

The Impact of English Speaking proficiency of Hotels' Staff on Attracting Tourists in Qeshm Island

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Abstract

The hotel industry in Qeshm Island is rapidly expanding. An important factor in the hotel industry is the human resource. Tourists do not visit a place just for the facilities and attractions; they want to be treated respectfully and that is why a good command of the English language is always regarded as an asset for the personnel in the tourism industry. This study worked on the impact of one of the English speaking proficiency of staff in hotels on attracting tourist in Qeshm Island. In order to do so, data was collected from 25 foreign tourists in Marina, Alvand, Olympic Hotels, regarding their expectations and perceptions of the language proficiency of the hotels' staff when facing them. The results indicated the importance of the 'English speaking proficiency' in relation to the tourism industry. this skill is more expected from those who often come into the direct face-to-face contact with hotel guests such as the reception staff and it is the case for the hotel director as well. In addition ,the result showed that those people who could speak English better succeeded in attraction more tourists coming and with those who were poor in speaking English.

Keywords: *hotel, tourist, tourism industry*

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Introduction

Qeshm Island is located a few kilometers off the southern coast of Iran (Persian Gulf), opposite the port cities of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Khamir. The island, which hosts a 300-square-kilometre (116-square-mile) free zone jurisdiction, is 135 km long, and lies strategically in the Strait of Hormuz, just 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the Omani port of Khasab, and about 180 kilometers (112 miles) from the UAE Port Rashid. The island, at its widest point, located near the center of the island, spans 40 kilometers (25 miles). Similarly, at its narrowest point, the island spans 9.4 kilometers (5.8 miles). The island has a surface area of 1,491 square kilometers (576 square miles) and is 2.5 times the size of Bahrain. Qeshm, located at the easternmost point of the island, is 22 kilometers (14 miles) from Bandar Abbas while the closest point of the island is but two kilometers (1 mile) from the mainland.

It is known that language proficiency or linguistic proficiency is a sort of ability of an individual to speak or perform in a language. As theories among pedagogues as to what constitutes proficiency go, there is little consistency as to how different organizations classify it. The language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols, which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learnt the system of that culture, communication or to interact. By speaking, we do not mean merely uttering words through mouth. It means conveying the message through the words of mouth. This skill is also neglected in our class rooms. Students do not get any chance either in the class room or outside to speak English. Speaking is not a part of our examinations. Canale, M. (1984) stated that learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention. We learn to speak our mother tongue just by listening and repeating. The teacher can adopt the same natural way. He can give them certain structures and ask them to repeat. This will remove their shyness. He can give those drills in the

basic patterns of language. Asking short questions and the use of short dialogues in the class room can also develop this skill.

McGraw-Hill. Fauzan

, Umar. (2014) pointed out that very few hotels are able to consider themselves to be truly luxury. These hotels hold a certain mystique that invites their guests to continually return, no matter what the cost is. While luxury is providing something exclusive that is not found everywhere, it is also becoming more about the experience (Allcock, 2007). Today, luxury hotels are aiming for ultra-luxury, and to do this, service and people factors make a huge difference (Tungate, 2009). The luxury concept includes being exclusive, sophisticated, and indulging your guests (Allcock, 2007). It is crucial that the design and service follow these concepts (Gunter, 2005). These hotels are expected to provide their guests with the best of everything (Sheehan, 2007). Maintaining this level of service is done through understanding guests' expectations, setting service standards to meet these expectations, training the staff to follow these service standards, guiding the guests' experiences, and identifying and closing service gaps. Working in the hotel industry you will come across many types of travelers. Some will be business guests; others will be tourists and visitors. Many will speak a different language other than your own. Chances are, plenty of your guests will speak English. Do you know how to speak politely to a guest in English? Can you understand their requests and serve them accordingly? Whether your job is to take reservations or clean the hotel rooms, you had better learn important words and expressions to use on the job in the hotel industry.

Bailey, K. M. (2003) accentuated that when a speaker of any language, no matter if the language is their first, or second, speaks the language, their performance results from their competence. The rightness of Hymes's broader conception of competence can be proved when we consider the question of what qualities make people good speakers. Presumably, the use of correct, appropriate and easily comprehensible language comes to our mind in the first place. People who often have to search for words, make a lot of pauses, slips and false starters, frequently use fillers, e.g. *err* or *you know*, often go for inappropriate words and awkward constructions, can hardly earn being labelled skillful speakers. Nonetheless, the perfect use of

language is not always the condition for holding the attention and interest of the audience. Bailey, K. M. (2003) found out that seldom could the somehow lower quality of the formal aspect of speech be compensated by the content. Thus a number of other features of the speaker play a role, e.g. their intelligence and general knowledge, expertise in the area the speaker is talking about, originality, inventiveness, characteristic style, wittiness, quick wit, ability to improvise and speak off the cuff, politeness and the awareness of what is appropriate and what not, familiarity with regalia and current issues etc.

There can be a variety of reasons behind a learner's decision to learn a foreign language. Similarly, the learner's expectations, aims and purposes can be very different. But practically all students of foreign languages, regardless of their age, social and cultural background, or profession, share the same desire: to be able to speak the language. One can hardly prove that they know a foreign language when they cannot use it efficiently in oral presentation. Even nowadays, in the age of mass media and electronic communication, the vast majority of verbal information exchange among people takes place through oral communication. Thus of the four basic skills in language learning – listening, reading, speaking, writing – speaking seems to be the most important one in terms of judging a learner's effective ability to use the language. One of the most widespread problems among learners of foreign languages is their considerably lower speaking performance when compared to their passive knowledge. Those learners are not able to express their thoughts and opinions satisfactorily generally use a more simplified language which does not match their overall acquired level often make mistakes and slips speak slowly and less fluently, making frequent pauses and thinking of suitable or correct words are usually very shy and hesitant when it comes to speaking, try to avoid such situations if possible, do not cooperate with the teacher or with their peers respond briefly, often using only one word answers, e.g. "Yes" or "No" sometimes have nothing to say at all.

In such learners, the poor speaking performance is a big handicap, as it makes their ability to use the language for its most important purpose – the exchange of information – limited. This leads to a

frustration and anxiety; not seldom do such people lose all love for the language and get discouraged from further studying.

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 are involved in this process. Language is a means for establishing a communication; it is also a tool for fostering relationships. According to Philipsson (1996), the importance of English is undeniable since English has been 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. If 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.

Literature Review

Ulibarri, Spencer, & Rivas (1981) stated that a learner can hardly understand anything at all, unless the speaker is talking about things the learner is observing, or unless the language being learned is closely related to some other language the learner knows. Through comprehension activities the learner can internalize some vocabulary and some grammatical structures, which will help the learner to understand more in stage two, when she or he knows enough to actually converse in a simple way. The result of getting through stage one is that the learner has acquired enough of the basic building blocks of the language to begin to function in real communication situations in a halting way. Ulibarri, et al. (1981) elaborated that in stage one there is very little real speaking ability, apart from some words and sentences that can be built on the comprehension exercises. In real communication situations the learner has to depend on memorized survival phrases to meet the most immediate needs.

Weaver (2006) found out that speaking skill is very important in the context of English learning. It is because through verbal language, speaking, one enables to express his/her ideas and thoughts and being

able to speak is one of the indicators of mastering the language (Fauzan, 2014). According to Ur (1996:120), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak. Nunan (1999) argues that the ability to function in another language is generally characterized in terms of being able to speak that language. Considering the importance of the speaking mastery, some teachers focus on how to teach speaking effectively in his/her English class.

For the English learners, mastering speaking is a challenging since it needs a huge powerful effort. You cannot plan the exact words/sentences in speaking. Unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in real time; usually the person we are talking to is waiting for us to speak right then. We cannot edit or revise what you want to say (Bailey in Nunan: 2003:47). Speaking is about to manage the conversation and to speak spontaneously (Fauzan, 2014). Oral communication involves two or more people in negotiating meanings, and it always related to the context in which it occurs (O'Malley & Pearce, 1996:59 and Nunan, 1999:227). For the English learners, to speak English in real time, to negotiate meanings, to manage the conversation, and to speak spontaneously is the challenging issues in the English learning. Being able to speak becomes one important goal to achieve in learning English. Many English learners feel obstacles and unsatisfied with their achievement in speaking. They faced some problem in mastering the speaking skill. The students have problems in speaking English due to reluctance, hesitation, fear of making mistakes, or lack of adequate vocabulary (Fauzan, 2014), many English learners are reluctant and unmotivated (Nunan, 1999:231-233), and EFL learners face the students' won't talk problem (Gebhard, 2000:186). The students do not want to speak English because they are too shy to talk in English, they are afraid of making mistakes or their friends will laugh at them, and they are also anxious because they had not many changes to speak or because the teacher always gave critics and correction on their mistakes right away (Fauzan, 2014).

Tourism is travel for pleasure or business; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining

tourists, and the business of operating tours.[1] Tourism may be international, or within the traveller's country. Weaver, D. (2006) mentioned that the WorldTourismOrganization defines tourism more generally, in terms which go "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only", as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Tourism can be domestic or international, and international tourism has both incoming and outgoing implications on a country's balance of payments. Today, tourism is a major source of income for many countries, and affects the economy of both the source and host countries, in some cases being of vital importance.

Leslie, D. (2001) in a study uttered that culture and tourism are linked because of their obvious synergies and their growth potential. Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets and the cultural and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations. The increasing use of culture and creativity to market destinations is also adding to the pressure of differentiating regional identities and images, and a growing range of cultural elements are being employed to brand and market regions. Partnership is essential. The complexity of both the tourism and cultural sectors implies that platforms must be created to support collaboration, and mechanisms must be found to ensure that these two sectors can communicate effectively. Local communities are beginning to come together to develop cultural products for tourism rather than competing directly with one another. Leslie, D. (2001) pointed out that new policies are likely to feature new structures and projects involving public-private partnership and bringing together a wider range of stakeholders to use culture not only to make destinations attractive for visitors, but also to promote regions as destinations to live, work and invest in. Tourism has assumed a vital role in the development of destinations around the world. In most cases, culture is a major asset for tourism development as well as one of the major beneficiaries of this development. Culture is a major factor in the attractiveness of most destinations, not only in terms of tourism, but also in attracting residents and inward investment. In this section of the book, the growing relationship between tourism and

culture, and the way in which they have together become major drivers of regional attractiveness and competitiveness, will be examined.

Chi and Qu (2008) mentioned that many factors are involved in the making of a country a tourist preferred destination. Both the government and the private sectors must work hand in hand. The people in the front line, from the immigration officers to the chambermaid are capable of making the visitors feel that they have chosen the right vacation destination. The hotel industry is a service based industry, and as such, the human factor is of major importance. Only with the complementary effort of the hotel staff and physical infrastructure can hotels and resorts achieve their maximum attraction. Chi, et., al (2008) furthered that the need to secure good calibre employees coupled with the expansion the tourism industry have created a shortage of 'employable' employees. In the selection of hotel staff, the language factor has a prominent role. In general, only those who have a reasonably good command of the English language are favoured. The emphasis on language proficiency is understandable. Language not only is a means for establishing a communication but also is a vehicle for fostering relationship. Language, when use properly can generate a very favourable impression. However, when it is used 'wrongly', it can produce a disastrous response. It is a sword that can cut both ways. Therefore, the personnel in the tourism industry, especially the front liners, must possess the level of language proficiency that will allow them to use the language effectively. It has also been pointed out that the level of language proficiency needed depends very much on the relative importance of the language factor as perceived by the people who matter, the tourists

Leslie (2001) indicated that different learners can have different reasons for learning a foreign language. Some of them might want to increase their confidence by the decision to start learning the language, others might need to keep their brains fit, quite a number of learners may only want to fill their free time productively. It is also no exception to hear reasons such as learning the language because of strong liking for it or for the nation in which the language is spoken, the desire to be able to understand foreign language texts or TV programmers, as well as pointing out the fact that learning a foreign

language is simply “in fashion“ and it would be embarrassing to stand aside. Somehow or other, one might notice that all these reasons appear to be rather “nonproductive“, “passive“, not expecting too much active production of language. This does not mean that any of them could be labeled as insufficient, or inappropriate. Whatever reason for learning a person has, it is well-founded. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that those people who want to learn English so as to be only passively acquainted with it are in the minority. Most of the learners wish to be capable of using English actively - for communication.

Leslie (2001) pinpointed that communication is unexceptionably the most common and significant function of any language. That is exactly why languages came to existence – people have always felt the need to express themselves and to set up communication among each other. It was the need to communicate that led to the invention and development of languages – not the existence of languages that led to communication. These entire facts together break down one of the most tragical myths in language teaching: The goal of teaching a language is not the language itself - it is efficient communication in the language. Unless we are linguists, the focus of our interest is not the system of language as such. We want to master the system in order to be able to make use of all of its potential to communicate information. The language only serves as a means, an instrument which enables us to carry out various acts of communication. Thus, if we go into small details, the terms “learning (or teaching) a foreign language“ are inaccurate in terms of how they reflect the process they signify. Instead, they should be “learning (teaching) how to communicate in a foreign language“.

Iftant (2015) stated that communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also known as the Communicative Approach, is an approach to ESL teaching that emphasizes the importance of learning the language for communication and interaction. It originates in Britain in the 1960’s as a response to the rising criticism of Situational Language Teaching, the principles of which are practising the language in various situational events and concentration on its forms and structures (Richards and Rogers). By contrast, Communicative Language Teaching accentuates the “functional and communicative potential of

language.“ (Richards and Rogers 64) More specifically, learners are taught to become proficient in communication and giving meaning, rather than master the forms of language, e.g. grammar or pronunciation.

Karsono, Puguh. (2014) showed that motivation is so complex that no single policy will help you motivate your employees. While you cannot ignore the reality that financial rewards play a critical role in motivating hospitality employees, you cannot also ignore the reality that money isn't everything to everyone. Recognition and feedback can also be effective tools, if you have the leadership and management skills to know when and how to provide these nonfinancial rewards effectively. The work itself can be highly motivating if designed appropriately. Yet a job cannot be designed without considering your hotel's culture, the training employees receive, the types of employees selected, and the way the service product is delivered. Putting all the pieces together in ways that lead every employee to do what they must do for organizational success is the true test of a manager's skill. For the most part, hospitality employees look for jobs that are fair, fun, interesting, and important. They appreciate leadership by managers who can determine what each person is looking for in the employment relationship and can provide it consistently and fairly. Karsono, Puguh. (2014) indicated that given what we know about motivation in the hospitality industry, the key to managing and retaining these employees is to create jobs that fulfill your employees' quest for fun, fair, interesting, and important positions; allocate rewards fairly; and provide leadership that takes the time and makes the effort to ensure that employees are appropriately treated, rewarded, respected, and recognized. If you can successfully build these elements into the job situation, employees will be motivated to work hard and follow your leadership.

Methods and Procedures

An interview and a questionnaire were used to gather data for the study. the questionnaire developed by the researchers was distributed among a sample of twenty one randomly selected tourists staying at three hotels in Qeshm . However, only 20 of the questionnaire completed could be used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were generated using SPAS to examine the relative importance of the

factors investigated. The Chi-Square coefficient was used to determine the significance.

Table 1: The mean, mode and standard deviation of the ranking of factors affecting choice of resort/hotel

	Location	Quality of service	ofHotel amenities	Room appointment	Room rates	Architectural design
Mean	2.02	2.78	2.95	3.81	4.17	4.74
Mode	1	3	2	3	5	6
S.D.	1.55	1.35	1.37	1.40	1.55	1.46
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Research findings

Note: 1 – Most important, 6 – least important

The actual distribution of ranking is as shown in Table 4. All the distributions were significant at the $p < .05$ levels

Table 2: Frequency distribution of ranking of factors affecting choice of resort/hotel

	1	2	3	4	5	6	N	2
Location	25	4	7	2	2	1	41	74.66
Quality of service	9	9	11	6	6		41	2.29
Hotel amenities	4	17	6	10	2	3	42	22.85
Room appointment		9	11	8	7	7	42	1.33
Room rates	3	4	5	8	11	9	40	7.40
Architectural design	1	4	3	4	11	16	39	25.46

Source: Research findings

Note: 1 – the most important, 6 – the least important

N – total number of respondent

2– Chi-square coefficient

To gauge the relative importance of the personal qualities of the various group of hotel personnel, the participants were asked to rank four qualities which are pleasant disposition, English language proficiency, courtesy, and service oriented from the most important to the least important. The distribution of the ranking is as shown in the Tables below.

Table 3: Distribution of the ranking

Personnel: Waiter	Pleasant disposition	English language proficiency	Courtesy	Service oriented*
1	13 (33%)	4 (10.3%)	13 (33.3%)	17 (40.5%)
2	11 (28.2)	8 (20.5%)	14 (35.9%)	12 (28.6%)
3	6 (15.4%)	12 (30.8%)	6 (15.4%)	10 (23.8%)
4	9 (23.1%)	15 (38.5%)	6 (15.4%)	3 (7.1%)
N	39	39	39	42
Mean	2.28	2.97	2.12	1.97
Mode	1	4	2	1
SD	1.16	1.01	1.05	0.97
Obtained ranking	3	4	2	1

Source: Research findings

Table 4 below shows the distribution of the level of English proficiency that is perceived to be sufficient for the various hotel personnel.

	Reasonably good	Good	Very good	N
Waiter	24 (58.5%)	16 (39.0%)	1 (2.4%)	41
Receptionist	13 (31.7%)	26 (63.4%)	2 (4.9%)	41
Management personnel	13 (31.7%)	22 (53.7%)	6 (14.6%)	42
Reservation staff	15 (36.6%)	20 (48.8%)	6 (14.6%)	42
Activity coordinator	17 (43.6%)	21 (53.8%)	1 (2.6%)	39
Housekeep staff	29 (72.5%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10.0%)	40

Source: Research findings

Note: N – total number of respondents

The general trend observed from the responses seems to point towards different requirements. For waiters and housekeeping staff, a reasonably good command of the English language proficiency was thought sufficient, whereas for the receptionists, management personnel, reservation staff and activity coordinator, a level of at least ‘good’ was suggested by more than half of the respondents. About 15% of the respondents thought that reservation staff and management personnel must possess a very good level of English language proficiency. All the distributions were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

The respondents were asked whether their choice of hotel/resort and stay would be affected by the use of ‘survival English’ by hotel staff members. Slightly more than half of the respondents said that they would be affected. The distribution of responses was as shown in Table 7 below. None of the distribution was significant at the .05 level.

Table 5: Frequency distribution of responses to the questions “Choice of hotel would be affected by the use of ‘survival’ English” and “Satisfaction of stay would be affected by the use of ‘survival’ English”

	Yes	No	N
Choice of hotel	16 (38.1%)	26 (61.9%)	42
Satisfaction of stay	20 (47%)	22 (56%)	42

Source: Research findings

About two thirds (76%) of the respondents thought that it was essential for them to be able to do so. However, in the interview with the researchers, many of the respondents qualified that it was an asset to be able to speak good English. The distribution was shown in Table 8 below. The distribution was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of responses to the question “good English is essential for hotel staff”

	Yes	No	N
Essential to have good English	32 (76%)	10 (24%)	42

Source: Research findings

Discussion

Tourism is important, even vital, source of income for many regions and countries. Its importance was recognized in the *Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980* as "an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations." Tourism brings in large amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and

services needed by tourists, accounting for 30% of the world's trade of services, and 6% of overall exports of goods and services. It also creates opportunities for employment in the service sector of the economy associated with tourism. In 1936, the League of Nations defined a *foreign tourist* as "someone traveling abroad for at least twenty-four hours". Its successor, the United Nations, amended this definition in 1945, by including a maximum stay of six months. In 1941, Hunziker and Kraft defined tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity." In 1976, the Tourism Society of England's definition was: "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes." In 1981, the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism defined tourism in terms of particular activities chosen and undertaken outside the home.

The role of English language proficiency in the tourism industry is prominent. It is considered as a factor that could affect choice of hotel and satisfaction of stay. However, the results obtained indicate that the role and importance of the English language in the tourism industry is relative to job function. It is more important for those who do not often come into direct face-to-face contact with hotel guests such as the reservation staff and hotel management personnel.

For hotel staff who often comes into direct contact with hotel guests, qualities such as pleasant disposition, hotel guests view courtesy, and 'service oriented' as more important. Hotel guests expected different level of English language proficiency from the various groups of hotel personnel. In short, the guest's expectation of English language proficiency is relative in nature.

Conclusion

In a world of surging globalization and increased pressure on countries to develop their English language learning tourism is utilized as a medium for meeting demands across the world. Weaver (2007) argues that lack of qualified English instructors presents one of

the largest challenges to educators and citizens across the globe, and as a result, skillfull English-speaking tourists are now frequently being called upon to help meet demands.

The results, as a whole, suggest that the role of the English language should be appropriately considered in the recruitment of hotel personnel. The emphasis on English language proficiency should be based on the nature of job. For the staff members who are in direct contact with guests most of the time, qualities such as 'courtesy' and 'pleasant disposition' should be given high priority as well. Being poor in speaking ability on the part of staff would affect the service provided by a hotel and it would be lead to difficulty employing sufficient number of staff. The results of this study, however, must be viewed with some reservation. The number of respondents in the study was comparatively small and the location was only limited to Qeshm Island. The language used in the questionnaire might have also affected the responses of the guests from countries where English is not their native language.

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