

Enhancing English Language Proficiency for Sustainable Tourism in Sabang: A Focus Group Discussion for the “Kampung Inggris Sabang” Program

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Article Info

Received: October 20, 2025

Accepted: January 23, 2026

Published: February 28, 2026

Online First: February 28, 2026

Keywords

FGD;

Keywords Keywords;

Sustainable Tourism Development;

English for Tourism;

Community-based;

Language Learning.

Abstract

Sabang's rise as a Free Trade Zone, Free Port, and National Tourism Strategic Area has increased international visitor flows, exposing a critical gap: many local tourism stakeholders (homestay operators, tour guides, MSMEs, transport providers) lack the English proficiency needed to deliver high-quality, culturally authentic services. This community-service study proposes and grounds the Kampung Inggris Sabang initiative using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to map needs, identify barriers, and co-design an actionable language-empowerment roadmap. Employing a qualitative design, the study engaged diverse stakeholders in structured FGDs and semi-structured interviews to examine current communicative competence, motivation, contextual language requirements, and institutional readiness. Thematic analysis reveals (1) a strong community motivation to acquire practical, tourism-specific English; (2) constraints including limited access to localized training, time/work pressures, and lack of context-driven materials; and (3) preference for flexible, task-based, and digitally supported learning models embedded in local practice. Based on these findings, the paper outlines curriculum principles English for Specific Purposes (Tourism), task-based learning, role-plays, and peer mentoring and proposes institutional partnerships for sustainability. The study concludes that a participatory, context-sensitive Kampung Inggris Sabang can improve service quality, foster inclusive economic benefits, and strengthen Sabang's competitiveness as a sustainable international destination.

A. Introduction

The rapid growth of international tourism has fundamentally transformed English proficiency from a supplementary communication skill into a strategic determinant of destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. In an increasingly globalized tourism industry, visitors expect not only attractive destinations but also effective communication, culturally responsive services, and meaningful interactions with local communities. Consequently, limited English communicative competence among tourism stakeholders has become one of the major barriers preventing many emerging destinations from maximizing the economic and social benefits generated by international tourism (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022; Junaid, 2015; Nenotek et al., 2025). Beyond facilitating communication, English proficiency now functions as an essential component of destination quality, influencing visitor satisfaction, service excellence, intercultural engagement, and the long-term sustainability of tourism-based local economies (Saragih et al., 2022; Berybe et al., 2021).

Sabang City represents one of Indonesia's strategic tourism destinations facing this challenge. Located at the westernmost point of the Indonesian archipelago, Sabang is internationally recognized for its marine biodiversity surrounding Weh Island and the iconic Kilometer Zero Monument. Its designation as a Free Trade Zone, Free Port, and National Tourism Strategic Area has accelerated the growth of domestic and international tourist arrivals, creating increasing demands for professional tourism services capable of serving diverse international visitors (Bernadtua Simanjuntak et al., 2023). However, despite its strategic position, recent assessments indicate that many frontline tourism stakeholders—including tour guides, homestay operators, transportation providers, and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)—still experience limited English language proficiency, reducing their ability to provide high-quality services, communicate local cultural values effectively, and compete within the increasingly competitive global tourism market (Oktoma et al., 2024). This discrepancy between tourism development and local communicative capacity has become a significant obstacle to strengthening Sabang's sustainable tourism competitiveness (Junaid, 2015; Nenotek et al., 2025).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that language education contributes significantly to tourism development by improving service quality, strengthening intercultural communication, and enhancing local economic opportunities. Community-based language empowerment programs have shown considerable potential for integrating

English learning with local economic development, thereby increasing community participation in tourism activities (Karimah & Al-Nur, 2023; Sukaton et al., 2022; Wibowo et al., 2021). Likewise, English for Tourism has been widely recognized as an essential competency enabling tourism practitioners to communicate effectively in international contexts and improve visitor experiences (Rahman, 2023; Saragih et al., 2022; Berybe et al., 2021). Participatory approaches have also been recommended as effective mechanisms for strengthening community ownership, ensuring equitable participation, and promoting sustainable tourism development through collaborative planning involving local stakeholders (Junaid, 2015; Yunikawati et al., 2021; Sutapa et al., 2022). Moreover, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have frequently been employed as an effective qualitative approach for identifying stakeholder needs, collecting community aspirations, and supporting evidence-based program development (Rini S. Saptaningtyas et al., 2025).

Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have predominantly focused on evaluating English language training, examining communicative competence, or assessing tourism education outcomes after programs have been implemented. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to investigating how participatory needs assessment can serve as the empirical foundation for designing a community-based English language ecosystem that simultaneously reflects local linguistic demands, stakeholder expectations, institutional readiness, and sustainable tourism objectives before program implementation. Consequently, many language intervention programs remain insufficiently contextualized, often adopting generalized English curricula that inadequately capture the authentic communication needs encountered by tourism stakeholders in specific destinations such as Sabang.

Addressing this gap, the present study positions Focus Group Discussions not merely as a qualitative data collection technique but as a collaborative planning mechanism through which tourism stakeholders actively participate in identifying priority communication needs, implementation barriers, institutional capacities, and strategic directions for developing the *Kampung Inggris Sabang* initiative. By integrating perspectives from academic institutions, local government, tourism industries, and community representatives, this study proposes an evidence-based framework for designing a community-centered English language ecosystem capable of strengthening tourism service quality, enhancing intercultural communication, promoting local economic empowerment, and supporting sustainable tourism development. Such an approach also aligns with broader international agendas emphasizing human capital development, inclusive

community participation, and sustainable economic growth through education and language empowerment (Trang & Phuong, 2023; Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023; Alhumaidan & Alghamdi, 2023; Wirantaka & Mardiningrum, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the English language needs, communication challenges, stakeholder expectations, and institutional readiness underlying the development of the *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program through Focus Group Discussions. The findings are expected to provide an empirical foundation for designing a context-sensitive, community-based English language learning ecosystem that supports sustainable tourism development while strengthening the competitiveness of Sabang as an international tourism destination.

B. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the primary method of data collection to explore the English language needs, communication challenges, stakeholder expectations, and institutional readiness associated with the proposed *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Sado & Sahdan, 2025).

The participants were purposively selected to ensure representation from key tourism stakeholders directly involved in tourism services in Sabang. These included homestay owners, tour guides, representatives of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), transportation service providers, local government officials, academics, and community representatives. Their diverse professional backgrounds provided comprehensive perspectives on the existing English communication needs and the practical challenges encountered in serving international tourists (Ima Frafika Sari, 2022).

Data were collected through a series of Focus Group Discussions complemented by semi-structured interviews using open-ended guiding questions. The discussions explored participants' experiences in communicating with foreign visitors, perceived barriers to English language acquisition, expectations regarding the proposed *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program, and recommendations for developing a sustainable community-based English learning ecosystem. All discussions were facilitated by the research team, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data completeness. This process enabled participants to interact openly, exchange experiences,

and collaboratively identify priority issues relevant to the development of English language interventions in Sabang's tourism sector (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2025).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Initially, all interview and FGD transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Meaningful statements relevant to the research objectives were then coded systematically and grouped into categories based on recurring patterns. These categories were subsequently refined into broader themes representing participants' perceptions of English language needs, communication barriers, institutional readiness, and strategic priorities for implementing the *Kampung Inggris Sabang* initiative. Throughout the analytical process, comparisons were continuously conducted across stakeholder groups to identify similarities, differences, and emerging perspectives that enriched the interpretation of the findings (Guntoro et al., 2024; Reresi et al., 2024; Kaur et al., 2020).

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the researchers employed data triangulation by comparing perspectives from different stakeholder groups and conducting iterative discussions among the research team during the coding and interpretation processes. The emerging themes were continuously reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflected participants' viewpoints and the sociocultural context of Sabang's tourism industry. This approach strengthened the trustworthiness of the analysis while providing a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and contextual factors influencing English language learning within the local tourism community (Sunasuan et al., 2020; Trang & Phuong, 2023).

This study adhered to established ethical principles for qualitative research. Prior to participation, all participants were informed of the study's objectives, voluntary nature, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced, and all personal identities were anonymized during transcription, analysis, and reporting to protect participants' privacy.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with tourism stakeholders in Sabang to explore their English language needs, communication challenges, expectations regarding the proposed *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program, and institutional readiness for its implementation. The findings are organized thematically according to the key issues emerging from the analysis and are

subsequently discussed in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives and previous studies to highlight their implications for sustainable tourism development.

1. Results

This section presents qualitative research findings from the Focus Group Discussions, detailing the perceptions of tourism development stakeholders, including government officials, academics, tourists, and local businesses (Guntoro et al., 2024; Valeriani et al., 2023). The findings highlight the substantial influence of English proficiency on service quality and competitiveness in the region's growing tourism industry, emphasizing the program's strategic significance.

These insights will subsequently guide the creation of specialized English language training modules designed to meet the distinct communication requirements and challenges identified within Sabang's tourism ecosystem, while also drawing comparisons to other Indonesian EFL contexts where pedagogical interventions have been investigated (Ratminingsih et al., 2024). The results also show how these needs can be effectively included in the "Kampung Inggris Sabang" curriculum, making it more valuable and relevant for improving tourism services in the area. This thorough understanding ensures that the program directly addresses the real problems English teachers and tourism operators in the area face, and that its teaching methods align with how people communicate in the real world (Khulel, 2021).

The analysis also showed that many survey respondents expected personal benefits, especially improvements in their foreign language skills, despite gaps in their current proficiency levels (Dewi et al., 2023). This finding highlights the impetus for engagement in language programs, fueled by the aspiration for improved communicative proficiency in both professional and personal spheres (Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023). These motivations align with the general idea that speaking English well is vital to providing great service in the hospitality industry, a key part of any thriving tourism industry (Rahayu, 2020). If planned with the proper teaching methods in mind, such a program can significantly improve the quality of tourist experiences by making interactions between tourists and local service providers more effective (Bøgelund & Nørgaard, 2018). A complete English language program should include basic language skills and practical communication skills necessary for effective cross-cultural interactions in tourism settings. This is similar to the need for professionals to keep

improving their language skills (Barus & Simanjuntak, 2023). Consequently, a comprehensive needs analysis is essential to elucidate the educational and aspirational requirements of students learning English for tourism purposes, thereby reconciling existing linguistic competencies with future professional expectations (Trang & Phuong, 2023).

This is especially important because there are gaps in English proficiency among tourism workers, which make it harder to provide high-quality service and authentic visitor experiences (Trang & Phuong, 2023). The identified deficiencies necessitate targeted pedagogical interventions integrating communicative language teaching methodologies with task-based learning scenarios relevant to various tourism-related roles (Trang & Phuong, 2023). This strategic alignment guarantees that the English for Tourism curriculum emphasizes practical language skills, including modality markers suitable for various tourism discourses, which are directly relevant to the industry's daily operational requirements (Radovanović, 2020). This strategy addresses the disparities in English proficiency among tourism workers, enhancing service quality and competitiveness in Sabang's tourism sector by equipping participants with essential language skills for effective communication with international visitors (Prima, 2022; Putra, 2020). This initiative will enhance the communication skills of individuals in the tourism sector, thereby enabling them to better address the diverse needs of international tourists and position Sabang as a premier tourist destination.

The "Kampung Inggris Sabang" program should integrate robust English for Specific Purposes principles, highlighting the essential specialized vocabulary and communicative functions required for effective engagement in the tourism sector (Guntoro, 2021; Radovanović, 2020). This involves tailoring language education to meet the specific needs of tourism professionals, ensuring that participants achieve both general English proficiency and the specialized vocabulary and contextual understanding necessary for their roles (Barus & Simanjuntak, 2023; Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023). A comprehensive needs analysis is essential to identify the gaps between current English language proficiency and the communicative competencies required for effective participation in Sabang's tourism sector (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024). This systematic approach enables the development of a relevant and flexible curriculum that responds to the evolving demands of the global tourism market. This enhances the employability of local stakeholders and the region's overall competitiveness (Ayob et al., 2024; Nur et

al., 2023). This requires a strategic integration of communicative language teaching methodologies and project-based learning to cultivate practical English skills pertinent to real-world tourism contexts (Ho, 2020; Kolmos et al., 2018).

The integration of authentic communication can enhance participants' interactions with international tourists, thereby improving service quality and visitor satisfaction (Fadhur Rahman et al., 2023). This method ensures that the "Kampung Inggris Sabang" program contributes to the sustainable growth of Sabang's tourism industry by developing a highly skilled and linguistically proficient workforce (Trang & Phuong, 2023; Uysal & Seçilmiş, 2019). This comprehensive strategy aims to enhance the professional standards of Sabang's tourism sector, thereby increasing the city's attractiveness to international visitors as a hospitable and well-served destination (Trang & Phuong, 2023). The proposed Focus Group Discussion serves as a critical initial step to ensure that the program design is grounded in empirical evidence and aligns with the needs and objectives of the local community and tourism stakeholders (Trang & Phuong, 2023). The initial meeting will facilitate participation and provide insight into the current levels of English proficiency among individuals, as well as the specific communication challenges faced by various stakeholders in the tourism industry (Trang & Phuong, 2023). The FGD's comprehensive needs assessment facilitates the development of a tailored curriculum that addresses deficiencies and emphasizes the essential English language skills pertinent to Sabang's tourism sector (Leong & Li, 2012). This ensures that all participants in the "Kampung Inggris Sabang" program are aligned and fully supportive, contributing to the development of an integrated, practical, and community-based English learning ecosystem.

2. Discussion

Focus group results pinpointed essential areas requiring intervention, underscoring the immediate need for an English curriculum tailored to the distinctive linguistic and cultural context of the Sabang tourism sector (Tuomi et al., 2020). Participants consistently emphasized the necessity of practical, communicative English skills for interactions with tourists, including greeting visitors, elucidating local attractions, and facilitating transactional communication (Barus & Simanjuntak, 2023; Choi & Poudel, 2024). Talks showed that people who work with foreign tourists feel very unsafe. This is usually because they haven't worked with them much and are afraid of making

mistakes in the language (Trang & Phuong, 2023). This widespread worry underscores the importance of teaching kids to speak fluently and build their confidence, rather than focusing solely on strict grammar rules (Do et al., 2022). Focus group discussions (FGDs) found certain words and phrases that were important to Sabang's unique tourism offerings. This showed that content should be tailored to the local context instead of general English education (Leong & Li, 2012; Uysal & Seçilmiş, 2019).

Consequently, the "Kampung Inggris Sabang" curriculum will incorporate context-specific vocabulary and role-playing activities replicating authentic tourist interactions to improve participants' linguistic proficiency and intercultural communicative competence (Trang & Phuong, 2023). A targeted curriculum that includes translanguaging and speaking technology can significantly enhance communicative competence, as shown by similar programs in the hospitality and aviation industries (Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023; Simatupang & Supri, 2024). This customized approach enhances language acquisition and cultivates an understanding of the cultural subtleties necessary for efficient service delivery in a multicultural tourism setting, directly responding to the identified requirements of Sabang's tourism stakeholders (Trang & Phuong, 2023). The program's design must therefore strike a balance between the immediate practical requirements for communicative English and the long-term objectives of cultivating a linguistically proficient and culturally competent tourism workforce, informed by analogous needs assessments across various educational settings (Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023; Ku, 2024).

It will also be necessary to incorporate real-life materials and activities that emphasise multiple points of view, such as role-playing and simulations, to help students enhance their language and cultural skills. This all-encompassing technique, which integrates language and culture, is required to overcome communication hurdles caused by cultural misunderstandings and to improve the overall quality of tourist experiences (Trang & Phuong, 2023). Furthermore, the pedagogical approach will emphasise task-based language learning to recreate authentic communication scenarios, equipping participants with the practical abilities needed for real-world interactions in the tourism industry (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024). This strategy is consistent with research demonstrating how crucial it is for tourism students to have resources that are rich in context and culturally appropriate in order. This strategy is consistent with research demonstrating the need to provide tourism students with contextually rich and culturally relevant

resources to develop their intercultural communication abilities (Trang & Phuong, 2023). This method is crucial in multicultural settings such as Sabang, where effective communication requires more than just language proficiency. This is consistent with principles shown to increase EFL learning in multilingual settings (Kepley et al., 2008; Ratminingsih et al., 2024; Trang & Phuong, 2023). Finally, the goal of this comprehensive plan is to improve English proficiency and equip local stakeholders with the tools to offer more culturally sensitive and enriching experiences for international tourists. This will help Sabang maintain its position as a top tourist destination (Ratminingsih et al., 2024; Trang & Phuong, 2023).

This programme will also incorporate communicative language teaching components aimed at sociolinguistic appropriateness and strategic competence, both of which are critical for professional communication in the tourism industry (Khasanova, 2024). This requires developing a grasp of various communication styles and cultural norms, going beyond mere language precision to foster genuine intercultural competence among stakeholders (Lawrence, 2013). The curriculum will also contain problem-based learning techniques to provide students with real-world opportunities to use their English skills. This will allow them to apply their English skills in real-world tourism scenarios (Kolmos et al., 2018). This teaching style is based on what we know about English for Specific Purposes and interdisciplinary studies. According to (Frimodt-Møller, 2018), this approach ensures that students' knowledge is relevant to the tourism business in Sabang. This ensures that participants obtain linguistic expertise and develop the professional communicative skills required for successful employment in an increasingly interconnected global tourist market (Khasanova, 2024).

Additionally, the "Kampung Inggris Sabang" initiative can improve its curriculum by drawing on lessons from similar programs designed for specific job settings to address the communication problems common in Sabang's tourism industry (Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023). This upgraded curriculum may also incorporate strategies to assist English as a Foreign Language students in addressing issues such as poor pronunciation, low self-esteem, and limited critical thinking, which are common among tourism students (Saragih et al., 2022). The programme may continue to improve, as it is customisable and based on ongoing needs assessments and feedback. This ensures it will always be helpful and effective in enhancing the English-language abilities of Sabang's tourism personnel and service quality. This strategic emphasis on

adaptable curriculum development and continuing assessment would allow "Kampung Inggris Sabang" to evolve dynamically, directly addressing emerging linguistic demands while also increasing the overall professionalism of local tourist players. This dynamic approach aligns with recent changes in how teachers teach professional communicative competence, which emphasize the use of real-world materials and simulated workplace situations in language learning (Khasanova, 2024).

This allows for a targeted, practical educational experience that immediately improves the communication skills necessary for success in the global tourism industry (Guerra et al., 2018; Khasanova, 2024). This type of framework not only enhances each individual's talents but also strengthens Sabang's reputation as a friendly, well-managed tourist destination, allowing the economy to flourish sustainably. The programme seeks to address the pressing need for tourism workers to improve their English skills, which are required for effective communication and high-quality service to tourists from other countries (Ayob et al., 2024). This is consistent with the fact that English is the lingua franca of global tourism, which directly affects local staff's ability to interact with a diverse range of international guests and promote cultural exchange (Saragih et al., 2022).

The initiative will also draw on lessons from successful English language training programmes in the hospitality industry to make its approach more effective, focusing on practical communication skills helpful in dealing with tourists. This involves learning how to communicate effectively in common circumstances such as giving directions, explaining local sights, and answering visitor queries, all of which are critical to improving the overall tourist experience (Khasanova, 2024; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022). This customised teaching method will teach more than just basic conversational English. It will also cover specialised vocabulary and cultural differences relevant to Sabang's distinct tourism offerings. This will ensure that stakeholders can clearly communicate what makes the island unique (Burhanuddin & Ratnawati, 2021).

By improving these specific language skills, the programme seeks to equip tourism workers with the tools they need to share Sabang's unique cultural legacy and natural beauty with visitors worldwide. This would help Sabang become a popular tourist location (Shella Gherina Saptiany & Tiara Sanika Langsa Putriningsih, 2023). This comprehensive language empowerment aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, as it enhances communication skills, job preparation, and economic growth (Fadhlur Rahman et al., 2023). It will also make the atmosphere more

hospitable and exciting for international tourists by enabling local communities to share their stories and traditions more effectively, helping individuals from diverse cultures understand one another better.

This improved linguistic proficiency is critical for encouraging community engagement in tourism by ensuring that local perspectives are recognised and indigenous cultures are successfully transmitted to visitors (Baker et al., 2024; Junaid, 2015). This directly supports sustainable tourism practices by empowering local communities and ensuring that tourism's economic advantages are distributed fairly while also maintaining cultural integrity (Junaid, 2015). The mix of language learning, cultural preservation, and economic development demonstrates a comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism development. The "Kampung Inggris Sabang" programme seeks to increase tourism professionals' ability to connect confidently and skilfully with foreign visitors, hence improving visitor experiences and making Sabang more desirable to people from all over the world (Zahedpisheh et al., 2017). These programmes align with the country's larger goals for sustainable tourist development, as seen in other locations where language proficiency programmes have benefited the economy and cultural interaction (Mamat et al., 2021; Widianingsih et al., 2021).

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that English language development constitutes a strategic prerequisite for strengthening sustainable tourism in Sabang. The Focus Group Discussions revealed that tourism stakeholders generally possess basic English knowledge; however, their communicative competence remains constrained by limited confidence, insufficient tourism-specific vocabulary, inadequate opportunities for continuous learning, and the absence of a structured community-based language development system. At the same time, stakeholders expressed strong commitment to improving their English communication skills through practical, tourism-oriented learning that reflects the authentic needs of their daily professional activities.

The findings further indicate that the successful development of the *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program depends not only on language instruction but also on sustained collaboration among universities, local government, tourism businesses, and local communities. Such collaboration provides an important institutional foundation for establishing a sustainable English learning ecosystem that supports service quality, intercultural communication, and community participation in tourism development.

This study contributes by providing an empirical needs assessment that positions stakeholder participation as the foundation for designing a community-based English language program for tourism. Rather than proposing a generic language training model, the study offers an evidence-informed framework that integrates local communication needs, institutional readiness, and collaborative governance into the development of English for Tourism initiatives in emerging tourism destinations.

Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for policymakers, educational institutions, and tourism organizations in designing English language development programs that are responsive to local contexts while supporting sustainable tourism objectives. Future research is encouraged to evaluate the implementation and long-term effectiveness of the *Kampung Inggris Sabang* program, examine its impact on tourism service quality and visitor satisfaction, and explore the applicability of similar community-based language empowerment models in other tourism destinations.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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