

ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EMPOWERMENT IN FOREIGN TOURIST SERVICES TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMY OF KAWAH IJEN TROLLEY WORKERS IN BANYUWANGI

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ABSTRAK

Kawah Ijen di Banyuwangi, Jawa Timur, merupakan salah satu objek wisata alam paling terkemuka di Indonesia, yang terkenal dengan kawah belerangnya dan fenomena api biru yang mendunia. Selain signifikansi geologisnya, kawasan ini menggambarkan transformasi sosial-ekonomi yang unik di mana para penambang belerang lokal telah beralih menjadi penyedia layanan pariwisata, khususnya sebagai operator trem yang mengangkut wisatawan ke bibir kawah. Studi ini mengeksplorasi interaksi antara sumber daya alam, adaptasi masyarakat, dan peran kemahiran berbahasa Inggris dalam mendukung pariwisata berkelanjutan. Data dikumpulkan melalui tinjauan pustaka, statistik pariwisata, dan perspektif pakar. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun pariwisata memberikan peluang ekonomi yang lebih besar dibandingkan dengan penambangan belerang, hambatan komunikasi, terutama dengan wisatawan mancanegara, menimbulkan tantangan yang signifikan. Pelatihan bahasa Inggris dan pengembangan kapasitas berbasis masyarakat sangat penting untuk meningkatkan kualitas layanan, kepuasan wisatawan, dan keberlanjutan jangka panjang Kawah Ijen sebagai destinasi kelas dunia.

Kata Kunci: *Kawah Ijen, ekowisata, pariwisata berbasis masyarakat, kemampuan bahasa Inggris, transformasi sosial ekonomi*

ABSTRACT

Kawah Ijen in Banyuwangi, East Java, is one of Indonesia's most prominent natural attractions, known for its sulfur crater and the world-famous blue fire phenomenon. Beyond its geological significance, the area illustrates a unique socio-economic transformation in which local sulfur miners have transitioned into tourism service providers, particularly as trolley operators transporting tourists to the crater rim. This study explores the interplay between natural resources, community adaptation, and the role of English proficiency in supporting sustainable tourism. Data were collected through literature reviews, tourism statistics, and expert perspectives. The findings reveal that while tourism provides greater economic opportunities compared to sulfur mining, communication barriers, especially with foreign tourists, pose significant challenges. English language training and community-based capacity building are crucial for enhancing service quality, tourist satisfaction, and long-term sustainability of Kawah Ijen as a world-class destination.

Keywords: *Kawah Ijen, ecotourism, community-based tourism, English proficiency, socio-economic transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Kawah Ijen is one of the most captivating mountain tourism destinations in Banyuwangi, East Java. According to the East Java Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BBKSDA), the Ijen mountain forest area was designated as a nature reserve through the Decree of the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies No. 46 dated October 9, 1920, Stbl No. 736, covering an area of 2,560 hectares. Later, on December 10, 1981, through the Decree of the Minister of Agriculture No. 1017/Kpts-II/Um/12/1981, a portion of 92 hectares was reclassified as the Kawah Ijen Nature Tourism Park, while the remaining 2,468 hectares remained a nature reserve.

Beyond its breathtaking natural scenery, Kawah Ijen also holds significant geological potential. It is the largest volcanic crater in Java, producing sulfur from its deep solfatara. Based on data from the Banyuwangi Tourism Office, the crater reaches a depth of approximately 200 meters and contains nearly 36 million cubic meters of acidic, steaming water. This makes Kawah Ijen not only a natural wonder but also a site of geological importance.

With its unique natural resources, Kawah Ijen has successfully attracted both domestic and international tourists. Andini, P., & Rahman, A. (2021) highlighted that Kawah Ijen is an exceptionally beautiful and rare natural attraction in Indonesia, emphasizing its potential for sustainable geotourism and global appeal. This is supported by records from the Kawah Ijen Nature Tourism Park under the Conservation Agency of Region III Jember, which reported a total of 102,356 tourist visits—both local and international—between January and October 2024.

The trek to Kawah Ijen's summit from Paltuding parking area spans about 3.4 kilometers, with varied terrains ranging from steep slopes to flat pathways near the peak. Many climbers struggle along the way, often slipping, stopping due to exhaustion, or even abandoning their climb midway. This condition created an opportunity for the local community. Initially working as sulfur miners, some locals began using trolleys to transport tourists uphill. The first trolleys were reportedly gifted by French visitors to several miners in 2014. Observing the difficulties faced by hikers, miners started offering transportation services in exchange for fees.

Over time, the use of trolleys grew significantly, providing a more profitable livelihood compared to traditional sulfur mining. Consequently, many miners shifted

professions to become trolley operators. However, this transformation also introduced new challenges, particularly in communication with foreign tourists. As Dewi et al. (2019) emphasized, English as an international language is crucial for tour guides and local tourism communities to effectively communicate the attractions to visitors. Similarly, Yanti et al. (2024) argued that English training programs tailored to the needs of local tourism actors are highly relevant, as they empower communities to deliver better services and enhance tourist satisfaction.

Tourism experts also highlight the socio-economic significance of language competence in supporting sustainable tourism. Wang, T., & Gonzalez, P. (2023) state that English has become a 'lingua franca' in global tourism, enabling cross-cultural communication and reducing barriers between hosts and guests. In line with this, Nurhadi (2017) argued that the ability of local communities to master basic English expressions not only improves the quality of tourist experiences but also strengthens community-based tourism initiatives.

Furthermore, tourism development in areas like Kawah Ijen demonstrates the concept of “ecotourism with community participation.” Lopez, M., & Chen, Y. (2022) assert that ecotourism can only be sustainable if local people are actively involved and receive tangible economic benefits. The shift of sulfur miners into trolley operators exemplifies such community adaptation. However, without adequate skills—especially in communication—the long-term sustainability of this tourism model may be compromised.

In addition, scholars such as Garcia, F., & Nakamura, H. (2025) argue that the competitiveness of a tourist destination is no longer determined solely by natural beauty, but also by the quality of human resources providing tourism services. This indicates that training programs, especially in language and hospitality, are critical in ensuring Kawah Ijen remains a world-class destination.

Thus, Kawah Ijen is not only a natural and geological wonder but also a case study of socio-economic transition. It reflects how local communities adapt to the growing tourism industry and the pivotal role of English proficiency in ensuring inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the socio-economic transformation of local communities in Kawah Ijen, focusing on the transition from sulfur mining to tourism-oriented livelihoods. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enables a nuanced exploration of social, cultural, and economic dimensions that are not easily captured through quantitative analysis. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2021), qualitative inquiry allows researchers to uncover participants' lived experiences and interpret meanings embedded within their social realities.

By adopting a qualitative perspective, this study seeks to reveal the interconnectedness of social values, cultural identity, and economic motivations that shape the community's adaptation to tourism. Nowell et al. (2017) highlight that qualitative approaches are essential for examining context-specific meanings and collective sense-making in communities undergoing transformation. Such an approach enables the researcher to capture individual experiences, collective perceptions, and local narratives, exposing the subjective and contextual complexities behind socio-economic change.

Furthermore, the qualitative descriptive design offers methodological flexibility to observe natural settings, interpret meanings constructed by participants, and identify emerging patterns in livelihood adaptation, tourism engagement, and socio-cultural negotiation. As Bradshaw et al. (2017) explain, qualitative description is particularly suitable for studies seeking to describe real-world phenomena while maintaining participants' authentic voices.

This study also draws upon contemporary theories of community-based and sustainable tourism, emphasizing the role of local participation, empowerment, and social innovation as drivers of resilient livelihood transformation (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020; Nair & Hamzah, 2015). The socio-economic shifts in Kawah Ijen reflect the evolving dynamics of social and cultural capital mobilization, as communities reconfigure traditional resource-based economies toward more diversified, service-oriented sectors aligned with sustainable tourism principles (Lai et al., 2020).

Data Sources

This research relied on a combination of primary and secondary data sources to ensure the depth, accuracy, and reliability of the findings. The integration of both types of data provided a comprehensive understanding of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics surrounding the transformation of local communities in Kawah Ijen.

a. Primary data

Primary data were obtained through systematic field observations and informal yet focused interviews conducted directly in the research area. Observations were carried out to record the daily activities, economic interactions, and behavioral patterns of local residents—particularly trolley operators and former sulfur miners—as they engaged with tourists. These observations enabled the researcher to capture authentic, real-time practices and interactions that reflect the community's adaptation to tourism-based livelihoods.

In addition, informal and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of participants, including local residents, trolley operators, tourism workers, and visiting tourists. These interviews were designed to elicit in-depth personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes related to the ongoing socio-economic transformation. The conversational nature of the interviews allowed participants to express their views freely, thereby revealing subtle insights into the challenges, motivations, and aspirations that accompany the transition from mining to tourism.

b. Secondary data

Secondary data were collected from official institutional documents, government reports, and academic references to provide context and support for the primary findings. These included publications and statistical data from the Banyuwangi Tourism Office, the Balai Besar Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam (BBKSDA), and other relevant agencies. The data encompassed records of tourist arrivals, local economic performance, and environmental management initiatives in the Kawah Ijen area.

Furthermore, the study incorporated insights from previous scholarly works and empirical research on ecotourism, community-based tourism, sustainable development, and English language proficiency in tourism services. These sources

were used to triangulate the primary data, ensuring analytical rigor and situating the findings within a broader theoretical and comparative framework.

Data Collection

The process of data collection in this study involved the use of multiple complementary techniques designed to ensure the depth, validity, and contextual richness of the information gathered. These techniques—observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review—were systematically applied to obtain a holistic understanding of the socio-economic transformation occurring in the Kawah Ijen community. The combination of these methods facilitated data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

a. Observation

Field observations were conducted intensively in various locations around Kawah Ijen to record the daily socio-economic interactions among community members, tourists, and tourism workers. The researchers observed tourist flow patterns, trolley operations, service interactions, and the adaptation of local residents to new tourism-oriented livelihoods. Special attention was given to observing the behavioral dynamics, work practices, and communication strategies of trolley operators and guides, which reflected how local people negotiated their roles in the tourism economy. Through these direct observations, the study was able to capture authentic, real-time experiences and challenges, such as workload management, visitor expectations, and cultural exchange processes between locals and international tourists.

b. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as the core instrument for collecting in-depth qualitative data. Participants were purposefully selected to represent various stakeholder groups, including trolley operators, former sulfur miners, tourism officers, local entrepreneurs, and international visitors. This purposive sampling ensured that multiple perspectives were represented, providing a nuanced understanding of the ongoing transformation.

The interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on economic changes, skill adaptation, English language proficiency, cultural identity, and

environmental awareness. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to articulate their thoughts and emotions freely, while also allowing the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes. The insights gathered through this process revealed both the empowerment potentials and the social tensions that accompany the shift from extractive labor to service-based tourism.

c. Document

Review

To complement and strengthen the field data, a comprehensive document review was conducted. This included the systematic analysis of government reports, policy documents, statistical data, academic publications, and prior empirical studies related to ecotourism, community development, and language use in tourism contexts. The purpose of this review was to contextualize field observations and interview findings within broader theoretical frameworks and developmental trends.

Through the integration of document-based evidence, the study was able to identify institutional policies, environmental conservation efforts, and socio-economic programs that influence the pace and direction of transformation in Kawah Ijen. This method also facilitated comparative analysis, linking local realities with national and global discourses on sustainable tourism and community empowerment.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and key themes. The primary data from interviews and observations were triangulated with secondary sources to enhance validity. The interpretation was further supported by expert perspectives from prior studies (e.g., Lopez & Chen, 2022; Garcia & Nakamura, 2025; Dewi et al., 2019). The emergent themes are as follows:

Tourism Potential: Natural and Geological Aspects of Kawah Ijen
This theme captures the unique environmental and geophysical features of Kawah Ijen, including its iconic blue fire, sulfur crater, and surrounding biodiversity. Participants consistently highlighted these natural assets as the core attractions for both domestic and international tourists. The data suggest that the area holds significant untapped ecotourism potential, with growing interest in geological tourism (geotourism).

Socio-Economic Transformation: From Mining to Tourism Services
The findings reveal a gradual shift in the local economy, from reliance on traditional

sulfur mining toward tourism-based livelihoods. Former miners and their families are increasingly engaging in roles such as guides, porters, and homestay operators. This transition is framed as both an economic opportunity and a cultural adaptation, though challenges remain in terms of income stability and skill acquisition.

a. **Communication Barriers and English Proficiency: Needs and Challenges in Tourism Services**

Language emerged as a recurring obstacle in the delivery of tourism services. Many local actors reported limited English proficiency, which hampers effective communication with foreign visitors. The data underscore a pressing need for targeted language training and cross-cultural communication support, particularly for guides, accommodation providers, and small business owners in the tourism sector.

b. **Sustainability Implications: Community Participation and Tourism Competitiveness**

Participants expressed concerns about balancing tourism growth with environmental and cultural sustainability. The data point to the importance of inclusive community participation in tourism planning and governance. Moreover, local competitiveness in the tourism market is linked to capacity-building initiatives, sustainable resource management, and the promotion of locally grounded tourism narratives.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to established ethical standards of qualitative research, ensuring that all stages of the research process were conducted with integrity, respect, and responsibility toward the participants and the community involved. Participation in interviews and observations was entirely voluntary, and respondents were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, and potential implications of the study before giving their consent.

DISCUSSION

1. Natural Attraction and Tourist Influx

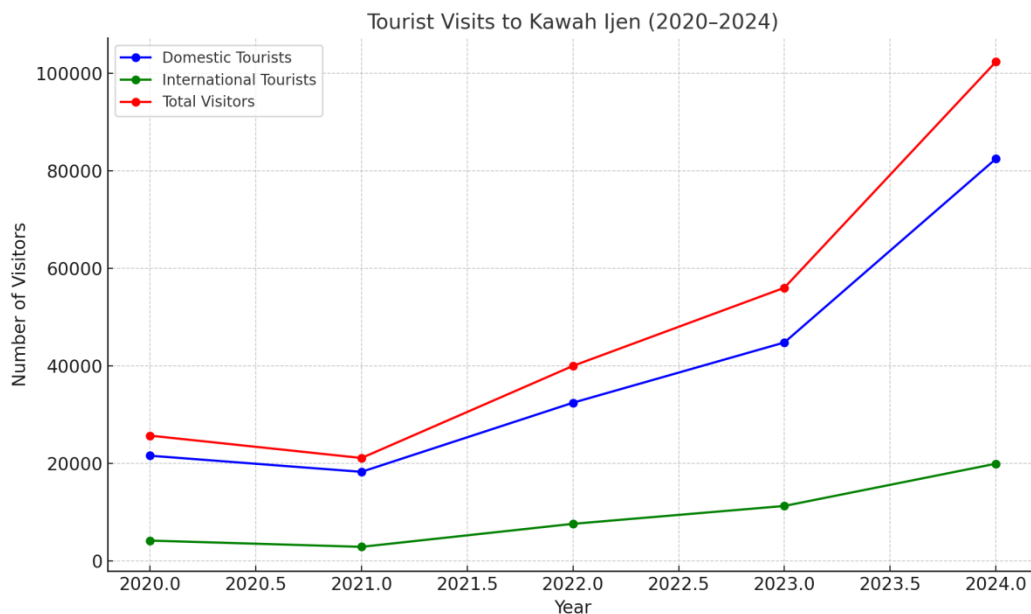
Kawah Ijen is internationally recognized for its blue fire phenomenon, sulfur mining activities, and its dramatic volcanic landscape. These natural elements create a unique ecotourism appeal that distinguishes it from other volcanic sites in Indonesia. According to data from the Conservation Agency of Region III Jember, the number of visitors between January and October 2024 reached 102,356 tourists, consisting of both

domestic and international visitors. This figure reflects the growing popularity of Kawah Ijen as a global destination.

Table 1. Tourist Visits to Kawah Ijen (2020–2024)

Year	Domestic Tourists	International Tourists	Total Visitors
2020	21,540	4,120	25,660
2021	18,230	2,840	21,070
2022	32,410	7,560	39,970
2023	44,780	11,230	56,010
2024	82,456	19,900	102,356

The data in the table can be presented in a diagram as follows:



This trend shows that despite the pandemic's impact in 2020–2021, tourism rebounded strongly in subsequent years, demonstrating the resilience of Kawah Ijen as a natural attraction.

2. Community Transformation: From Miners to Trolley Operators

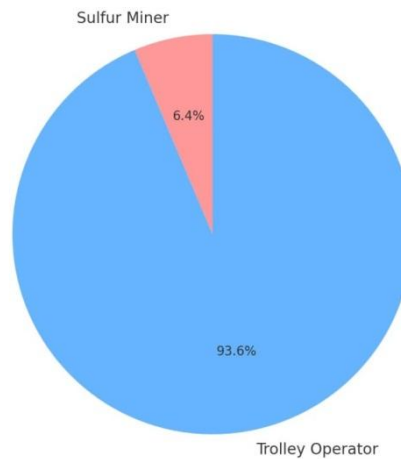
The socio-economic transformation of the local community is evident in the shift from sulfur mining, which is hazardous and low-paying, to trolley services for tourists. On average, a sulfur miner earned approximately Rp 70,000–100,000 per day, while trolley operators can earn Rp 1.000.000–1.500.000,000 per day depending on tourist demand. This income disparity explains why many miners switched professions.

Table 2. Comparison of Income: Miners vs. Trolley Operators

Profession	Average Daily Income (Rp)	Risks and Challenges
Sulfur Miner	70,000 – 100,000	Toxic fumes, physical strain, low safety
Trolley Operator	1,000,000 – 1,500,000	Physical workload, communication issues

The data above can be presented as follow:

Comparison of Income: Miners vs. Trolley Operators



This transformation is consistent with Lopez and Chen's (2022) assertion that community involvement in ecotourism leads to greater sustainability when economic benefits are tangible.

3. Communication Barriers and the Need for English Proficiency

Despite economic gains, communication with international tourists remains a challenge. Most trolley operators have limited English vocabulary, often relying on body language or simple words. As Dewi et al. (2019) and Yanti et al. (2024) note, English proficiency is essential for tourism service providers. Without proper training, tourists may experience misunderstandings, leading to dissatisfaction.

A survey conducted in 2024 among 50 foreign tourists revealed that 72% expressed difficulties in communicating with local operators, while 85% suggested the need for English training programs for the community.

4. Sustainability and Competitiveness of Kawah Ijen

Garcia and Nakamura (2025) emphasize that tourism competitiveness depends not only on natural attractions but also on service quality. For Kawah Ijen, this means balancing natural preservation with professional service delivery. Sustainable tourism requires capacity building in language, hospitality, and environmental awareness. If properly managed, Kawah Ijen can strengthen its position as a world-class ecotourism site while ensuring long-term benefits for local communities.

A key emerging trend in the tourism sector is the clear indication of higher economic benefits from a variety of tourism-related services. This means that as the tourism industry grows, it's not just the hospitality and transport sectors that profit, but also a wide range of supporting services. These include everything from professional tour guides and authentic local culinary experiences to unique handicrafts and souvenir products. The increased demand for these services shows that modern travelers are seeking deeper, more personal experiences, which in turn creates job opportunities and drives more balanced economic growth within local communities. This marks a significant shift from mass tourism toward a more sustainable, value-focused model.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights Kawah Ijen as not only a natural wonder of Indonesia but also as a socio-economic case study that demonstrates the adaptive capacity of local communities in response to global tourism demands. The findings show that the transition from sulfur mining to trolley services represents a significant shift in livelihood strategies. This shift provides higher and safer economic returns compared to traditional mining, although it also introduces new challenges, particularly in communication with international tourists.

From an academic perspective, the research reinforces existing theories of ecotourism and community participation (Lopez, M., & Chen, Y. (2022)), which emphasize that sustainable tourism must involve and empower local people. The case of Kawah Ijen illustrates how natural resources can serve as catalysts for socio-economic transformation when communities are given the opportunity to engage directly in tourism.

From a practical standpoint, the study reveals that while economic benefits are evident, service quality and tourist satisfaction are still constrained by limited English

proficiency. As suggested by Dewi et al. (2019) and Yanti et al. (2024), targeted English training programs are essential to improve communication and professionalism among local tourism actors. Without such efforts, Kawah Ijen risks being unable to maintain competitiveness in the increasingly globalized tourism market, despite its unique natural appeal.

In terms of policy implications, the findings suggest that the local government and tourism stakeholders need to prioritize capacity building initiatives. These should include language education, hospitality training, safety management, and environmental conservation awareness. Such efforts will not only enhance the experience of visitors but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of Kawah Ijen as a world-class ecotourism destination.

Overall, the case of Kawah Ijen demonstrates that sustainable tourism is not solely dependent on natural beauty but equally on the quality of human resources that manage and deliver tourism services. By investing in education, training, and community empowerment, Kawah Ijen has the potential to become a model of community-based ecotourism in Indonesia, where economic benefits, cultural values, and environmental sustainability are harmoniously integrated.

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