Career Opportunities for Students of Mandarin Language Education Study Program in Tourism Industry

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Abstract
Tourism is a strategic sector that contributes significantly to global economic growth. In Indonesia, this sector serves as one of the main pillars of national economic development, particularly with the increasing number of international tourists including those from China visiting various destinations such as Malang City. This phenomenon opens up new opportunities in the job market, especially for graduates of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program. This study aims to identify the career potential of students in this program within the tourism industry. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to students and tourism industry practitioners. The analysis results show that most students express a strong interest in pursuing careers in this sector. The most in-demand and popular profession is that of a tour guide, especially those who are able to communicate in Mandarin. Nevertheless, the main challenge faced is the lack of practical foreign language proficiency and other supporting skills. Therefore, it is necessary to improve competencies through language training and professional skill development so that graduates are better prepared to compete in the job market, particularly in the tourism sector, which is based on service and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: *Career Opportunities, Tourism Industry Mandarin Language Education*

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Introduction

The tourism sector has become one of the most dynamic sectors and has made a major contribution to the global economy. The tourism sector has become one of the most dynamic sectors and has made a major contribution to the global economy. Based on the Travel & Tourism: Global Economic Impact & Trends 2020 report from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), this sector contributes around 10% of the total global gross domestic product (GDP) and creates more than 330 million jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2020). In Indonesia, the tourism sector is one of the leading sectors that has great potential to be developed, in line with the opinion of Dwi and Subekti (2017) who stated that as an archipelagic country with around 17,000 islands, Indonesia has a unique geography that gives birth to a diversity of environments, cultures, and tourist destinations throughout the archipelago. During 2017, the number of foreign tourist visits to Indonesia reached 14.04 million visits or an increase of 21.88% compared to the number of visits during 2016 which was recorded at 11.52 million

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visits (BPS, 2017). This shows that the tourism sector in Indonesia occupies a strategic position as one of the main pillars in national economic development. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, foreign tourists from China are one of the largest groups visiting Indonesia, with the number continuing to increase (Kemenparekraf, 2022). Several tourist attractions in Malang that attract Chinese tourists include natural attractions such as Mount Bromo, Tumpak Sewu Waterfall, and Coban Rondo, as well as artificial attractions such as Jatim Park, Museum Angkut, and Kampung Warna-Warni Jodipan. These places are the main destinations in the tour packages offered to foreign tourists, including tourists from China who show a high interest in the natural beauty and richness of local culture. This condition has resulted in the need for workers with Mandarin language skills in the tourism sector becoming increasingly urgent. In line with this, Sutami (2007) emphasized that learning Mandarin is directed at mastering and utilizing the language in order to access science and technology and face the challenges of global competition. Therefore, students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program have a great opportunity to contribute to the tourism sector because they are equipped with language skills that are in accordance with the needs of the job market. Mastery of Mandarin is a skill that is very much needed, especially in the tourism sector which involves direct interaction with Chinese tourists. This is important to ensure effective communication and to minimize the potential for misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions (Hira, 2024). The need to strengthen the competence of students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program in the tourism sector is increasingly relevant along with the increasing demand for workers who have Mandarin language skills, especially in dealing with the flow of Chinese tourists to Indonesia. Although structurally the Mandarin Language Education study program focuses on the field of education, students have high adaptive potential to contribute to various sectors, including tourism. Mandarin Language Education students are not only equipped with language skills, but also equipped with cultural understanding which is an important capital in supporting the quality of service to Chinese tourists. However, this potential has not been utilized optimally, either by students as prospective workers or by the tourism industry which has not strategically involved graduates from this study program in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector based on language and cultural needs. This study aims to understand the views of students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program on job opportunities in the tourism sector, especially in serving tourists from China. In addition, this study also aims to find out how tourism industry players in Malang City view the need for workers who have Mandarin language skills. Furthermore, this study analyzes the extent to which the language skills possessed by graduates of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program are in accordance with the needs of the world of work, and reviews the role of Mandarin in improving the quality of service and the attractiveness of tourist destinations in Malang for Chinese tourists.

Method

In the study of career opportunities for students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive method. Data were obtained through instruments in the form of questionnaires and essays distributed to students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program and tourism industry players. The questionnaire given to students was designed to explore students' perceptions, interests, and readiness to enter the workforce, especially in the tourism sector that serves tourists from China.

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Meanwhile, the questionnaire for industry players aims to find out their views on the need for workers who have Mandarin language skills and their expectations regarding graduate competencies. According to Moleong (2022), qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as their perceptions, attitudes, and actions, through a comprehensive and contextual approach. Therefore, this approach is considered appropriate to describe in depth the experiences and views of the two groups regarding job opportunities in the tourism sector.

This method is also known as naturalistic research because it is carried out in natural conditions, without any treatment or manipulation of the variables studied (Sugiyono, 2019). To analyze the data obtained, this study uses analysis techniques according to Miles and Huberman (1994), which consist of three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. This process allows researchers to filter important information, organize findings based on themes and draw relevant meanings from respondents' answers. Thus, certain patterns in student perceptions and industry players' views can be identified in depth to gain a complete understanding of career opportunities for graduates of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program in the tourism sector.

The initial stage in this analysis process begins with the preparation of a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire designed in accordance with the research objectives to collect information related to student interests, skills, and experiences, as well as the views of tourism industry players regarding job opportunities in the field, especially in the context of serving tourists from China. The questionnaire for students was distributed online on January 8, 2025 to 29 students of the 2022 batch of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program Offering B, through the assistance of the head of the offering by utilizing the class WhatsApp group as a distribution medium. Meanwhile, the distribution of questionnaires to eight tourism industry players was carried out personally via WhatsApp messages, taking place from January 8 to 30, 2025. Respondents were selected based on accessibility and relevance to the research topic. They consisted of four travel agency owners, one hotel supervisor (hospitality supervisor), and three tour guides. The results of filling out the questionnaire from these respondents provided significant data regarding the need for Mandarin-speaking workers, industry expectations of graduate competencies, and challenges in interacting with Chinese tourists.

After the data was collected, the researcher proceeded to the data reduction stage. At this stage, the data was filtered, condensed, and focused only on information that was relevant to the research objectives. This reduction made it easier for researchers to identify key themes, such as the language and cultural skills needed in the tourism sector, students' perceptions of job readiness, and industry views on graduate contributions. This process is an important initial step before the data is presented and conclusions are drawn comprehensively.

Results and Discussion

Career Opportunities for Students of Mandarin Language Education Study Program
Perception of students

After the researcher conducted research by distributing questionnaires to students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program, State University of Malang, class of 2022, the researcher obtained the following results.

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Based on the results of the questionnaire above, as many as 21 students (72.4%) stated that they were interested, 7 students (24.1%) were very interested, and only 1 student (3.4%) was not interested in the tourism industry. These data show that the majority of students have a high interest and potential to contribute to the development of the tourism industry, especially in Malang City. This interest is in line with Sundari's view (in Hasan, 2024) which states that mastery of Mandarin is an important factor for Mandarin Language Education graduates to be able to compete in the job market related to the international trade sector and bilateral relations with China. Therefore, students' interest in the tourism industry can be understood as a response to promising career opportunities, especially in the international sector that emphasizes foreign language skills and cultural understanding, as is the tourism industry which also sells services and cultural diversity.

The results of the questionnaire obtained showed that the majority of students of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program believed that the tourism sector offers quite promising career opportunities. This was shown by 17 students (58.6%) who stated that there were sufficient opportunities for a career in tourism, while the remaining 12 students (41.4%) even stated that the opportunities were very wide open. This finding indicates that students are aware of the importance of Mandarin language skills as the main capital in facing the world of work, especially in industries that are directly related to intercultural interactions such as tourism. This view is in line with the opinion of Novitasari (2017) who emphasized that Mandarin is one of the most widely used languages in the world, both in the context of interpersonal communication and in the professional sector. Therefore, mastery of Mandarin is an important asset in the era of globalization that demands a workforce that not only has technical competence, but also cross-cultural communication skills. In line with this, the tourism sector as one of the industries that is highly dependent on global interaction places mastery of foreign languages, especially Mandarin, as one of the main qualifications that can increase the competitiveness of graduates. Mandarin language skills can be categorized as skills as well as cross-cultural understanding that significantly contribute to improving students' working abilities. Especially in the tourism sector, which highly demands intercultural communication skills and adaptation in the work environment.

Based on the results of the questionnaire in Figure 3, questions regarding the sectors that most need workers with Mandarin language skills show that most students mention professions such as tour guides, hotel staff and travel consultants as fields that really need these skills. This student statement shows an awareness that language skills, especially Mandarin, are very much needed in positions that involve direct interaction with foreign tourists, especially from China. This understanding is in line with the opinion of Marlyana and Khoiriyah (2015) who stated that the level of tourist satisfaction is greatly influenced by the quality of service, both in terms of communication between tourists and service providers and from the physical condition of the tourist destination. Therefore, Mandarin language skills are one of the important factors in supporting service quality, especially when dealing with tourists from China. In line with that, the findings of Sulistyo et al. (2024) emphasized that effective interpersonal communication between tour guides and visitors has a positive and significant effect on the level of tourist satisfaction. In this context, Mandarin language skills not only play a role as a means of communication, but also as a key skill that supports the success of interactions between service providers and tourists. This ultimately

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contributes to creating a more enjoyable travel experience, building a positive destination image, and increasing overall visitor loyalty and satisfaction.

Perception from the Tourism Industry

The tourism industry perceives Mandarin language skills positively, aligning with the rising number of Chinese tourists in Indonesia. A questionnaire revealed that out of eight industry respondents (travel agency owners, hotel supervisors, tour guides, managers), 62.5% "agreed" and 37.5% "strongly agreed" on the need for Mandarin-speaking workers, reflecting high awareness of market adaptation and opportunities for graduates (Irianto, 2016). Mandarin serves as a communication bridge, enhancing comfort and understanding between tourists and locals, while language barriers can reduce tourism quality (Laisya Failah Sufa, 2024).

Half of the respondents rated Mandarin skills as "important" and the other half as "very important" for tourism services, aligning with Tribe (2018) that foreign language skills improve communication, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Mandarin is now seen as a core strategic competency that reflects professionalism (Tumewu, 2018), adding value in facing a multicultural tourism market and supporting service growth in Indonesia.

On interaction frequency, 50% of companies often interact with Chinese tourists, 25% occasionally, and 25% never, reinforcing the need for cross-cultural communication (Haviza, 2015). Mastery of intercultural communication is essential for smooth, effective interactions, avoiding misunderstandings, and improving tourism experiences (Mapikawanti, 2015).

A questionnaire in Figure 7 showed that 87.5% "strongly agree" and 12.5% "agree" that Mandarin Language Education graduates have high potential in tourism, reflecting their language and cultural competencies needed for quality, experience-oriented tourism services (Sharpley, 2019). Students in this program can strengthen tourism service capacity and address cultural diversity challenges, aligning with Zubair, Rahayu, and Mahmudah (2019) on the need for aligned intercultural competence in cross-cultural cooperation.

Additionally, Figure 8 revealed 75% "strongly agree" and 25% "agree" that Mandarin proficiency enhances tourist experiences, showing industry awareness of its role in comfort and satisfaction. This aligns with Rismawati Hamid and D. L. (2020), who found that empathy and responsiveness increase customer revisits, and with Earley and Ang (2003), who stated that strong cross-cultural communication skills improve adaptation and tourism interactions.

Finally, entering the tourism industry requires graduates to master not only theory but also practical skills aligned with industry needs (Jaya, 2024), especially amidst rapid technological advances and dynamic market expectations. Understanding these challenges from both student and industry perspectives is essential to producing human resources capable of meeting the tourism sector's evolving demands.

Student Perspective

Students' essay responses revealed various challenges in the tourism job market, including adapting to a market biased towards education, mastering vocabulary and evolving hanzi, speaking Mandarin fluently, understanding dialect differences, and gaining knowledge of destinations and culture, while also facing competition from other Mandarin speakers and needing skills in public speaking, marketing, and digital technology (Diniati in Sutarjo, 2023). These align with Deci and Ryan (2000), who stated that motivation is influenced by

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competence, control, and social connection. In preparing for tourism careers, students aimed to take the HSK test, practice speaking, join additional courses, attend tourism training, and seek internships, supporting Kolb's (1984) view that effective learning comes through direct experience, and Bourdieu (1986) on the importance of building networks. Students also highlighted interpersonal skills in line with Goleman (1995) and emphasized digital mastery, vocabulary expansion, and mental readiness.

Regarding curriculum improvement, students suggested adding practical courses in business communication, customer service, tour guiding in Mandarin, cultural training, mandatory Mandarin for tourism, and simulations, as well as expanding internship cooperation and updating learning materials to align with industry needs (Limuria, 2018). This aligns with Tyler (1949), who stressed aligning learning objectives with societal and industry needs, and Piaget (1952), who emphasized active, experience-based learning.

Students' understanding of the relationship between Mandarin education and tourism varied. Some recognized Mandarin's growing importance for serving Chinese tourists and enhancing communication, which is valued by companies (Tauhid, 2024), and saw opportunities in guiding and other roles. Others had limited awareness. Kim (2001) emphasized cultural adaptation as key in tourism, while Becker (1994) noted that language skills like Mandarin enhance competitiveness in the global market.

Regarding readiness to communicate in Mandarin in tourism, students reported varying levels, with many feeling unprepared due to limited vocabulary and experience, some expressing nervousness, and others having informal or internship-based experience in explaining destinations, recognizing the need for skill improvement. This aligns with Bandura (1986), who emphasized learning through observation and experience to build confidence, and Chow (2024), who highlighted Mandarin mastery's growing importance in tourism due to the rise in Chinese tourists visiting Indonesia.

Tourism Perspective

The essay responses from tourism managers showed that besides Mandarin, English is crucial for international and digital communication (Murti, 2024). Confidence and mental resilience are important for dealing with diverse tourists, while public speaking, active listening, and local knowledge are vital for clear, interactive guiding. Adaptability and problem-solving are also needed (Rahayu, 2019). While Mandarin is needed and some students are ready in speaking, listening, and reading (Alwasilah, 2019), others lack daily Mandarin use, making practical experience and soft skills essential. Closer industry-education collaboration is needed (Smith, 2019) to integrate language, culture, and industry knowledge for effective tourism communication (Babushko et al., 2020). Managers view job opportunities for Mandarin graduates optimistically due to the rising Chinese tourist market, although job information remains uneven (Jesslyn, 2019). Foreign language skills signal professional readiness in the labor market (Connelly et al., 2011). Overall, the questionnaires confirm that Mandarin skills offer a competitive advantage and are key to meeting tourism workforce needs in Indonesia's growing industry.

Conclusion

Career opportunities for graduates of the Mandarin Language Education Study Program in Indonesia's tourism industry are strategic and promising, driven by the rising need for

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Mandarin-speaking workers in line with the increasing number of Chinese tourists, especially in Malang. Mandarin proficiency has become essential, particularly in sectors directly serving foreign tourists. Students recognize its importance but show varying levels of readiness, with many lacking confidence in practical skills such as vocabulary, speaking, and socio-cultural understanding, indicating the need for more contextual practice and field experience. The tourism industry also highlights the importance of soft skills, cross-cultural communication, and multilingual abilities, with English remaining valuable for competitiveness. Students aspire to a curriculum more aligned with industry needs, including Mandarin for tourism, cultural training, and practical experiences through internships. Meanwhile, industry stakeholders note challenges in disseminating workforce needs due to reliance on informal networks, emphasizing the need for structured partnerships for job information distribution and student involvement. Overall, the study shows that graduates have strong potential to contribute significantly as tour guides, hotel staff, and travel agents, supported by high industry demand and student interest, despite the need to enhance practical readiness.

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