



ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF ECOTOURISM AT THE GUNUNG TUNAK NATURE TOURISM PARK DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource Management (HRM) assumes a critical function in fostering the sustainability and advancement of natural tourism destinations, such as the Gunung Tunak Nature Tourism Park (TWA). This study seeks to assess the efficacy of human resource management, specifically via the training of tour guides and ongoing education, in enhancing the quality of tourism services and environmental conservation. This study highlights the role of human resource management in fostering sustainable ecotourism at TWA Gunung Tunak as a conservation tourism site. The study employs a qualitative methodology, including interviews and field observations to examine the execution of training programs and their effects on ecotourism operations. The research findings suggest that while knowledge concerning ecological and cultural heritage exists, there is a necessity to augment training quality, offer competency certification, and improve access to digital material. Enhancing human resource capability in advanced education, multi-stakeholder engagement, and supportive policies is essential for attaining optimal and sustainable ecotourism management in this region

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector has emerged as a pivotal catalyst for local and national economic growth by promoting the equitable use of community resources (Sutrisno, 2020). In Indonesia, tourism is cultivated by many regions as a strategy to enhance revenue and reinforce local identity through attractions derived from natural and cultural resources (Hidayat, 2021). The province of West Nusa Tenggara possesses significant potential for tourism development, particularly via the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK). In conjunction with the establishment of the Special Economic Zone (KEK), adjacent areas are commencing development as ancillary destinations, notably the Gunung Tunak Nature Tourism Park (TWA) located in Mertak Village, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency. This protected area, including 1,219.97 hectares, possesses significant biodiversity, indigenous culture, and natural sceneries, rendering it a pivotal site for ecotourism (Suprpti & Subandi, 2022).

TWA Gunung Tunak, a pivotal conservation area within the buffer zone of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, boasts significant biodiversity and natural beauty while being essential to a substantial economic transition in the region driven by tourism sector development. Gunung Tunak's proximity to national priority projects enhances its potential for development as a premier ecotourism destination. Nonetheless, this potential is underutilized owing to constrained managerial capabilities and an absence of methods to enhance local human resources (HR) within the realms of conservation and tourism services. Prior research indicates that other conservation sites in Indonesia encounter analogous issues, specifically the disparity between the increase in tourist visitation and the capacity for community-based administration (Modjo, 2018).

Ecotourism, a kind of sustainable tourism, prioritizes the engagement of local people and management that fosters conservation and education (Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2019; Tilavova et al., 2024). In this context, human resource management is essential for aligning conservation requirements with the tourism experience (Kurniawan, 2021). The function of human resources, including tour guides and area managers, is crucial in informing tourists and preserving the biological equilibrium of the region (Nugroho et al., 2020; Pan, 2006).

Moreover, Gunung Tunak is confronted with the peril of environmental deterioration stemming from unregulated tourism demand and the insufficient ecological awareness among tourists. Consequently, research aimed at enhancing human resources is of paramount importance and relevance. Efficient human resource management via training and ongoing education can enhance the quality of tourism services while bolstering local capacity in ecotourism management (Wijayanti & Pertiwi, 2021; Mohd et al., 2008). Management collaboration, capacity enhancement, and the adoption of best practices are essential components for the effective management of ecotourism regions (Mohd et al., 2008). Skilled human resources also aid in the conservation of ecological resources and the enhancement of community welfare via community-based ecotourism (Bhatt, 2020; Gurung, 2008).

Conversely, enhancing human resources in ecotourism has become increasingly imperative due to the growing demand for sustainable tourism following the pandemic. Contemporary tourists exhibit a greater inclination towards nature-based, cultural, and environmental education tourism experiences (Libosada, 2009). This necessitates the preparedness of local human resources not only as tourism service providers but also as conservation advocates and educators. Consequently, examining the capability and function of human resources at TWA Gunung Tunak is a crucial measure to guarantee that tourism development in this region adheres to the concepts of sustainability and community empowerment.

This study seeks to assess human resource management in facilitating the advancement of ecotourism in the TWA Gunung Tunak region. The primary objective is to augment the capabilities of tour guides and to institute sustainable education to elevate service quality while conserving natural resources. This study's findings are anticipated to enhance sustainable ecotourism management practices in conservation areas and act as a reference for the development of analogous regions in Indonesia (Ramadhani & Rahmawati, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative research design with a descriptive methodology to evaluate the execution of human resource management techniques in the advancement of ecotourism at TWA Gunung Tunak. Qualitative methods are especially effective for in-depth exploration of intricate social phenomena within their real-life contexts, including human behavior, experiences, and perceptions in tourism environments (Creswell, 2014). The study was executed in TWA Gunung Tunak in Mertak Village, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency, on December 2, 2024. This study primarily aims to evaluate the efficacy of training and continuous education for tour guides, with the objective of enhancing service quality and environmental conservation measures inside the park. The necessity of this assessment stems from the pivotal importance of proficient guides in aligning conservation objectives with visitor contentment (Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2019).

The study participants include individuals engaged in tour guide services, consisting of 25 students enrolled in a local tour guide training program and 2 active tour leaders in the field. Participants were chosen via purposive sampling, suitable for qualitative research to identify persons with specialized knowledge and practical experience pertinent to the research issue (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The study employs two principal research instruments to acquire comprehensive and dependable data: (1) Semi-structured interview guide — This instrument is employed to investigate participants' experiences with the training program, the obstacles encountered in executing tour guide activities, and their views on the influence of ongoing education on performance and conservation initiatives; (2) Observation sheet — This tool is utilized to record the real-time conduct and interactions between guides and visitors, as well as to monitor the execution of training and field activities within the ecotourism program.

Alongside qualitative interviews and field observations, the Ecotour Operator Certification Checklist from SustainableTourismHawaii.org serves as an evaluating instrument. This checklist includes essential factors such as personnel training, interpretation of natural and cultural assets, environmental practices, community engagement, and sustainable company operations. The checklist functions as a realistic and standardized framework to evaluate the degree to which existing actions at TWA Gunung Tunak conform to international best practices in sustainable and responsible ecotourism (Sustainable Tourism Hawaii, 2024). All data were gathered in person to guarantee contextual depth and direct observation. Data analysis employs theme coding, facilitating the categorization and interpretation of recurring patterns and insights derived from narratives and observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Training for New Guides

TWA Gunung Tunak's human resource management prioritizes the improvement of service quality and tourism interpretation through the training of new guides. This training program provides learners with proficiency in biodiversity, communication tactics, and the ability to construct educational tourism experiences. These competences correspond with the tenets of ecotourism, emphasizing education, conservation, and community engagement (Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2019). The recruitment of new guides favors persons from local communities, particularly those living in the vicinity of TWA Gunung Tunak. This community-oriented strategy promotes ecotourism by encouraging local ownership, generating sustainable employment, and improving cultural authenticity in tour provision. Engaging local citizens not only empowers the community but also strengthens conservation initiatives, as locals frequently possess profound ecological knowledge and cultural ties to the place (Gurung, 2008). This program prepares guides not only as information givers but as nature interpreters—individuals who can articulate the natural and cultural significance of Gunung Tunak into engaging narratives that foster ecological awareness. Their mission beyond instruction; they serve as agents of behavioral change, fostering conservation-oriented ideals in tourists. Participation of the community in guiding roles has demonstrably enhanced conservation results and community well-being in protected ecotourism areas (Bhatt, 2020; Himoonde, 2007)..

Security and Emergency Readiness

TWA Gunung Tunak utilizes a cooperative and community-oriented approach to enhance area security and improve disaster preparedness, namely in reducing forest fire hazards and overseeing tourist safety. Principal initiatives encompass collaborative patrol operations, fundamental emergency response training, and community engagement in oversight activities within the protected area. In accordance with ecotourism ideals that prioritize sustainability and inclusivity, local community people are actively involved as key stakeholders in protecting the region. This method is both pragmatic, considering that community people often navigate and live adjacent to the park, and strategic, as they have extensive knowledge of the landscape and early signs of environmental hazards. Incorporating them into security and response processes improves alertness and early detection capacities (Gurung, 2008; Modjo, 2018). Nonetheless, a significant obstacle persists: the insufficient quantity of committed security staff, which affects the response and scope of existing patrol and emergency systems. Although collaborative initiatives among park authority, local government, and community organizations have commenced, the extent of cooperation necessitates additional enhancement and formalization to optimize coordination and resource distribution. From an ecotourism standpoint, the existence of a secure and resilient environment is a crucial element in attracting conscientious tourists that value safety and environmental integrity. Efficient risk management and community involvement enhance Gunung Tunak's reputation as a dependable and sustainable nature-based tourism locale. This corresponds with earlier research highlighting the significance of participatory security in upholding the legitimacy of protected areas and fostering sustainable tourism (Libosada, 2009; Cheung, 2015).



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. The form of synergy and collaboration activities carried out by the managers of TWA Gunung Tunak

(a) Forest fire prevention and control patrol activities, (b) Collaboration with the Korean Forest Service for the management of community-based forest tourism attractions

Ecological Heritage and Natural Resources

Specialized training programs, such as those for avian guides, are offered to bolster local capacity in providing meaningful and scientifically informed tourism experiences that support the interpretation of TWA Gunung Tunak's unique natural legacy. These training modules aim to provide learners with an understanding of the park's biodiversity, encompassing indigenous species, migratory wildlife, and native flora. Biological literacy is crucial for promoting high-quality, conservation-focused ecotourism. In alignment with fundamental ecotourism principles, all personnel trained and assigned as guides in TWA Gunung Tunak are local inhabitants. Numerous individuals formerly involved in extractive practices like hunting are now enabled to shift towards sustainable livelihoods by acting as nature interpreters. This transition generates sustainable revenue while simultaneously aligning the community's welfare with the long-term ecological conservation of the park (Bhatt, 2020; Langoya, 1997). This change illustrates how ecotourism serves as both a conservation approach and a mechanism for community development (Cheung, 2015). The incorporation of indigenous knowledge and conservation principles into guiding services enhances the authenticity of the visitor experience and bolsters Gunung Tunak's standing as a leading ecotourism destination inside the buffer zone of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone. Nonetheless, a significant operational difficulty endures: guides are not assigned daily, but rather utilized on an as-needed basis contingent upon prior tourist reservations. Consequently, spontaneous or walk-in guests frequently forfeit guided interpretation, so diminishing the profundity and educational caliber of their encounter. This gap highlights the necessity for enhanced guide deployment mechanisms, like rotational standby schedules or real-time booking platforms, to maintain consistent visitor engagement and increased compliance with ecotourism standards (Gurung, 2008).



Figure 2. Diverse interpretative methodologies are employed in the advancement of ecotourism at TWA Gunung Tunak. (a) A module utilized by guides to impart information regarding ecological legacy to tourists is the Book of Biodiversity Art: Birds of Lombok & Sumbawa, (b) One explanation pertaining to Indonesia's cultural history is the utilization of the Indonesian/local language.

Cultural and Historical Heritage

TWA Gunung Tunak's human resource development initiatives integrate aspects of local cultural heritage and regional history as essential components of guide training. These initiatives closely adhere to the fundamental tenets of ecotourism, which prioritize ecological conservation alongside the protection of cultural and historical heritage. Ecotourism is most efficacious when it encompasses comprehensive conservation, including both natural ecosystems and the cultural practices of indigenous communities (Gurung, 2008; Anup, 2017). This method is exemplified by the incorporation of local languages in conjunction with scientific and English nomenclature for species identification, especially for flora and avifauna. These linguistic selections are integrated into interpretative narratives conveyed during activities like birdwatching and nature excursions. This cultural integration enhances visitors' emotional and educational ties to the location, while also aiding in the preservation of intangible heritage associated with the local ecosystem. Additionally, guides are urged to include traditional knowledge and folklore into their narratives to convey the cultural importance of natural elements. For example, myths related to hills, woodland spirits, or the application of specific flora in traditional medicine are included into narratives to enhance cultural significance and understanding. These initiatives preserve the region's identity, foster pride among local inhabitants, and provide tourists with a more enriched and contextual experience. Nevertheless, several elements of cultural interpretation—such as the regular application of local language in signage, botanical identification, and formal documentation—require systematic improvement. These deficiencies indicate the necessity for enhanced coordination among cultural specialists, local elders, and park management to improve and standardize interpretative material. The incorporation of local culture and history into tourism services in Gunung Tunak presents a potential foundation that, if further developed, might



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exemplify culturally rooted ecotourism. Research indicates that cultural narratives and historical context enhance tourist appreciation and promote more responsible conservation behavior (Bhatt, 2020; Libosada, 2009).

Ongoing Education

Continuing education has emerged as a pivotal focus in the management strategy of TWA Gunung Tunak. The park authority actively advocates, enables, and offers organized lifelong learning initiatives for workers and the local community. These programs encompass rigorous training in conservation methodologies, ecotourism administration, risk management, environmental communication, and the application of digital tools for monitoring and sustainability. Workshops, seminars, and certification courses—including local species identification, fire hazard response, and conservation technology utilization (e.g., GPS mapping, drone surveillance)—are incorporated to guarantee that stakeholders possess current technical expertise and conform to international ecotourism standards. These programs are essential for enhancing the expertise and preparedness of tour guides, park rangers, and eco-volunteers in addressing the intricate and evolving demands of sustainable tourism (Tilavova et al., 2024; Crispin, 2010). Furthermore, the program's enduring advantages reside in its capacity to empower local communities. By providing them with market-relevant skills and environmental consciousness, community members are more effectively prepared to engage in conservation initiatives and secure sustainable livelihoods as participants in tourism. This bottom-up methodology embodies the ecotourism principle of amalgamating community development with environmental care (Bhatt, 2020; Gurung, 2008). Nonetheless, despite these commendable endeavors, capacity-building initiatives at Gunung Tunak necessitate substantial enhancement. The tourism sector in Lombok is swiftly transforming, with the rise of rival locations like Mandalika Beach, Sembalun Highlands, and the Gili Islands, which are fervently investing in digital tourism infrastructure, branding, and hospitality education. Conversely, the current training operations at Gunung Tunak are restricted in frequency, scope, and specialty. Numerous training programs are executed sporadically and have not been integrated into a continuous professional development framework. Moreover, there exists insufficient linkage with extensive tourism business networks or academic institutions that could augment curriculum content and qualifications. In the absence of strategic expansion, the site jeopardizes its ability to provide competitive and high-quality ecotourism experiences, particularly as post-pandemic travelers increasingly seek knowledgeable guides and immersive educational opportunities (Libosada, 2009). TWA Gunung Tunak must invest in a systematic, scalable, and collaborative educational plan, including collaborations with universities, NGOs, conservation specialists, and the commercial sector to remain competitive and sustainable. These initiatives will guarantee that the park not only safeguards its ecological and cultural resources but also develops as a vibrant ecotourism destination in a progressively competitive market.

Personel Resources and Information Accessibility

In tourism management, employee attitudes and competences are crucial in determining the level of service provided to guests. These factors directly affect tourist comfort, satisfaction, and overall perception of their visit. The efficacy and sustainability of a tourism destination are significantly influenced by the performance of its human resources, especially those involved in direct visitor interaction, such as tour guides and service personnel. At TWA Gunung Tunak, most personnel engaged in tourist activities, whether as nature guides or local community members interacting with visitors, possess educational qualifications restricted to primary (SD) or junior secondary (SMP) levels. Although they offer essential local knowledge, many lack formal education in ecotourism, forestry, or environmental science, so constraining their technical proficiency in providing instructive and conservation-oriented tourism experiences. The management has commenced initiatives to offer ongoing education and skills development via training modules focused on biodiversity, endemic species, and local cultural heritage, with the objective of equipping staff to convey precise and engaging information to guests. This involves providing personnel with interpretative resources, organized guidance manuals, and environmental data sets, allowing them to convert intricate ecological information into accessible narratives for visitors. Nonetheless, these training initiatives necessitate increased intensification, particularly in specialized areas such as ecosystem conservation, tourist risk management, guiding ethics, and sustainable tourism practices. The lack of experience in forestry or tourism among the majority of participants requires more fundamental, adaptable, and pragmatic educational methods suited to local circumstances (Crispin, 2010; Fandeli & Mukhlison, 2019). In the absence of focused upskilling, there exists a potential for stagnation in service quality, which could compromise the competitiveness of TWA Gunung Tunak as a viable ecotourism destination—especially given the heightened expectations of post-pandemic travelers for educational and sustainable tourism experiences (Libosada, 2009; Tilavova et al., 2024). To address these deficiencies, managers must engage with educational institutions, NGOs, and tourism specialists to develop inclusive training curriculum that cater to diverse educational backgrounds while prioritizing practical conservation and interpretative abilities. A knowledgeable and competent workforce is essential for providing engaging visitor experiences and ensuring the long-term survival and uniqueness of the protected area.

Assessment for Ecotourism Accreditation

The evaluation of human resource management was performed to ascertain the destination's preparedness and appropriateness for formal ecotourism certification. This assessment employed a structured tool—the Ecotour Operator Certification Checklist created by SustainableTourismHawaii.org—which encompasses six fundamental components vital for ecotourism accreditation: Human Resource Management, Environmental Management, Interpretation Management, Customer and Staff Evaluation, Marketing Execution, and Community Engagement. This study concentrated on the Human Resource Management aspect, facilitating a thorough evaluation of the internal capacity-building processes, employee development, and continuous educational initiatives at TWA Gunung Tunak. The assessment results indicated a varied outcome. Despite the clear advantages of training and education activities, the aggregate scores suggest significant potential for enhancement. The Continuing Education subcomponent, which constitutes 20% of the total score, obtained merely 15 out of a possible 55 points, resulting in a value score of 29, derived from answers to eight critical evaluation questions. The findings indicate that although preliminary advancements in staff training have occurred, the depth, consistency, and institutionalization of these programs are inadequate to satisfy rigorous international ecotourism requirements. There is an absence of formal documentation about training outcomes, insufficient certification among personnel, and inconsistent execution of coaching or mentoring initiatives. Moreover, the poor score indicates a lack of a rigorous performance monitoring structure and inadequate access to professional development opportunities specifically designed for the ecotourism environment. These deficiencies highlight the necessity for increased investment in human resource systems and organized educational trajectories that correspond with certification standards and sustainability objectives (Crispin, 2010; Libosada, 2009). Nevertheless, the results confirm that human resources are an essential factor in developing TWA Gunung Tunak into a premier conservation-focused tourism destination. Enhancing this sector can concurrently elevate destination competitiveness, professionalize service provision, and establish a foundation for future ecotourism accreditation.

Table 1. Outcomes of the Human Resource Management assessment

No	Component	Weight (%)	Maximum score	Score achieved	Value achieved	Number of questions
1	Human resource management	20	55	15	29	8
Total	Continuing Education	20	55	15	29	8

4. CONCLUSION

This research has shown that human resource management (HRM) is pivotal to the sustainable development of ecotourism in TWA Gunung Tunak. The assessment findings indicate that although foundational efforts—such as local guide recruitment, continuous education, cultural integration, and community engagement—have commenced, substantial challenges remain that must be resolved to enhance the park's status as an internationally recognized ecotourism destination. Primary challenges encompass: (1) insufficient educational qualifications among staff, the majority of whom lack formal training in tourism or environmental science; (2) irregular execution of technical training and ongoing education initiatives; and (3) deficient documentation, monitoring, and certification frameworks pertaining to personnel development. The limits are exacerbated by the competitive tourism environment in Lombok, where adjacent locations have swiftly improved their infrastructure, digital services, and tourism expertise. TWA Gunung Tunak adheres to fundamental ecotourism principles by emphasizing community involvement, conservation, and cultural authenticity; however, the results from the Ecotour Operator Certification Checklist indicate that the site does not meet international standards, especially regarding continuing education, which received a score of 15 out of 55 (29%). The report emphasizes the necessity of a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to solve these deficiencies, which encompasses: (1) Regularly implemented training programs that are tailored to the educational levels of local stakeholders; (2) Incorporation of scientific and cultural elements into tour interpretation; (3) Establishment of performance-oriented certification and assessment systems; (4) Enhanced collaborations with universities, NGOs, and conservation specialists for curriculum and resource assistance. Moreover, investments in scalable digital solutions for guide scheduling, tourist interaction, and ecological monitoring are essential for enhancing service delivery and operating efficiency. In conclusion, via strategic enhancements in human resource management and training systems, TWA Gunung Tunak possesses significant potential to exemplify community-based, conservation-oriented ecotourism in Indonesia. Improving human capital alongside sustainable policies can produce enduring advantages—not only in safeguarding natural and cultural resources—but also in strengthening local people and enhancing visitor experiences.



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