawai Islands district, namely Tuapejat Island. Based on the results of the data analysis, it can be concluded that:

- a. The tourism potential of the Mentawai Islands is very large, consisting of marine tourism, nature tourism, and cultural tourism that must be maximized.
- b. Tourism facilities and infrastructure in the Mentawai islands are still said to be said, especially the community's ability to receive foreign guests.
- c. The English proficiency of local people who have jobs directly involved in tourism is still in the very low category.
- d. The public realizes that having English language skills is very important and needed. They think that the "English Island" training program is very much needed because it will help them in offering goods and services to foreign tourists who frequently visit Tuapejat Island.

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