

THE IMPACT OF HOTEL STAFFS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ON
TOURISTS' SATISFACTION WITH HOTELS IN MALAYSIA

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To my family especially my gentle father, Mahmoud, my lovely mother Farinaz, my dear brother Shervin, and my scrumptious Setare and steadfast Nader, thank you for always being there for me, supporting me and encouraging me to be the best that I can be.

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ABSTRACT

The hotel industry in Malaysia is rapidly expanding. An important component in the hotel industry is the human resource. Tourists do not just come for the facilities and attractions, they want to be treated right and well and that is why a good command of the English language is always regarded as an asset for personnel in the tourism industry since most visitors do not speak Bahasa Melayu, the national language of Malaysia. This study was conducted in order to analyze the possible relationship between the English language proficiency of the hotel staff and the satisfaction level of tourists. In order to do so, data was collected from 72 foreign tourists regarding their expectations and perceptions of their stay about personal qualities of the hotels' staff in different positions. The results obtained from the expectation of the guests indicate that the role and importance of the 'English language proficiency' in the tourism industry is relative to job function. 'English language proficiency' is more expected from those who often come into direct face-to-face contact with hotel guests such as the reception staff and it is more expected for the hotel management personnel as well. For other hotel staff, such as food & beverage and housekeeping staff, other qualities are expected more than 'English language proficiency' by hotel guests. The outcome of these results suggests that the emphasis on 'English language proficiency' for recruitment of the staff should also be based on the nature of job. An equal stress would only hinder the recruitment process. Another noticeable fact in this study indicates that the level of perceived 'English language proficiency' of the staff working in food & beverage and management departments still seems to be less than the level of guests' expectation. As the gap observed was huge in these areas, especially in food & beverage section, more English language training is recommended.

ABSTRAK

Industri perhotelan di Malaysia semakin pesat membangun. Salah satu elemen yang penting adalah sumber manusia. Para pelancong melawat Malaysia bukan semata-mata kerana tarikan dan kemudahan yang ada, mereka juga mahu dilayan dengan baik dan saksama. Atas sebab itulah penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris yang baik menjadi aset penting di dalam industri pelancongan memandangkan pelancong-pelancong yang datang tidak berkomunikasi di dalam Bahasa Melayu yang merupakan bahasa kebangsaan di Malaysia. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji hubungkait di antara level kepakaran Bahasa Inggeris pekerja di hotel dan kepuasan pelancong yang datang melancong di Malaysia. Untuk melaksanakan kajian ini, maklumat diperoleh daripada 72 orang pelancong berkaitan dengan pendapat mereka mengenai kualiti layanan diterima daripada staf-staf mengikut pangkat mereka. Hasil kajian yang diperoleh berdasarkan jangkaan pelancong-pelancong ke atas kepentingan "Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris" di dalam industri pelancongan seharusnya menjadi salah satu elemen untuk memilih pekerja. "Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris" diperlukan terutama daripada staf-staf yang berinteraksi secara berdepan dengan tetamu-tetamu hotel seperti staf di bahagian meja hadapan dan ianya menjadi keutamaan kepada pihak pengurusan hotel. Kepada staf-staf yang lain, seperti; bahagian makanan dan kebersihan, kualiti-kualiti lain lebih diutamakan berbanding "Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris". Keputusan kajian menunjukkan "Penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris" untuk pemilihan pekerja haruslah bergantung kepada jawatan yang diminta. Selain itu, pengkaji melihat bahawa pencapaian "penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris" staf yang bekerja di bahagian makanan dan pengurusan tidak dititikberatkan oleh para tetamu. Oleh kerana terdapat kelemahan yang besar di situ, maka, latihan penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris kepada staf di bahagian makanan telah dicadangkan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	x
	LIST OF FIGURES	xii
1	BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE	1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Statement of The Problem	3
	1.3 Research Objectives	4
	1.4 Research Questions	5
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	6
	2.1 Importance of Tourism	6
	2.2 Importance of Hotels	8
	2.2.1 Hotel Rating System	9
	2.2.1.1 Characteristics of Hotel Rating Systems	11
	2.2.2 Hotel Star Rating in Malaysia	13
	2.2.2.1 Recruitment of Staff in Four and Five Star Hotels in Malaysia	17

2.3	Main Hotel Staff	17
2.3.1	Front Desk	18
2.3.1.1	Reception	20
2.3.2	Food and Beverage	22
2.3.3	Management	23
2.3.4	Housekeeping	24
2.4	Tourists' Satisfaction	25
2.4.1	Revisit Intention	26
2.4.2	The Relationship between Satisfaction and Revisit Intension	29
2.4.3	Expectation of Customers	29
2.4.4	Disconfirmation Theory	30
2.5	Factors Affecting Tourists' Satisfaction with Hotels	33
2.5.1	Location	34
2.5.2	Amenities	34
2.5.3	Price	35
2.5.4	Brand	35
2.5.5	Cleanness and Hygiene	35
2.5.6	Guests' Experience	36
2.5.7	Security and Safety	36
2.5.8	Personal Quality	37
2.6	English Language	38
2.6.1	What is a Global Language?	38
2.6.2	A Language in Common	39
2.6.3	English as a Global Language	39
2.6.4	English Language in Malaysia	40
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	42
3.1	Method	42
3.2	Design	45
3.3	Participants	45
3.4	Setting	46

3.5	Instrumentation	48
3.6	Procedure	48
3.7	Data Analysis	49
3.8	Variables of the Study	50
4	RESULTS	52
4.1	Personal Data of Respondents	52
4.2	Ranking of the Factors Affecting the Choice of Hotel	54
4.3	Customers' Expectation and Perception Level towards the Personal Qualities of the Hotels' staff	55
4.3.1	Expectation of Guests Toward Personal Qualities of the Staff	56
4.3.2	Perception of Guests Toward Personal Qualities of the Staff	59
4.4	The Gap Score Between Guests' Expectation and Perception Level Towards Personal Quality of the Hotel Staff	62
4.5	Potential for Returning Customers to the Hotels	66
4.6	Customers' Suggestions Towards Personal Qualities of the Hotel Staff	67
4.7	Conclusion	68
5	DISCUSSIONAND CONCLUSION	69
5.1	Findings	69
5.2	Discussion	72
5.3	Implications of the Study	75
5.4	Limitations of the Study	76
5.5	Recommendations for Further Studies	77
	REFERENCES	78
	APPENDIX A	86
	APPENDIX B	89

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Minimum Requirements for Star Rating of Hotels	16
3.1	Participants' Sample Size Based on Hotels	46
3.2	Variables of the Study	51
3.3	Personal Data of Customers	53
4.2	Ranking of Factors Affecting Choice of Hotel	54
4.3	Expectation of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Reception Staff	56
4.4	Expectation of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Food & Beverage Staff	57
4.5	Expectation of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Management Staff	57
4.6	Expectation of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Housekeeping Staff	58
4.7	Perception of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Reception staff	59
4.8	Perception of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Food & Beverage Staff	60
4.9	Perception of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Management Staff	60
4.10	Perception of Guests Toward Personal Quality of the Housekeeping Staff	61
4.11	Gap Score Between Guests' Expectation and Perception of the Reception Staffs' Personal Qualities	62
4.12	Gap Score Between Guests' Expectation and Perception of the Food & Beverage Staffs' Personal Qualities	63

4.13	Gap Score Between Guests' Expectation and Perception of the Management Staffs' Personal Qualities	64
4.14	Gap Score Between Guests' Expectation and Perception of the Housekeeping Staffs' Personal Qualities	65
4.15	Potential for Customers to Return to the Hotels	66
4.16	Customers' Suggestions Toward Personal Quality of the Hotel Staff	67
5.1	Summary of Findings	71

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Expectation Disconfirmation Theory	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

For the last 20 years tourism industry has had a significant development in Malaysia. In the year 2010 the number of tourists coming to this country from all over the world was 24.6 million (Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen, Tourism Minister of Malaysia) and in a report published in 2010 by WTO, Kuala Lumpur which is the capital city of Malaysia, was recorded as the top 10 most visited cities by number of international visitors.

All countries are searching for some new ways to have the attention of more tourists, and because of this, satisfaction of tourists has been an important research subject in recent years and to understand what drives satisfaction, for a tourist, is one of the most relevant research areas (Prebensen, 2006), assuming that satisfied tourists will definitely transmit their positive experiences to other tourists and to make sure that they will repeat their visit (Gonzalesz et al., 2007)

There exist many definitions for satisfaction, according to Reichel (1978) definition, tourists' satisfaction is as a result of comparing the experience of a tourist at the visited destination and their destination's expectation. Feng (2007) believes that, when you want to analyze tourists' behavior, one of the most relevant variables is satisfaction. It sure has some influences on the destination choice of tourists and on their consumption of services and products and their intention to come again.

For a country to be a preferred destination for tourists many factors are involved. Both the government and the private sectors have a main role. The people in the front line must be able to make the visitors feel that the vacation destination which they have chosen was the right one. Thus there is an emphasis on language proficiency of those who involved in this process. Language is a mean for establishing a communication; it is also a tool for fostering relationship.

Nearly 1400 million of people live in English spoken countries and in most of them English has an official status. Thus, it is not very surprising that one out of five portion of the population of the world speak this language at the level of competence and others are still in demand of learning this language (Graddol, 1997).

According to Malaysia Government official website in the time duration of January- September 2011, 54366 number of visitors arrived from European countries, 14725 visitors were from North America and 21445 of them were from Oceania. Most of these travelers' first language was English and on those tourists who were from Asia and Africa recognize English as the Language of the world.

If these tourists have the option to communicate in their mother language or any other language which has more usage, they surely feel at home in the destination

countries. It will help them to have the feeling of safety and confidence and it would increase their level of satisfaction.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It was mentioned that in the tourism industry, tourist's satisfaction is a very important component. The level of tourist's satisfaction has an eminent role in promoting the image of a country as one top tourism spot.

Recent researches indicate that the depth of tourist satisfaction with a specific trip is as a result of various factors (Peter & Olson, 1996) these factors are described as a comparison between the tourist's perception of the services and the products they would receive and , the expectations that they have before and during their trip (Barsky & Labagh, 1992).

The Hotel Industry is one of the main parts of tourism industry. The major goal of hospitality industry is to provide desired or necessary products and services to travelers. Tourists do not come for attractions and facilities only. One of the thing that they want is to be treated well and right. That's why an acceptable command of English language has always been regarded as an asset for all personnel's who work in the tourism industry, specifically in the hotel industry.

According to Philipsson (1996), the importance of English is undeniable since English has considered being the most important medium of communication of

the world .English, as a global language, is the language of prestige, power and success. This language can open windows throughout the world.

Malaysia has two official languages, English and Malay. However our focus is on English only, because most of the visitors are not able to speak Bahasa Melayu, the national language. Most of the Malaysian citizens, who speak English, consider it as a second language, but a lot of tourism interactions occur in English.

Various papers have been conducted to assess the level of tourist satisfaction, but very few studies have focused on analyzing any possible relationships between this variable under investigation and English language application by tourism staff.

As a conclusion, the main objective of this thesis is to question if English language proficiency of the staffs working in the hotel industry has any impact on the level of tourist's satisfaction with hotels in Malaysia or not.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine whether the English language proficiency of the staff working in the hotel industry can influence the level of tourist's satisfaction in Malaysia.

2. To investigate the relative importance of the English language proficiency in the recruitment of employees in hotel industry.

3. To make possible recommendation about consideration of English language proficiency in recruitment of the hotel staff.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What factors are more effective in tourists' satisfaction with hotels in Malaysia?

2. What is the expectation of tourists about personal qualities of the hotel staff in Malaysia?

3. Does English language proficiency of the hotel staff influence the level of tourists' satisfaction with hotels in Malaysia?

4. What is the relative importance of English language proficiency in the recruitment of employees in hotel industry of Malaysia?

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