

HOTEL STAFF'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ENGLISH COMPETENCE IN HANDLING THE FRONT OFFICE JOBS

Eka Putri Juliantari¹, Untung Waluyo², Yuni Budi Lestari³
^{1,2,3}University of Mataram
ekap7388@gmail.com,

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to discover how hotel receptionists perceived their competence to use English related to their jobs and describe the language problems they faced when handling front office jobs. The participants of this study consist of five front office staff (receptionists) who worked at MRT Hotel Senggigi Lombok. The study employed a qualitative approach with single case study design. Data were gathered from a number of sources, such as interviews, observations, and study documents. The result of the study shows that the receptionists' language competence varied. Several perceived that they had adequate speaking competence to handle their jobs but some showed the opposite. They perceived that they were able to communicate with guests by only understanding one keyword to interpret what the guests meant. It was revealed from the study that participants' level of education, training, and prior experience dealing with English-speaking guests all have an impact on this perception. It was suggested that the hotel management should invest in continuous language training programs to ensure receptionists maintain and improve their English-language communication skills over time.

Keywords: receptionists, perceptions, language problems.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi resepsionis hotel terhadap kompetensi diri mereka dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris untuk kegiatan bekerja mereka dan mendeskripsikan masalah kebahasaan yang mereka hadapi ketika menangani pekerjaan di bagian front office. Partisipan penelitian ini terdiri dari lima orang staf front office (resepsionis) yang bekerja di MRT Hotel Senggigi Lombok. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus tunggal. Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber, seperti wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi bahasa resepsionis bervariasi. Beberapa orang merasa bahwa mereka mempunyai kemampuan berkomunikasi yang cukup untuk menangani pekerjaannya, namun ada pula yang menunjukkan sebaliknya. Mereka hanya merasa mampu berkomunikasi dengan tamu sebatas memahami satu kata kunci untuk mengartikan maksud tamu tersebut. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa tingkat pendidikan, pelatihan, dan pengalaman peserta sebelumnya dalam menangani tamu berbahasa Inggris semuanya berdampak pada persepsi ini. Disarankan agar manajemen hotel berinvestasi dalam program pelatihan bahasa berkelanjutan untuk memastikan resepsionis mempertahankan dan meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi bahasa Inggris mereka seiring berjalannya waktu.

Kata kunci: resepsionis, persepsi, masalah bahasa.

A. Introduction

According to the data shown by the Central Statistics Agency, the number of tourists has greatly increased, and one of the tourism tools that must be considered is the hotel. Hotels are an important part of the tourism development of an area. Hotels are accommodations that will accommodate existing tourists. They not only provide a comfortable stay for travelers but also contribute to the local economy by creating job opportunities and generating revenue through tourism-related services. Additionally, hotels play a crucial role in enhancing the overall experience of tourists by offering various amenities and services, such as restaurants, spas, and recreational facilities. Reflecting on the implementation of MotoGP in 2022, one of the problems faced by the local accommodation industry is the need for more hotel facilities in Lombok. The influx of tourists expected for the MotoGP event will likely put a strain on the existing hotel capacity in Lombok. This highlights the importance of investing in new hotel infrastructure to meet the growing demand and ensure a positive experience for visitors attending the event.

In addition to the problem of hotel competence, the hotel service system is an important aspect that requires attention. Service is closely related to customer satisfaction, and good-quality service can provide reasonable customer satisfaction so

that customers feel cared for by the company. Experts also define service as a process of fulfilling needs directly through the activities of other people. Hotels are part of the existing tourism industry. In addition to transportation as a means of mobilization, hotels as accommodations play an essential role in developing tourism in an area. Therefore, hotel owners must continue to develop quality hotel services to balance the conditions and needs of tourism in the field. Improving the quality of staff work and their competence will determine the quality of services.

Hotel staff is a group whose job it is to maintain the service, standards, and quality of hotel services. Hotel staff were divided into administration, guest services, and support staff. These three sections have their respective job descriptions. Hotel staff in the guest service section are responsible for providing the best experiences for guests or visitors. One of the staff members on duty in the guest services section was the receptionist. The first-time guests arrive and carry out the check-in process to register with the receptionist. Receptionists are a very important part of welcoming guests. The English language skills of receptionists are also required to be very good because they will explain many things to guests, such as the type or types of rooms, hotel facilities, restaurants, gyms, and spas. Oliveri and McCulla (2019) explain that in both national and international

businesses in English – speaking countries, English proficiency is increasingly required for successful performance of workplace activities, elevating the importance for prospective employees to have English for employability. Alqahtani (2015) also stated that vocabulary, as one of important factors knowledge in language plays a very large role for learners to acquire language. Receptionists play a crucial role in ensuring that guests have a smooth and enjoyable stay. They not only provide information about the hotel's amenities but also assist guests with any inquiries or concerns they may have during their stay. Their friendly attitudes and competence to communicate effectively in English create a welcoming atmosphere for visitors, making their experience truly exceptional.

At this point, it can be said that the receptionist is the hotel's representative. The receptionist is the front guard who provides services to guests. It is from the receptionist that guests will be welcomed as a medium for conveying complaints or additional requests from guests. These things are conveyed to the receptionist as a liaison between guests and the hotel. As Lombok is a world tourist destination, examining the quality of hotel receptionist services in serving foreign tourists is necessary. A skilled receptionist should be able to effectively communicate and understand the needs of foreign guests. Stevens (2005) stated that communication is a two-way activity

between the communicator and the communicant. Goutam (2013) also stated that communication skills are one of the officer's most important weapons on the street. Receptionist should also possess cultural sensitivity and be knowledgeable about local attractions and amenities to provide helpful recommendations to guests. In this relation, (Robert & Brown, 2004) stated that competence is the competence to work based on knowledge, skills, and work attitude. By ensuring excellent receptionist services, hotels can enhance the overall experience for their foreign guests and contribute to the positive reputation of Lombok as a tourist destination.

Foreign tourists visiting Lombok come from various countries. Most foreign tourists are from France, the Netherlands, and Australia (Disbudpar, 2023). The arrival of tourists from various countries is a challenge for hotel services, particularly communication. Therefore, hotel receptionists must master English as a communication tool to serve foreign tourists. Mastering English is very important because it allows communication between hotel guests and staff to convey clear information about the hotel or when making reservations. Another challenge in mastering English is receptionists' competence to understand different English accents. Thus, hotels must consider English language training to improve the quality of hotel receptionists in providing services to guests to avoid

misunderstandings between hotel staff and foreign tourists. The present situation in a number of hotels in Lombok show that many receptionists lack proficiency in English, leading to communication barriers and dissatisfaction among international guests. This issue can negatively impact the reputation of the hotel and hinder its competence to attract and retain foreign tourists. A study conducted by Lathifah (2022) with the title "The Needs and Problems of English Skills of the hotel front office Staff at Lombok West Nusa Tenggara" explains that the competence to listen and communicate in English is two essential things needed by hotel staff, especially hotel receptionists in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The problem of hotel staff competence is proven by the results of her research, which show that there are problems in hotel receptionist activities concerning the use of English among hotel staff when dealing with customer complaints. The problem obtained is the need for greater competence of hotel receptionists to understand British English accents or other accents used by customers. Therefore, the relationship between hotel receptionists and customers must be clarified. However, this also causes a lack of guest satisfaction with hotel services, especially services at the front office of the hotel.

Another study conducted by Kurniarini et al. (2021), entitled "Assessing Tourism Students' English

Proficiency Competence Based on ASEAN Common Competency Standard" shows similarly. It was revealed that tourism students at AKN were not able to do three competency standards, such as delivering oral communication in English, using oral English to convey a complex exchange of ideas, and coaching others in job skills. The results of this study show that the present English competence of students in Akademi Komunitas Negeri (AKN) Lombok Barat is in the low category. More than half of the students were not able to pass three (3) of the eight (8) competency standards as the requirement of the tourism professional stated in the ASEAN Common Competency Standards. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a gap between the present English competence standards that should be achieved for professional workers.

All of the above problems inspire the researchers to explore research on hotel employees' perceptions of English use for communication in receptionist jobs. The aim of this study is determine what hotel receptionists perceive about their own use of English in serving guests or foreign tourists and to observe what language problems receptionists face when they communicate with foreign tourists in English. By understanding the perceptions and challenges faced by hotel receptionists in using English for communication, this research can contribute to the development of

effective language training programs tailored to their specific needs. The findings of this study are expected to inform hotel management about the importance of providing ongoing support and resources to improve English proficiency among their receptionist staff.

B. Research Method

This study was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative approach. The research design of this study was a case study that was expected to discover hotel receptionists' perceptions of using English related to their job. In this study, the researcher conducted the research in three steps of data collection procedures. The first data collection was observation; the second was an interview session; and the third was a documentary study. The results were analyzed to determine hotel receptionists' perceptions of using English as a communication tool related to receptionists' jobs.

Observation is a process used to obtain data based on direct observation. Therefore, it is possible to observe and record events or situations related to research (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). In this study, the researcher observed hotel receptionists using English in their work environment, especially when providing services to foreign guests. To obtain data when making observations, the researcher used a checklist during remote observations and asked permission to use digital recording to record sound when the hotel receptionist conducted the

guest service process. The use of a checklist allowed the researcher to systematically document specific behaviors and interactions that were relevant to the study. Additionally, obtaining permission to record sound provided an opportunity to capture authentic verbal exchanges between the hotel receptionists and foreign guests, enhancing the accuracy and richness of the data collected.

The next data collection method is interviewing. An interview is a form of oral communication conducted in a structured manner by two or more people, either in person or through remote interviews. With interviews, the researcher gathers in-depth information and insights from participants, as they can provide detailed explanations and personal experiences related to the study topic. There were five (5) participating in the interviews. The interview was done on a one-on-one basis. Conducting interviews this way offers flexibility, allowing researchers to reach a wider range of participants and accommodate their schedules. In this research, the interviews were semi-structured to allow new questions to arise because of the answers given by the respondents. Thus, during the session, information digging can be performed at greater depths.

Further, the researcher did a document study. The document study as a written source was in the form of supporting documents related to the research being conducted. Such as certificate of competence issued by the Indonesian Professional

Certification Authority Tourism Professional Certification Development Competency with occupation as front office (receptionist) and certificate by PT QIS CERTI Indonesia since 2019 proves that MRT Hotel is a hotel that is recognized as a 5-star hotel in Lombok, especially in the Senggigi region. The purpose of using a document study was to gather additional information and insights that may not have been obtained through interviews alone. By analyzing relevant documents, the researcher was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and validate the findings from the interviews. This approach also helped to triangulate the data and ensure the reliability and validity of the research results. These documents can be in the form of photographs or proof of the procurement of training in English, in the use of English, or other documents related to improving the competence of hotel receptionists to use English.

To analyze the data, the researcher divided the analyzed data into three categories. These include data reduction, data display, and conclusions. Data reduction encompasses the process of organizing and summarizing the collected data to identify key patterns and themes. This involves condensing the information to its essential elements, allowing for a more focused analysis. Data display involves presenting the findings in a clear and visually appealing manner,

such as through charts, graphs, or tables. This helps to facilitate understanding and interpretation of the data by both the researcher and other stakeholders. Finally, drawing conclusions involves making logical connections between the analyzed data and the research objectives, leading to meaningful insights and recommendations.

C. Findings And Discussion

C.1. Hotel Receptionists' Perception of English Use for Communication Related to Their Job

The interview data showed that receptionists perceived their speaking ability was sufficient to communicate and understand what a guest means. They perceived themselves to be able to communicate with guests by only understanding one keyword that could be inferred from what the guests meant. Therefore, they considered that it was not necessary for guests to understand the entire sentence. By understanding one keyword, they could understand what the guests wanted or asked. In this relation, R2 said, "*There is no need to understand the entire sentence conveyed by the guest. Understanding one keyword can help us understand the meaning or what the guest wants, especially about hotel services*". R3 also said, "*What guests ask is not far from hotel services, so we understand just one keyword, and then we immediately understand what the guest wants to ask*". Similarly R5 stated, "*The important thing is that we understand just one keyword the guest says. That is the key to understanding what the guest wants to ask.*" All these

quotations mean that the hotel staff believes that understanding one keyword from a guest's request is crucial in comprehending their needs and desires regarding hotel services. They emphasize the efficiency and effectiveness of this approach, suggesting that by grasping just one keyword, they can quickly discern the guest's intentions and provide appropriate assistance.

Only one receptionist differs from a colleague. He perceived his competence to speak English to an advanced level. R4 stated, *"In my opinion, my level of speaking skill is at an advanced level because with my work experience of approximately three years, I can handle foreign guests very well without any confusion in understanding the intention of the guest, and there is no difficulty in conveying a response to the guest"*. From the observations conducted by the researcher, R4 showed that he was indeed at an advanced level. His level of speaking skill was proven by R4's ability to serve and explain what guests ask, without repeating sentences or stuttering. This shows that R4 has a strong command of English and is able to effectively communicate with foreign guests. Additionally, R4's ability to handle complex inquiries and provide accurate responses further demonstrates their advanced level of speaking skills.

Meanwhile, only two receptionists considered that they were able to speak at an intermediate level. R1 said, *"My speaking skill is at the intermediate level, because I can explain or give responses that guests can understand, but sometimes I had problems dealing with foreign guests speak with a British accent."* Likewise, R3 also said, *"My speaking*

skill is at the intermediate level, because I can explain or give a response that can be understood by guests with two or three repetitions when guests do not understand the meaning of what I am explaining." From these observations, R1 and R3 showed their ability to serve guests through two-way communication. They could explain things asked by guests, although sometimes they invited guests to repeat the sentences said by guests to clarify the meaning of what was being asked. This indicates that R1 and R3 have good listening skills and are willing to ensure clear communication with guests. Their competence to adapt and find alternative ways to explain concepts shows their dedication to providing excellent customer service.

In addition, the rest of the receptionists thought their competence to speak was at the pre-intermediate level. R2 said, *"I think my speaking skill is at a pre-intermediate level, because I can explain and respond quite well within the scope of hotel topics. Could you please rephrase the sentence to convey a more formal tone? Furthermore, I occasionally struggle to comprehend or provide suitable responses"*. In the same way, R5 remarked, *"In my opinion, my speaking skill is at the pre-intermediate level, because I can convey information and responses that guests can understand. However, the grammar and vocabulary selection I use is still lacking."* The results of the observations showed differently. For example, R2 did not respond well to what the guests had asked. From the observation, the researcher noted that when a guest asked about the best recommendation of a Salon in

Mataram, R2 often repeated the same word to make sure she understood. R2 said *"In Mataram ya, hmm waits ya, I call the Salon for you ya, It is ok ya"*. The observation showed that R2 had difficulties communicating with guests in English, causing the conversation to not run smoothly. All of these mean that R2's English proficiency is limited, which affects his competence to effectively communicate with guests. This could potentially lead to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction among guests who expect prompt and accurate responses. It is crucial for R2 to improve her English language skills in order to provide better customer service and enhance the overall guest experience.

In addition, R5 had difficulty using English for communication. For example, from the observation in the front office, when a guest asked a question about the location of the Basilico restaurant, R5 continued using a pointing finger to a direction to the location of the site instead of using verbal communication. This proves that R5 did not speak well.

Further, two receptionists explained in the interviews that their speaking competence did not improve because the hotel did not provide them with special language training to the staff. R3 said, *"So far, there has been no training provided by the hotel specifically to improve English language skills. The training given every six months is general hotel service training."* In the same vein, R4 asserted, *"The Hotel does not provide us with staff training or special speaking classes, especially receptionists or bellhops."* Both R3 and R4's statements highlighted the lack of specific English language training for hotel staff. Instead, the

training offered every six months focuses on general hotel service skills. However, both respondents emphasized the need for training in areas such as computer operating systems/ administration, hospitality, and service systems.

To confirm these statements, the researcher asked the manager of HRD whether the hotel staff had provided language training. The manager of HRD explained that there was no specific language training. The hotel conducted training only on general themes, such as training on hotel operating systems and administration. The manager of HRD also explained that in selecting staff in the front office, the hotel management obliged that applicants must have had an English language training certificate from the relevant agency, such as an English course. Therefore, the management considered that the hotel did not need to provide language training.

The absence of foreign language training in the hotel resulted the lack of language improvement among the receptionists, especially speaking skills. R2 said, *"Working as a receptionist I did not improve my English skills. I only used English when necessary, especially when dealing with foreign guests, I did not learn much about new vocabulary related to hotels."* Similarly, R5 said, *'Working as a receptionist did not affect my English. I learn little about the new vocabulary. The expressions I use are just templates provided in the front office desks, such as welcoming guests or directing guests to enjoy meal, informing the guests about the room readiness"*. Both R2 and R5 acknowledged that their experience as receptionists did not significantly enhance their overall

English proficiency. While they did acquire hotel-related vocabulary and commonly used phrases, their exposure to English was limited to interactions with foreign guests and specific scenarios within the hotel setting. Thus, their language development remained somewhat restricted in terms of broader conversational skills and fluency outside of the hotel context. They expected that the hotel will provide special language training to staff in the future. This would allow them to further improve their English proficiency and expand their language skills beyond the hotel setting. Additionally, they believed that such language training would enable them to confidently engage in conversations with a wider range of English-speaking individuals, enhancing their overall communication abilities.

C.2. Difficulties Faced by Receptionists Dealing with Guests

The data from the interview showed that four of the five receptionists interviewed had difficulty communicating with foreign guests. The problems they experience when serving foreign guests vary from one person to another. Two receptionists stated that their difficulties were dealing with guests with British accents. In this relation, R1 said, *“One of the difficulties when communicating with foreign guests is that foreign guests use British accents. Because they speak too fast, so it’s hard for me to digest what is meant.”* R3 also said, *“The difficulty is that foreign guests have different accents. So sometimes I found it difficult to understand the sentences delivered”*.

In addition, one receptionist stated that she had difficulty communicating with foreign guests, and her listening skills were still lacking. In this relation, R5 said, *“My ability to listen is still very lacking, especially when guests ask something outside the hotel context”*. R5 explained the problem that had occurred because of this condition was a mistake in understanding the guest's intention to ask for an *“adapter”*, but what was heard was *“doctor”*, so the receptionist called a doctor to check the guest. In addition, there is also the same error, in the form of guests asking to be sent *“Maps”* of the hotel's location, but the intention caught by hotel receptionists is the usual *“Map”*, which is commonly used to tidy up files. Looking at these problems, the researcher could infer that the perception of receptionists who convey that when communicating, there is no need to understand the meaning of the sentences conveyed by guests is wrong because it is proven that this causes misunderstandings to occur, such as the case described above.

Moreover, the rest stated that they had difficulties dealing with very limited vocabulary. In this relation, R2 said, *“My vocabulary is limited to hotels only. Sometimes I forget what I have to say.”* R2 also stated, *“I need time to choose the word that I want to say when dealing with guests asking for information about salon recommendations”*. The observations show that R2 indeed had language problem due to the lack of

vocabulary. The various situations make the researcher infer that mastering vocabulary outside the hotel context and English practices is very important at the workplace because this situation will improve the competence to speak English well.

Below is the recap of overall data from interviews and observations of hotel employees' perceptions regarding their speaking skill level in using English for communication.

Receptionist Perception	Number of Receptionist
Speaking skills at the advanced level	1
Speaking skills at the intermediate level	2
Speaking skills at beginner level	2

The data shows that only one receptionist perceived his speaking skill at the advanced level, two of the receptionists perceived their speaking skill at the intermediate level, and the rest were at the beginner level.

Discussion

The researcher found that most receptionists perceived themselves as capable of communicating with foreign guests in English, because they could handle guests when checking in or out of the hotel. From these observations, the researcher found that only three (3) of the five (5) receptionists could communicate in English when handling guests. The rest of the receptionists still often ask

guests to repeat what they said because they need to help them understand what the previous guest meant. They also often use body language to ensure that information is obtained. This condition is different from the results of the document study, which is a certificate of competence as a receptionist that is always renewed every three years. Robert and Brown (2004) stated that competence is the ability to work based on knowledge, skills, and work attitudes.

The study shows that the lack of English language competence among hotel receptionists can have a significant impact on their communication quality. This can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in providing efficient communication with guests. The study also reveals that due to the lack of English training among hotel receptionists, they struggle to understand and respond to guest inquiries or requests accurately. Additionally, the study highlights that this language barrier can hinder the receptionists' ability to effectively convey important information such as hotel policies or amenities, resulting in a unpleasant guest experience. The findings of this study highlight the importance of investing in English language training programs for hotel staff to improve their communication skills and enhance guest satisfaction. By improving their language skills, hotel staff can confidently and accurately address guest inquiries, ensuring a seamless experience. These findings were congruent with Oliveri and McCulla's (2019) findings, i.e. English proficiency is absolutely required to successfully perform the job-related activities in the workplace.

The study concluded that the

difficulties encountered by participants in using English were caused by a lack of vocabulary and the lack of habit using English in the work environment. The study also revealed that the lack of training, specifically in language training, caused participants to have diverse foreign language competence. As a result, it impacts on the quality of language used by MRT Hotel receptionists. This problem was acknowledged by the four receptionists who participated in this study. They stated that there was no obligation to speak English in the workplace, except when serving foreign guests.

The results of this study align with the research conducted by Lathifah (2022) entitled *The Needs and Problems of English Skills of the hotel front office Staff at Lombok West Nusa Tenggara* and Kurniarini' et al. (2021), entitled *Assessing Tourism Students' English Proficiency Competence Based on ASEAN Common Competency Standard*. The research results show that English speaking and listening skills need to be improved by hotel staff to make it easier for staff to communicate with foreign guests. This research shows that speaking and listening skills must be acquired well by receptionists working at the MRT Hotel. All of these research studies are in line with the findings of the present study.

The researcher admitted that there were several weaknesses of this research. This happened due to several factors, such as difficulty in obtaining research permits at the hotel and asking permission to interview participants. As this research is a single case study with a small number of participants, the results of this study cannot be

generalized.

D. Conclusion And Suggestions

The study concludes that hotel receptionists perceive that the adequacy of their English-language communication skills varies. Several of them perceived that their English was adequate enough to handle guests, whereas some of them perceived it as inadequate. It was revealed from the data that their level of education, training, and prior experience dealing with English-speaking guests all have an impact on this perception. Additionally, the study led to the understanding that these receptionists need to have adequate English language training so that they can have a higher level of confidence when they communicate with guests. This language training can help them effectively handle various situations, such as handling guest inquiries and providing accurate information. Furthermore, the study also suggests that hotels should invest in continuous language training programs to ensure receptionists maintain and improve their English-language communication skills over time. As frontline representatives of the establishment, they play a crucial role in creating a positive guest experience and ensuring effective communication. Thus, it is essential for hotels to provide receptionists with ongoing training opportunities to enhance their customer service skills and adapt competence. By equipping receptionists with the necessary tools and knowledge, hotels can ensure that guests receive exceptional services.

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