

A Need analysis on English language skill sets required in hospitality sector

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Abstract

The continuous expansion of hospitality sector on global level and establishment of branded hotel chains in Uttarakhand state has led to the enormous requirement of the trained manpower especially equipped with a good command over the English language.

This paper is an attempt to find out the importance of skill sets required for socio economic development through hospitality sector. Among all the skills discussed in the paper, English language skills, which has emerged as a universal language in the modern scenario in the hotels of Uttarakhand in effective and efficient service delivery. English language ranked 1st with the highest composite mean score value 3.18 and the lowest 3 respectively. Thus, the study suggests that proficiency over the English language help in establishing better understanding between the service providers and the customers. This in turn, helps in guest satisfaction, retention and hence increased revenue generation leading to the socio economic development of the local community. On a questionnaire based on a Likert scale of 5, the responses were recorded. In December and January 2022, the study was carried out in a period of 08 weeks in both the regions i.e Garhwal and Kumaon of the Uttarakhand state of Republic of India.

Keywords: English language skills, hospitality sector, command over language, proficiency, and understanding.

INTRODUCTION

There are certain barriers to the communication. Language is one of them. Especially in hospitality sector, where the clientele is global, one must have a good command and control over English communication. Framing inclusive development of tourism where inclusion of every person from the society even with deficiencies or disabilities can also be possible with enabling language leading to breaking down the barriers of negative attitude.

Language itself is capable of removing any barrier. An efficient orator can create better understanding (Brielle, 2020). English is Lingua Franca to communicate with the international tourists. Correct grammar, structure and accent helps in establishing better understanding in tourism sector. In order to express better and show gratitude towards international customers and domestic with less command over the local language, English can be really helpful for tourism and hospitality professionals in maintain good rapport with their customers (Syamini,2019). In

Uttarakhand, majority of domestic and foreign tourists visit Uttarakhand for various purposes including special interest tourism like religious, pilgrimage, yoga, meditation, spirituality, health, rejuvenation etc. Though, in order to enhance all the major typologies of tourism, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, which is a regulatory body of State government has done remarkable job in this regard ranging from infrastructure development and skills development of those who are associated with the tourism and hospitality sector. (Joshi, 2021).

Psychological factors play a vital role in creating and maintain the perception or image of a destination. When communication with tourists is held in such a way so as to minimize any cultural difference, they feel more connected to the destination as well as locals. Here knowledge of language other than local for example a working knowledge of skills can be great help (Durgapal, 2018). Employees in the hotels of Uttarakhand were not much comfortable with English communication. Due to huge spike that is observed till 2017-18 in the number of lodging establishments i.e. 2,312 properties with more than 27,899 guestrooms. These numbers are evident enough to have a skilled manpower coupled with both hard and soft skills, especially communication skills in order to cater the needs of domestic and international guests effectively and efficiently (Akihito, 2017). Therefore, with this study, an attempt is made to investigate the English language needs, purpose specific of its usage and the various issues faced by the employees. The finding of this study can serve towards their betterment through managerial implications.

Literature Review

Suneel Kumar (2020) prioritized the importance of good communication along with the local support, coordination and cooperation from the authorities are the factors supporting the growth of tourism. Communication between the locals and the tourists visiting the destination hold the utmost significance.

Mayra Alexandra (2019) advocated that English as a language is of great importance in businesses related to tourism, technologies and commerce. In hospitality sector, it is required not only for transmitting the information but also to develop a good understanding with the tourists by effectively communicating and interacting with them.

Silvia Blanca (2018) marked English as a specified language for tourism by pointing out the trans-disciplinary character of the language of tourism. English for tourism with sociology helps one to easily find out the linkage between theoretical and empirical perspectives on overall experience of the tourists.

Jaroslav Kacetl (2018) focused on language classes for the students of Management of Travel and Tourism. Videos, study material through internet enhancing vocabulary, studying grammar should be used with skills related to listening and speaking.

Nahid Zahed Pisheh (2017) quoted that ETP i.e. English for tourism purposes can be useful if inculcated as an essential part of the hospitality curriculum. It should be designed as per the specific needs and wants of the learners and with relevance to the international tourism.

Nur Izzati Binti Suhaimi (2017) showed in his study that non-verbal communication has helped to communicate the service provider to deliver their messages clearly to the consumers. Multilingual skills, especially in the field of tourism holds a great importance.

Arnab Bose (2016) asserted that 300 million people around the world speak English language as their mother tongue. Language can be the biggest barrier while catering the international clientele which can be minimized through a blend of proper training of English language along with Soft skills training.

Kusum Chaudhary (2016) said that English for Academic Purpose (EAP) comes under the framework called ESP- English for Specific Purposes. In tourism and hospitality sector, it has become a universal form of communication. ESP embarks upon the needs and coupled the same with motivation, subject

matter and content to impart relevant language skills to the learners.

Aleksandra (2015) in the study showed that knowledge of language, culture, food and customs is required to enhance intercultural competence which should focus on centric courses including languages that they can learn during their studies additionally.

Montserrat (2015) asserted that SLA i.e. Second Language Acquisition provides an opportunity to socialize with the host or local community. This will help out in developing a working model of the language tourism market system.

Arati Prabhu (2015) affirmed that apart from personality, attitude, technical skills, English communication is of so much importance in hospitality industry that is why it is considered as an employability and future career growth. Hospitality professionals, academicians and the aspirants of hospitality industry all must come together to identify the skill gaps; make and implement strategies to bridge those gaps.

Chia Hui Lin (2013) advocated that ESP-English for Specific Purpose should be designed as per the needs of the learners; be it in the form of students or hotel employees. This will enable them to communicate a set of professional skills and will deliver job related functions with great efficiency.

Josko Sindik (2013) embarked upon the inclusion of multilingual education in tourism and hospitality management curriculum. For better communication and exchange of ideas, students especially from tourism, hospitality and other business studies should be encouraged to learn other languages, cultures, custom and tradition.

Muhammad Arif (2012) emphasized on persuasive communication which can be effective with the proper usage of attitude and behaviour. By providing relevant information through language and images, that too in a transparent manner and putting efforts to persuade tourists can be of great help to the host for effective marketing of the destination and image building also.

Nawamin Prachanant (2012) emphasized on four basic communication skills i.e speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking skills is required to guide, escort, interact; while listening helps to identify and comprehend the information. Reading helps in providing more detailed information if asked by the hotel guests. Writing on the other hand is done to outline the details provided by the guests.

Kostic Bonanovic M. (2011) pointed out idiomatic phrases and slang as an obstacle in communication. Businesses like travel agency use English language extensively. The same is crucial for the success of entrepreneurs and aspirants of the tourism industry. A nice command over English language raises the confidence of the service provider as well.

Cinzia Mancini (2009) argued that fluency over language is quite important. In tourism sector, it can contribute significantly to cross-cultural interactions. Language can be an effective tool to cope-up with culture-shock and linguistic gaps and hence increasing the communication between the guests and the hosts.

Need Analysis

Jia Hui Hou (2019) emphasized that both listening and speaking in English if done on a regular basis, leads to fluency while spelling and vocabulary gets improved with more reading and writing. Evolution of tourism in Asia with changes in demographic, economic status, technology and educational trends has increased the demand of English language in order to have a competitive edge. In order to ascertain the training and development needs of the employees, we have to identify their linguistic needs, method of acquisition and the purpose or aim it will fulfil.

Research Problem

The major problem that this study aims to solve at is to primarily find out the gaps between what the hotel employees already know and what would they like to learn further.

Significance Of The Study

As majority of the employees hail from the hilly areas and are educated in local language

medium schools, they face issues while communicating in English and thus, shortages in language skills may hamper their work proficiency. So, for the betterment and holistic development of the employees, this study can provide a conceptual framework to design the training and development program.

Objective Of The Study

1. To analyse employees' perspective towards their need to learn English language skills.
2. To identify factors behind the essential incorporation of Language skills in employees' training and development program.
3. To suggest intervention strategies to cope up with skill shortages.

Study Area

Uttarakhand state has always been a popular tourist destination among domestic and international tourists visiting for religious, pilgrimage, adventure, health, wellness and rejuvenation purposes. The state is categorized in 02 regions (mandals in hindi) Garhwal and Kumaon, both are studded with the number of hotel properties including the hotel units of internationally recognized branded hotel chains including IHCL Taj Hotels, Resorts and Spa, , Ginger by Taj, JW Marriott, Radisson, Four Points by Sheraton, Jaypee Hotel, LemonTree, Club Mahindra etc along with some well maintained and operated individual hotel properties approved and recognized by HRACC (Hotels and Restaurants Approval Classification committee) governed by the Department of Tourism, India and FHRAI (Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India).

The population consisted of 198 employees (both male and female) hailing from the different levels of management working with different departments and acquiring positions of the from 22 star category hotels (not less than three stars) from both the Garhwal (12) and Kumaon (10) regions. The reason star category were chosen for the study is that they have well defined set of rules known as SOPs i.e. Standard Operating Procedures for smooth

and standardized functioning of each and every department of the hotel including Human Resource for staff training and development.

The instrument of survey was a questionnaire developed to measure the responses on likert scale of five ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Semi-structure interviews were carried out in a period of 08 weeks (02 months) of January and February 2021. The first section of the questionnaire embarked on demographics (age, gender, education, current position and work experience). The second section included the questions emphasizing on rating the various skills asked to be rated by the respondents on the Likert scale of 5.

Research Methodology

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, the research is exploratory and descriptive in nature. It is aimed to find out the overall perspective towards their need to learn English language skills.

Basis of Sample Selection

Sample design:

1. Sample frame: The population consisted of 198 employees (both male and female) hailing from the different levels of management working with different departments and acquiring positions of the from 22 star category hotels (not less than three stars) from both the Garhwal (12) and Kumaon (10) regions.
2. Sample size: Sample size consists of 198 respondents for the proposed study.
3. Sample technique: Sample is selected on the basis of convenient sampling.

Types of Instruments and Methods Used for Research

- 1) Data collection through Questionnaires with first section as demographics (age, gender, education, current position and work experience). The second section included the managerial skills required and rated by the respondents.

2) Respondents Core responses are recorded regarding their perspective on their need to learn English language skills on Likert scale of 5 with hotel management employees.

Data Analysis Tools:

- 1) Development of Hypothesis
- 2) For analysis of data, percentile method with descriptive statistics is used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Demographic Characteristics		No of Respondents	%
Age	21-30 years	133	67.17%
	31-40 years	46	23.32%
	41-50 years	12	6.06%
	51 and above	07	3.53%
Gender	Male	132	66.67%
	Female	66	33.33%
Education	Graduate	24	12.12%
	Graduate (HM)	92	46.46%
	Post graduate	22	11.11%
	Diploma	48	24.24%
	Others	12	6.06%
Experience	< 5 years	58	29.29%
	5-10 years	102	51.51%
	10-15 years	19	9.59%
	15-20 years	15	7.57%
	>20 years	04	2.02%
Total Number of Respondents		198	100%
Number of Hotels		22	

Table 1, depicting the demographic profile of the respondents where there is a huge number of young workforce i.e. 133 (67.17%) respondents belonged to the age group 21-30 years while 31-40 years of age group had 46 (23.32%) of the total respondents. Age group 41-50 years had 12 (6.06%) and 51-60 years had 07 (3.53%) respondents.

With a total number of respondents i.e. 92(46.46%), hotel management graduates hold the majority of the respondents while diploma holders in hotel management were 48 (24.24%). Number of graduates was 24 (12.12%) while that of post graduate respondents was 22 (4.83%). A total of 12 (6.06%) respondents has their qualification under others category (secondary, senior secondary etc.)

Employees having work experience of 5-10 years in the field of hospitality were 102 (51.51%) while those having less than 05 years of experience were 58 (29.29%) which shows again the young guns in their early phase of the career with a bit more experienced employees. Respondents having 10-15 years of experience was 19(9.59%), 15-20 years with 15 (7.57%) and 04 (2.02%) had more than 15 years experience of working in hotel industry.

Respondents were selected from various departments of the hotels i.e. Front Office, Housekeeping, Food and Beverage production, Food and Beverage service, Human Resource etc.

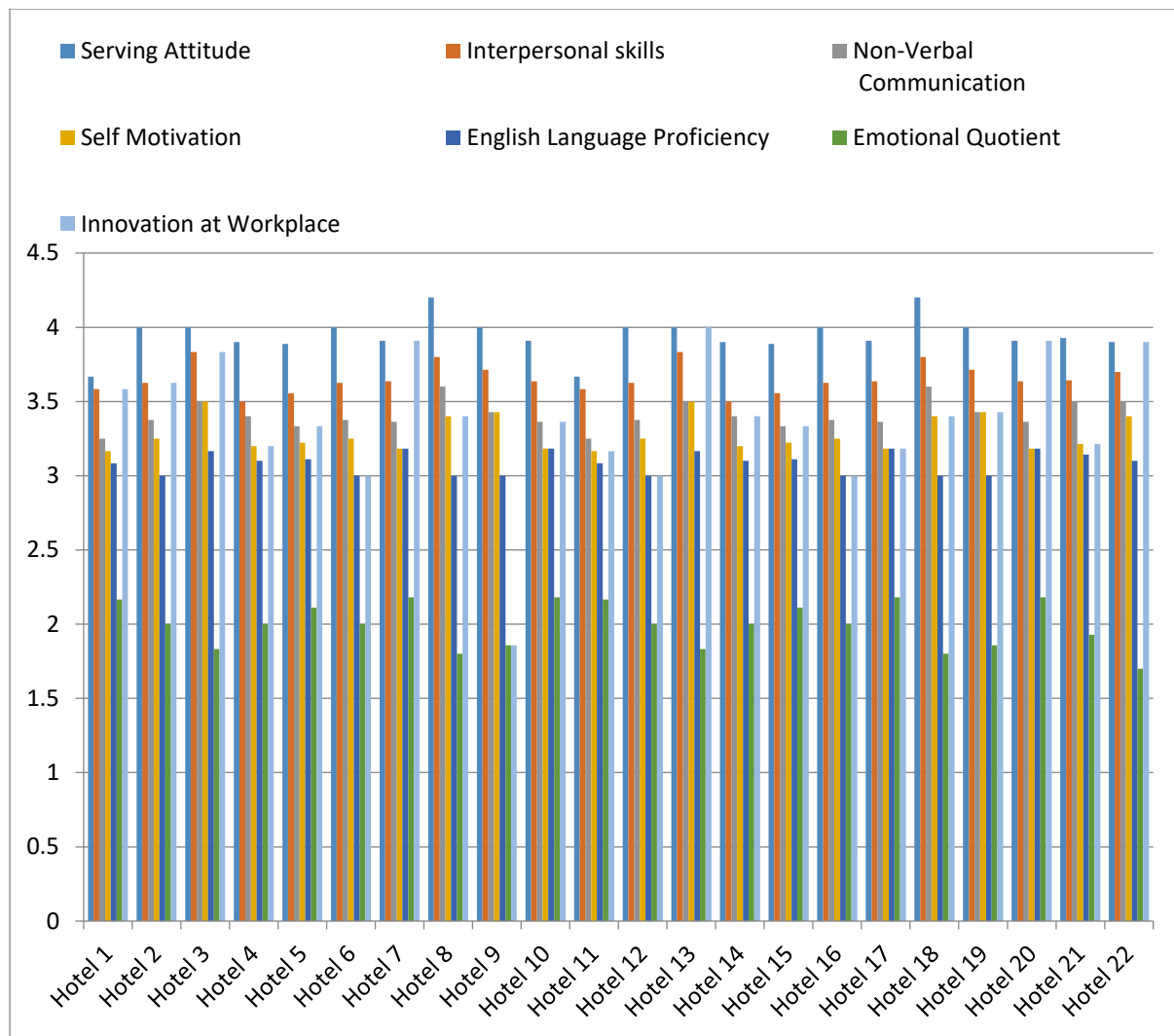


Figure no. 1: *Composite Graph for employees' perspective towards various Skill Sets*

Table 2: *Key employees' perspective towards various Skill Sets (Composite Mean Value)*

Hotel	Serving Attitude	Interpersonal skills	Non-Verbal Communication	Self Motivation	English Language Proficiency	Emotional Quotient	Innovation at Workplace
Hotel 1	3.66	3.58	3.25	3.16	3.08	2.16	3.58
Hotel 2	4	3.62	3.37	3.25	3	2	3.62
Hotel 3	4	3.83	3.5	3.5	3.16	1.83	3.83
Hotel 4	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	2	3.2
Hotel 5	3.88	3.55	3.33	3.22	3.11	2.11	3.33
Hotel 6	4	3.62	3.37	3.25	3	2	3
Hotel 7	3.90	3.63	3.36	3.18	3.18	2.18	3.90
Hotel 8	4.2	3.8	3.6	3.4	3	1.8	3.4
Hotel 9	4	3.71	3.42	3.42	3	1.85	1.85
Hotel 10	3.90	3.63	3.36	3.18	3.18	2.18	3.36
Hotel 11	3.66	3.58	3.25	3.16	3.08	2.16	3.16
Hotel 12	4	3.62	3.37	3.25	3	2	3

Hotel 13	4	3.83	3.5	3.5	3.16	1.83	4
Hotel 14	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.1	2	3.4
Hotel 15	3.88	3.55	3.33	3.22	3.11	2.11	3.33
Hotel 16	4	3.62	3.37	3.25	3	2	3
Hotel 17	3.90	3.63	3.36	3.18	3.18	2.18	3.18
Hotel 18	4.2	3.8	3.6	3.4	3	1.8	3.4
Hotel 19	4	3.71	3.42	3.42	3	1.85	3.42
Hotel 20	3.90	3.63	3.36	3.18	3.18	2.18	3.90
Hotel 21	3.92	3.64	3.5	3.21	3.14	1.92	3.21
Hotel 22	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.1	1.7	3.9
SD	0.124	0.097	0.093	0.114	0.073	0.151	0.458
RANK	5	3	2	4	1	6	7

shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Findings And Results

Responses to the questionnaire have lead to some findings and have come up with some useful findings and suggestions. Table 2 depicts the composite mean score values of the skills sets required and ranked by the hotel management employees where the need for proficiency on the English language ranked 1st with the highest composite mean score value 3.18 and the lowest 3 respectively. It clearly signifies the importance of such skills in hotel industry. It simply aids in communication. The value of standard deviation was 0.073 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Non verbal communication 2nd with the highest composite mean score value 3.6 and the lowest 3.25 respectively. It clearly signifies that this factor plays a dominant role especially in hotel industry by ensuring a support to what is being said through posture, gesture, eye contact etc. The value of standard deviation was 0.093 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Interpersonal skills 3rd with the highest composite mean score value 3.83 and the lowest 3.5 respectively. It clearly signifies that such skills can increase staff efficiency as group working as a cohesive team through good communication among the members. The value of standard deviation was 0.097 which

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Self motivation 4th with the highest composite mean score value 3.42 and the lowest 3.2 respectively. It clearly signifies that such skills can help in keeping staff members going to give their best at their respective jobs The value of standard deviation was 0.114 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Serving attitude 5th with the highest composite mean score value 4.2 and the lowest 3.66 respectively. It clearly signifies that most of the respondents believe that some serving attitude and dedication towards guest and their needs is of utmost importance. The value of standard deviation was 0.124 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Emotional Quotient 6th with the highest composite mean score value 2.18 and the lowest 1.7 respectively. It clearly signifies that most of the respondents believe that with a calm, composed and a firm mindset, emotions should be controlled through understanding and rapport among the employees and with the guests as well. The value of standard deviation was 0.151 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Hotel Employees as respondents ranked Innovation at Workplace 7th with the highest

composite mean score value 3.9 and the lowest 1.85 respectively. It clearly signifies that most of the respondents believe that innovation at workplace can break the monotony and will let the employee feel free and comfortable without hampering his creative skills. The value of standard deviation was 0.458 which shows that the respondents perspective didn't vary much while rating these skills.

Discussion

The present study shows enough evidence towards inclination of majority of the respondents towards the language centric training and development program. The positive value of the Standard Deviation shows that the perspective of the employees' as respondents towards their need to learn English language skills seems to be in relevance with each other. George George M. Bluea (2003) divided the writing in hospitality in three categories prescriptive, descriptive and analytical. That is why there could be a provision of employees' training both pre-service and in-service. In order to develop communicative ability relevant terms from the other language should be taught to the employees. The study thus affirms supports and establishes the requirement of essential inclusion and incorporation of Language skills in employees' training and development program as responded by the employees. In order to suggest intervention strategies to cope up with skill shortages, Naawar Al-Saadi (2015) emphasized that development program for the hotel's staff should be conducted in order to make them more competent in linguistic skills. These skills will improvise both the formal and informal communication and hence will give an edge to the employees and the hotels as well.

Thus, the study goes towards satisfying all the objectives as the employees' perception towards various variables was found overwhelmingly positive. This clearly signifies that the employees would prefer to get adapted themselves and their learning according to the need of the hour.

Suggestions

The study suggests that an extensive training and development program as per the needs of the employees from different departments, hailing from different levels of management incorporating all the mentioned skills can prove out to be really helpful in their holistic development, increased customer satisfaction and hence increased revenue generation. A regular training and development program identifying the skills gaps and then defining the layout of whom, when and how to be trained can be done to implement intervention strategies to cope up with skill shortages effectively and efficiently.

Managerial Implications

Managers can plan accordingly the training and development programs to hone up the skills of his/her sub-ordinates. The employees equipped with the contemporary skills will definitely perform betterment and act more responsibly, professionally and confidentially. This will lead to enhanced guest satisfaction and revenue generation too at the same time attaining organizational goals and objectives that too adhering to the rules and regulation and SOPs (standard operating procedures) of the organization.

Conclusion

Regarding the first objective of this study, the employees' perspective towards their need to learn English language skills was analysed and they seemed to be keen to learn to enhance their English communication skills. It can be concluded that the employees were not only keen to learn the communication skills (for better co-ordination and cooperation) but they embarked upon non-verbal communication (using posture, gesture, facial expressions, eye-contact effectively for better understanding), interpersonal skills (to enhance team building abilities), self motivation (to remain dedicated and focused towards their job), serving attitude (for better guest satisfaction), emotional quotient (to remain calm and composed during

guest handling), and innovation at workplace (to let the creativity alive) respectively and ranked these skills to be acquired respectively in descending order.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The survey was conducted on employees from hotel industry in Uttarakhand state as respondents. The applicability of the study can be tested with some different demographic profile and geographical area; maybe with a bigger sample size just to ascertain the similarity in the perspective of the respondents while ranking need for the required skills.

The future research could test for the skills requirements of the employees in some other sector also and then plan out their training and development programs accordingly. Managerial implications can be carried out adhering to the outcomes of the study.

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