

Effective Communication Skills for Housekeeping Staff: Improving Guest Interaction in English

Muhammad Nadjmuddin
m.nadjmuddin@polsri.ac.id
Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya

Aisyah
azzahra99aisyah@gmail.com
Universitas Muhammadiyah Papua

Dwi Hanadya
hanadya.dwi@gmail.com
Politeknik Prasetiya Mandiri

ABSTRACT

Practical language skills are essential in the hospitality industry, especially for housekeeping staff interacting directly with international guests. This study aims to identify and evaluate effective English training strategies to improve the communication skills of housekeeping staff at Duta Syariah Hotel Palembang. This study uses a mixed-methods approach involving ten housekeeping staff selected through purposive sampling. The quantitative method was conducted with pre-tests and post-tests to measure the improvement of English proficiency. In contrast, the qualitative method involved in-depth interviews and questionnaire analysis to gain insight into the staff's perception of the training received. 77.4. This indicates that, in general, housekeeping staff is at a moderate level of ability. However, there is considerable variation among them. The highest score obtained was 89 (SH), while the lowest score was 58 (RR). The average score of all staff was 77.4, which indicates that overall, the staff's speaking ability was at a moderate level. The English training program developed and implemented in this study effectively improves the English skills of housekeeping staff, improving professional competence and guest satisfaction. The study recommends implementing similar training strategies in other hospitality industry sectors to improve the quality of global service and communication.

Keywords: Language Training; Housekeeping; Communication Skills; Hospitality Industry

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is one of the sectors that continues to proliferate, especially in big cities such as Palembang, which is increasingly becoming a domestic and international tourist destination. Along with these developments, improving the quality of hotel services is also increasingly important. One of the crucial aspects of providing quality service is the ability of hotel staff, especially housekeeping, to

communicate with international guests. In this era of globalization, Purwanto et al. (2024) explaining English has become a global language of instruction spoken in various sectors, including hospitality (Cappelli, 2013). Therefore, housekeeping staff must master English so that communication with foreign guests can occur smoothly and professionally.

Housekeeping plays an integral part in providing comfortable service to guests, not only in terms of cleanliness (Rață, 2013) but also in meeting special needs and providing information needed by guests. In many cases, Putri et al. (2018) explained that housekeeping staff often interact directly with foreign guests, so their ability to communicate using English significantly affects the guest experience during their stay (Muntiningsih, 2018). However, in many hotels, including the Duta Syariah Palembang Hotel, the English skills of the housekeeping staff still need to improve. This condition causes obstacles in communication with foreign guests, ultimately impacting the quality of services provided. For this reason, it is essential to research strategies that can be used to improve housekeeping staff's English skills to provide better and professional services.

Housekeeping staff often interact with international guests, such as cleaning rooms, fulfilling additional requests, or handling complaints. Fersaoui (2021) explained that a good command of English allows staff to understand guests' needs more quickly and provide the right solutions. Hotels with staff who can communicate well in English tend to have a better reputation among foreign guests (Basturkmen, 2015). This can increase positive reviews and attract international guests (Rahmani & Supardi, 2021). For staff, English skills also open up career development opportunities in the hospitality industry (Yurko et al., 2019). These skills can provide opportunities for staff to get promotions or move to international hotels (Jaisabai et al., 2019).

Several previous studies support the importance of English training for hotel staff, especially housekeeping. One of the relevant studies is the study conducted by (Khalida and Refnaldi, 2020), which found that language skills are essential in improving the quality of hotel services and influencing guest satisfaction. The study highlights that international guests feel more comfortable in hotels where the staff can speak their language, especially in English. Another study by (Omondi et al., 2014) shows that English proficiency among hotel staff positively impacts service efficiency and increases the number of returning guests. This study also states that English training programs designed according to the daily situation in hotels are very effective in improving staff communication skills.

Based on this background, this research is important to identify strategies that can improve the language skills of housekeeping staff at the Duta Syariah Hotel Palembang. Referring to previous research studies, the right English training program is expected to improve the quality of service and guest satisfaction at the hotel and have a positive impact on staff career development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Study

Research Tarnopolsky (2013). – "Developing ESP students English speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills in internet-assisted project work," in this study, Tarnopolsky found that improving English skills in the workplace improves the overall performance of hotel staff, especially in the housekeeping section. The study also emphasizes the importance of continuous practice, real-life situation simulation, and the use of technology in English learning. Tarnopolsky recommends that hotels introduce training programs that support direct interaction with guests as one of the most effective ways to train housekeeping staff. Furthermore Omondi et al., (2014) – "Embedding ICT in English second language teacher professional development: Challenges and prospects for Kenya "; This study focuses on the impact of English proficiency among hotel staff on employee satisfaction and productivity. Omondi found that contextually designed English training programs, tailored to the daily needs of staff, proved to be effective in improving their language skills. Housekeeping staff who receive English training are better able to communicate with guests and feel more confident and motivated in their work. Research Nabila Zayanti et al. (2023). – "The Necessity of Speaking English in Hospitality "; This research was conducted in several hotels in Indonesia and examined the effectiveness of English training programs for housekeeping staff. The study results show that training programs that focus on practical everyday conversations and situations that hotel staff often face can significantly improve their English skills. This study is relevant because it shows that a contextual approach to learning in the English has proven to be more effective in improving the skills of hotel staff.

Language Training

Language training is a learning program designed to develop a person's language skills, usually with a specific purpose, such as for professional or academic purposes. Agustin and Purwanto (2023) explained that in the context of the hospitality industry, language training generally focuses on practical communication skills needed to interact with international guests in English. This language training is often known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which targets language needs in a specific work environment. According to Kaharuddin et al. (2019), ESP is a language-learning approach centered on students' needs. In language training for housekeeping staff, for example, English training programs are focused on using the language in everyday situations they often face, such as answering guest questions, providing information about hotel services, or responding to guest complaints.

Language training for housekeeping staff at hotels is designed to enhance their communication skills in English, focusing on several key aspects. One important area is listening to comprehension, which involves understanding a variety of guest

requests or questions, even when they are spoken with different accents or dialects. Another crucial skill is speaking fluency, enabling staff to respond to guests promptly and appropriately, with minimal pauses or grammatical errors. The training also emphasizes vocabulary acquisition, specifically the addition of terms relevant to housekeeping tasks, such as those related to hotel facilities, service procedures, and technical instructions. Furthermore, the training helps staff master politeness strategies, ensuring they use friendly and professional expressions in their interactions with guests, maintaining both politeness and etiquette.

Research by Putera Jaya et al. (2022) shows that needs-based language training, such as ESP, is more effective in improving communication skills compared to general language learning. Language training programs can also use a task-based approach, where trainees are involved in simulating real-life tasks they perform on a daily basis, such as taking room service orders or handling guest complaints in English. In addition, the duration and intensity of training are also essential factors in the success of language training. According to Yaumi (2012), intensive and continuous training programs produce more significant skill improvement than sporadic training. Therefore, ideal English training for hotel housekeeping staff should be carried out regularly and involve hands-on training in the context of work.

Speaking Performance

Speaking performance is one of the productive skills in language learning, and it involves the ability to produce speech that others can understand. In the context of language learning, speaking skills are an essential skill (Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017), especially in environments that require intensive verbal interaction (Mantra et al., 2020), such as in the hospitality sector (Purwanto, 2022), including for housekeeping staff. Purwanto and Agustin (2022) explained that good speaking skills include mastery of several aspects, such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to adapt to the context. According to (Wragg and Brown, 2002), speaking involves a two-way communication process in which one must express ideas, feelings, and information verbally while paying attention to feedback from the listener. It also demands pragmatic mastery, namely adapting the speaking style to the situation and audience (R. Brown, 1973). Thus, speaking performance reflects the extent to which a person can communicate effectively in the language he or she is learning.

In the hospitality sector, especially in housekeeping, speaking is indispensable because staff often interact directly with guests, whether to answer questions, respond to requests, or resolve issues that may arise during guests' stays. According to (H. D. Brown et al., 2002), effective speaking performance is characterized by the ability to speak fluently, by using proper grammar (accuracy), and by being well understood by listeners (intelligibility). Several factors can influence speaking performance. One common issue is the anxiety that many individuals, particularly non-native speakers, feel when speaking in environments such as the United Kingdom. This anxiety can significantly affect their fluency and confidence in

speaking (G. et al., 2003). Another crucial factor is practice and exposure. The more frequently a person engages in speaking a foreign language, the better they become at articulating their ideas. Finally, a strong knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is essential for clear communication. When individuals have a solid grasp of language structure and a broad vocabulary, they are better equipped to express their thoughts effectively. In this context, the assessment of speaking ability often involves several components: fluency, correctness of grammar use, pronunciation, understanding of meaning, and the ability to construct sentences coherently.

METHOD

Design and Samples

The sample in this study consisted of 10 housekeeping staff in a hotel, who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Criteria for selection include staff who have direct and regular interaction with guests and variations in their initial level of English proficiency. A sample size of 10 people was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the effects of the training while ensuring that each participant received sufficient attention during the training and evaluation process. This study uses quantitative and qualitative approaches (mixed methods) to get a comprehensive picture of the effect of training on English 's staff language skills. Quantitative measures measure changes in language proficiency scores, and qualitative methods are used to understand staff experiences and perceptions of training.

Instrument and Procedure

The research utilizes various methods to assess the effectiveness of the training program aimed at improving staff English proficiency. Pre-tests and post-tests are administered to measure the staff's proficiency levels before and after the training. These tests include both written and oral components to assess vocabulary, grammar, and speaking skills. Additionally, a questionnaire is used to gather data on staff perceptions of the training's effectiveness, while interviews provide in-depth insights into their experiences and how they apply the skills in the workplace. The implementation of the research is divided into three phases. Phase 1 focuses on training preparation, where the needs of the staff are assessed and relevant training materials are developed. Phase 2 involves the actual implementation of the training sessions. Finally, Phase 3 is the evaluation phase, during which pre-tests and post-tests are conducted, and qualitative data is collected through questionnaires and interviews to assess the overall impact of the training.

Data Analysis

The conclusions of this analysis will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the training strategies used and provide evidence-based recommendations for future improvements. It will also support the further development of the hotel's

English training program, which aims to improve the quality of service and guest satisfaction. The data analysis technique in this study uses descriptive statistics. The collected research data is then analyzed using descriptive statistics and adjusted to the speaking performance of the housekeeping staff. The criteria are as follows

Table 1. Criteria for Housekeeping staff's speaking performance

Percentage (%)	Criterion
85– 100	High
65 – 84	Medium
64 – 30	Low

Source: Adlika (2020)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Results of the speaking skills of the housekeeping staff

Table 2. Results of speaking skills of the housekeeping staff

No	Staff Initial	Score	Criteria	Average
1	AM	80	Medium	77.4
2	BW	77	Medium	
3	SH	89	High	
4	B	78	Medium	
5	S	61	Low	
6	MB	78	Medium	
7	HS	86	High	
8	KM	80	Medium	
9	RR	58	Low	
10	UI	87	High	

The data in Table two shows the results of the assessment of speaking ability of housekeeping staff based on the scores obtained. Here is the interpretation of the data:

Value Distribution:

The highest score was 89 (SH), while the lowest was 58 (RR). The average score of all staff was 77.4, which indicates that the staff's speaking ability is at a moderate level overall.

Assessment Criteria:

- **High:** Three staff members have high assessment criteria (SH, HS, UI), which indicates that they have good speaking skills and can communicate effectively in work situations.
- **Medium:** Most staff, i.e., six people (AM, BW, B, MB, KM), have moderate assessment criteria. This indicates that they have adequate speaking skills for

basic needs but may still need improvement in fluency or comprehension of more complex vocabulary.

- **Low:** Two staff members (S, RR) received low grades, indicating they need help speaking, which could impact their ability to communicate effectively with international guests.

Average:

- **Average grade:** 77.4. This suggests that housekeeping staff are generally at a moderate level of ability; however, there is quite a significant variation among them.

Implications for Training:

- **Training Focus:** Staff with low criteria (S and RR) need to get more attention in language training, focusing on developing fundamental skills and confidence in speaking.
- **Advanced Development:** Staff with moderate grades need continuous support to improve their skills, especially in fluency and the use of more complex phrases.
- **Potential Utilization:** High-scoring staff can act as mentors or role models for their peers or be involved in tasks that require more intense interaction with foreign guests.

This data shows that while most staff have adequate English, there is a clear need for additional training, especially for those in the low category. With proper and continuous training, it is hoped that the average speaking ability of staff can improve, thus supporting the overall quality of hotel services.

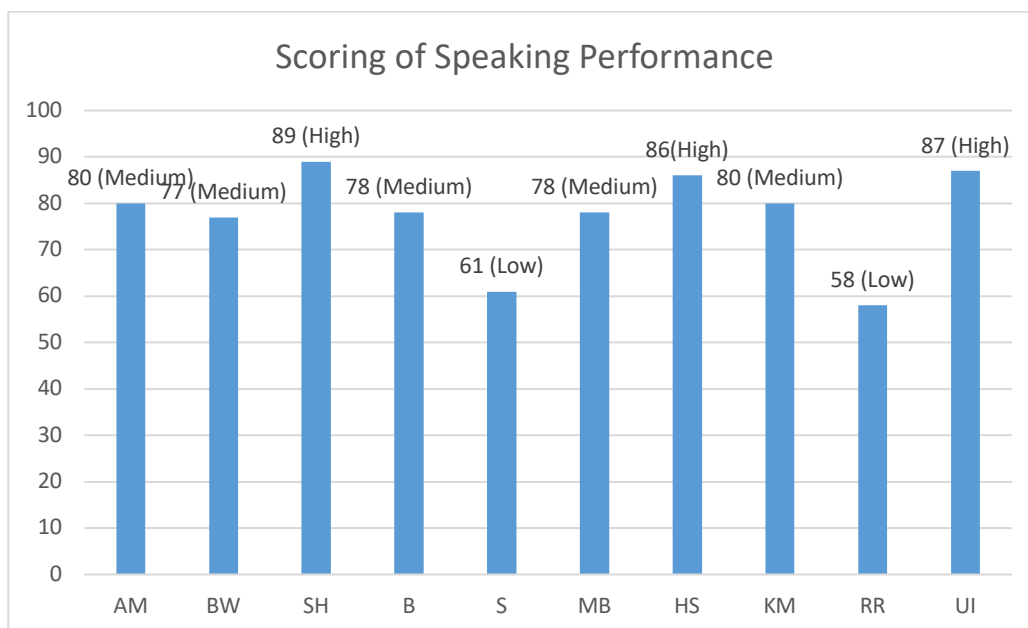


Figure 1. Scoring of Speaking Performance

Figure one presents a bar graph illustrating the speaking proficiency scores of housekeeping staff based on various assessment criteria. The results indicate that staff members identified as SH, HS, and UI have high scores, demonstrating strong speaking abilities in English, which allows them to effectively communicate with guests. Those in the medium score category possess adequate speaking skills but would benefit from further training to enhance their proficiency. However, staff members labeled S and RRs show lower scores, highlighting the need for special attention. To improve their speaking abilities, several steps can be implemented: 1) Conducting intensive English training with a focus on basic speaking skills through practical and interactive classes involving frequent conversation exercises. 2) Incorporating real-world scenarios they encounter in their daily work, such as interacting with guests, answering inquiries, and giving instructions, to help them apply the skills they learn. 3) Offering one-on-one tutoring and personalized learning sessions to ensure low-scoring staff receive the attention and support they need to progress at their own pace. This graph shows that while some staff already have good English skills, others still need additional training to ensure the entire team can communicate effectively in English.

B. Results of Guest Satisfaction Survey on the English Language Proficiency of Housekeeping Staff

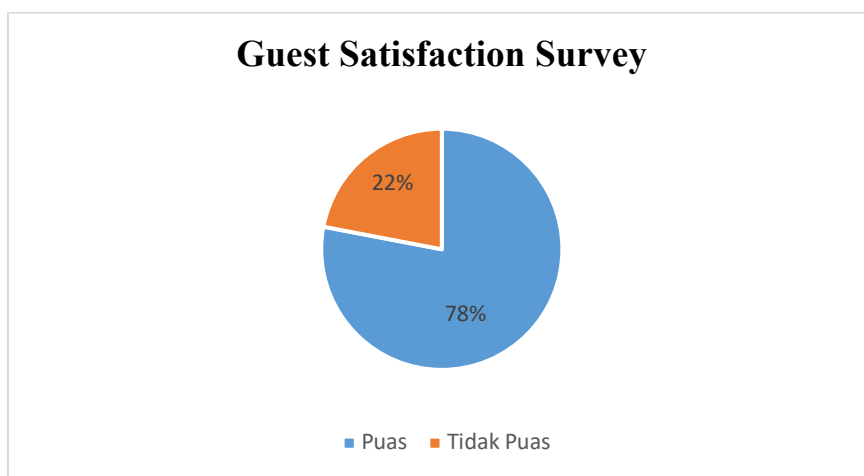


Figure 2. Guest Satisfaction Survey on the English Language Proficiency of Housekeeping Staff

Figure two is a pie chart that shows the results of a guest satisfaction survey on the United Kingdom language proficiency of housekeeping staff. This chart divides the study results into "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied". The picture above explains that most guests, 78% of whom are satisfied with the language skills of the housekeeping staff. This shows that most guests feel the housekeeping staff have good English skills and can communicate effectively. As many as 22% of guests are dissatisfied with the English skills of the housekeeping staff. This indicates that some guests need help communicating with staff, perhaps due to a lack of fluency or language understanding. From the explanation above, 78% of guests are

satisfied; it can be concluded that, in general, the English skills of the housekeeping staff are good enough and meet the needs of most guests. However, there is room for improvement, significantly to improve guest satisfaction, which needs to be attainable.

The survey results indicate that housekeeping staff can generally provide adequate services in English, essential to maintaining guest satisfaction, especially for international guests. While most guests are satisfied, 22% of dissatisfied guests indicate that a segment of staff may need additional training or improvements in their English skills. This is important to improve the quality of service and achieve higher guest satisfaction. By taking these steps, the level of guest satisfaction can be further enhanced, thereby improving the reputation and overall quality of the hotel's services.

C. The most influential factors in improving the English-language skills of housekeeping staff.

The most influential factors in improving the language skills of housekeeping staff include the following:

1. Quality and Training Methods:
 - Material Relevance: Training materials relevant to the daily tasks and situations in the hotel are essential. For example, phrases and vocabulary used in communication with guests, work instructions, and handling guest complaints.
 - Interactive Methods: Interactive methods such as role-playing, simulation, and audiovisual can help staff understand and apply the United Kingdom in their work contexts.
 - Training Frequency and Duration: Training provided regularly and sufficiently long allows staff to internalize and practice new skills.
2. Staff Motivation and Awareness:
 - Awareness of the Importance of English: Staff who understand the importance of English skills for career advancement and service quality are more likely to be motivated to learn.
 - Support and Awards: Hotel management's appreciation for staff training achievements, such as certificates or incentives, can increase motivation.
3. Supportive Work Environment:
 - Daily Practice: The opportunity to use English consistently in daily tasks helps strengthen the skills learned.
 - Peer Support: Support from colleagues and employers in using English regularly in the workplace can create an environment that supports continuous learning.
4. Education:
 - Level of Education and English Foundation: Staff with a higher educational background or a better English foundation usually find it easier to follow the training and improve faster.

5. Availability of Learning Resources:
 - Access to Additional Resources: Access to additional learning materials such as books, apps, or online classes outside of business hours can help staff continue learning and practicing in English.
6. Hotel Management Commitment:
 - Management Policy: Full support from management in the form of policies that encourage improving language skills, such as allocating time for training and support facilities, is highly influential.
 - Evaluation and Feedback: A continuous evaluation system and feedback to staff after training can help identify areas for improvement and provide guidance for constant improvement.
7. Guest Interaction Experience:
 - Direct Interaction with Foreign Guests: Staff who interact frequently with foreign guests have a greater chance of practicing English and improving their skills through hands-on experience.

These factors are interrelated and contribute significantly to the success of improving English proficiency among housekeeping staff. A holistic approach that focuses on a combination of these factors will provide more effective and sustainable results.

Based on the initial analysis, the English needs of the Duta Syariah Palembang Hotel's housekeeping staff are mainly related to daily communication with foreign guests, such as welcoming guests, answering questions related to hotel facilities, and handling requests or complaints. The ability to understand and respond effectively in English is essential to maintaining guest satisfaction and the hotel's image. The highest score obtained was 89, while the lowest score was 58. The average score of all staff was 77.4, which indicates that overall, the staff's speaking ability was at a moderate level. Then, after the implementation of the training, there was a significant improvement in the English skills of the housekeeping staff. Assessment after the training showed that the average speaking proficiency score in English improved, with more staff reaching the "medium" and "high" categories. The post-training guest satisfaction survey showed an increase in satisfaction, with 85% of guests expressing satisfaction with language skills of the housekeeping staff, compared to 78% before the training.

Relevant research is shown by Sermsook, K., Nakplad, R., & Jantawong, L. (2021); this study explains that the present study was carried out to investigate tourism staff's problems and needs for using English at work and to explore their needs for improving English for their work. The participants were 200 hotel staff in Phang Nga Province, Thailand. Data were collected through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for data analysis. The findings showed that the hotel staff's problem with using English at work was generally moderate ($M=2.76$, $S.D.=1.11$). They had English writing problems the most. They found it very difficult to write letters or e-mails in English.

Regarding their needs to use English, it was found that every English skill was rated at a high level ($M=3.75$, $S.D.=1.11$), and English speaking was the most necessary. The hotel staff reported having to speak English to welcome, greet, and say good-bye to foreign guests. Regarding their need to improve their English, overall, the hotel staff needed to improve their English skills to a high level ($M=3.85$, $S.D.=0.98$). They needed to improve their English use in every aspect, especially English listening. Based on the interview information, English courses, handbooks, or applications relating to English for hotels are genuinely needed for their English use improvement. Then, the research from Riyantika, F., Endra, R., Afrull, T., & Puspa, A. (2020), The results of their research revealed, the result of this study indicates that speaking and listening are the major needs of the staff. The staff mostly need speaking and listening skills. Speaking is the most frequently used form of oral communication with guests. Speaking also, the language functions needed were in greeting, offering menu, asking for the customer's needs or orders, confirming, dealing with billing, apologizing or complaining, etc. In addition, some problems are found in listening, such as listening to accents and dialects. The staff realize that the accent, the dialect, and the intonation of the guests can have a massive impact on their communication. Therefore, listening is also very needed in their work because the staff also need listening skills since speaking and listening are interrelated. Based on the findings, one suggestion was proposed: to prepare a language training program to improve the English language skills of the staff.

In the implementation of the training program, the program focuses on speaking and listening skills, emphasizing daily scenarios often faced by housekeeping staff. The practice sessions include role-playing, conversation simulations, and audiovisual materials. The training is carried out for three months, with a frequency of twice a week. Teaching methods involve hands-on learning in the classroom, independent learning through language learning applications, and periodic evaluations to measure progress (Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017; Tong, 2022). Staff with better English skills are also engaged as mentors to help their less proficient colleagues (Pratiwi et al., 2020; Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Some staff resisted training in this activity because they felt they needed to be more confident or saw training as an additional workload. The solutions include motivating through incentives and recognition for the progress achieved. However, time constraints due to a dense workload make it challenging to implement training. The training schedule is adjusted so as not to interfere with working hours. Therefore, adopting a continuous training program with an adjusted frequency is recommended to ensure that the staff's English skills continue to improve (Rosyidin & Purwanto, 2024; Umar et al., 2023). Periodic evaluation and feedback to assess the effectiveness of training and make adjustments if necessary (Ridayani & Purwanto, 2024; Taufiqi & Purwanto, 2024). Technology such as English learning applications that can be accessed at any time can be a solution to overcome staff time limitations.

The explanation above shows that structured and contextually relevant English training can significantly improve the language skills of housekeeping staff at Duta Syariah Hotel Palembang. This improvement has a positive impact on guest satisfaction and increases the staff's confidence and professional competence. Continuous training programs and regular evaluations are recommended to maintain and improve results.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the structured and focused English training strategy on the specific needs of housekeeping staff is very effective in improving their language skills, which in turn improves the quality of service and guest satisfaction at Hotel Duta Syariah Palembang. From the findings, it was explained that the training program specifically designed for the daily communication needs of housekeeping staff has proven to be effective in improving speaking and listening skills in English. After attending the training, most staff significantly improved their ability to communicate with foreign guests. There was a positive correlation between improved staff English proficiency and guest satisfaction levels. Post-training surveys show guest satisfaction with staff's English skills increased from 78% to 85%. Training methods involving simulation, role-playing, and the use of audiovisual materials assist staff in developing practical skills relevant to their daily duties. This strengthens their ability to handle real situations on the ground. In its implementation, several challenges, such as time limitations and staff motivation, were successfully overcome through adjustments to training schedules and providing incentives. This shows the importance of flexibility and management support in the training program's success. For sustainability recommendations, this study recommends that hotels implement continuous training programs and use language learning technology to accommodate flexible learning needs for staff.

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