

A Study of Front Office Staff's Perception on Importance of English in Tegal City

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The aim of this research is to determine the perception of front office staff regarding the importance of English in Tegal City.

Design/methods/approach – The research object was front office staffs of a 3-star hotel in Tegal City. The design of this research is a case study with data collection methods in the form of questionnaires, observation and literature study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis with a quantitative approach.

Findings The results of the research showed that front office staff's perception of the importance of English in Tegal City is viewed positively. English language skills are one of the important things that FO staff must master. The factors underlying this are the large number of FO terms that use English, the requirement to be able to communicate in English with foreign guests, as well as the obligation to provide maximum professional and friendly service. Respondents' interest in maximizing potential in English skills is seen as a good perception of the importance of English.

Research implications/limitations – This study focuses on front office staff working at three-star hotels in Tegal City. A total of eight respondents participated in the research, all of whom are employed in the front office departments of these hotels. The main objective of this study is to explore their perceptions regarding the importance of English language skills in the hospitality industry, particularly in delivering quality service to guests.

OPEN ACCESS

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 07-08-2025

Revised: 20-08-2025

Accepted: 23-08-2025

KEYWORDS

case study, English skill, front office staff, perception

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Introduction

The hospitality industry, in the era of globalization, demands continuous improvement in service quality, particularly within the front office (FO) department, which functions as the primary gateway in shaping both the first and last impressions of guests. As highlighted by Insani and Setiyariski (2020), the front office is regarded as "the first and last impression for guests," thereby determining the overall image of a hotel. This underscores that communication quality—ranging from administrative tasks to interpersonal interactions—plays a central role in enhancing guest satisfaction and service efficiency. Within this framework, English language proficiency emerges as an indispensable skill, not only as a communication tool but also as a strategic asset to strengthen the competitiveness of hotels in the global tourism market.

The significance of foreign language mastery, particularly English, has been consistently reinforced in academic discourse. Hasyim et al., as cited in Putri et al. (2024), emphasized the importance of foreign language training for professionals in tourism-related sectors such as hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies, to ensure high-quality service and competitive advantage. Similarly, Sujatno, as referenced in Wowor et al. (2022), asserted that communication skills, negotiation abilities, and language proficiency substantially enhance the value of front office personnel. Accordingly, English functions not only as a lingua franca but also as a professional competency that shapes reputation, productivity, and competitiveness in hospitality services.

This phenomenon is increasingly relevant in Tegal City, which is undergoing rapid development as both an industrial zone and an emerging tourist destination. The expansion of industrial activities in the western region of Central Java, including Batang, has stimulated the inflow of international visitors, thereby creating new demands for hospitality services. Hotels in Tegal are consequently challenged to elevate their service standards by strengthening the English proficiency of their front office staff. Yet, most prior research has predominantly focused on metropolitan centers such as Jakarta and Bali (Prima et al., 2022), leaving a research gap in medium-sized cities like Tegal. This gap justifies the present study, which seeks to explore the unique context of Tegal's hospitality industry.

Theoretically, this study draws upon the concept of perception as elaborated by Setiadi (2013), Kotler and Keller (2008), and Sobur (2010), who describe perception as the process of selecting and interpreting sensory information to construct meaning. More specifically, Deffie, in Anggraeni and Sabrina in (2023), distinguishes three dimensions of perception: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive dimension relates to knowledge and understanding, the affective dimension concerns emotional responses, while the conative dimension involves behavioral tendencies and intentions. In this

research, these dimensions provide a conceptual framework for analyzing how front office staff perceive the importance of English proficiency in their professional roles.

Positioned within the broader literature, this study offers a distinct contribution. Whereas Putri et al. (2024) investigated foreign language proficiency beyond English and Prima et al. (2022) examined staff perceptions across demographic and occupational variables, the present research adopts a case study design focusing specifically on front office staff at three-star hotels in Tegal City. By employing a non-generalizable qualitative approach, this study seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of staff perceptions regarding the role of English in front office service practices. The findings are expected not only to address the research questions but also to provide practical insights for strengthening human resource strategies in the hospitality sector, particularly in emerging urban centers.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with a case study design, selected for its capacity to provide an in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomenon within its real-life context. As emphasized by Datu et al. (2022), case studies enable researchers to examine a specific subject—whether an individual, group, organization, or social phenomenon—in greater detail, making it highly applicable across social, educational, business, and clinical fields. This perspective is further supported by Yin, as cited in Rinda et al. (2022), who argues that case studies are particularly useful when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are indistinct. Therefore, this research design was deemed appropriate for exploring front office staff perceptions of the importance of English language proficiency in hotel services within the specific context of Tegal City.

The study utilized purposive sampling, a technique in which participants are selected based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2014). The criteria required that respondents be front office staff working in three-star hotels in Tegal City. Based on this consideration, the sample consisted of eight front office staff members representing six different three-star hotels. Data were collected through three main techniques: questionnaires, observations, and literature review. The questionnaire served as the primary instrument, comprising 15 statements structured on a five-point Likert scale, designed to measure three dimensions of perception: cognitive, affective, and conative. The instrument was adapted from the works of Prima et al. (2022) and Husin et al. (2023), with adjustments made to fit the local context of Tegal's hotel industry.

To ensure instrument quality, validity and reliability tests were conducted. The validity test confirmed that all items were valid, with calculated r values exceeding the r table threshold ($N = 8$, r table = 0.707), in line with Sugiyono (2014). The reliability test also indicated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.60

(Arikunto, 2010). The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis within a quantitative framework, enabling a systematic depiction of respondents' perceptions across the three measured dimensions. This analytical approach was chosen for its ability to provide accurate interpretations of the tendencies among front office staff regarding the role of English in hotel service practices. Furthermore, the study adhered to research ethics by ensuring confidentiality of participant identities and securing voluntary informed consent from all respondents.

Result

In this section, the research results are presented in two parts. First, the respondent profile that explains the gender, age and last education of the respondents in this study. Second, the results of the questionnaire analysis are also presented in the form of a table and described based on the research variables, namely cognitive, affective and conative variables.

1. The Profile of Respondents

The profile of respondents in this study is described based on gender, age and last education. Respondents in this study were FO staff at several hotels in Tegal City as many as 8 people.

Table 1. Gender of Respondents

| | Male | Female |
|---|------|--------|
| N | 4 | 4 |
| % | 50% | 50% |

Based on Table 1, respondents consist of 50% male and 50% female. It is important to emphasize that gender does not influence job performance in the FO department since service requirements are not determined by the staff's gender. This is in line with the results of research (Prima et al., 2022) that gender does not affect the resulting perception.

Furthermore, all respondents were between 20-30 years old that can be seen on Table 2, which is an age range that falls into the productive age category.

Table 2. Age of Respondents

| No. | Age Category | Percentage |
|-----|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | 20-23 years old | 25% |
| 2 | 24-27 years old | 37% |
| 3 | 28-30 years old | 38% |

Based on Table 2, 38% of the respondents are aged between 28-30 years, then 37% of the respondents are in the age range of 24-27 years, and the remaining 25% are aged 20-23 years.

The FO staff members who participated in the study had educational backgrounds that varied from high school and vocational school to D3 (associate degree) and S1 (bachelor degree). This can be seen from the respondents' last education on Table 3 which is different.

Table 3. Educational Background of Respondents

| No. | Category | N | Percentage |
|-----|--------------------|---|------------|
| 1 | Senior High School | 3 | 37.5% |
| 2 | Vocational School | 2 | 25.0% |
| 3 | Associate Degree | 2 | 25.0% |
| 4 | Bachelor Degree | 1 | 12.5% |

Respondents had varying levels of education, with the highest percentage was high school graduates and the lowest was bachelor degree. As many as 37.5% of the respondents have a high school education as their highest level of education. Then, 25% of the respondents are graduates of vocational high schools (SMK) and associate degrees (D3), respectively. There are 12.5% of the respondents who are bachelor's degree (S1) graduates.

2. The Findings of FO staffs' Perception on the Importance of English in Tegal City

The results of the data analysis are presented in three parts based on the aspects tested, namely cognitive, affective and conative aspects. Each analysis result for each statement is presented in the form of a table according to the aspects studied, then the results of the questionnaire answer analysis are described based on each aspect. The cognitive aspect consists of seven assertions that address familiarity with various aspects of English, comprehension in applying practical English in front office service practices, and the way respondents' English proficiency is characterized. The affective aspect includes four statements that assess respondents' feelings or emotional content, such as their self-confidence in using English for communication, their skills in both spoken and written communication, interpersonal abilities, and front office service capabilities. In contrast, the conative aspect comprises four statements that reflect the motivation to enhance communication skills through English learning.

Statements included in the cognitive aspect are represented in statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. The cognitive aspect includes listening, speaking, writing, reading, vocabulary mastery, grammar in writing, and grammar in speaking. The results of the cognitive aspect can be seen on Table 4

Table 4. Perceptions of Front Office Staffs on Cognitive Aspects

| No. | Cognitive Aspects | Percentage of Strongly Agree |
|-----|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Listening | 37.5% |
| 2 | Speaking | 12.5% |
| 3 | Writing | 12.5% |
| 4 | Reading | 37.5% |
| 5 | Vocabulary | 50.0% |
| 6 | Grammar in writing | 37.5% |
| 7 | Grammar in speaking | 37.5% |

In the cognitive aspect, the highest result was obtained in vocabulary, namely 50% respondents stated that they mastered English vocabulary in the hospitality sector. This shows that the basic English skills possessed by respondents are sufficient in the hospitality sector. Then followed the skills of listening, reading, grammar in writing, and grammar in speaking. As many as 37.5% of respondents perceived that the skills mentioned were important skills to be acquired. In contrast to the results of research done by (Prima et al., 2022) that listening ranked the highest and was considered important by respondents followed by next skill, namely speaking. In contrast to this statement, in this study the skills that were considered important besides vocabulary were listening, reading, grammar in writing and grammar in speaking.

The second desired perception is related to the affective aspect described in statements 8, 9, 14, and 15 as describe in Table 5.

Table 5. Perceptions of Front Office Staffs on Affective Aspects

| No. | Affective Aspects | Percentage of Strongly Agree |
|-----|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Interpersonal skills | 50.0% |
| 2 | Guest services | 62.5% |
| 3 | Communication skills | 75.0% |
| 4 | Front office services | 50.0% |

The highest analysis result is in communication skills as many as 75.0%. Furthermore, guest services got the second highest result with 62.5% of respondents stating that they strongly agree that FO staff should deliver exceptional service to guests and adopt the guest's perspective.

The last aspect of perception that we want to know is the conative aspect. This aspect is related to the respondent's desire to maximize their English skills. Statements

that explain this aspect are in statements 10, 11, 12, and 13. The results of the conative aspects can be seen on Table 6.

Table 6. Perceptions of Front Office Staffs on Conative Aspects

| No. | Conative Aspects | Percentage of Strongly Agree |
|-----|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Desire to improve hotel vocabulary mastery | 62,5% |
| 2 | Desire to practice speaking more | 62.5% |
| 3 | Desire to improve other English skills | 62,5% |
| 4 | Desire to develop speaking skills through training | 37,5% |

It can be described that desire to improve vocabulary mastery, to practice speaking more and desire to improve other English skills are perceived positively by respondents. It is proved that 62.5% respondents chose 'strongly agree' to those aspects.

Discussion

Respondents had varying levels of education, with the highest percentage was high school graduates as 37.5% and the lowest was bachelor degree as 12.5%. At the same time, the educational qualifications do not serve as a criterion for hotel employees in the Front Office department. There were only two respondents who were graduates of the hospitality department, including from hospitality vocational school and associate degree in hospitality. While the other respondents were graduates of high school, vocational school/associate degree in other majors, and bachelor degree majoring in accounting.

The research results present the analysis based on the perception aspects inquired, such as cognitive aspects, affective aspects, and conative aspects. First, seven statements inquiring about the cognitive aspect relate to the English language skills possessed by the respondents. Second, four statements inquire about the FO staff's skills in the affective aspect. Third, four statements inquire about the desire to improve English language proficiency in the conative aspect.

In the cognitive aspect, the highest result was obtained in statement 5, where 50% of respondents stated that they mastered English vocabulary in the hospitality field. This indicates that the basic English skills possessed by the respondents are adequate in the hospitality field. Then followed by statements 1, 4, 6, and 7. The statements explain listening, reading, grammar in writing, and grammar in speaking skills. As many as 37.5% of respondents consider that the mentioned skills are important skills for them. Unlike the results of study (Prima et al., 2022) which found that listening ranked highest and was

considered important by respondents, followed by the next skill, speaking. In contrast to that statement, in this study, the skills considered important beside vocabulary are listening, reading, grammar in writing, and grammar in speaking. This may be caused by a lack of practice to sharpen and improve those skills, especially speaking skills. Therefore, the minimal speaking practice results in respondents having difficulty communicating with foreign guests who are staying. Nevertheless, respondents often use technological assistance in the form of language translation applications that can be used directly. This application is used to translate language difficulties faced by both FO staff and foreign guests. Information obtained during the observation indicates that in several hotels, foreign guests who frequently stay come from Asian regions such as South Korea, Japan, and China with business purposes in Tegal. The English proficiency of these guests is also lacking, so as an alternative assistance, the staff will use the application.

The second perception to be understood is related to the affective aspect described in statements 8, 9, 14, and 15. The highest analysis result is found in statement 14. Respondents believe that the service provided in the FO department will become more difficult if one does not master English. Considering that many FO terms use English and must be understood by FO staff to avoid mistakes in handling and performing their duties. Mastery of vocabulary and speaking skills is very much needed in FO service. This shows that respondents view English as important, especially in communication with guests. This is in line with the research findings (Wowor et al., 2022) which indicate that oral communication received the highest score, considering the importance of these skills for FO staff in communicating, conveying information, or carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

Next, statement 9 also received the second highest result, with 62.5% of respondents strongly agreeing that FO staff must provide maximum service to guests and be able to position themselves from the guests' perspective. Providing maximum service is mandatory in the FO department. This is because FO staff are the frontline of a hotel, so the first impression guests receive must be a positive one, as well as when they leave the hotel. FO staff are required to be professional and friendly to guests visiting the hotel. Additionally, the standard procedures that must be implemented involve friendly, warm, and good service.

The last aspect of perception that is sought is the conative aspect. This aspect relates to the respondents' desire to maximize their English skills. The statements that explain this aspect are found in statements 10, 11, 12, and 13. The analysis results of statements 10, 11, and 12 received the highest scores. Respondents consider that learning vocabulary, speaking, and English in general is important. The respondents' desire to learn is considered a positive perception of English language skills. Based on the observations, the respondents feel they still need to attend English training, especially

speaking. The reason given by the respondents is that speaking skills can be practically used in providing service at the Front Office (FO).

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the perception of front office staff towards the importance of English in Tegal City is viewed positively. English language skills are one of the important things that must be mastered by FO staff. The underlying factors are the many FO terms that use English, the requirement to be able to communicate in English with foreign guests, and the obligation to provide maximum service in a professional and friendly manner. Respondents' interest in maximizing their potential in English skills is seen as a good perception of the importance of English. In addition, the increasing number of foreign guests visiting Tegal City motivates FO staff to sharpen their English skills such as vocabulary and speaking skills. English language training for FO staff can be conducted using various approaches so that the trained skills can be developed optimally.

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