

PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH CONVERSATION TRAINING FOR THE FRONT OFFICE STAFF OF WYNDHAM HOTEL PALEMBANG

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Abstract

Effective communication is essential for success in the profitable hotel sector. In this line of work, communication is crucial to a seamless and productive exchange between hotel service personnel and guests. In today's competitive hotel industry, training in English communication skills offers several benefits, including increased productivity at work, enhanced customer satisfaction, and long-term success. This training initiative serves as a community service project that showcases the front office staff of Wyndham Hotel Palembang's proficiency in professional English conversation with customers. Interviews were conducted to assess participants' satisfaction with the training's content and methodology. The majority of participants expressed positive opinions about the training's methods and content, as indicated by the findings. The conclusions of this community service project raise awareness among employers, directors, and industry specialists about the need to reevaluate the approach and substance of hotel staff communication skills training. Further discussion was held regarding the implications of providing hotel front office staff with well-designed training in English conversation skills.

Keywords: Conversation, English, Front Office, Hotel

INTRODUCTION

There are differences in the way speakers utilize language with each other. The speaker's position as a member of several communities—such as those related to birthplace, housing, education, social groups, workplace, and others—motivates the differences. Speakers speak in a way that suits their needs. For instance, the terminology used in medicine and hospitality differs. Language particularities or specific terminology can arise from variations in language use. Consequently, the significance of English as a common language—especially English for Specific Purposes (ESP)—played a significant role in the hotel industry. The hotel staff members had to get ready to use their English while on the job. English is frequently used in hotels as a second language, not just for communication with visiting foreigners but also for room names, brochures, amenities, and other services. Raising the standard of service is a key factor in succeeding in the fiercely competitive global hospitality industry. Effective communication, particularly oral communication, is essential for a hotel to project a positive image to guests (Firharmawan et al., 2022).

Most of the words used in the Front Office section were in English. The study found that the Front Office department employed a diverse range of lexical and contextual English expressions (Asmin, 2014). Moreover, speaking and listening are the two most crucial abilities for Indonesian hotel workers (Prima et al., 2022). One of the most crucial skills for the efficient and successful operation of the front office department is English. Unsurprisingly, possessing outstanding skills in English, including hearing, speaking, reading, and writing, is a prerequisite for working in the hotel's front office department. Upon completing the study, the researcher discovered that speaking was the most frequently utilized talent in the hotel's front desk. There was a clear trend in the hotel front desk to use speaking skills more often (Aprianto, 2018).

The human resources department should encourage its employees to become more proficient in the language by bringing in an English language expert to give after-hours lessons. The results of this study could be utilized to determine how hotel front desk English courses should be set. Additionally, the company should enable and encourage them to speak English with confidence. When assessing customer satisfaction, the role of hotel staff is considered a key supporting aspect. The hotel sector requires language proficiency from its employees, particularly from front desk staff. Still, poor English skills and communication issues have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and the quality of service. In addition, the researcher stated the research question as follows: "What English proficiency is most required of the front office department in their work?" In five-star hotels, the language proficiency of front desk employees and customer satisfaction are significantly correlated (Jawabreh et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have explored and suggested the importance of English conversation training for the front office department. Juliantari et al. (2023) indicate that the perspective of English-speaking guests is influenced by the education, training, and prior experience of the participants. Hotel management should invest in ongoing language training programs to ensure that receptionists maintain and improve their English language skills over time. In addition, Panggabean (2023) confirms a need for improvement in front office English language skills by conducting staff professional development training. Pham (2023) found that hotel receptionists use four essential English abilities in their line of work. Speaking skills are frequently utilized in the hotel industry. As a result, instructors, trainers, and curriculum developers should view it as a crucial step in developing their communication abilities.

Related community service projects have been conducted in conjunction with English conversation training and the front office department. However, only a limited number were done for professional English conversation by front office staff. Mulyah et al. (2022) found that English conversation training was effective in improving improving the communication skills of village leaders. Miqawati (2023) revealed that proficient oral English communication, as well as strong reading and writing abilities, are prerequisites in the front office department. Husin et al. (2023) raised awareness among employers, HR managers, and industry specialists on the need to reevaluate the approach and substance of hotel staff's English communication skill training. Lastly, Herdiawan et al. (2023) conducted a community service project for front office staff, focusing on all language skills, and found that English training was practical for their overall skills. However, it did not specifically target conversation aspects.

The front office staff at the hotel today are aware of the importance of having good English skills, especially when it comes to speaking. This community service project aims to determine the most effective way to enhance the staff's English skills at Wyndham Hotel Palembang through intensive professional English conversation training. Regarding the need for stronger collaboration between higher education and industry, this community service project focuses on providing professional training for the front office department staff of Wyndham Hotel Palembang, the project partner. This community service project can benefit both the community and the institution. The front office staff can enhance their understanding of how to communicate effectively in English within a hotel context. They can also learn directly from experts in the field to enhance their speaking skills. Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya can strengthen its partnership with Wyndham Hotel Palembang for future projects by exchanging experts in the same fields.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The community service project took place from October 14 to 19, 2024, at the Wyndham Hotel Palembang. The implementation method included seminars, media preparation, and training, as described below.



Figure 1. Project Implementation Method

The purpose of the seminar is to educate attendees about the partnership program that the devotees are running at the hotel. The willingness of partners to engage in activities, in terms of time, effort, and implementation location, was the key result of the project. The project's goals guided the activities, which included training in hotel English to improve communication skills. The actions done included supplying instructional materials and auxiliary equipment. It was accomplished by developing a curriculum and using instructional materials provided by the support staff. In addition, equipment purchases and classroom setup were coordinated with the Wyndham Hotel Palembang, a partner establishment. Roleplaying, demonstration, and lectures were all used in this training. The training contents were thoroughly explained through lectures and discussions. To provide training participants with the necessary information, experience, comprehension, and examples to speak English fluently and access support services in the workplace, a demonstration technique was required.

Twenty staff members from the hotel's front office departments received the training.

The training materials covered a variety of topics, including making reservations, providing information about hotel amenities, serving at restaurants, describing events, requesting assistance, offering directions, explaining tourist attractions, and handling complaints. To help all training participants improve their English speaking skills, roleplaying was employed to promote active participation. Roleplaying was based on experience, so when it came to language acquisition, this approach made learners more adaptable to various novel situations, which facilitated their language use. Learners were able to enjoy speaking practice in the classroom setting, and the flexibility of roleplaying generated new conversation methods.

Participants could act or pretend to be someone else in a real-world setting, where they were brought into the classroom, allowing them to practice their English language skills in the learning context within the training activities. Before and after training, there were pretests and posttests. These assessments were conducted to evaluate the participants' skill levels both before and after training. According to the agreement between the service team and partners, speaking skills were the primary focus of the training objectives in terms of skill assessment. The speaking assessment rubric was used to measure participant abilities. Five criteria were used to evaluate the speaking abilities of training participants: understanding, speed, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The maximum score is the highest possible score that a participant could receive if they possess flawless ability. There are 10 points in the value. To facilitate the classification of participants' skill levels, the service team converted the scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this community service project start with the seminar. It went well, as the participants enthusiastically asked questions of the speakers to strengthen partnerships and foster active engagement. The pretest was also done to see their initial ability.



Figure 2. Seminar on English Conversation for Front Office Department

The outcomes of English language instruction for hotel receptionists demonstrate that the training yields substantial advantages for these individuals. They can improve their ability to communicate in English, thereby facilitating communication with foreign guests who visit

the hotel. Additionally, hotel receptionists can enhance their ability to read and write in English, which is particularly useful in their daily work. One of the most significant impacts is the increased confidence of hotel receptionists in communicating with foreign guests. It can help improve the hotel's image and increase visitor satisfaction. Additionally, training in English can enable hotel receptionists to provide better service to clients. With improved English communication skills, hotel receptionists can better understand the needs and desires of guests, thereby providing more effective service.



Figure 3. Professional English Conversation Training Sessions

However, there were also some obstacles faced in English training for hotel receptionists. One of them was the limited time and resources available. English training was usually conducted outside of working hours, which could interfere with the work schedules of hotel receptionists. The first day was dedicated to the introduction of the trainers and participants, the presentation of the objectives and benefits of English training for hotel receptionists, an evaluation of participants' English levels, a discussion on communication in hotels, and a discussion of the duties and responsibilities of a receptionist. The second day was dedicated to discussing basic English grammar, practicing English pronunciation, roleplaying a hotel reception scenario, and discussing complaint handling in English. The third day was dedicated to English email writing practice, a presentation on tips and tricks for dealing with foreign guests, a roleplay of foreign guest check-in and check-out situations, and a discussion on the use of English in hotel room reservations. The fourth day was dedicated to English presentation practice, a discussion on tips and tricks to overcome difficulties in communicating with foreign guests, a roleplay of a situation involving room reservation cancellation by a foreign guest, and an evaluation of participant development during the training. The final day of English training for hotel receptionists was conducted by presenting the learning outcomes that participants had achieved during the training. Each participant was asked to present their learning outcomes from each material provided during the training. The posttest results show significant improvement among the training participants, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results of Pre-test and Post-test

| Participant | Pre-test | Post-test |
|-------------|----------|-----------|
| 1 | 6 | 7 |
| 2 | 7 | 9 |
| 3 | 6 | 8 |
| 4 | 6 | 8 |
| 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6 | 8 | 9 |
| 7 | 7 | 8 |
| 8 | 6 | 8 |
| 9 | 6 | 8 |
| 10 | 5 | 7 |
| 11 | 7 | 8 |
| 12 | 6 | 8 |
| 13 | 6 | 8 |
| 14 | 7 | 8 |
| 15 | 8 | 9 |
| 16 | 5 | 7 |
| 17 | 5 | 7 |
| 18 | 7 | 8 |
| 19 | 6 | 8 |
| 20 | 6 | 8 |
| Mean Score | 6 | 7.5 |

After that, the training was closed, and certificates of completion were given to participants who had finished all the training materials. This certificate will serve as proof that participants have completed English training for hotel receptionists, adding value to their careers in the hospitality sector.



Figure 3. Closing and Certificate Distribution

CONCLUSION

Professional English conversation training is an effective way and important step for hotel receptionists. In this community service project, we discussed the importance of being able to communicate in English to perform daily tasks as a hotel receptionist. This training enables receptionists to interact smoothly with international guests and deliver exceptional service. First, receptionists will be able to answer guests' questions effectively and provide accurate information about the hotel's facilities, attractions, and other services. It will increase guest satisfaction levels and create a positive experience. Additionally, English language training also helps receptionists in emergencies. They can quickly and effectively communicate with guests who may need assistance or are experiencing difficulties. Good English skills will allow receptionists to handle difficult situations calmly and provide the necessary assistance. In conclusion, English conversation training for hotel receptionists is essential for improving the quality of service and enhancing the overall guest experience. With good English skills, receptionists can provide better service to international guests and build a positive image for the hotel. Therefore, hotel companies should provide English language training to their reception staff to support their ongoing operational success.

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