

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research background, research problems, research objectives, scope and limitations, research significance, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

Language is the ability possessed by humans to communicate with other humans. Individual habits influence every human being's language ability in interacting with their environment. Language as a human communication tool is an absolute instrument that must be learned and used in everyday life. Language education has an important role in facing the challenges of globalization, especially in tourism. The tourism industry is one of the main economic sectors in many countries, including Indonesia, and the demand for workers who are competent in English is increasing.

However, Vocational High School (VHS) students often experience difficulties in developing their English language skills because the orientation of the curriculum focuses more on technical skills than on language. As a result, VHS students' English skills may be limited and affect their chances of entering the tourism industry, which requires effective cross-cultural communication. In facing these challenges, the transformation of language education into a crisis is the improvement of English skills for VHS students, especially in tourism.

One interesting approach to improve English learning is to implement conversation-based English learning. This approach emphasizes the real and practical use of language in communication, focusing on speaking skills and understanding language contextually. Learning in this way is an effective and relevant alternative for preparing VHS students to face the needs of the world of work in the increasingly globalized tourism industry.

In the last ten years, research on English for tourism has been done by a number of researchers. First, Astawa et al., (2017) find that the conversation-based English learning approach is effective in preparing students for careers in tourism. In addition, research by Zebua, (2019) added that guided conversations help students build confidence and understand grammar. Similarly, Ulfa & Wahyudi, (2023) observed that students who engaged in conversation activities gained higher confidence and performed better interactions with international guests. Мілова, (2015) further stated that conversation-based learning improves speaking fluency, vocabulary, and motivation, making the learning process more interesting and effective.

Overall, the results of previous research evaluations confirm the effectiveness of conversation-based language learning methods in improving students' English skills. These findings provide a solid basis for adopting this method in a wider educational context and provide valuable guidance for the development of more effective and interesting language learning.

However, research exploring the use of English in the tourism industry by vocational high school students is still underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the extent of English language skills of vocational high students in the tourism industry sector, especially hospitality. In addition, this research is expected to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring the effectiveness and significance of conversation-based English learning approaches. This study is different from previous studies in the method of approach to students and the context of research. Through a deeper understanding of this topic, it is hoped that this research can make a positive contribution to the developers of the language education system and can advance the tourism sector in Indonesia.

1.2 Research Problem

Based on the background of the study above, this research is purposely to answer the following research problem:

1. How do vocational high school students perceive their English learning experience before and after engaging in conversation-based instruction during their internship in the tourism industry?
2. How does conversation-based English instruction impact students' confidence and competence in real-life communication within the tourism industry?

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives are as follows:

- 1) To find out the conversation-based English learning can influence the communication skills of vocational high school students in the tourism industry
- 2) Describe students' perceptions of their learning transformation after participating in conversation-based English learning during their internship.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research is focused on the field of English language education, with the application of conversation-based learning, for vocational students in Indonesia. This research emphasizes students who are involved in the tourism sector, particularly those undergoing internships in hospitality-related settings such as hotels and resorts. The research explores how conversation-based English instruction can improve students' speaking and listening skills in real-world communication relevant to the tourism industry.

The limitations of this study include the small number of participants, which consisted of only four vocational students who have or are in on-the-job training activities in the tourism industry for six months. All participants were in the tourism sector, specifically in the food and beverage service department.

1.5 Research Significance

The results of this study are expected to be a reference for teachers, students, and other researchers. For teachers, this research is expected to be an inspiration and additional information about the English learning process from the students' perspective, and teachers can find alternatives to developing an innovative teaching and learning process according to students' needs. In addition to students, the results of this study are expected to provide further insight and broader information to vocational high school students in the industry. In addition, for other researchers, this research is expected to use the right resources as a basis for conducting similar research.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1) Transformation of Language Education

Refers to changes or developments in language learning approaches and methods that goals to increase the effectiveness and relevance of the language education process for students, with an emphasis on developing language skills in a communicative and contextual manner (Setyanto & Litt, 2014).

2) Conversation-Based English Learning

An approach or method of teaching English that emphasizes the active use of language in the context of conversation or communicative interaction. The main focus is to improve the ability to speak and understand the language in real-life situations (Liu, 2023).

3) Vocational High School

Public or private learning institutions that given the opportunity to explore and identify potential career goals and prepare students to enter the industry or continue higher education (Wołodźko et al., 2023).

4) Tourism Industry

The tourism industry involves people, activities, and organizations involved in providing services for tourists on holiday. Tourism refers to the activity of individuals or groups traveling to specific locations for leisure or personal growth (Zulfikar et al., 2023).