

## Digital Learning for ASEAN Readiness: The Role of Bahaso in Enhancing International Communication Skills of Indonesian Tourism Workers

Putri Jasmine Surapati<sup>1\*</sup>, and Lutfi Amalia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> School of Graduate Studies, PhD in Business Administration, Asia E University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author: [jasminesurapati@gmail.com](mailto:jasminesurapati@gmail.com)

Paper Info:

Received: 18 Apr 2025 | Revised: 22 Jun 2025

| Accepted: 28 Jul 2025 | Available Online: 28 Jul 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64233/VKOP7107>

Citation:

Surapati, P. J., & Amalia, L. (2025). Digital learning for ASEAN readiness: The role of bahaso in enhancing international communication skills of Indonesian tourism workers. *ASEAN Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 17(1), 43-52, <https://doi.org/10.64233/VKOP7107>

### Abstract

*This study investigates the contribution of Bahaso, a digital learning platform, in enhancing the international communication readiness of Indonesian tourism workers amid ASEAN Economic Community integration. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and assessments conducted before and after English language training programmes in 2021 and 2022. The results indicate a notable improvement in participants' English proficiency, with post-test scores rising by 51% in 2021 and 30% in 2022. Beyond technical language skills, participants also reported increased confidence in cross-cultural communication and customer interaction. These findings suggest that digital learning platforms such as Bahaso are capable of delivering accessible, scalable, and context-sensitive training that supports regional workforce development. The initiative also addresses disparities in underserved areas while advancing national goals to strengthen human capital in the tourism and service sectors. Furthermore, the study emphasises the strategic role of private education technology providers as non-state actors in public service innovation and digital inclusion. Through sector-specific adaptation and collaboration with government entities, Bahaso, a module by a private company, contributes to ASEAN readiness and inclusive economic participation among the locals. The paper concludes that such models offer valuable insights for other high-contact sectors aiming to enhance workforce competitiveness through digital education.*

**Keywords:** ASEAN integration, digital learning, EdTech, education technology, international communication, tourism workforce, tourism

## 1. Introduction

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) represents a transformative shift in the regional labour landscape, particularly affecting service industries such as tourism (Association of Southeast Asia Nations, 2015a). As outlined by the AEC Council Minister Indonesia, this integration aims to establish a single market and production base, enabling the free flow of goods, services, investment, and skilled labour across ASEAN countries (AEC Council Minister Indonesia, 2020). Indonesian tourism workers are now expected to possess robust international communication skills, including English proficiency and intercultural competence, to remain competitive in a liberalised and increasingly integrated ASEAN market (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). However, access to high-quality language training remains limited, especially in underserved and remote areas. As the official working language of ASEAN, English functions as both a communicative tool and a strategic asset for engaging in international tourism (Association of Southeast Asia Nations, 2015b). Despite its importance, Indonesia consistently ranks low in English proficiency among ASEAN nations, with rural regions experiencing the greatest gaps. These disparities restrict the potential for cross-border labour mobility and hinder efforts to meet the service quality standards demanded in the regional tourism industry. In this light, digital transformation presents an opportunity to democratise access to education. With internet access expanding throughout Indonesia, digital education platforms offer scalable and inclusive alternatives to traditional training models. In response, Bahaso, in partnership with *Badan Aksesibilitas Telekomunikasi dan Informasi* (BAKTI Kominfo), implemented a nationwide initiative to deliver online English language training tailored for tourism workers in remote areas. This initiative exemplifies how digital innovation and economic regionalism can intersect to enhance workforce capacity and inclusion (Hinings et al., 2018).

This study explores the role of digital learning platforms, particularly Bahaso, in bridging communication skill gaps and aligning local tourism workforce development with ASEAN integration goals. Situated within the context of Indonesia's service sector and regional economic liberalisation, the research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were gathered through three procedures: document analysis; interviews with facilitators and participants; and assessments conducted before and after English language training. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how digital training initiatives can strengthen international communication competencies in support of ASEAN workforce readiness. To guide this investigation, the study is structured around the following objectives: (1) to examine the effectiveness of Bahaso's digital English training in enhancing the international communication readiness of Indonesian tourism workers; (2) to explore participants' perceived changes in communicative self-efficacy and workforce competitiveness; and (3) to evaluate the role of public-private partnerships in promoting inclusive and scalable capacity-building models through education technology (EdTech). Based on these objectives, the central research question addressed in this study is: How does Bahaso's digital training initiative enhance the international communication readiness of Indonesia's tourism workforce?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. International Communication in Tourism

International communication plays a critical role in tourism, where service interactions often require cross-cultural understanding and language proficiency (Shobikah, 2017).

Gudykunst and Kim (2021) define intercultural communication competence as the ability to deliver effective messages by combining linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity and communicative confidence. For ASEAN tourism workers, particularly in high-contact roles, mastering these skills is essential to bridge cultural differences and ensure meaningful visitor experiences, which in turn supports tourism growth in the ASEAN region. Accurate, reliable, and culturally appropriate communication contributes to better-informed travel decisions by tourists regarding destinations, accommodations, transportation, and activities. Progressively, the process enhances the visitor experience and fosters trust—ultimately increasing tourist arrivals and job opportunities (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2010).

## **2.2. Digital Transformation in Language Education**

Digital platforms have transformed how language education is delivered, offering scalable and flexible learning environments (Morakanyane et al., 2017). pp-based learning enhances user engagement and provides personalised pathways tailored to learner needs, especially in remote or underserved communities (Luruk et al., 2025). Digital education also allows the content to be updated with current or practical applications, which can improve the efficacy in adult learners (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In these lights, Bahasa, as a local EdTech solution, exemplifies how technology can be harnessed for effective national-scale training delivery. These platforms are not merely tools but enablers of educational inclusion and equity, especially relevant in geographically diverse nations like Indonesia.

## **2.3. ASEAN Economic Regionalism and Workforce Readiness**

From a regional economic standpoint, strong communication skills empower tourism businesses to provide responsive and high-quality customer service across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Fluency in a shared language, particularly English, enables staff to address inquiries, complaints, and requests promptly and appropriately, thereby enhancing customer loyalty and competitive positioning within the AEC (Setiawan & Prakoso, 2021). Furthermore, international communication enables knowledge exchange, capacity building, and best practice sharing among ASEAN member states. As tourism workers participate in regional training and collaborative programmes, they gain exposure to new service standards and cultural insights that improve workforce professionalism.

Effective cross-cultural communication also facilitates strategic marketing and branding efforts throughout the ASEAN region. By tailoring messages to local cultures and preferences, tourism companies can reach diverse audiences and rapidly adapt to market trends. Such agility enhances their ability to expand market share and remain competitive. In addition, cross-border collaboration is enabled through robust communication infrastructures. Joint tourism campaigns, shared promotional materials, and coordinated regional strategies amplify the visibility of destinations and generate synergies that strengthen ASEAN's tourism appeal. These outcomes further highlight the behavioural readiness of workers to engage with ASEAN-level opportunities and challenges.

The AEC's strategic direction promotes free movement of skilled labour across member states, positioning English proficiency as a fundamental workforce requirement (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). According to Setiawan and Prakoso (2021), tourism-specific language training is not only an educational priority but a national development imperative. The ability to communicate in English is directly linked to improved customer service, better job mobility, and increased competitiveness within ASEAN's integrated service economy (Parianom & Rahmawati, 2019).

Furthermore, Rahmawati and Yuniarti (2022) emphasised that communication preparedness enhances not only individual employability but also national competitiveness

in regional tourism markets. Similarly, other than obtaining the skill itself, confidence is also a key to workforce readiness, which can be obtained from work experience. Bahaso can speed up this process through modules extracted from real-life settings, which can simulate a practical experience and improve workforce readiness. According to Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, this process of simulated role-playing can contribute to one's self-assurance in own communication skills.

#### **2.4. The Role of Non-State Actors in Human Capital Development**

Contemporary international relations increasingly recognise the contributions of non-state actors—including EdTech companies—in shaping public service innovation and economic diplomacy (Keohane & Nye, 2020). Bahaso's role as a digital education provider reflects this trend, bridging government policy with grassroots needs. Its collaboration with BAKTI Kominfo demonstrates the value of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in accelerating human capital development and enhancing digital inclusion, especially in Indonesia's 3T (frontier, outermost, and underdeveloped) regions.

While existing research highlights the strategic role of English proficiency in workforce mobility (Setiawan & Prakoso, 2021), recent analyses by the Asian Development Bank (2022) further note the widening digital divide across ASEAN's lower-middle income economies, posing challenges for inclusive skill development. This reinforces the urgency for scalable and low-bandwidth training models like Bahaso.

In addition, scholars such as Loonam et al. (2018) have emphasised that digital interventions in capacity building must align with sector-specific needs to maximise impact: a principle reflected in Bahaso's targeted training for tourism. Compared to other ASEAN EdTech initiatives, Bahaso's government-linked implementation model fills an institutional gap and provides lessons for future private-sector participation in skills development.

### **3. Research Method**

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of Bahaso in enhancing the international communication competence of Indonesian tourism workers through digital English training. A qualitative method was deemed appropriate to investigate complex social phenomena in context and to capture the lived experiences of programme participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected using three main procedures. First, a document analysis was conducted on training reports provided by Bahaso and BAKTI Kominfo for the years 2021 and 2022. Second, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both programme facilitators and selected participants to obtain deeper insights into implementation processes and learner experiences. Third, the study incorporated an analysis of pre-test and post-test English language proficiency scores, complemented by a questionnaire distributed to 60 participants from the tourism sector who completed the training.

The analysis followed a systematic qualitative process comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles et al. (2014). To enhance the validity of findings, both source and method triangulation were applied. A total of ten (10) semi-structured interviews were conducted, consisting of five (5) training facilitators and five (5) programme participants, selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation from various geographic regions. Additionally, questionnaire responses were collected from 60 training participants.

The qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questionnaire items were then thematically coded using manual analysis. Recurring patterns and categories were identified, grouped, and interpreted to understand key dimensions of participant experiences. Triangulation was implemented by comparing results across document reviews, test scores, interview transcripts, and questionnaire data to ensure consistency and enhance reliability.

The unit of analysis was Bahaso's digital English language training programme, with a specific focus on its effects on tourism workers across various Indonesian regions. The broader context of this analysis included public policy objectives related to tourism development and the dynamics of ASEAN regional integration under the AEC framework.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

Building on the literature and research framework outlined above, this section presents the key findings and interprets their implications within the ASEAN workforce development context.

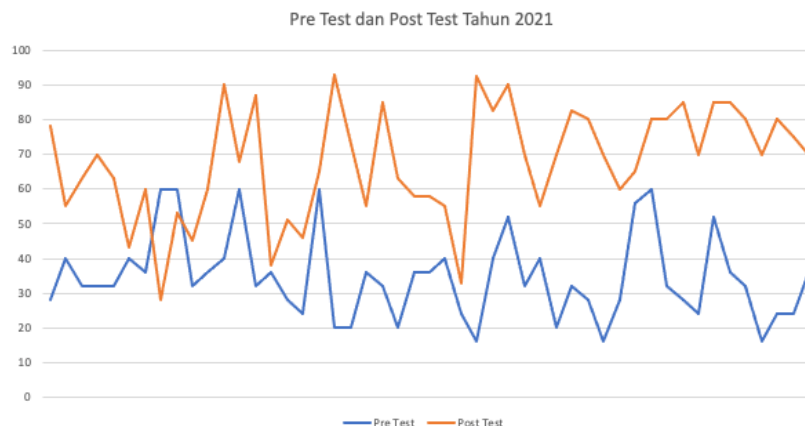
##### 4.1. Significant Improvement in English Language Proficiency

Data from the 2021 and 2022 programme evaluations in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively, indicate a marked improvement in participants' English language proficiency following the completion of Bahaso's digital training modules. Specifically, the average post-test scores increased by 51% in 2021 and 30% in 2022. These quantitative improvements underscore not only the instructional efficacy of the digital learning content but also the pedagogical flexibility of Bahaso's model in addressing diverse learner profiles across the tourism workforce.

These findings are consistent with the concept of learning transfer in adult education, where practical, context-specific instruction facilitates faster knowledge assimilation and long-term skill retention (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Moreover, their study underscores that mobile-accessible, asynchronous learning supports user engagement in remote contexts, addressing common barriers such as limited connectivity, time constraints, and geographic isolation (Luruk et al., 2025). As such, Bahaso not only delivers content effectively but also provides an inclusive model of digital training suited for widespread national implementation in the tourism sector.

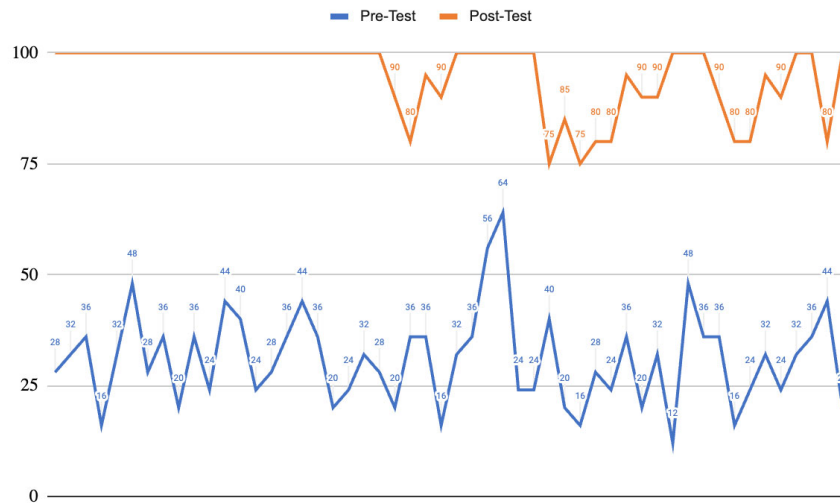
**Figure 1**

*Improvement in English Language Test Scores of Bahaso Training Participants (2021)*



**Figure 2**

*Improvement in English Language Test Scores of Bahaso Training Participants (2022)*



**4.2. Development of Communicative Self-Efficacy**

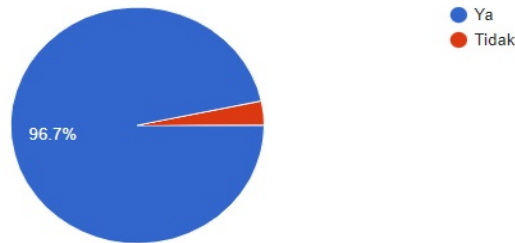
Beyond technical language acquisition, participant interviews and questionnaire responses revealed a notable increase in communicative confidence. As shown in Figure 3, a total of 96.7% of respondents reported improved conviction to interact with international tourists following the training. These findings align with Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that mastery experiences—such as simulated role-playing in relevant contexts—strengthen individuals’ beliefs in their ability to perform specific communication tasks.

**Figure 3**

*Questionnaire Items on the Credibility Indicators of Tourism Sector Workers*

Apakah dengan adanya kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang baik dapat mempermudah anda dalam melakukan komunikasi internasional saat bekerja?

60 responses



In the tourism sector, communicative confidence is particularly essential due to the emotionally intensive nature of service delivery and the diplomatic function of frontline staff. Participants indicated that they felt more equipped to address diverse customer expectations and to represent Indonesian hospitality with greater clarity and professionalism. The importance of context in cross-cultural communication was also emphasised. As Shobikah (2017) suggested, effective communication requires an awareness of cultural values and

recipient expectations. One participant stated the importance of adjusting tone and style based on the perceived preferences of international tourists:

“In terms of communication style, try to adjust so that the person you are talking to feels more comfortable. If the person you are talking to is formal, we should also be formal. If it is informal, we can also be more relaxed. If the person you are talking to tends to be humorous, we can also follow the atmosphere with a humorous style.” (A.N., Personal Interview, 2023)

Another participant shared that the training helped him plan better itineraries, provide clear explanations at destinations, and communicate with tourists more confidently. The preparedness and effective communication resulted in more positive feedback from both clients and colleagues, which is consistent with the notion by Rahmawati and Yuniarti (2022) that communication readiness benefits beyond the individual level in the tourism market. His reflections highlighted a deeper awareness of the cultural and linguistic diversity present in tourism, underscoring the value of contextually responsive communication.

These insights collectively illustrate how Bahasa’s programme not only improved language proficiency but also cultivated communicative self-efficacy—an essential attribute for navigating the multicultural demands of ASEAN’s tourism industry.

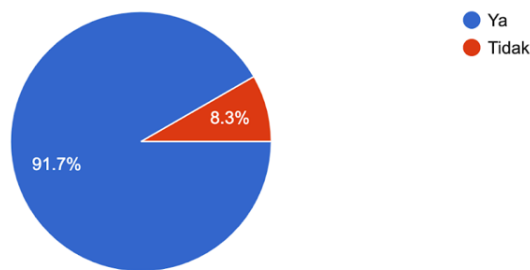
#### 4.3. Cognitive and Behavioural Readiness in AEC Context

A notable outcome of the training was participants’ enhanced cognitive and behavioural readiness to compete within the AEC labour market. More than 90% of respondents demonstrated awareness of Indonesia’s participation in the AEC and recognised the importance of developing international communication competencies, as displayed in Figure 4. This awareness reflects both the programme’s penetration and its alignment with regional integration objectives (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

**Figure 4**

*Questionnaire on the Training Program to Support Competitiveness in the AEC*

Apakah dengan adanya program pelatihan ini bisa membantu kamu untuk bersaing di MEA?  
60 responses

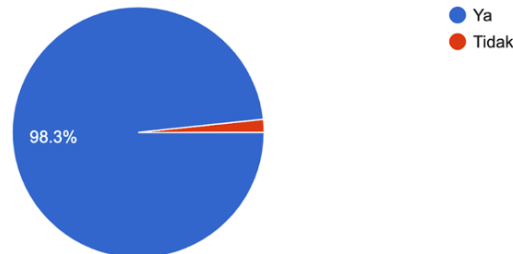


**Figure 5**

*Questionnaire on Bahaso's Contribution to Enhancing Competitiveness in the AEC Era*

Apakah kontribusi dari Bahaso dapat membantu kamu untuk bersaing dalam sektor pariwisata di era Masyarakat Ekonomi ASEAN (MEA)?

60 responses



Importantly, both Figure 4 and Figure 5 show that participants perceive the programme as equipping them with a competitive edge and market readiness—attributes that are central to employability in the AEC. This readiness is not merely technical but also cognitive and behavioural: the training fostered adaptability, customer orientation, and linguistic flexibility, which are fundamental in navigating multicultural workplace interactions.

#### **4.4. Digital Equity and the Role of Bahaso in Public-Private Collaboration**

Bahaso's ability to reach participants in remote areas across Indonesia underscores the growing relevance of digital equity in national development efforts. The training programme's accessibility in 3T regions, areas often constrained by geographical isolation and limited infrastructure, demonstrates how digital platforms can bridge spatial and socioeconomic divides in skills development (Muslimin & Indrawati, 2024).

This initiative exemplifies the strategic potential of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in advancing inclusive education, as emphasised by Keohane and Nye (2020). Through collaboration with BAKTI Kominfo, Bahaso contributed to a national capacity-building agenda that extends beyond urban centres. By combining public sector resources with private sector innovation, the partnership successfully addressed both infrastructural and pedagogical barriers to learning. Bahaso's role in the digital learning ecosystem illustrates how such actors can complement government strategies in achieving sustainable human capital development.

#### **4.5. From Best Practice to Policy Recommendation**

Given the measurable improvements in both competence and confidence among participants, the Bahaso training model presents a scalable and adaptable best practice for digital capacity-building in other high-contact sectors. Its blended structure—featuring asynchronous learning, contextualised content, and public sector collaboration—could be replicated in fields such as healthcare, logistics, and creative industries where communication plays a vital operational role.

This study contributes to broader policy discourse by demonstrating how Indonesia can equip its workforce not only for ASEAN regional integration but also for the global labour market. As the post-pandemic economy continues to normalise hybrid and remote working models, digitally delivered and sector-specific training becomes increasingly critical. The Bahaso initiative exemplifies how targeted interventions—especially those supported by public-private partnerships—can close skills gaps while promoting inclusive development.

Policymakers are thus encouraged to consider the Bahasa model as a strategic reference for expanding workforce development programmes. By leveraging local EdTech providers and aligning training content with industry needs, national strategies can foster human capital that is both globally competitive and digitally literate.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has explored how digital language training, facilitated through a public–private partnership, contributed to improving the international communication competencies of Indonesian tourism workers in alignment with ASEAN regional integration goals. The Bahasa training programme demonstrated measurable impacts across three core areas: enhanced English proficiency, increased communicative self-efficacy, and deeper cognitive and behavioural readiness for cross-border work, particularly in the context of the AEC integration. Furthermore, the programme’s delivery through digital platforms reached underserved and geographically isolated regions, reinforcing its importance in promoting digital equity and inclusive access to education. The strategic collaboration with BAKTI Kominfo exemplifies how public–private partnerships can extend the reach of national capacity-building initiatives by overcoming infrastructural limitations and resource constraints. As a locally grounded and scalable model, the Bahasa initiative offers practical insights for national stakeholders and other ASEAN member states pursuing similar workforce development strategies. The findings of this study reaffirm the potential of targeted, sector-specific digital learning interventions to support inclusive economic participation and improve workforce competitiveness across Southeast Asia. Future research may investigate long-term behavioural changes among programme alumni, evaluate the transferability of this model to other high-contact sectors such as healthcare or logistics, and explore the comparative effectiveness of hybrid and digital learning formats in advancing post-pandemic workforce development.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Badan Aksesibilitas Telekomunikasi dan Informasi (BAKTI Kominfo) and Bahasa for their collaboration and for providing access to essential data that made this study possible. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the training facilitators and participants whose valuable insights significantly contributed to the research findings. This study would not have been possible without the collective efforts and cooperation of all parties involved.

## References

- AEC Council Minister Indonesia. (2020). *Masyarakat Ekonomi ASEAN*. <https://Meaindonesia.Ekon.Go.Id/Mea/>
- Asian Development Bank. (2022). *Harnessing the potential of the digital economy for ASEAN: Promoting inclusive digital skills and jobs*. Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/770436/asian-economic-integration-report-2022.pdf>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2023). *Human resource development for the future of work*. ASEAN Secretariat. [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/ASEAN-Declaration-on-Human-Resources-Development-for-the-Changing-World-of-Work-and-its-Roadmap\\_Final\\_19Feb2021.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/ASEAN-Declaration-on-Human-Resources-Development-for-the-Changing-World-of-Work-and-its-Roadmap_Final_19Feb2021.pdf)
- Association of Southeast Asia Nations. (2015a). *ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025*. <https://asean.org/book/asean-economic-community-blueprint-2025/>
- Association of Southeast Asia Nations. (2015b). *ASEAN strategic action plan for SME development 2016–2025*. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/SAP-SMED-Final.pdf>

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. [https://spada.uns.ac.id/pluginfile.php/510378/mod\\_resource/content/1/creswell.pdf](https://spada.uns.ac.id/pluginfile.php/510378/mod_resource/content/1/creswell.pdf)
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2021). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Hinings, B., Gegenhuber, T., & Greenwood, R. (2018). Digital innovation and transformation: An institutional perspective. *Information and Organization*, 28(1), 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2018.02.004>
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (2012). *Power and interdependence* (4th ed.). Longman
- Loonam, J., Eaves, S., Kumar, V., & Parry, G. (2018). Towards digital transformation: Lessons learned from traditional organizations. *Strategic Change*, 27(2), 101–109. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jsc.2185>
- Luruk, Y. L., Panggalih, W. B., & Muharlisiani, L. T. (2025). Digital learning's impact: Measuring the effectiveness of online English speaking instruction in Indonesia. *Educational: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan & Pengajaran*, 5(2), 305–313. <https://doi.org/10.51878/educational.v5i2.5024>
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. Jossey-Bass. <https://download.e-bookshelf.de/download/0003/9722/52/L-G-0003972252-0002483324.pdf>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage. <https://www.metodos.work/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Qualitative-Data-Analysis.pdf>
- Morakanyane, R., Grace, A., & O'Reilly, P. (2017). Conceptualizing digital transformation in business organizations: A systematic review of literature. *BLED 2017 Proceedings* (pp. 427–444). <https://aisel.aisnet.org/bled2017/21>
- Muslimin, M., & Indrawati, R. A. (2024). Digitalization and education equity in remote areas: Challenges and strategic solutions. *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences*, 7(2), 364–383. <https://doi.org/10.34007/jehss.v7i2.2356>
- Parianom, R., & Rahmawati, N. F. (2019). Kesiapan Indonesia menghadapi masyarakat ekonomi ASEAN: Sektor pariwisata [Indonesia's readiness in facing the ASEAN economic community: The tourism sector]. *Jurnal Kajian Ilmiah Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya*, 19(2), 141–150.
- Rahmawati, I., & Yuniarti, L. (2022). Kesiapan SDM pariwisata dalam menghadapi integrasi ASEAN: Perspektif komunikasi lintas budaya [Readiness of tourism human resources for ASEAN integration: The Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective]. *Jurnal Pariwisata Nusantara*, 14(2), 123–136.
- Setiawan, B., & Prakoso, D. (2021). Bahasa Inggris sebagai kebutuhan strategis dalam daya saing MEA [English as a strategic requirement for competitiveness in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)]. *Jurnal Kajian ASEAN*, 9(1), 77–90.
- Shobikah, N. (2017). *The importance of English language in facing ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)*. *At-Turats*, 11(1), 85-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24260/at-turats.v11i1.873>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2010). *ASEAN integration and its impact on tourism*. <https://www.travel-impact-newswire.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/UNWTO-REPORT-on-ASEAN-Tourism-Integration.pdf>