The Perceptions of Students on the Importance of English Speaking Skill in the Tourism Sector

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Abstract
The objective of this study is to find out the perceptions of students on the importance of English speaking skill in the tourism sector. The instruments used to collect the data were the questionnaire and interview. Both the instruments were adapted from Arslan and Akbarov (2012). The set of interview questions were adjusted by the writer to figure out the perceptions of students toward the importance of English speaking skill in tourism sector. The subjects of this study were the fourth and sixth semester students of Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh. The writer took 25 students as the sample. The data were analyzed by using qualitative data analysis (data reduction, data display, and conclusion). Based on the data obtained from both instruments, the findings showed that the majority of students perceived that English speaking skills in the tourism sector was important. It can be seen from the data result based on each category of the questionnaire item. More than 50% of the respondents perceived that English for tourism was attractive to learn. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents stated that English for tourism was useful in finding future jobs. Based on the third category, there were 91% of the respondents stated that English was important in facilitating communication process in the tourism sector. Moreover, there were 56% of the respondents stated there was an impact of speaking English to native language. The last category, 91% of the students perceived that they were aware of basic terms of tourism in English.

Key words: Students’ Perception, Speaking, Tourism Sector

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of important industries for most countries in the world. Each year, there are a great number of tourists travelling across countries for different purposes, particularly for leisure, business, and study. According to The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2016, international tourist arrivals have increased from 25 million globally in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 674 million in 2010, and 1186 million in 2015. Many factors are involved in the making
of a country as tourists preferred destination. The biggest factors that can develop a tourism destination are the government and private sectors. According to Rao and Abdullah (2007), both the government and the private sectors are the big contributors for the development of tourism destination.

In Indonesia, the travel and tourism industries have increased a total of USD 80 billion or approximately 9.3% of the country's GDP in 2014. According to Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics Agency (BPS), international tourist arrivals to Indonesia in 2016 reached 9,413,814 and it is being a growth of 9.54 percent year on year. In fact, tourism industry creates thousands of jobs for Indonesian in various sectors, ranging from hotels and villas to tourist attractions and transportations. In Aceh, the number of foreign tourist reached 14,000 people in the first semester of 2015. According to Indonesia’s Central Bureau of Statistics Agency (BPS), it increased about 8.84 percent compared to the same period last year.

Since tourism industry is one of major sources of income, every country in the world is preparing their best tourism destinations and hospitality to welcome the international visitors. Consequently, there is a great demand for human resources. In order to produce qualified human resources in tourism sector, a number of tourism education institutions have been organized throughout the world.

Oral communication skill in intercultural context is ultimately being one of the important requirements for people who study and work in the tourism sector. In such contexts, the English has become increasingly significant as it has been recognized as the global language which is commonly used by native and non-native English speakers around the world. Moreover, Cohen (2004) states that tourism personnel are required to communicate effectively in English because the majority of international tourists can speak English as it is widely taught across the world.

However, oral communication is still a challenge to be mastered by the EFL learners. According to Tanveer (2007, p. 1), many EFL students express inability and sometimes even acknowledge the failure in speaking foreign language. There are many problems faced by students in speaking. First, students often have incorrect pronunciation. Second, students have lack of confidence to share their opinions and ideas. Third, students are lack of imagination and critical thinking. Furthermore, Ur (1996, p. 121) states that the problems in speaking English faced by students include inhibition, nothing to say, the low of participation, the theme to be spoken and use of mother tongue.

Several studies related to students' perception about the importance of English speaking skill in tourism sector have been conducted before. Rao and Abdullah (2007) did a research about the role of English language in the tourism industry. The result of the study shows that the human resource factor plays an eminent role in promoting the tourism spot in a country. A good command of the English language is always regarded as an asset for tourism personnel. Another researcher, Simion (2012) did a research about the importance of teaching English in the field of tourism in universities. The researcher suggested that students of tourism should be aware of the enormous importance of English in their education because it is an essential tool in any field of their future activity in the tourism sector.

The phenomenon also happened to the EFL learners in Aceh. Based on the preliminary study that was conducted by the writer (February 8th, 2017) in
Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh, the writer found that most of students are still reluctant to speak. From an informal interview with several students, the writer found out that shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence considered as the biggest problems which affect their ability to speak. They were afraid of speaking because they were fear of making mistake while practicing. Moreover, many students were not able to speak in English and they could not express their idea orally. It might be caused by the lack of self-confidence or less of vocabulary while speaking.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Speaking

Speaking is one of the four primary skills that is used by speakers to communicate in any language, particularly when speakers are not using their mother tongue (Boonkit, 2010, p. 1305). As stated by Harmer, (2007, p. 38), speaking is the way to construct words and phrases with individual sounds, use pitch change, intonation and stress to convey different meaning. Moreover, Gaskari & Azari (2013, p. 241) added that speaking is the matter of capability of speaker to deliver messages to the listener in daily life communication.

2.2 Components in Speaking

2.2.1 Grammar

Grammar is the set of structural rules that govern the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in any given natural language. According to Swan (2005), grammar is the rules that show how words are combined, arranged or changed to show certain kinds of meaning. Coghill and Magendanz (2003) also say that the grammar of a language is the set of rules that govern its structure. Grammar determines how words are arranged to meaningful units.

2.2.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the language aspects which is very important in learning language skills including speaking. Vocabulary is about words; where they come from, how they change, how they relate to each other and how to use them in sentences (Bauer, 1998, p. 2). In order to express their ideas, students have to master adequate vocabulary to undertake conversation clearly and fluently.

2.2.3 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way in which a language or a word or sound is pronounced. In the same perspective, Nunan and Carter (2001) state that pronunciation is the sounds we make while speaking. Therefore, one of the things that we should consider when we are speaking is pronouncing words clearly in order to get successful in transferring words.

2.2.4 Fluency

Fluency is defined as the ability to speak a language well without stopping or making mistakes. Fluency is an ability to produce discourse that is comprehensible, easy to follow, and free from errors and breakdowns in communication. In addition, fluency is an ability to use long sentences with few pauses, in coherence in the topics, and be creative and imaginative, in their language use.

2.3 Speaking as The Language Skill
According to Chastain (1976: 333) speaking is a productive skill. Its development is undertaken after the receptive skill of listening comprehension. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral aspect. Like the other skills, speaking is more complicated than it seems and it involves more than just pronouncing words.

Generally, there are four categories used in a conversation. The first category is communicative ability and content, which refers to the interlocutor's ability to express opinions and information. The second category is pronunciation and fluency, which refers to the interlocutor's ability to produce comprehensible language and other aspects such as stress patterns, amount of hesitation and accent. The third category is lexical accuracy and range which refers to the interlocutor’s ability to accurately and appropriately use vocabulary in communication. The fourth category is grammatical accuracy and range which refers to the range and accuracy of the grammatical structures which the speaker and hearer use during the conversation.

2.4 Functions of Speaking

Viewing from its usage, the functions of speaking can be categorized in three categories (Richards, 2008: 21). The three functions of speaking are explained below.

2.4.1 Speaking as interaction

It can be defined as daily communication that we also call conversation. It deals with the social function of language. People meet to exchange greetings, small talks, experiences, etc.

2.4.2 Speaking as transaction

Speaking as transaction means a speaker focuses on the accuracy of speech in which the purpose is to make the listener understand and get clear information.

2.4.3 Speaking as performance

Speaking as performance deals with public speaking including giving a message, instruction, presentation, announcement, etc. It is specifically in monolog rather than dialog.

2.5 Tourism

There are many experts who have defined tourism over the years. Generally, tourism is an activity to visit some places in short time with a purpose to enjoy tourism objects.

According to the Eurostat (2014, p. 16), tourism is an activity of visitors taking a trip to a main destination outside the usual environment, for less than a year and for any main purpose, including business, leisure, or other personal purposes, other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or the place visited.

2.6 Speaking Skill for Tourism

It is very crucial for tourism personnel to have communicative skills and competence throughout the sector. Communicating in English with tourists in terms of understanding their expectations is the key to the tourists’ satisfaction. According to Al-Saadi (2015), understanding the role of language makes tourism personnel are able to improve the coordination skills, operate better new
technology, develop customer satisfaction and have effective management in the tourism industry.

2.7 The Concept of Perception

There are many different theories about perception. Peterson and Yaakobi (1979, p. 433) defined perception as a behavior of a person to see him/herself, the behavior of others, or a fictitious ideal. According to Walgito (2004, p. 87-88), perception is a process preceded by a process of sensing which is the process of receipt of the stimulus by the individual through the sense. Furthermore, Sarwono (2010, p. 86) argues that perception is the conclusion of what we see, hear and we try to make a best guess. The definitions of perceptions above can be concluded as the way people think and understand about something.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study involved 25 students in the fourth and sixth semester at Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh. The method that was employed in the study was qualitative method. The data were collected through questionnaire and interview that were adapted from Arslan and Akbarov (2012).

The writer adjusted some items of the questionnaire in relation to English for Tourism. There are five categories in the questionnaire items. For the first category is to obtain such information on the attractiveness of English for tourism (questionnaire number 1 to 4). The second category is the usefulness of English for tourism (questionnaire number 5 and 6). The third category is about the importance of English in facilitating the process of communication in tourism sector (questionnaire number 7 to 10). The fourth category describes about the impact of speaking English to native languages (questionnaire number 11). For the last category is developed in four more items in order discover whether the students are aware of some basic terms in English for tourism subject (questionnaire number 12 to 15).

The writer used closed-ended questionnaire. The respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement based on four points Like Scale namely, strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. According to Likert scale, there are Strongly Agree which assigns 5 points, Agree 4 points, Undecided 3 points, Disagree 2 points, Strongly Disagree 1 point. Many researchers feel that there is no logical enough reason to assign the weight of 3 points to the respondent who is undecided on a given issue. Therefore, the modified 4 Likert scale is more preferred which is Strongly Agree which assigns 4 points, Agree 3 points, Disagree 2 points, Strongly Disagree 1 point.

Meanwhile, the interview was conducted with the students in fourth and sixth semester who have studied speaking for tourism in order to find out their perceptions on the importance of English speaking skill in tourism sector. The set of interview questions were adjusted by the writer based on the questionnaire form proposed by Arslan and Akbarov (2012). Then, the writer translated the interview questions into Bahasa in order to make the respondents easy to understand.

The result of questionnaire items were analyzed by using formula as suggested by Sudijono (2010, p. 43) which can be seen below.

\[ P = \frac{\sum f}{n} \times 100\% \]
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Which:
P = the percentage of respondents’ answer
f = frequency from each of respondent’s answer
n = number of respondents
100% = constant number

4. Findings and Discussion
4.1 Findings
4.1.1 The Attractiveness of English for Tourism
There was 1 student or 2.5% of the total students who disagreed with the statement. It means that not all of the students find English for tourism is an interesting course to learn. However, the data shows that half of the students agreed with the statement. There were 48% or 12 students who agreed with the statement and gave a positive response that English for tourism is a subject that is interesting to learn. Furthermore, it also shows that there were 48% or 12 students who strongly agreed with the statement. It means that almost all the students think that English for tourism is an interesting subject to learn. From the result of the questionnaire, it is clear that the student implied that English for tourism is an interesting course to learn.

According to the data from questionnaire number 2, that is, English for tourism is hard subject to learn, there were 2 students or 8% of the total students who strongly agreed with the statement given. Then, there were 5 students or 20% who agreed with the statement given. A slight difference between the number of students who chose “strongly agreed” and “agreed” toward the questionnaire item number 2. In contrast, there were 16 students or 64% who chose the option “disagree” to the statement. So, regarding the result of the students’ perceptions toward the statement above, the writer surely understood that according to their perceptions English for tourism is an interesting subject to learn. In addition, there were also 2 students or 8% of the total students who strongly disagreed with the statement. It means that the students who chose “strongly disagree” are the students who really enjoy and love to study English for tourism. From the statements above, the students clearly implied that English for tourism course is easy to learn.

The result of the questionnaire item 3 deals with the students’ perceptions whether they like English for tourism course more than any other subjects. The writer found that 12% of students or 3 students chose “strongly agree” and 64% of students or 16 students chose “agree”. It means that more than 50% of the students like English for tourism course more than any other subjects. However, there were 5 students or 20% students who agreed that they like English for tourism but it is not the most favorite subject. Moreover, there was 1 student or 4% of students who completely and strongly disagreed with the questionnaire item number 3.

The questionnaire result from item 4, that is, English for tourism is the optional course. There were 4 students (16%) who strongly agreed with the statement. There is a slight difference in the number of students who chose “agree” and “disagree”. 11 students or 44% of the students chose English as their optional course and 10 students or 40% of students disagreed with the statement. From this finding, it can be concluded that the students mostly chose English as their optional course.

4.1.2 The Usefulness of English for Tourism

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From the result of questionnaire item 5, that is, English for tourism will be very useful for the tourism students in finding jobs in the tourism sector, it clearly shows that more than half of the students strongly agreed with the statement (52%) and 40% of the students agreed with the statement. It means that almost all the students agreed that English for tourism will be very useful in finding their future jobs. However, there were 8% students or 2 students who did not feel that taking English for tourism course will help them to find their future jobs.

The questionnaire item 6 shows the result of the students' perceptions toward the statement that whether or not the students are confident when they speak in English. It can be concluded that more than half of the students agreed with the statement. There were 13 students (52%) who agreed and 9 students or 36% of the students who strongly agreed with the statement. It means that the majority of students were positively confident to speak English. Meanwhile, there were only 3 students or 12% of the students who chose the option disagree to the statement and none of them who chose the last option strongly disagree to the statement.

4.1.3 The Importance of English in Facilitating the Process of Communication in the Tourism Sector

The results of the questionnaire display the item number 7 concerning the students' perception whether or not they speak in English in every opportunity outside the university. 24% or 6 students chose "strongly agree" and 56% or 14 students chose "agree". It means that the majority of students try to speak English in every opportunity outside the campus. However, according to the data, the writer found that 20% or 5 students disagreed with the statement. Regarding the result of questionnaire item 7, it can be implied that in general the students tried to speak English in every opportunity outside the campus.

The result of questionnaire item 8 clearly indicates the students' perspective toward the statement. There were 9 students (36%) who strongly agreed with the statement and the 14 students (56%) agreed with the statement. From this result, it can be concluded that most students agreed with the statement that English indicates prestige and modernization. However, there were only 2 students (8%) who did not think that English indicates prestige and modernization.

Based on the questionnaire item 9 results, 100% of the students responded positively concerning the questionnaire item that speaking in English facilitates communication with international institutions around the world (52% of students or 13 students chose "strongly agree" and 48% of students or 12 students chose "agree"). The finding above indicates the students feel that speaking English is really important in the tourism sector and can facilitate them to international institutions around the world.

From the questionnaire item 10 result, the writer found that 44% students strongly agreed and 48% students agreed concerning the item through the issue that speaking fluently in English for tourism course will be helpful for the future job. It seems that almost all the students responded positively toward the statement. Only 2 students or 8% of the students negatively responded to the issue whether speaking English for tourism course will be helpful to find future jobs. It means that most of the students gave their positive comments toward the statement.
4.1.4 The Impact of Speaking English to Native Languages

According to the results of the questionnaire item 11 that the use of English will be a threat for my native language, it clearly shows the students’ who perspective toward the statement. The writer discovered that 44% or 11 students strongly agreed and 32% or 8 students disagreed toward the statement. It means that the percentage of students positively perceived the issue that the use of English will be a threat for native language is higher than the percentage of students who disagreed with that. Based on the data above, the writer also found that the percentages of students who strongly agreed and strongly disagreed are similar (12% of students or 3 students each). Therefore, it can be concluded that the students’ perspectives varied. They mostly agreed with the statement that the use of English will be a threat for native language.

4.1.5 Students’ Awareness of Some Basic Terms in English for Tourism

The questionnaire item 12 displays the students’ perception whether or not they are familiar with some basic terms related to tourism in English. The writer found that 12% of the students or 3 students chose “strongly agree” and 68% of students or 17 students chose “agree”. It means that most of the students are familiar with basic English terms in tourism sector. In contrast, approximately 20% of the total students disagreed with the statement and none of them chose “strongly disagree”. According to the finding, the writer concluded mostly students know the terms in English for tourism and some of them implement their knowledge about the term in daily conversation.

Based on the result of questionnaire item 13, all the students gave positive comments concerning the statement that some basic terms related to tourism should be available in the syllabus of English for tourism subject. Based on the finding, most respondents gave their responses with “agree” (76% or 19 students) and the rest of them chose “strongly agree” (24% or 6 students). It means that all of the students agreed with the statement and none of them disagreed with that. Based on the percentage above, all the basic English terms in the tourism sector are all important and those terms should be included in the syllabus.

From the result of questionnaire item 14, it seems that almost 50% of the students agreed with that statement. It says that 44% students strongly agreed and 48% students chose agree. However, concerning the issue on students’ perceptions whether they should take speaking class in which they study English for tourism field, only 8% or 2 students disagreed with the matter. It means that most of the students positively said that they should take speaking class as it is part of the requirement in their study in English for tourism. In addition, the writer assumed that all students have to take the course not only because it is as the compulsory subject to learn but also because the students feel that mastering English speaking skill especially in the field of tourism will make them earn money more easily.

The results of the questionnaire item 15 show that more than half of the students strongly agreed with the statement that speaking should be obligatory in English for tourism course. There were 52% or 13 students who chose “strongly agree” and 40% or 10 students who chose “agree”. It means that the majority of students agreed that speaking should be obligatory in English for tourism course. However, there were also some students who disagreed with that statement. There were 8% or 2 students who did not think that it is better to not include speaking into English for tourism course. Based on the statements above, the writer assumed
that some of the students do not like to speak and prefer to study English for tourism without having the teaching material about speaking.

The writer took a conclusion based on the result of questionnaire and interview. Based on the first category of questionnaire items that is the attractiveness of English for tourism, the writer discovered that there were almost two thirds of the total respondents who positively stated that English for tourism is attractive. From the usefulness of English for tourism, which is the second category, the writer found the majority of respondents positively stated that English for tourism is useful for them, which means that almost all respondents agreed toward the statement regarding the usefulness of English for tourism. Based on the third category of questionnaire items, i.e. the importance of English in facilitating the process of communication in the tourism sector, the writer also concluded that most of the students positively stated that English for tourism is important to facilitate the process of communication in the tourism sector. The fourth category of questionnaire items is the impact of speaking English to native languages. Based on the category, the writer discovered that the majority of the respondents stated that there would be an impact of speaking English to native languages. The last category of the questionnaire item is students’ awareness of some basic terms in English for tourism. Based on the questionnaire result, the writer found that almost all of the respondents positively stated that students were aware of some basic tourism terms in English. The students added that they should be able to master English terms in the tourism sector as it is important for every tourism student at Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh.

Based on the interview result, the writer concluded that the interview respondents agreed that English speaking skill in the tourism sector should be mastered by every tourism students. By having English speaking skill, they can communicate in English better and it makes them easy to find jobs especially in the tourism sector.

4.2 Discussion

The results of the study show that Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh students perceived that English for tourism is attractive. Based on the first category of questionnaire items, the attractiveness of English for tourism, which was including question number 1 to 4, the writer discovered that 65% of the respondents positively stated that English for tourism is attractive. It means that more than 50% of the respondents stated positively toward the statement. This finding is in line with Simion (2012, p. 152) who stated English language has played an important role in the development of tourism. In this case, English is used widely for travel and other industries in tourism sector.

Furthermore, English for tourism will be very useful in finding future jobs in the tourism sector. All tourism personnel are required to have good communication skills in order to strengthen their position in the tourism companies. Based on the usefulness of English for tourism category which was included in questionnaire item 5 and 6, the writer found that 90% of the respondents positively stated that English for tourism is useful. It means that almost all of the respondents agreed toward the statement regarding the usefulness of English for tourism. This finding is in line with Kay and Russette (2000) who expressed that the tourism industry supply and demand side must have communication skills, especially English, to ensure quality and needed performance.
standards. In the tourism business, practicing oral communication is easier than written communication, but both categories are rated highly.

Based on the third category of questionnaire items, the importance of English in facilitating the process of communication in tourism sector, the writer stated that there were questions number 7 to 10 which were included in the category. The writer found that 91% of the respondents positively stated that English for tourism is important to facilitate the process of communication in the tourism sector. Based on the percentages above, most of the respondents positively stated that English is important toward communication process in the tourism sector. This finding in line with Rao (2007, p.1) who stated the role of English language proficiency in the tourism sector is prominent. It is a factor that could affect the choice of tourism destination. It indicates that the role of English speaking skills is important in the process of communication in the tourism sector.

Regarding the fourth category of questionnaire item, i.e. the impact of speaking English to native languages, which include question number 11, the writer discovered that 56% of the respondents stated there was an impact of speaking English to native languages. This finding was in line with the result of study conducted by Majidi (2013, p. 33) who stated that the hot debates over global spread of English which remain controversial was the threat of English to other languages, particularly those of less known communities and minority languages.

The last category of the questionnaire item is students’ awareness of some basic terms in English for tourism. The writer divided the questionnaire item from questions number 12 to 15 into this category. Based on the questionnaire result, the writer found that 91% of the respondents positively stated that students are aware of some basic tourism terms in English. It means that almost all of the students believed that students at Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh should be aware of English terms in the tourism sector. This finding is in line with Kacetl (2015, p. 364) who stated the management of travel and tourism students need to be aware of currently used specialized vocabulary in their field of study. It means every student in the tourism department should be able to master tourism terms since most terms in tourism are in the English language in order to be skillful in the tourism sector.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
5.1 Conclusion
In this study, the students at Tourism Academy of Muhammadiyah Aceh perceived that English for tourism was attractive to learn. They also added that English for tourism would be very useful in finding future jobs in the tourism sector. Moreover, it was found that the students perceived that English was important in facilitating the process of communication in tourism sector. Then, the students stated the use of English probably would be a threat for their native languages. However, the local languages should always be used in everyday life even though English is also used in education. Lastly, the tourism students at tourism academy are aware of some tourism terms in English.

5.2 Suggestions
At the end of this study, the writer would like to give suggestion although there was limitation in this study which the writer only viewed the perception of English speaking skills by students in tourism academy, yet the writer believes that
the result of this study can represent the whole perception of tourism students. It is expected to be contribution in some ways to the tourism sector by adding knowledge about this topic. Therefore, it is recommended to other researchers to conduct further analysis considering this topic with a larger scope of respondents.

5.2.1 Suggestion for the teachers

Related to the speaking skills, every student has their own capacity and learning style, so a teacher must understand their students’ needs as future tourism personnel before teaching and learning process.

5.2.2 Suggestion for the students

The students must realize that mastering English speaking skills is not easy. The students highly need to practice English with their friends, teachers or others. The students also need to find the fastest and easiest ways to improve their speaking skills precisely in English for tourism. In addition, finding speaking partners is one way which the students can apply to improve their speaking ability.

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