

The Urgency of English Application in Public Relations Functions at SDN 173557 Tanding, Pintubosi, Laguboti, Toba

Renta^{1*}, Dwi Wahyuningtyas², Krisha Camille R. Angoluan³, Achmad Rizqi Ramadhan⁴, Debora Rut Necia Hutapea⁵, Marcella Valencia Natasa Nggedi Weto⁶

¹UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. e-mail: renta.bispro@upnjatim.ac.id

²UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. e-mail: dwi.wahyuningtyas.ih@upnjatim.ac.id

³Isabela State University. e-mail: krishacamille.r.angoluan@isu.edu.ph

⁴UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. e-mail: 24047010019@student.upnjatim.ac.id

⁵UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. e-mail: 24047010028@student.upnjatim.ac.id

⁶UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. e-mail: 24047010023@student.upnjatim.ac.id

*corresponding author: renta.bispro@upnjatim.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

English for Public Relations, Elementary School, English for Specific Purpose, Toba Regency, Tourism

DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.33005/jesscom.v2i2.16>

Submitted: 1 August 2025;

Revised: 30 September 2025;

Accepted: 20 October 2025,

Published: 7 November 2025,

ABSTRACT

The increasing international visibility of Toba Regency as a super-priority tourism destination has highlighted the need for local institutions, including schools, to strengthen their global communication competencies. In response, some schools are striving to enhance their international communication capacity, particularly within their public relations (PR) function. This study examines the importance of English language application in the public relations (PR) functions at SDN 173557 Tanding. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the school's headmistress and PR staff. The findings indicate that although the importance of English is recognized, the practical application in PR remains limited due to low English proficiency and a lack of targeted training. The school acknowledges the necessity of improving English skills to enhance its image and communicate effectively with foreign stakeholders. Consequently, capacity-building strategies, such as specialized training, are required for the school's public relations. It emphasizes that the integration of English in school PR functions can improve institutional image and communication and contributing to the region's sustainable tourism development. The study recommends the implementation of targeted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training, supported by local government policy and partnerships with higher education institutions, to foster a globally oriented school environment and professional PR capacity.

How to cite:

Renta, Wahyuningtyas, D., Angoluan, K.C.R., Ramadhan, A.R., Hutapea, D.R.N., & Weto, M.V.N.N. (2025). The Urgency of English Application in Public Relations Functions at SDN 173557 Tanding, Pintubosi, Laguboti, Toba. *Journal of English Studies and Business Communication*, 2(2), 46-54. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33005/jesscom.v2i2.16>

License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. INTRODUCTION

Toba Regency, which includes Samosir Island, has been designated a national strategic tourism destination due to the potential of Lake Toba, which attracts both domestic and international tourists (Pramala, 2018; Sihite et al., 2021). The growing presence of foreign tourists necessitates that educational institutions in the surrounding area enhance their international communication capacities, particularly within the public relations (PR) function at the elementary school level. This includes the ability to draft and disseminate information in English through both digital platforms and direct interaction. The objective is to enable schools to build a positive image in the eyes of the international community while simultaneously supporting sustainable tourism programs in Toba Regency.

SDN 173557 Tanding, an elementary school in the Laguboti District of Toba Regency, directly confronts this challenge given its location within a strategic tourism area. English becomes crucial for welcoming volunteers, partners, and foreign guests, who predominantly use an international language for communication. When engaging with volunteers or foreign guests seeking collaboration, the PR staff is often required to prepare presentation materials, invitations, or other documents in English to ensure the intended message is conveyed without distortion. Furthermore, the use of English in school PR activities holds significant potential for expanding networks, enhancing institutional image, and supporting branding efforts (Maili, 2018; Setyati, 2024).

Although SDN 173557 Tanding has begun to implement English in its PR function, its application remains highly limited due to a lack of training. Consequently, the staff lacks the requisite competence to develop appropriate and fluent communication materials (Sumendap, 2022). This situation is rooted in a scarcity of human resources who possess a functional command of the English language. In their studies, Sihite et al. (2021) assert that schools in tourism areas need to equip teachers and PR staff with international communication skills to serve foreign visitors and establish cross-border collaborations. Similarly, Setyati (2024) highlights that the PR function in schools extends beyond information dissemination to include image management and intercultural relations through bilingual content, making strong writing and speaking skills in English a key prerequisite.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the urgency of applying English in the execution of the public relations function at SDN 173557 Tanding, Laguboti District, Toba Regency. Specifically, this study will examine the perceptions of school stakeholders regarding the need for English in PR, the barriers faced during implementation, and the school's future expectations for the continued application of English in its PR function. This research is necessary as the existing literature is largely limited to general studies on bilingual schools or English language teaching strategies, with few focusing specifically on the application of English within the PR function of elementary schools in tourism areas.

The research gap is evident in the scarcity of case studies that explicitly illustrate the role of an elementary school like SDN 173557 Tanding in executing an English-based PR function, including its associated challenges and development strategies. Previous research has tended to focus on aspects of bilingual curricula or the effectiveness of English language instruction in the classroom (Misnaniarti et al., 2019; Hapsari, 2020), without detailing the role of school PR in a tourism context. However, the ability of a school's PR to communicate in English can strengthen the institution's image, attract partner support, and bolster sustainable tourism programs (Pramala, 2018; Sihite et al., 2021). Through a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews, this article is expected to provide practical recommendations for other elementary schools in tourism areas to develop their English-based PR functions in a structured and sustainable manner.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This research methodology was designed to address the research objective concerning the urgency of applying English in public relations (PR) functions at SDN 173557 Tanding. This section was organized into four subsections: research design, participants, instruments, and data analysis procedure. The references used consisted of primary sources from books and journals published within the last five to ten years.

This study utilized a qualitative design with a case study approach. A qualitative design was chosen because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the urgency and challenges related to English-based public relations practices within the context of an elementary school (Creswell et al., 2018). The case study approach was necessary to obtain a comprehensive contextual overview of SDN 173557 Tanding as the unit of analysis—an elementary school located in the tourism area of Toba Regency (Yin, 2018).

As the scope of the study was focused solely on SDN 173557 Tanding, the researcher employed the purposive sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016; Sugiyono, 2017). This technique was selected to obtain relevant information from those who possessed experience and knowledge in the use of English for the school's public relations purposes. Through this approach and technique, the research team could explore the social phenomenon—the use of English in school public relations—in detail, observing how environmental factors, policies, and participant characteristics interrelate (Merriam et al., 2016).

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study comprised all parties directly involved in the public relations functions at SDN 173557 Tanding, namely the headmistress and one PR staff member. The informants were selected based on the headmistress's recommendation and the priority of their involvement in the PR process, with the expectation that the data obtained would represent diverse perspectives on the research phenomenon.

2.3 Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was an in-depth interview guide. The interview guide was developed in a semi-structured format to allow the research team to gather focused information while still providing informants the flexibility to express their perspectives freely (Kvale et al., 2015). The interview guide covered several main topics, including views on the urgency of using English in the school's PR functions, past implementation successes and challenges, and hopes and recommendations for enhancing English-based PR capacity in the future. The questions were open-ended to elicit rich, narrative responses.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted in stages following the thematic analysis guidelines formulated by Miles et al. (2014). Broadly, the analysis procedure undertaken by the research team included verbatim transcription of the data; identifying units of meaning (segments of sentences or phrases) relevant to the context of urgency, challenges, and strategies for using English in PR; and elaborating the coded data into a descriptive narrative. This narrative was then supplemented with the researchers' interpretations and linked to relevant literature (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell et al., 2018). This procedure was expected to yield results that are valid, possess analytical depth, and accurately reflect the field reality.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Sub Findings

Based on qualitative data obtained through interviews conducted by the research team with the principal and public relations staff of SDN 173557 Tanding on May 24, 2025 in 3.5 hours, relevant insights were gathered to support the objectives of the study. These findings have been summarized in the following table, which outlines the main points:

Finding Category	Summary of Interviewee Statements (Principal & PR Staff)
Perception of Urgency	Both interviewees concurred that English proficiency is crucial for the public relations function. The primary reason cited is the school's location in Toba Regency, an international tourism destination, making interaction with foreign parties (e.g., volunteers, guests) inevitable.
Current Implementation	The application of English in PR activities is currently limited. Its use is confined to simple documents (e.g., a school profile for international audiences), responding to emails, and creating invitations for external parties. The majority of internal and external communications are still conducted in Bahasa Indonesia.
Example of Good Practice	A notable success story involved a fundraising campaign for the school's marching band. The use of simple English in social media interactions successfully expanded the campaign's reach to include external and international parties.
Main Challenges	The main challenges identified are both internal and systemic: 1) Staff's limited proficiency and lack of confidence in constructing formal sentences. 2) A lack of regular practice and habituation. 3) The absence of structured, specialized training programs designed to support the PR function in English.
Future Expectations	The interviewees expressed a desire for intensive, regular training focused on practical skills (writing and speaking), ideally with mentorship from experts like native speakers or facilitators from leading Indonesian universities. They also aim to systematically rebuild the school's brand to be globally competitive by fostering the regular use of English among not only staff and teachers but also students.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Findings

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1. The Urgency and Application of English as a Public Relations Tool

The finding that English is considered "highly important" by the principal and public relations (PR) staff of SDN 173557 Tanding aligns with the demands of globalization, which now extend to the local level. The principal explicitly links this urgency to the status of Lake Toba as a Super Priority Tourism Destination (KSPN). This statement is supported by the fact that the Indonesian government is actively promoting Lake Toba on the world stage, which automatically increases the potential for interaction between local communities, including educational institutions and international parties (BPIW, 2023).

Recognizing that the world has evolved to adapt to the modern era, SDN 173557 Tanding has demonstrated a strong awareness of the importance of English proficiency and its implementation in supporting the PR function. This was reinforced by the principal's statement during the interview:

"Yes, we strongly feel the impact of a world that is advancing. This is especially true as our school is located near a major tourism destination, Lake Toba. I personally believe that English is very important because it is the international language used for two-way, cross-cultural communication. Currently, many tourists visit the school just to see the daily life of the local people around the Lake Toba area. Therefore, I, along with the PR staff, personally greet them and introduce them to the students. Of course, I cannot demand that they speak our language; rather, we are the ones who must try to understand theirs."

The principal also added that while existing English implementation has been successful, it is still insufficient due to a significant lack of human resources who are truly proficient in foreign languages within the school environment. Furthermore, a lack of support from the local government has prevented the school from fully optimizing the application of English in its PR activities. This is because the local government has not yet provided standards or guidelines that direct schools to build a PR function with an international orientation.

However, the current reality is that the PR function is no longer merely a "bridge" to the local community but also serves as the "face" or "showcase" of the school to the world. The ability to communicate in English has become a strategic competency for building a positive institutional image. Cutlip et al. (2006) affirm that a key to successful public relations is the ability to adapt language and messages to specific audiences, including international ones.

In this digital era, the image of an educational institution is also shaped by interactions on social media and other digital platforms that transcend geographical boundaries (Yuliana et al., 2023). A positive image facilitates effective communication with international audiences and can open opportunities for collaboration, partnerships, and even aid, as was positively experienced by SDN 173557 Tanding during their fundraising for the marching band extracurricular activity. The school successfully obtained financial support from an international audience to improve the quality of their extracurricular learning. This was achieved directly through their ability to implement English, albeit simply, in support of their PR function.

Although not yet fully optimized, the application of English in PR activities at SDN 173557 Tanding can be considered to be at an intermediate level. This is demonstrated not only through oral communication, as previously described, but also in written form. One example is the school profile designed for an international audience, which is presented bilingually in both Indonesian and English. In the English version, the school intentionally preserves certain cultural aspects, such as their slogan, to maintain their cultural identity. This is intended to promote the Indonesian language on the international stage and to establish a unique and distinctive identity for SDN 173557 Tanding. The school also implements English in its PR function through two-way communication via email and the creation of official invitations for external parties.

3.2.2. Main Challenges in the Application of English for the PR Function

Despite a strong awareness at SDN 173557 Tanding, the practical use of English in the school's PR function remains very limited. This is because its practical implementation often encounters a series of fundamental impediments. The first and most foundational challenge is limited English proficiency, which leads to low self-confidence. A member of the PR staff

shared their experience during our interview, stating that during PR activities requiring the use of English, their main obstacles were a lack of confidence and difficulty in constructing formal sentences.

“To be honest, I’m not very confident when I have to speak English. I can do it, but I’m afraid of making mistakes and that they won’t understand what I’m saying, considering our cultures and accents are different.”

From this statement, we deduce that while the PR staff may understand the importance of the message they wish to convey, they struggle with composing sentences in English that are formal, grammatically accurate, and appropriate for a PR context. This condition is known as language anxiety. This anxiety is not merely nervousness but a psychological barrier that causes an individual to fear negative evaluation and making mistakes, ultimately leading them to avoid using the target language altogether (Rahardjo et al., 2022).

This low self-efficacy, or belief in one's English language abilities, directly hinders the PR function from reaching a wider audience. However, the PR staff at SDN 173557 Tanding have devised creative solutions to overcome this issue, such as utilizing assistive tools like translators when foreign language dialogue is required. Although helpful, this workaround necessitates further support through training to make communication more seamless and concise, eliminating the processing delay that occurs while a message is typed or recorded to be translated.

The second challenge is the minimal amount of practice and habituation. As previously mentioned, the application of English in the PR function requires support in the form of accessible and consistent training. This is intended to help the PR staff become more accustomed to communicating in English. Language ability is a skill that must be continuously honed. Without a work environment that encourages or even mandates the use of English for certain tasks, previously acquired skills may deteriorate. In her studies, Sari (2023) emphasizes that the creation of a supportive linguistic environment in the workplace is a key factor in maintaining and improving the foreign language proficiency of professionals. When English is used only occasionally for incidental tasks, it never becomes a habit. Consequently, the PR staff never achieve the level of fluency and spontaneity required for dynamic and responsive PR communication.

Furthermore, many institutions fail to realize that the English training needs of PR staff are very different from general English courses. The required training is specific, known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP)—in this case, English for Public Relations. Such training should focus not only on grammar but also on practical skills like drafting press releases, writing engaging bilingual social media content, corresponding via formal emails, and delivering institutional profile presentations in English (Hidayatullah, 2021).

Overall, these challenges are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. A lack of confidence impedes practice, a lack of practice prevents competency improvement, and the absence of specialized training for PR staff perpetuates both issues. Therefore, a solution to these challenges is necessary so that the application of English in the PR function, especially at SDN 173557 Tanding, can be effectively realized.

3.2.3. Aspirations as the Solution to Application Challenges

Located in a strategic tourism area, the school must inevitably continue to adapt. Foreign tourists will continue to explore local regions, especially the area around Lake Toba, a proud icon of Indonesia. The challenges previously mentioned have corresponding solutions that were expressed as hopes by the interviewees and are also recommended by this research team based on a shared rationale. The absence of standards or guidelines directing the school

to build a PR function with an international orientation is the root cause of the challenges faced by SDN 173557 Tanding.

As a recommendation, the school could propose a policy to the local government for the application of English in the PR function for schools within the region. Once the proposal is approved and formalized, it would be easier for the school to obtain various forms of support from the local government to implement an English-based PR function. Furthermore, the lack of training can be addressed with intensive and regular programs focused on the practical skills of the PR profession. To realize this recommendation, the school can collaborate with public or private higher education institutions or international organizations to develop PR staff training programs and to integrate local culture with the English language in school activities. Through effective collaboration, the quality of PR training for SDN 173557 Tanding would be enhanced, ideally with mentorship from experts, such as native speakers or facilitators from leading Indonesian universities. Moreover, English proficiency stems not only from intensive training but also from routine habituation. Through habituation, a lack of confidence will erode over time, allowing the PR staff to adapt more easily and minimize language anxiety.

Despite the existing challenges, SDN 173557 Tanding has a significant opportunity to develop as a public elementary school that supports an internationally-based curriculum. By creating a communicative and globally oriented environment, the school would not only strengthen its PR function but also provide added value for its graduates. This would also facilitate the school's ability to rebuild its brand to be competitive on a global scale. With the commitment of the principal and a community that is aware of the importance of English, SDN 173557 Tanding has the potential to become a model for elementary schools in the region, capable of actively developing an internationally oriented public relations function.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the application of English in Public Relations functions at SDN 173557 Tanding is of great importance. This is particularly true because the school is located in the Lake Toba tourism area, which frequently attracts international tourists. The school principal and public relations staff are well aware that English proficiency is crucial for the school to communicate more broadly, especially with foreign guests, volunteers, or international partners.

However, the reality on the ground shows that the implementation of English-based public relations functions is still far from ideal. The use of English at the school remains limited. Generally, it's only used for formal documents like bilingual school profiles, responding to English emails, or creating official invitations. Many other public relations activities, such as public speaking, institutional presentations, or writing official content in English, have not yet been optimally performed due to various constraints. These challenges are primarily caused by low staff confidence, limited competence in formal English, minimal regular practice, and the absence of specific and continuous training.

These challenges cannot be addressed partially. A systematic and collaborative effort is needed to overcome them. One strategy that can be pursued is to encourage the implementation of local policies that specifically regulate the strengthening of English language proficiency within the context of school public relations functions, particularly in tourist destination areas. Such a policy would provide legitimacy and clear direction for schools like SDN 173557 Tanding to develop training programs and enhance the capacity of their public relations staff. Furthermore, English training cannot be general; it must be designed within an English for Public Relations framework, tailored to practical needs such as writing press releases, digital communication, and institutional presentations to foreign audiences.

Moreover, regular practice is also a crucial key. A work environment that encourages routine English usage will help build confidence and reduce language anxiety. In this regard,

collaboration with universities, training institutions, and even international communities can be an effective solution, especially if it involves direct mentorship from expert facilitators or native speakers. This approach will not only improve staff capabilities but also have a long-term impact on the communication culture within the school environment.

In general, SDN 173557 Tanding has a strong foundation to develop into a globally oriented public elementary school. With the high commitment from the school leadership, the local community's awareness of the importance of international communication, and ample opportunities for collaboration, this school can become a successful example for other primary education institutions in the region, especially those in tourism areas. Implementing English in Public Relations functions will not only strengthen the school's image but also expand access and opportunities for beneficial collaborations for sustainable and inclusive educational development in the future.

REFERENCES

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (2006). *Effective public relations: edisi kesembilan*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Hapsari, N. (2020). Efektivitas Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar Kabupaten X. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 11(2), 123–135.
- Hidayatullah, F. A. (2021). Needs Analysis of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Professional Employees in the Service Industry. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 4(2), 112-125.
- Badan Pengembangan Infrastruktur Wilayah (BPIW). (2023, September 15). *BPIW Dorong Akselerasi Pelaksanaan NUDP*. Retrieved from [bpiw.pu.go.id: https://bpiw.pu.go.id/berita/bpiw-dorong-akselerasi-pelaksanaan-nudp](https://bpiw.pu.go.id/berita/bpiw-dorong-akselerasi-pelaksanaan-nudp)
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Maili, A. (2018). Pengenalan Bahasa Inggris pada Anak Usia Dini di Sekolah Dasar. *Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 4(1), 45–57.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (4th ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Misnaniarti, I., & Sukendro, F. (2019). Implementasi Kurikulum Bilingual di Sekolah Dasar: Studi Kasus di Provinsi Y. *Indonesian Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(3), 201–214.
- Pramala, S. (2018). Peran Lembaga Pendidikan Tinggi dalam Pengembangan Pariwisata Berbasis Masyarakat. *Jurnal Pariwisata dan Masyarakat*, 2(1), 22–35.
- Rahardjo, S., & Wulandari, T. (2022). The Correlation between Language Anxiety, Self-Efficacy, and Oral Communication Performance among Non-English Department Staff. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, 2(3), 245-256.

- Sari, M. K. (2023). Creating a Supportive Linguistic Environment to Foster Foreign Language Proficiency in the Workplace. *Jurnal Manajemen dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia*, 7(1), 58-70.
- Setyati, R. (2024). Peran Humas Sekolah Internasional dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya. *International Journal of Public Relations*, 5(1), 67–82.
- Sihite, R., Lubis, M., & Putra, D. (2021). Komunikasi Internasional di Sekolah Kawasan Pariwisata: Studi di Kabupaten Bintan. *Journal of Tourism Education*, 3(2), 15–29.
- Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (Ed. 23). Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sumendap, E. (2022). Manajemen Humas Sekolah Dasar dan Partisipasi Masyarakat di Era Digital. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 8(1), 94–108.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yuliana, D., & Santoso, B. (2023). Digital Public Relations Strategy for Educational Institutions in Building a Global Reputation. *Jurnal Komunikasi Nusantara*, 5(2), 210-225.