Received: March 25, 2025
Accepted: April 10, 2025
Published: April 18, 2025

Homepage: http://trj.stptrisakti.ac.id/index.php/trj/index
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30647/trj.v9i1.274

Tourism Research Journal
E-ISSN: 2598-9839
2025, Vol. 9 No. 1

Investigating Local Community Perception towards English Language Volunteer Tourism: Case Study in A Balinese Village

I Gusti Ngurah Agung Suprastayasa*, Ida Ayu Sri Puspa Adi, Nyoman Reni Ariasri

Politeknik Pariwisata Bali

**agung.suprastayasa@ppb.ac.id*

Abstract

Volunteer tourism has become a trend where individuals engage in voluntary work while traveling. Volunteer teaching English as a foreign language stands out as one of the activities. This study aimed at investigating the local community perception towards a volunteer teaching English program in a village in Bali. This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The finding showed that the local community, whether they participated as students or not, highly appreciated and had a positive attitude toward the volunteer tourism program. They viewed only the positive sides of the activities since this was the first such volunteer program conducted in their village. Further studies need to be conducted for investigating the local community perception of receiving longer periods or more frequent English volunteer programs.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, educational tourism, English as a foreign language

A. Introduction

Volunteer tourism, also known as voluntourism, has emerged as a popular trend in travel where individuals engage in voluntary work while traveling to different destinations (Proyrungroj, 2020). Volunteer tourism is defined as "a type of alternative tourism in which tourists volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society of environment" (Wearing, 2001).

Interest in voluntary tourism is increasing because in addition to tourism and recreation, they can also do services to others and work (Tomazos, 2020). This sector is considered a niche for mass tourism, but the number of tourists involved in it cannot be ascertained (McGehee, 2014). However, it is estimated that the industry is worth $2 Billion per year, involving about ten million volunteers worldwide (Hernandez-Maskivker et al., 2018). The difficult task of estimating the size and scope of an industry is made more challenging by various definitions that lead to inconsistencies when trying to provide industry estimates. This ambiguity and confusion has prompted leading researchers in voluntary tourism to call for the industry to be further separated into micro-niches (Wearing et al., 2020).

Among the various forms of volunteer tourism, volunteer teaching English as a foreign language stands out as a significant activity, particularly in regions where English language proficiency is limited (Chen, 2020). It is also considered as a niche form of volunteer tourism and a common project category (Bernstein & Woosnam, 2019).

Volunteers teaching English as foreign language programs attract a diverse range of participants, including students, professionals, and retirees, seeking to make a positive difference in communities while immersing themselves in local cultures. These programs are often facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), or commercial volunteer travel operators (Jakubiak, 2012; Brown & Morrison, 2003). It presents unique opportunities and challenges. On one hand, volunteers have the chance to contribute to education and empowerment in underserved communities, fostering cross-cultural understanding and language proficiency among local populations. On the other hand, volunteers may encounter language barriers, cultural differences, and varying levels of infrastructure and resources in the host communities, which can influence their experiences and perceptions (Suprastayasa, 2011).

Previous studies have explored various aspects of volunteer tourism, including motivations, impacts, and ethical considerations (McGehee, 2014; Wearing, Young & Everingham, 2017; Lee, 2020). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the experiences and perceptions of host community or the students who participate in the program. The research on volunteer tourism has paid less attention to host communities since locals are frequently positioned at the bottom of the tourism hierarchy (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Understanding local community perceptions is crucial for assessing the

effectiveness of these programs, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring meaningful engagement for both volunteers and host communities. This study, therefore, aimed to explore the perception of the local community toward the teaching English as a foreign language volunteer tourism program.

B. Literature Review

Volunteer tourism, a unique blend of travel and altruism, has gained significant traction in recent years, with volunteer teaching English emerging as a prominent activity within this niche. There is a great need for English speakers as a result of English's rapid ascent to prominence as the primary language of communication in both local and international contexts (Stainton, 2018). English-language voluntourism or Teaching English as a Foreign Language Volunteer Tourism (TEFL VT) is defined as a form of volunteer tourism in which native speakers of prestige-variety, or inner core English, teach language lessons in the Global South on a short-term basis (Jakubiak, 2012, p. 437). It is one type of volunteer tourism in education.

Numerous studies have explored the motivations driving individuals to participate in volunteer teaching English programs. One consistent finding is the desire for cultural immersion and cross-cultural exchange (McGehee & Santos, 2005; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Volunteers often seek opportunities to engage with local communities, learn about different cultures, and develop interpersonal skills (Khasanzyanova, 2017).

Additionally, altruistic motives play a significant role, with volunteers expressing a desire to contribute positively to society and make a meaningful difference in the lives of others (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). The opportunity to enhance English language proficiency among disadvantaged populations is also a common motivation, driven by the belief in the transformative power of education (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008).

Understanding the motivations and expectations of host communities is crucial for assessing the reception and effectiveness of volunteer teaching English programs. Research suggests that host communities often welcome such initiatives as opportunities for educational enrichment, cultural exchange, and community development. Many communities view volunteer teachers as valuable resources who can provide language instruction and cultural insights that complement formal education systems (Lewin, 2009).

C. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Data analysis involved thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and narratives within the interview transcripts. The analysis was guided by the research objectives, focusing on understanding participants' experiences and perceptions related to the English as a foreign language program by volunteer.

Participants/Subject/Population and Sample

The study was conducted in a village in Bali where a volunteer tourism project focuses on teaching English. The selection of this village is based on the existence of an English volunteer program that was run for two months in 2024, as well as the existence of local communities directly involved in these activities. Participants of this study comprises students who participated in English course programs, community leaders and parents of the students, villagers who are directly involved or affected by the English volunteer program. They will be selected purposely, namely based on certain criteria such as their age, profession, and experience with the program. Community leaders or representatives from the village involved in the volunteer program. The number of participants will be adjusted to the principle of saturation point, which is a sufficient amount of data to gain a deep understanding of the research topic.

Instruments

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with local communities, and village stakeholders. This interview aims to explore their perceptions of the existence of English-language volunteer tourism programs, their impact on culture and economy, and their impact on local education. Interview questions covered topics such as: personal experience related to the program, the influence of the program on the use of English in students' life. A view on the sustainability of the program and its impact on the younger generation. The influence of the program on the local economy and relations with tourists.

Data Analysis

Data collected from in-depth interviews and participatory observations were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The data analysis process includes the following steps: transcript of interviews, data coding to identify key themes that come up in conversations, preparation of emerging themes and data interpretation based on relevant theories regarding volunteer tourism and local community perceptions of social and cultural change. The findings of the analyzed data was linked to the existing literature on volunteer tourism, its impact on local communities, and studies on language learning in the context of tourism.

D. Result

The English as a Foreign Language volunteer program is a vital component of the "*Belajar di Banjar*" (Learning in Community) educational initiative. This pilot volunteer program aims to supplement the education of children in the village and takes place every Sunday, coinciding with the volunteers' and students' non-campus days. The program caters to elementary school students in grades 4 to 6, with some university students serving as volunteers.

The program initially ran for three months but had to terminate due to the volunteers' demanding study schedules. However, a fortunate turn of events came when a foundation offered the assistance of two foreign volunteers specializing in business studies from France. These graduate students dedicated six weeks to intensive English teaching. The classes were extended to two hours each day, running from 14:00 to 16:00, four days a week (Tuesday to Friday).

The classes are conducted in two *Balai Banjars* (public halls), each accommodating around 30 students. The volunteer teachers receive support from two local volunteers who assist with translations as needed and help organize classroom activities. This collaborative effort ensures effective communication and smooth operations during the sessions, contributing to an enriching learning environment for the students.

Local Community's Perceptions

The local community viewed volunteer English programs positively as opportunities for themselves or their children to learn valuable skills that can enhance educational and employment prospects. As Bali is recognized as a prominent international tourism destination, mastering English is seen as crucial. They firmly believe that the ability to communicate in English can significantly boost young people's chances of securing future employment, especially in sectors closely tied to tourism, hospitality, and international business. This sentiment reflects a broader recognition of English not just as a language of communication but also as a gateway to economic opportunities in a globalized world. By participating in these programs, individuals not only gain language proficiency but also develop confidence and cross-cultural skills, which are increasingly valued in today's interconnected society.

The English language volunteer program is also seen as a valuable activity to fill students' school breaks. Many students spend excessive time on their phones playing games, and this program offers them an opportunity to engage in meaningful activities. By participating, students not only improve their English skills but also develop important soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and cultural awareness. This helps them make productive use of their free time while also preparing them for future academic and professional endeavors. Additionally, the program fosters a sense of community and social responsibility among young participants, encouraging them to contribute positively to society beyond their academic responsibilities.

English language volunteer program is considered as most effective when they are continuous and run for an extended period since it offers ongoing benefits that accumulate over time, especially for the younger generation. Continuity ensures that participants have the opportunity to progress steadily in their language skills and personal development. Moreover, long-term programs allow for the establishment of strong relationships between volunteers, educators, and the community, fostering a sense of trust and commitment to the program's goals.

This consistency also benefits future generations by providing a stable platform for learning and growth. As participants advance through different levels of proficiency, they can take on new challenges and responsibilities within the program, further enhancing their skills and confidence. Additionally, long-term programs create a sense of tradition and value within the community, encouraging continued participation and support from both current and future generations.

In conclusion maintaining these programs over time not only ensures their effectiveness but also contributes to the overall development and success of individuals and the community as a whole.

"*Bali is well-known tourism destination so that the job available in the market are mostly related to tourism. By mastering English, our young generation can get job easily. This is a good program for our village*"

"*This (the TEFL volunteer program) is very good for our community especially the kids to prepare for their future" (head of the village/ kelihan banjar)"*

"*This is a very good activity for preparing the kids for their future. I will support fully this program" (former head of the village)"*

"*Thank you for initiating the program, I fully support this. I am a tourist guide so I know how important English is. In the future, other training would also be beneficial for the kids" (a tourist guide from the village)"*

"*This is very beneficial and*

The English language volunteer program is also seen as a valuable activities to fill the students school break. They spend too much time on sell phone to play game and by this program they can do valuable activities.

"I like to learn from Bule (foreigner)" (Student2)

The Students' Perceptions

Some students who join the program appreciate the cultural exchange aspect of volunteer English programs, seeing them as valuable opportunities to interact with people from different countries and learn English from foreign teachers. The participants are particularly interested in the program when they discover that the teacher is a white European (referred to as "bule" in Indonesia), assuming that the teacher is a native speaker of English. This perception adds a layer of authenticity and credibility to the learning experience for them.

"I like to join the course, the teacher is from France. I like to see the video about student life overseas" (Student1)

"I like being taught by foreign teacher"

Moreover, the fact that the program is offered for free also motivates students to participate. Many students may not have access to paid English courses, so a free program not only meets their educational needs but also makes it accessible to a wider range of students in the community.

"I like the course since it's free of charge" (Student3)

Interestingly, social influence plays a significant role as well. When students see their friends joining the program, they are more likely to join as well. This social aspect creates a sense of camaraderie and shared learning experiences among peers, making the program more engaging and enjoyable for everyone involved.

"*I don't have any specific reason to join the program" (Student4)*

"I was told to join so I join, and all my friends attend the course so I also attend it" (Student5).

E. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into local community perceptions towards English Language Volunteer Tourism. By examining the views of community members directly impacted by these programs, several key themes have emerged that shed light on the benefits, challenges, and complexities of English Language Volunteer Tourism.

Participants highlighted several positive impacts of English Language Volunteer Tourism on their communities which is in line with a number of studies on volunteer tourism (for example: Wearing et al., 2020; Jakubiak, 2020; Jakubiak, 2012). The most frequently cited benefit was the improved English language proficiency among community members, particularly children and youth. Enhanced language skills were perceived as a gateway to better educational and employment opportunities. Additionally, English Language Volunteer Tourism was seen as a means of fostering cultural exchange, with volunteers acting as informal ambassadors of their home cultures while gaining an appreciation for the local culture.

Another significant benefit identified was the potential for economic development. By attracting volunteers who often engage in local tourism activities and support small businesses, English Language Volunteer Tourism indirectly contributes to the local economy. These findings align with previous studies that suggest volunteer tourism can stimulate micro-economic activities in host communities (Vetitnev et al., 2015).

Despite the perceived benefits, participants also expressed concerns regarding English Language Volunteer Tourism. One key issue was the sustainability and consistency of the programs. Many participants noted that volunteer turnover and short-term engagements often disrupted the continuity of language learning, leaving students without sustained support.

Cultural sensitivity was another recurrent theme. While many volunteers were respectful, some participants recounted instances of cultural misunderstandings or behaviors perceived as inappropriate within the local context (Raymond & Hall, 2008). These instances underscore the importance of cultural orientation and preparation for volunteers before they engage with host communities.

The power dynamics inherent in English Language Volunteer Tourism also emerged as a concern. Some participants noted a perceived imbalance in relationships between volunteers and locals, with volunteers sometimes viewed

as "experts" despite lacking formal teaching qualifications. This perception could inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or dependency rather than mutual collaboration and empowerment.

The study also revealed the nuanced and sometimes ambivalent nature of local perceptions. While many community members appreciated the altruistic intentions of volunteers, there was a recognition that English Language Volunteer Tourism is not purely altruistic but often tied to personal development goals for the volunteers themselves, such as gaining experience or enhancing resumes. This duality was met with mixed feelings, as it sometimes led to questions about the authenticity of volunteers' motivations.

F. Conclusion

Overall, the perceptions of local communities about volunteer English programs are positive. They tend to appreciate the benefit of the program to their community especially to the children joining it as students. Since such voluntarism has not been familiar to the community, they think the activity is very beneficial to them.

Even though the perception of the local community toward the volunteer tourism English program is highly positive, it is essential for program organizers to engage with community members, listen to their feedback, and address their concerns to ensure that the program is culturally sensitive, sustainable, and beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

While this study provides rich qualitative insights, its findings are limited to a specific geographic and cultural context. Future research could expand to include comparative studies across different regions or examine the long-term impacts of English Language Volunteer Tourism on both host communities and volunteers. Quantitative approaches could also complement these findings, providing broader generalizability.

E. Conflict of Interest

The authors have no financial or non-financial competing interests to disclose in connection with this study on community perceptions of English language volunteer tourism.

F. Declaration of AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT by OpenAI to support literature searches on volunteer tourism, English language teaching, and local community perceptions. They evaluated the suggested publications against their original sources to confirm relevance, accuracy, and bibliographic details. The authors retain full responsibility for the selection and interpretation of the literature and the integrity of the final manuscript.

REFERENCES

Benson, A. M., & Wearing, S. (2012). Volunteer tourism: commodified trend or new phenomenon? In *Controversies in tourism* (pp. 242-254). Wallingford UK: CABI.

Bernstein, J. D., & Woosnam, K. M. (2019). Same same but different: Distinguishing what it means to teach English as a foreign language within the context of volunteer tourism. *Tourism Management*, 72, 427-436. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.01.010

Brown, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2003). Expanding Volunteer Vacation Participation An Exploratory Study on the Mini-Mission Concept. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 28(3), 73–82 https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2003.11081419

Chen, J. (2020). '*Voluntourism' and English Language in China: Examining Six Case Studies*. Tricollege Libraries, Institutional Schlarship.

Dolnicar, S., & Leisch, F. (2008). An investigation of tourists' patterns of obligation to protect the environment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(4), 381-391. DOI:10.1177/0047287507308330

Hernandez-Maskivker, G., Lapointe, D., & Aquino, R. (2018). The impact of volunteer tourism on local communities: A managerial perspective. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(5), 650-659. DOI:10.1002/jtr.2213

Jakubiak, C. (2012). "English for the global": discourses in/of English-language voluntourism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(4), 435-451. DOI:10.1080/09518398.2012.673029

Jakubiak, C. (2020). "English Is Out There—You Have to Get with the Program": Linguistic Instrumentalism, Global Citizenship Education, and English-Language Voluntourism. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 51(2), 212-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12332

Khasanzyanova, A. (2017). How volunteering helps students to develop soft skills. *International Review of Education*, 63, 363-379. DOI:10.1007/s11159-017-9645-2

Lee, H. Y. (2020). Understanding community attitudes towards volunteer tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 45(4), 445-458. DOI:10.1080/02508281.2020.1740959

Lewin, K. M. (2009). Access to education in sub-Saharan Africa: patterns, problems and possibilities. *Comparative Education*, 45(2), 151-174. DOI:10.1080/03050060902920518

Lyons, K. D., & Wearing, S. (2008). Volunteer tourism as alternative tourism: Journeys beyond otherness. *Journeys of discovery in volunteer tourism: International case study perspectives*, 3-11.

McGehee, N. G. (2014). Volunteer tourism: Evolution, issues and futures. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(6), 847-854. DOI:10.1080/09669582.2014.907299

McGehee, N. G., & Santos, C. A. (2005). Social change, discourse and volunteer tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 32(3), 760-779. DOI:10.1016/j.annals.2004.12.002

Palacios, C. M. (2010). Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 18(7), 861-878. DOI:10.1080/09669581003782739

Proyrungroj, R. (2020). Volunteer tourism: Motivations of Thai tourists and Western tourists. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, *24*, 2408-2408. DOI:10.54055/ejtr.v24i.410

Raymond, E. M., & Hall, C. M. (2008). The development of cross-cultural (mis) understanding through volunteer tourism. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 16(5), 530-543. DOI:10.1080/09669580802159610

Stainton, H. (2018). TEFL tourism: The tourist who teaches. *Tourism geographies*, 20(1), 127-143. DOI:10.1080/14616688.2017.1298151

Suprastayasa, I. G. N. A. (2011). Pariwisata Relawan (Volunteer Tourism): Perkembangan, Aktivitas dan Masyarakat Lokal. *Jurnal Kepariwisataan*, 10(1). DOI: https://doi.org/10.52352/jpar.v10i1.274

Tomazos, K. (2020). *Contested tourism commodities: What's for sale*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Vetitnev, A., Kruglova, M., & Bobina, N. (2015). The economic dimension of volunteerism as a trend of university research. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 214, 748-757. DOI:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.710

Wearing, S. (2001). *Volunteer tourism: Experiences that make a difference*. New York: CABI Publishing

Wearing, S., & McGehee, N. G. (2013). Volunteer tourism: *A review. Tourism management,* 38, 120-130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.03.002

Wearing, S., Beirman, D., & Grabowski, S. (2020). Engaging volunteer tourism in post-disaster recovery in Nepal. Annals of Tourism Research, 80, 102802. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2019.102802

Wearing, S., Young, T., & Everingham, P. (2017). Evaluating volunteer tourism: has it made a difference?. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 42(4), 512-521. DOI:10.1080/02508281.2017.1345470