

# Identifying English Communication Competence for Front Office of Hotel Industries

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**Abstract.** English bridges the communication needs of global society, including in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The aim of this research was to identify communication skills for front office in the hotel sector. It was a qualitative study deploying document analysis method. In this case, certain English language competencies or skills were identified also through particular document review. The reviewed documents were ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement Tourism Professional, Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI), and Ministry Regulations. The results of the analysis showed that the required English language skills include competence in communicating verbally in English at a basic operational level and reading and writing at an advanced level. This research is limited to front office English competency identification and further identifications in other areas are recommended.

**Keywords:** English Communication Competence, Front Office, Hotel.

## 1 Introduction

The flow of globalization and the rapid development of technology in the 21st century requires people to be able to adapt quickly and compete with others from various countries and different continents. Competency demands are also increasingly complex and higher. One of them is foreign language skills which are part of these 21st century skills. To communicate internationally, English is one of the languages that plays a dominant role and is most widely used not only in the fields of education and politics, but in other sectors such as tourism. In other words, English has become a lingua franca that bridges the communication needs of global society [1], [2].

International travel and tourism activities are starting to run normally after the Covid19 pandemic. Cross-cultural communication between hosts and guests/tourists (guests and hosts) from different linguistic backgrounds is increasing. Thus, this creates front line staffs' need in the industry of hospitality [3]. In the hotel industry, hospitality is closely related to how to provide good service to guests in accordance with established standards or conditions. Front

line staff need to master English because they are in direct contact from when guests arrive until they leave and are the ones who serve as references for guests when they encounter problems while traveling or staying at a hotel.

Several previous studies investigated the language needs of students and employees [4], [5], [6], while others focused on analyzing the effectiveness of language learning in the tourism and hospitality sector and the interventions provided on a person's language competence [7], [8], [9]. The findings of the study show that there is a compelling need for English mastery in the sectors of tourism and hospitality, not just oral communication skills, but also the ability to read and write. Apart from that, the Republic of Indonesia government through the Ministry of Manpower has also determined the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI). It is a formulation of work ability that covers knowledge, skills and/or expertise and work attitude aspects. Those aspects are relevant to the real implementation of the specified duties and job requirements [10]. SKKNI for the tourism sector has also been established. However, for certain work fields in the tourism and hospitality sector, more intensive analysis needs to be carried out according to the level and needs of employees. This study aimed at identifying the specific English competences for front office staffs working in Indonesian hotel industries, especially those stated in legal documents launched by the authorized institution or ministry in Indonesia.

## **2 Method**

This study used document analysis method. It is a systematic procedure for evaluating both printed and electronic documents. [11], [12], 2008; see also Rapley, 2007). The reviewed documents were ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement Tourism Professional, Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI), and the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Regulation.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

To answer the problem in the research, we conducted document analysis to identify the English communication competencies that a hotel staff must possess. There are several main documents that we analyzed, namely the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 5 Year 2022 about the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in the Hotel Sector and the Decree the Manpower Minister of the Republic of Indonesia Number 145 of 2018 about Work Competency Standard Determination in Indonesian National Category: Providing Accommodation and Providing Food and Drink, Main Category of Providing Accommodation in the Hotel and Restaurant Sector. These two documents are the latest documents and improvements to previous regulations and are reviewed every five years. SKKNI for hotels and restaurants points out to the ASEAN MRA-TP (Mutual Recognition Arrangement Tourism professionals) results. They cover the determination of tourism-sector competency standards, which are commonly known as Asian Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals/ACCSTP as well as Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum/CATC.

SKKNI can be used by various institutions according to their individual needs. Education and

training agencies can use SKKNI to obtain information on program and curriculum development and as a reference in organizing training, assessment and certification. Meanwhile, the business/industry world and workforce can use SKKNI to assist with the recruitment process, performance assessment, preparation of job descriptions, and development of specific training programs based on the needs of the business/industry world. Institutions administering testing and certification can also use SKKNI as a reference in formulating certification program packages according to qualifications and levels and as a reference in organizing assessment and certification training.

The first thing we analyzed from these two documents was that there are four levels of the KKNi in the Hotel and Restaurant Sector. First, KKNi qualification levels 2 (two) to 6 (six) for the front office subfield. Second, KKNi qualification levels 2 (two) to 6 (six) for the housekeeping subfield. Third, KKNi qualification levels 2 (two) to 6 (six) for the food and beverage services subfield. Fourth, KKNi qualification levels 2 (two) to 6 (six) for the food production subfield. Because this study focuses on the front office subfield, we limit our study to the first subfield, front office.

At each level of the KKNi in the hotel sector, front office sub-sector, there are possible positions that correspond to that level. Possible level 2 positions are bell boy, bell attendant, or bell service attendant. Possible level 3 positions include a) Receptionist, Front Desk Agent, Guest Service Associate, Guest Service Attendant, Guest Service Agent, Resort Host, and Guest Service Assistant; b) Telephone Operator, Call Center Assistant, Communication Associate, Communication Host, c) Reservation Staff, Reservation Agent, Reservation Associate, d) Guest Relations Officer, Business Center Attendant, Business Center Office, and Guest Experience, e) Villa Host, Butler, Club Lounge Attendant, Executive Lounge Attendant, and f. Concierge. At qualification level 4, possible positions are a) Front Desk Supervisor, Guest Service Supervisor, Reception Supervisor, b) Guest Relations Supervisor, Executive Lounge Supervisor, Guest Service Supervisor, c) At Your Service Supervisor, Call Center Supervisor, Telephone Operator Supervisor, Communication Supervisor, d) Bell Service Supervisor, Concierge Supervisor, Bell Captain; and e. Reservations Supervisor. Possible positions at level 5 are a) Duty Manager, Night Manager, Duty Assistant Manager, Front Desk Manager, Front Office Assistant Manager, Host Manager, Hotel Assistant Manager, Front Office Coordinator, Front Office Supervisor, b) Guest Experience Manager, Guest Relations Manager, Guest Service Manager, Associate Manager, c) Chief Butler, Head Butler, Club Manager, Executive Lounge Manager, and d) Chief Concierge. Possible level 6 positions are Front Office Manager, Assistant Front Office Manager, and Front of the House Manager. Based on the description of the possible positions at the five levels, it can be concluded that each level has different possible positions and this influences the competencies that are expected to be mastered.

English language competency is one of the competencies required at every level. At levels 2 and 3, the competency to communicate verbally in basic operational level English is one of the core competencies that must be mastered. At levels 4 and 5, there are two English language competencies that must be mastered. The required competencies are to be able to communicate verbally in English at a basic operational level as well as reading and writing English at an advanced level. Competencies related to foreign language skills (English) at level 6 include competency in reading and writing English at an advanced level. It supports the findings of a study conducted by [13] that one of the most implemented skills in a hotel is speaking.

There are two English language competencies that must be mastered, namely core competencies and elective competencies. All of those competencies are indispensable skills to be acquired. In the core competencies particularly in basic operational level English, the students or employees are required to communicate with customers or colleagues on issues pertaining to daily workplace activities and customer services, either face-to-face or via phone. The material coverage in basic operational level English is greeting and parting, welcoming guests, apologizing, showing gratitude, giving suggestions and factual information, requesting and offering help, giving direction, and giving polite remarks. This material coverage is required to be mastered because the front office staffs, in particular, should have reasonable fluency in English in order to communicate with foreign guests [14]. They should be able to anticipate and comprehend what the guests need and be prepared to meet the guests' expectations.

As students or employees advance to level 4,5 and 6, the requirement for English language ability become more stringent. They need to get more specialized aspects of competencies, namely reading and writing. In this elective competency, particularly reading English at an advanced level, they are required to read and interpret complex documents at the workplace. It covers identifying the purpose of the text, comprehending the text, finding detailed information both explicitly and implicitly. In addition, writing English at an advanced level emphasizes on writing complex business letter, proposal and report, effective minute meeting, and translating written document. The material coverage in writing English at an advanced level are correspondences or writing business letters (e.g., complaining and order letter), and writing proposal and reports (e.g., sales and marketing report). This gradual development of English language competence which cover specialized aspects of competencies namely core competency and elective competency will make them well-prepared to excel their professional responsibilities. With this situation, speaking and listening as a part of compulsory competencies are the most used skills in communicating with customers. However, writing and reading as a part of elective competencies are also important in doing paper work and documents for instance room reservations and guest contact [15].

#### **4 Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study is to investigate English competencies needed by hotel front office in relation to the most current work competency standards in Indonesia. The front office staffs are required to communicate in English a basic operational level. In addition, they also need to be able to read and write English at an advanced level, depending on the levels and positions. This study is limited in identifying front office English competencies. The results of this study may be used as guidelines for course designers to develop a specific and authentic material for hotel front office. In relation to the results of this study, we also suggest that human resource professional development should always be considered by inviting experts or giving training to improve the staffs' competencies.

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