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THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE FROM HOTELS IN BANYUWANGI

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Abstrak

Industri perhotelan sangat bergantung pada komunikasi yang efektif, dengan penguasaan bahasa Inggris menjadi aspek kunci dalam memberikan layanan berkualitas kepada tamu internasional. Penelitian kualitatif ini meneliti peran bahasa Inggris dalam komunikasi perhotelan dari perspektif linguistik, dengan fokus pada tiga hotel berbintang di Banyuwangi, Indonesia. Melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam operasional hotel, mengidentifikasi tantangan komunikasi, dan mengusulkan strategi pengembangan bahasa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa karyawan menghadapi kendala seperti keterbatasan kosakata, kesulitan pelafalan, dan kesalahpahaman budaya, yang berdampak pada kepuasan tamu dan kualitas layanan. Studi ini merekomendasikan penerapan pelatihan English for Specific Purposes (ESP) yang disesuaikan dengan konteks perhotelan, dengan penekanan pada skenario nyata, kesadaran budaya, dan peningkatan rasa percaya diri. Peningkatan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris staf hotel dapat secara signifikan meningkatkan kualitas layanan dan daya saing pariwisata Banyuwangi di tingkat global.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris untuk perhotelan, komunikasi hotel, pariwisata Banyuwangi, pelatihan ESP, kepuasan tamu

Abstract

The hospitality industry relies extensively on effective communication, with English proficiency serving as a cornerstone for delivering high-quality services to international guests. This qualitative research investigates the role of English in hospitality communication, adopting a linguistic perspective and focusing on three star-rated hotels in Banyuwangi, Indonesia. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study explores the use of English in daily hotel operations, identifies common communication challenges, and proposes language development strategies. The findings reveal that employees face issues such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and cultural misunderstandings, all of which affect guest satisfaction and service delivery. The study recommends the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training tailored to

hospitality settings, emphasizing real-life scenarios, cultural awareness, and confidence-building. Enhancing English proficiency among hotel staff can significantly contribute to improved service quality and the global competitiveness of Banyuwangi's tourism sector.

Keywords: English for hospitality, hotel communication, Banyuwangi tourism, ESP training, guest satisfaction

Introduction

Banyuwangi, located at the eastern tip of Java Island, has emerged as one of Indonesia's rapidly developing tourist destinations, known for its natural attractions and cultural heritage. According to data from the Banyuwangi Tourism Office (2024), the district received over 2.5 million visitors, including more than 80,000 international tourists, marking a steady growth in foreign arrivals. This trend is aligned with the region's active promotion as a sustainable tourism destination and its accessibility through Banyuwangi Airport.

As the number of international visitors increases, the demand for effective communication between hotel staff and guests has intensified. English, functioning as a global lingua franca, has become a crucial tool in enabling hotel staff to meet the expectations of international clientele. In this context, English proficiency is not merely a language skill, but a strategic asset for hospitality service providers.

Hotel staff, particularly those in the front office, housekeeping, and food and beverage departments, are required to perform a wide range of communication tasks in English—from check-in procedures to handling guest complaints. However, in many regional areas such as Banyuwangi, language barriers remain prevalent due to limited access to formal language training. Miscommunication can result in guest dissatisfaction, negative reviews, and ultimately, loss of business.

This study investigates the linguistic demands of the hospitality industry in Banyuwangi, the challenges faced by employees, and the role of English in enhancing service quality. By analyzing field data and current practices, the study contributes to the broader discourse on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and workplace communication in emerging tourism regions.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the role of English in the hospitality industry from a linguistic perspective. A combination of

descriptive and case study methods is used to explore the significance of English proficiency among hotel employees, the communication challenges they face, and potential strategies for improving their language skills.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to examine how English is used in hotel operations and to explore the linguistic challenges experienced by employees. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the real-life context of English usage in hospitality settings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the following methods:

1. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 hotel employees, including front desk staff, housekeeping personnel, and food and beverage workers, as well as three hotel managers.
2. **Observations:** Non-participant observations were carried out in hotel lobbies, restaurants, and service areas to capture authentic interactions between employees and guests.
3. **Document Analysis:** Internal documents such as employee training materials, SOPs, and language modules were reviewed to assess the scope and focus of language support provided by the hotels.

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling from three three-star hotels in Banyuwangi that regularly host international guests. The sample included male and female employees aged 21 to 45 with varying levels of education and professional experience.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and categories related to English communication. Manual coding was conducted based on linguistic and ESP frameworks, focusing on areas such as communication barriers, functional language use, and employee attitudes toward English. Methodological triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the objectives of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Their identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity.

Data Collection Period

Data collection was conducted over a six-week period between March and April 2025, coinciding with Banyuwangi's mid-season tourist period. While not the peak season, this period saw moderate guest traffic and presented a representative view of routine guest-staff interactions.

Finding And Discussion

1. The Importance of English in Hospitality Services

English is widely used across various service points in the hotels studied. Employees frequently used English for greeting guests, providing directions, explaining services, and resolving complaints. Hotel managers noted that English competence is now a preferred qualification during recruitment. Moreover, English communication was seen by staff as a means to improve their career prospects, with many aspiring to work in international hotel chains.

2. Challenges in English Communication

Several challenges emerged from the data:

- 1) **Limited Vocabulary and Grammar:** Employees reported difficulty articulating complete responses or explaining procedures clearly. One housekeeping staff member noted, "I often know what to say in Indonesian, but I don't know the English word, so I just smile and hope the guest understands."
- 2) **Pronunciation Issues:** Mispronunciations often led to misunderstandings, especially with native speakers. A front office agent explained, "Sometimes guests ask me to repeat again and again. I think my pronunciation is not clear for them."
- 3) **Cultural Misinterpretations:** Literal translations from Bahasa Indonesia to English sometimes resulted in unintended impoliteness. One waiter said, "I used to say 'you take now' when giving food, but later I found out it sounded rude."

- 4) **Low Confidence:** Employees expressed fear of making mistakes, which led to avoidance of direct communication with guests. Several staff members admitted they preferred to “call the supervisor” rather than speak English themselves.

3. Hospitality Strategies for Improvement

To address the above challenges, the following strategies were recommended:

- 1) **ESP-Based Training:** English training tailored to hospitality tasks, including vocabulary drills, functional expressions, and service dialogues. For example, a hotel in Yogyakarta implemented role-play sessions simulating check-in and complaint handling, which significantly improved employee confidence.
- 2) **Pronunciation Workshops:** Sessions focused on common pronunciation difficulties using multimedia resources. One hotel adopted pronunciation apps combined with peer feedback circles to practice guest greetings.
- 3) **Cultural Competence Modules:** Training that incorporates intercultural communication and guest expectations. A comparative example from Bali showed that cultural awareness training reduced complaints from international guests by 20% in six months.
- 4) **Digital Learning Tools:** Mobile applications and online platforms providing interactive English lessons relevant to the hospitality field. In Banyuwangi, one manager encouraged staff to use Duolingo and BBC Learning English during breaks as part of self-directed learning.

4. English and Service Quality

Enhanced English proficiency was associated with more efficient service delivery, higher guest satisfaction, and fewer complaints. Hotels that offered structured language programs reported increased staff confidence and professionalism. Participants stated that improving their English made them feel more empowered and appreciated by guests. As one manager stated, “When staff can speak clearly, guests feel more welcome and leave better reviews. That’s good for everyone.”

5. Summary of Findings in Tabular Form

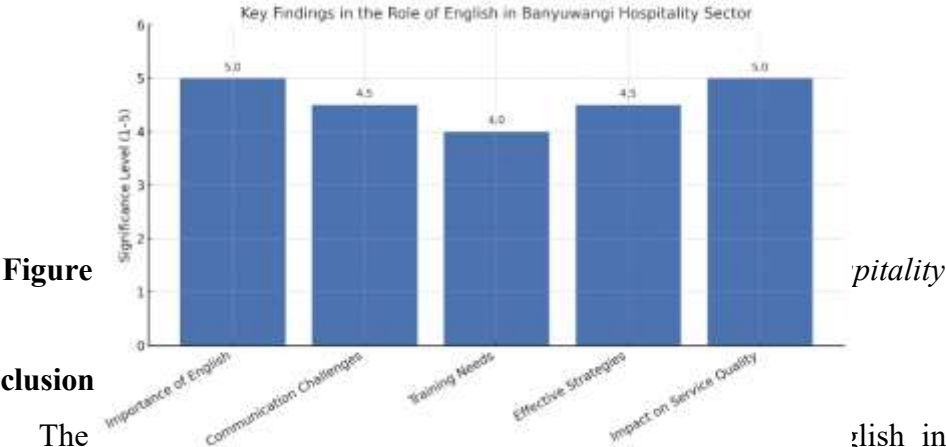
To complement the discussion above, the following table summarizes the main findings of this study, highlighting the use of English, key communication challenges, training needs, and their impact on service quality in Banyuwangi hotels.

| Theme | Findings | Evidence Source |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Use of English in Services | English is consistently used in guest greetings, giving directions, explaining menus/services, and handling complaints. | Observation notes; manager interviews from 3 hotels |
| Main Communication Barriers | Staff struggle with limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and cultural misunderstandings that lead to guest confusion. | Interview quotes from front office and F&B staff (e.g., “I just smile when I don’t know the English word.”) |
| Psychological Challenges | Low confidence leads to avoidance of guest interaction and over-reliance on supervisors. | Reported by 10 out of 18 staff; especially among junior employees |
| Training Gaps Identified | Existing training is too general; lacks specific vocabulary or cultural content relevant to hospitality settings. | Analysis of 3 hotel training documents; feedback from staff |
| Preferred Learning Methods | Staff prefer role-plays, mobile apps, and contextual dialogues to build both skill and confidence in a safe environment. | Participant suggestions; current use of Duolingo, BBC Learning, and WhatsApp peer chats |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Proposed ESP Solutions | ESP-based modules customized for hospitality scenarios (e.g., check-in, complaint resolution, restaurant service). | Supported by literature (Tsou, 2015; Harding, 2007); benchmarking Bali and Yogyakarta |
| Impact of Training on Quality | Hotels that implemented informal training saw increased guest satisfaction, fewer complaints, and higher online ratings. | Comparative manager reports; internal feedback tracking post-training |

Table 1. Summary of Findings from Hotels in Banyuwangi

To further illustrate the significance of the key findings, the following bar chart presents a visual summary of the major themes identified in this study. It reflects the relative emphasis and impact of each aspect as observed and reported across hotel departments.



hospitality industry in Banyuwangi. While English enables employees to communicate effectively with international guests, challenges such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and cultural misunderstandings persist. Addressing these challenges through targeted ESP training programs can greatly improve service quality and elevate the guest experience.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by demonstrating the practical integration of workplace

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communication, cultural competence, and linguistic proficiency in a real-world hospitality setting. It reinforces the need to contextualize English learning not only in terms of grammar and vocabulary but also in sociolinguistic and intercultural dimensions.

Future research could examine the long-term impact of language training on employee performance and guest retention. Comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia—such as Bali, Yogyakarta, and Lombok—can further enrich our understanding of regional differences in ESP implementation and its influence on tourism development.

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