

The Role of Foreign Languages as a Supporter of Literacy Skills in Event Management (Thematic Study on Event Organizers) in South Sulawesi

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of foreign languages, especially English, in supporting literacy skills needed by event organizers in managing international and hybrid events in South Sulawesi. In the era of globalization, cross-cultural communication skills are crucial, so that verbal, digital, and cultural literacy skills play an important role in increasing the effectiveness of event management. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis conducted on several event organizers in Makassar, Maros, and Gowa. The main focus is to identify challenges in the use of foreign languages and explore strategies for strengthening multilingual literacy skills. This study highlights various types of events, such as the Phinisi Festival, Toraja Festival, International Conference on Marine Science, and Makassar F8 which require international communication skills. The results of the study are expected to provide a significant contribution to the development of inclusive and professional multilingual communication strategies, as well as become the basis for formulating a relevant curriculum for the Convention and Event Management Study Program at the Makassar Tourism Polytechnic. Thus, this study not only enriches the understanding of the importance of foreign language literacy in event management, but also offers strategic recommendations for increasing the capacity of event organizers in facing global challenges, while strengthening the position of South Sulawesi as a center of international activities in Eastern Indonesia.

Keywords: Foreign Language, Literacy Skills, Event Organizer, Digital Literacy, Intercultural Communication.

Introduction

The tourism and event organizing industry in Indonesia, especially in South Sulawesi, has grown rapidly in recent years (Hamzah et al., 2024). Makassar, as the capital city of South Sulawesi Province, has become a major center for business, tourism, and cultural activities (Aini et al., 2024; Mayasari et al., 2024; Rijal et al., 2020). Based on data from the South Sulawesi Provincial Tourism Office in 2024, the number of domestic tourists visiting Makassar was recorded at 1,695,183 people, while foreign tourists reached 3,352 people. Gowa and Maros Regencies also contributed significantly to the tourism sector with percentages of 24% and 18% of total tourist visits in the province, respectively (South Sulawesi Provincial Tourism Office, 2024). These figures reflect that the tourism sector in this region continues to grow, which has an impact on the increasing demand for professional and efficient event organizers. However, even though the event organizer industry in South Sulawesi shows a positive trend, a number of challenges remain, especially related to foreign language and digital literacy skills (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2022). Previous studies have revealed that many local event organizers

have not fully utilized digital technology in event management (Osman, 2022; Siriyayasa et al., 2022). The main problem faced is the limited ability to use digital platforms that can increase the efficiency of event management, such as event management applications and automation systems (Filipiak et al., 2023; Septiadi & Agus, 2024). In the context of international events, multilingual communication skills, especially English, are one of the determining factors for smooth interactions between organizers and participants from various countries (Nesterenko et al., 2023; Uwatt et al., 2023). Limitations in this case can slow down the flow of information, affect the participant experience, and even potentially damage the reputation of the event organizer (Hassan et al., 2020). As globalization and digitalization increase, the need to improve foreign language and digital literacy skills is increasingly urgent (Li et al., 2020). In cross-cultural communication theory, Li et al. (2020) and Sahadevan & Sumangala (2021) state that cultural differences affect the way individuals communicate, both in personal and professional contexts. Therefore, strong foreign language skills, especially English as a lingua franca in the international world, are essential to facilitate effective communication between various parties involved in the event (Suparto et al., 2023). In addition, adequate digital literacy is an important factor in optimizing the use of technology in event planning and implementation (Kerkhoff et al., 2024; Yang & Kuo, 2023). By understanding and applying cross-cultural communication theory (Guo & Chueachainat, 2024) and digital literacy, event organizers will be better prepared to face the dynamics of international and hybrid events involving participants from various countries with different cultural backgrounds (Dragin-Jensen et al., 2022).

One approach to addressing this challenge is to improve foreign language and digital literacy skills among event organizers. Therefore, education that integrates theories of culture, language, and cross-cultural communication into the educational curriculum is key to creating professionals who are ready to face international and hybrid events. The Event and Convention Study Program at Makassar Tourism Polytechnic plays an important role in preparing a workforce that not only masters technical skills in organizing events, but also has the cross-cultural communication skills needed in international events. This study program provides practical and theoretical training that prepares students to face global challenges in the event organizing industry (Day & Lee, 2024; Guo & Chueachainat, 2024; Wang & Uysal, 2024). Makassar Tourism Polytechnic plays a significant role in producing skilled workers who are able to manage international events by utilizing digital technology and cross-cultural communication skills.

In addition, it is important to understand that event management in this digital and global era requires not only technical skills in using digital platforms, but also the ability to navigate the challenges of cross-cultural communication. According to high and low context theory. Culture plays an important role in determining how information is conveyed and received in intercultural communication. This is very relevant in event organizing, where proper communication management can affect the success of the event, especially in international events involving many participants with diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study aims to explore how event organizers in South Sulawesi utilize cultural and language knowledge in planning and managing international and hybrid events, and how they can improve this understanding through foreign language and digital literacy.

Methods

In the first year of this research, the main focus was to identify problems and analyze challenges faced by event organizers in South Sulawesi related to foreign language literacy, especially English, and the use of digital technology in managing international and hybrid events. The cross-cultural communication approach became the theoretical basis of this research, referring to high and low context theories. This underlines the importance of understanding cultural differences in interactions between international participants, which are relevant in managing

international events. The research began with data collection through an online survey that will be distributed to 100-150 event organizers in Makassar, Gowa, and Maros. This survey aims to obtain information on the level of English language comprehension and digital technology usage skills in managing international and hybrid events. The survey questionnaire instrument consists of questions that measure the frequency of foreign language use in event interactions, comfort level in communicating with international participants, and understanding of digital event management platforms. The reference to this survey instrument highlights multilingual communication skills in event organizing, as well as the importance of digital literacy for efficient event management. As a complement to the survey, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 15-20 selected event organizers to explore the challenges they face in managing international and hybrid events.

The interview guide will focus on three main areas: practical experience in using a foreign language, barriers to implementing digital technology, and perceptions of the importance of foreign language and digital literacy training. The interviews will be recorded and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify key patterns and themes related to challenges and solutions that can be implemented by event organizers in South Sulawesi. The thematic analysis process aims to gain deeper insights into the need for education and training that supports foreign language and digital literacy skills. Case studies will be conducted on several international events that have been held in South Sulawesi to gain a clearer picture of the application of cross-cultural communication theory and digital literacy in real-world event management practices. Thus, this study will provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by event organizers in the region. After data collection, the next stage is to analyze the results obtained. Quantitative data from the survey will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the level of foreign language understanding and use of digital technology by event organizers.

Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews and case studies will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to explore emerging themes related to the challenges faced by event organizers. This analysis will help identify gaps in foreign language and digital literacy and provide recommendations for improving the skills needed. In addition, this research is also about cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, which serves to understand how cultural differences affect the way of communicating in international events. An interim report prepared at the end of the sixth month will include initial findings on the challenges faced by event organizers in South Sulawesi, along with recommendations for improving foreign language and digital literacy in managing international events. Throughout the research process, the research team will work collaboratively with industry partners and academics to ensure smooth data collection and analysis. The principal investigator will be responsible for the overall coordination of the research, while the research assistant will assist in data collection, analysis, and processing of results. The data processing team will focus on statistical and qualitative analysis, while the industry partners will provide practical insights through case studies conducted.

The expected outcome of this first year is a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by event organizers in South Sulawesi related to foreign language and digital literacy, which will be the basis for the steps to develop curriculum and training models in the second year of the research. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of event organizer professionalism in South Sulawesi, especially in managing international and hybrid events, in accordance with the theory of professional development suggested by Liu (2022) who stated that education that integrates practical and theoretical skills can improve professional performance. Literacy skills in event management are the main key to improving the professionalism of event organizers, especially in facing the challenges of globalization and

digitalization. This literacy includes two important aspects, namely foreign language literacy and digital literacy, which play an important role in managing international and hybrid events. In the first year of this research, the main focus is to identify the challenges faced by event organizers in South Sulawesi, especially related to foreign language comprehension, especially English, and skills in using digital technology platforms that support efficient event management.

Thus, strengthening foreign language and digital literacy skills is an important step to facilitate smooth and effective communication in international events, as well as increasing the competitiveness of event organizers in the global market. In the data collection stage, an online survey method will be used to obtain quantitative information on the extent to which event organizers in South Sulawesi have skills in using foreign languages and digital technology in managing international events. In addition, in-depth interviews and direct observations of events that have been held will help to gain a deeper perspective on the real challenges faced by event organizers. Quantitative data analysis will be conducted using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from interviews will be analyzed using a thematic approach to explore patterns that emerge in the experiences of event organizers. The results of this analysis will provide a clear picture of the need for foreign language and digital training, as well as recommendations for the development of training programs that can support the improvement of literacy skills in event management. These findings will form the basis for designing an educational curriculum that is in accordance with industry needs, which will be developed in the second year of the research. The following is the research flow of thought.

Results and Discussion

In the increasingly competitive and globally oriented MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition) industry, English language proficiency is an essential competency for an event organizer. English not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a medium of intercultural communication, and is key to building professionalism on an international scale. The Event and Convention Study Program at Makassar Tourism Polytechnic realizes the importance of this and actively designs various educational strategies to improve students' English language competency as prospective event organizing practitioners.

Integration of English in an Industry-Based Curriculum

This study program has developed a curriculum based on the needs of the global industry, by placing English not only as a supporting course, but as an integral element in the learning process. Courses such as English for Events, English for Tourism, and Professional English Communication are designed to adapt to terminology and situations that are common in the real world of work. The material includes the ability to write event proposals, prepare budgets in English, make presentations to international clients, and understand technical terms in the fields of protocol, event management, and hospitality services.

Contextual and Practice-Based Teaching Methods

The learning methods applied are not only theoretical, but also contextual and practice-based. Students are trained to use English in simulations of organizing international events, such as mock conferences, virtual meetings, or role-plays as liaison officers (LO) in campus activities involving foreign guests. This approach aims to enable students to practice in conditions that resemble reality, including facing real-time communication challenges with participants from various language and cultural backgrounds.

Strengthening Digital and Multicultural Literacy

In organizing hybrid and virtual events that are now increasingly dominant, English language skills must be accompanied by digital literacy and cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, this study program teaches students to use various international digital communication platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Canva, Eventbrite, and English-based event management software. Students are also introduced to the concepts of intercultural communication and cross-cultural sensitivity in order to be able to interact effectively with international participants and understand their cultural norms.

Collaboration with Practitioners and Industry-Based Activities

The Event and Convention Study Program also actively collaborates with various industry players, both domestically and abroad. Internships at event organizer companies, collaboration in organizing international events (e.g. Phinisi Festival, F8 Makassar, or International Conference), and seminars with foreign speakers provide opportunities for students to practice English in a professional context. In some of these activities, students are often involved as part of the core committee, protocol, international participant guides, and informal interpreters.

Continuous Evaluation and Individual Coaching

To ensure the effectiveness of English language learning, the study program also implements a continuous evaluation system that not only assesses cognitive aspects (mastery of grammar and vocabulary), but also performative aspects (speaking, presentation, and negotiation skills in English). In addition, there is individual coaching for students who experience difficulties, through language clinics or special academic guidance. Lecturers also use blended learning methods and interactive media to make learning more interesting and applicable.

Implications for Student Readiness in the World of Work

These educational efforts have a direct impact on increasing student readiness to enter the world of work, especially in managing international events. Graduates of this study program are expected to have good English communication skills, be adaptive to the dynamics of cross-cultural communication, and be able to manage challenges in organizing virtual or hybrid events. This ability is a significant added value amidst global competition in the MICE industry.

Relevance to Curriculum Development and Graduate Profile

The findings from this educational process also form the basis for developing a curriculum that is more responsive to industry needs. Study programs can continue to update the syllabus, add internationalization content, and form graduate profiles that are not only technically skilled, but also globally communicative. In the context of Makassar Tourism Polytechnic as a leading vocational education institution, this approach strengthens the role of the institution in producing competitive human resources who are ready to compete internationally.

Conclusion

The tourism and event organizing industry in South Sulawesi, especially in Makassar, has shown rapid development along with the increasing number of tourist visits and the frequency of international events. However, behind this great opportunity, there are serious challenges faced by local event organizers, especially related to limited foreign language and digital literacy. In the context of increasingly intensive globalization and digitalization, cross-cultural communication skills, mastery of English as an international lingua franca, and the ability to utilize digital technology are crucial elements in supporting the success of events, especially those on an international and hybrid scale. This study confirms that improving foreign language and digital literacy skills is not only a practical need, but also a strategic demand that must be responded to by vocational education institutions, especially the Events and Conventions Study Program at the Makassar Tourism Polytechnic. Through the development of an industry-based

curriculum, contextual learning methods, integration of cross-cultural communication theory, and collaboration with industry practitioners, this study program has succeeded in facilitating the formation of student competencies in organizing international events professionally. Initial findings from surveys and in-depth interviews conducted in the first year of this study indicate that there are still gaps in English language proficiency and digital literacy among event organizers. Therefore, practice-based education integrated with theories of cross-cultural communication and digital technology must continue to be strengthened. This research provides a strong basis for the development of relevant curricula and training programs, as well as being a reference in building a vocational education model that is adaptive to the needs of the global industry. Thus, graduates of the Event and Convention Study Program are expected to not only be ready to work, but also be able to compete in the global market as competent, professional event organizers who are sensitive to the dynamics of cross-cultural communication and technological developments.

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