

# Implementation of Foreign Language Skills in Guest Relations to Increase Loyalty of International Guests

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**Abstract** - The growth of Indonesia's tourism sector, marked by a significant increase in the number of international tourist visits, has significantly boosted the hospitality industry, including the need for superior and communicative services. Hotels, as primary accommodation facilities, face challenges in providing responsive services to international guests with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This study aims to analyze the implementation of foreign language skills by Guest Relations Officers (GROs) in enhancing international guest loyalty at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and field documentation. The results indicate that foreign language skills, particularly in the context of intercultural communication competence (ICC), play a crucial role in building emotional closeness, enhancing interaction quality, and creating a personalized and satisfying stay experience. These skills also support the SERVQUAL service quality dimension and contribute to the formation of guest loyalty from the cognitive to the action stages as described in Oliver's (1999) customer loyalty theory. These findings underscore the importance of broader foreign language training for GROs to be able to meet international guest expectations and strengthen the hotel's position as an internationally recognized service provider.

**Key words:** Guest Relation Officer, foreign language skills, guest loyalty, intercultural communication.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a strategic sector that contributes to foreign exchange, job creation, and export revenues, as well as being an economic driver in developing countries. Data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy shows that in November 2024, foreign tourist arrivals to Indonesia reached 1,092,067 people, a 17.27% increase compared to November 2023, with 86.13% through immigration and 13.87% through Mobile Positioning Data.



Source : (Kemenparekraf, 2024).

Figure I.1 Tourist Visit Trend Graph

Throughout 2024, tourist visits to Indonesia reached 12,658,048 people, a 20.17% increase compared to 2023, indicating an upward trend after fluctuations in the previous year. The increase in tourists, both domestic and international, drove demand for hotel accommodations, particularly in Jakarta, making excellent hotel service—including cleanliness, facilities, friendliness, speed of service, and staff communication skills—critical. The Room Occupancy Rate (TPK) of star-rated hotels in DKI Jakarta showed seasonal fluctuations, peaking at 62.05% in November 2024 as community activity increased towards the end of the year.



Source: (BPS & BRS, 2024)

Figure I.2 Development of Room Occupancy Rate (TPK) of Star-rated Hotels in Jakarta (percent), 2021—2024

Compared to 2021, which experienced significant fluctuations due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted mobility and tourism, performance in 2024 showed improved results. Meanwhile, trends in 2022 and 2023 were relatively stable, but the increase in 2024 was much stronger, indicating significant improvements in performance or measured indicators (BPS & BRS, 2024).



Source: (BPS & BRS, 2024).

Figure I. 3 Average Length of Stay of Star-Rated Hotel Guests in Jakarta December 2023-2024

Average Guest Length of Stay (ALST) in star-rated hotels in December 2024 was 1.63 days, a slight decrease compared to December 2023. Foreign guests tended to stay longer (2.05 days) than domestic guests (1.59 days), indicating the significant contribution of foreign tourists to the revenue and growth of the hotel industry in Indonesia. International guests with diverse language backgrounds present communication challenges for hotel staff. Each department plays a role in maintaining service quality to enhance guest loyalty, with the Front Office playing a strategic role as a coordination center that determines guests' first and last impressions of the hotel. The Front Office serves as the frontline of hotel service, handling complaints and ensuring guests feel valued. Effective communication and friendly staff significantly impact guest satisfaction, especially for international guests. The Guest Relations Officer (GRO) plays a crucial role as a direct liaison with guests, providing exclusive services, addressing special needs, and enhancing the international guest experience.

The Guest Relations Officer (GRO) is the spearhead of service in 4-star hotels and above, tasked with handling guest needs and complaints. A swift and appropriate complaint handling strategy, including compensation, can improve guest satisfaction. The GRO also acts as a liaison between guests and the hotel, so good communication and interaction skills are crucial for building relationships and understanding guest needs. Effective communication and foreign language skills by the Guest Relations Officer (GRO) are crucial for building emotional closeness with guests, handling complaints, and preventing misinformation. The GRO must be thorough, agile, and reliable in understanding guest needs, so that consistent service can increase guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Foreign language skills by Guest Relations Officers (GROs) are essential for overcoming cultural differences, facilitating communication, and avoiding misinformation, thus creating positive experiences, increasing satisfaction, and strengthening the loyalty of international guests. Guest loyalty is a crucial factor for hotel sustainability, and service quality, especially by Guest Relations Officers (GROs), directly influences guest satisfaction and repeat visits. GROs who are able to communicate intensively, understand guest preferences, and provide services that exceed expectations have been proven to increase satisfaction and loyalty, while limited foreign language skills can hinder communication and decrease the loyalty of international guests.

Although English is commonly spoken, many international guests prefer to use their native language, such as Mandarin or Japanese, which presents a challenge for Guest Relations Officers who only speak English. This study aims to analyze the implementation of foreign language skills by GROs to serve non-English speaking guests and its impact on international guest loyalty.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because the goal is to understand the meaning and processes that emerge from social interactions, rather than simply measuring phenomena with numbers. This approach was

chosen so that researchers could obtain an in-depth, detailed, and contextualized picture of the implementation of foreign language skills by Guest Relations Officers (GROs) (Creswell, 2009; Wardani, 2021). The research design is descriptive-narrative, characterized by flexibility, interpretiveness, and an emphasis on process. This design allows researchers to understand how GROs' foreign language skills are implemented in daily practice and how they contribute to international guest loyalty, a process that cannot be explained simply by numbers.

The research was conducted at the Borobudur Hotel Jakarta, a five-star hotel and a prime destination for international tourists in the capital. This location was chosen due to the cultural and linguistic diversity of its guests, making GROs' foreign language skills crucial to supporting service quality. The study lasted six months, from July 21, 2024, to January 21, 2025, allowing researchers to deepen their observations and interviews to generate representative data.

1. The research subjects were Guest Relations Supervisors and Guest Relations Officers (GROs) who were directly involved in serving international guests.
2. The research objectives included the application of foreign language skills by GROs, the quality of service interactions provided, and their impact on international guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Research data was obtained directly from the field using three main techniques, namely:

1. Observations were conducted on service activities at the Front Office, particularly in the Guest Relations department, to see how the GRO uses foreign languages to greet guests, explain information, handle complaints, and adapt their communication style to their cultural background.
2. Interviews were conducted with Guest Relations Supervisors to gather information regarding their experiences using foreign languages, the challenges they face, and the perceived impact on service quality and guest loyalty.
3. Documentation, such as photos of activities.

Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative descriptive method, through the following stages:

1. Data reduction, which involves filtering and selecting important information relevant to the application of foreign language skills, service quality, and guest loyalty.
2. Data presentation, which involves organizing information in the form of narrative descriptions, interview excerpts, and visual documentation to strengthen research findings.
3. Conclusion drawing, which involves inductively summarizing findings by linking field findings to the theories of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), SERVQUAL, and Customer Loyalty.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The increasingly competitive hospitality industry demands that hotels provide services that are not only functional, but also personalized and memorable, especially for international guests who have high expectations for service quality. In this context, foreign language skills, especially English, are an important tool in bridging cross-cultural communication and creating a safe, comfortable, and memorable stay experience. Guest Relations Officers (GROs) play a strategic role because they represent friendliness, attention to detail, and effective interpersonal communication skills. GROs are not only required to greet and assist guests, but also to be sensitive to cultural differences, able to listen actively, understand social context, and use appropriate non-verbal expressions. At the internationally renowned Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, expectations for service quality are very high, especially in aspects of communication and staff friendliness. Therefore, foreign language proficiency and intercultural communication competency are important assets for GROs in building long-term relationships, increasing satisfaction, and encouraging guest loyalty. As part of the Front Office that plays a role in shaping guests' first impressions, GROs represent the hotel's image through a personalized, communicative, and professional service approach.

### **1. Effectiveness of Guest Relations Officer Interaction at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta**

The effective interaction skills of Guest Relation Officers (GRO) at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta play an important role in building the loyalty of international guests, which can be understood through the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), namely the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with individuals from various cultural backgrounds using foreign languages.

a Knowledge: Research findings indicate that Guest Relation Officers (GROs) at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta have

good cultural sensitivity in adjusting communication with international guests in accordance with the concept of knowledge in Michael Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) theory. However, limited mastery of foreign languages other than English hinders the optimal application of these competencies, so it is necessary to improve more diverse foreign language skills to support service quality and guest loyalty.

b. Skills: Guest Relations Officers (GROs) at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta demonstrate intercultural communication skills through their ability to adapt their speaking style to suit the guest's personality, fluent use of English, and non-verbal strategies to ensure understanding. These findings align with the skills dimension of Michael Byram's ICC theory, specifically the skills of interpreting, relating, and interacting. However, limited proficiency in foreign languages other than English remains a barrier, often necessitating the use of translation tools. This limits the ability to convey cultural nuances in depth and diminishes personal impressions, making proficiency in additional foreign languages crucial for improving service quality and guest loyalty.

c. Attitudes: Guest Relations Officers (GROs) at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta demonstrate an open, polite, and professional attitude in interacting with international guests, in line with the attitudes dimension in Michael Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) theory. This attitude is reflected in a willingness to listen, respect cultural differences, and a willingness to learn from cross-cultural communication experiences. This openness and curiosity enable GROs to transform potential awkwardness into more natural and meaningful interactions. Thus, this positive attitude not only helps avoid misunderstandings but also builds a comfortable communication atmosphere, increases guest satisfaction, and contributes to long-term loyalty.

## 2. Quality of Service by Guest Relations Officers to International Guests at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta

Service quality is a key factor in international guest satisfaction. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, the Guest Relations Officer (GRO) plays a vital role in creating a positive first impression and maintaining international service standards in accordance with SERVQUAL principles.

a. Tangibles: The Tangibles dimension of SERVQUAL at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta is reflected in the neat and professional appearance of the GRO, well-maintained physical facilities, and communication materials such as bilingual brochures and informational TVs. Additional efforts using Google Translate and visual media demonstrate the hotel's commitment to supporting communication with international guests. However, technological limitations and language differences make tangible elements ineffective without interpersonal communication skills. Therefore, strengthening the GRO's foreign language competency is key to integrating the physical aspects of service with adaptive communication, thereby creating a more personalized experience and encouraging guest loyalty.

b. Reliability: The reliability dimension of SERVQUAL emphasizes a hotel's ability to deliver services consistently, timely, and accurately. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, Guest Relations Officers (GROs) serve as the first point of contact, welcoming guests in a friendly and professional manner, systematically conveying service information, and assisting guests with everything from hotel facilities to tourist destinations. This consistency of attitude and accuracy of information strengthens trust and a sense of appreciation in guests, contributing to their loyalty. However, limited proficiency in foreign languages other than English often presents a communication barrier, forcing GROs to rely on translation apps that are not always accurate. This can reduce service efficiency and impact perceptions of the hotel's professionalism. Therefore, enhancing GROs' foreign language competency and cultural sensitivity is a crucial strategy to truly realize the reliability dimension and strengthen Hotel Borobudur Jakarta's image as a professional and inclusive international service provider.

c. Responsiveness: The responsiveness dimension of SERVQUAL emphasizes staff readiness to assist guests promptly, accurately, and proactively. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, Guest Relations Officers (GROs) demonstrate responsiveness by readily providing information, offering assistance without being asked, and promptly following up on guest complaints through cross-departmental coordination. This responsiveness enhances guest comfort and appreciation, while also strengthening the hotel's positive image. However, limited language proficiency beyond English presents a barrier, as it slows down understanding of guest needs and raises the risk of miscommunication. Reliance on translation apps or other staff can also diminish the impression of professionalism and lower the level of trust among international guests.

d. Assurance: The assurance dimension of SERVQUAL emphasizes the ability of hotel staff to foster a sense of trust and security through politeness, professionalism, knowledge acquisition, and communication skills. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, Guest Relations Officers (GROs) demonstrate this through friendly demeanor, polite formal language, professional appearance, and the ability to clearly explain facilities and procedures, thus enhancing guest trust. However, limited proficiency in foreign languages other than English often presents a

barrier. Guests from Japan, Korea, or the Middle East often struggle to understand explanations, while the use of translation apps can diminish the impression of professionalism and undermine trust. This demonstrates that cross-lingual and cross-cultural communication competencies are crucial for strengthening the assurance dimension. Investment in foreign language training and intercultural sensitivity for GROs is necessary so they can convey information accurately, empathetically, and convincingly, thereby maintaining guest security and strengthening loyalty.

e. Empathy: The empathy dimension of SERVQUAL emphasizes personal attention, caring, and understanding of each guest's unique needs. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, empathy is demonstrated through personal greetings, patient listening, and a willingness to adapt information or solutions to guests' specific needs, such as halal food, wheelchair access, or places of worship. However, the application of empathy is often hampered by language barriers, particularly with guests from China, Korea, or the Middle East. This communication barrier tends to make expressions of empathy superficial, such as a smile or polite gesture, without deep understanding. As a result, the guest experience can become impersonal, leading to misunderstandings, and even potentially damaging the hotel's reputation in sensitive situations such as lost items. This situation demonstrates that foreign language competence and intercultural understanding are crucial for creating authentic empathy that can enhance the comfort and trust of international guests.

### 3. International Guest Loyalty at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta

Guest loyalty is formed through the accumulation of repeated positive experiences that encourage guests to return and recommend a hotel. Loyalty encompasses emotional attachment and a commitment to continue choosing a hotel, even when there is no immediate need. According to Oliver (1999), loyalty develops through four stages: cognitive, affective, conative, and action. These stages serve as the basis for analyzing the contribution of the foreign language skills of Hotel Borobudur Jakarta's Guest Relations Officers (GROs) in building international guest loyalty.

a. Cognitive Loyalty: Cognitive loyalty, according to Oliver (1999), is the initial stage of loyalty formed from guests' rational evaluation of the quality and reliability of service. At the Borobudur Hotel in Jakarta, clear, systematic, and professional information delivery by the GRO plays a crucial role in building positive initial perceptions. However, language limitations, especially for non-English speaking guests such as those from China, Japan, or Arabic, often hinder comprehension of information, thus reducing confidence in service quality. Reliance on translation apps also often leads to confusion and a perceived lack of professionalism. This situation suggests that effective cross-language communication is a key factor in building cognitive loyalty, making strategic foreign language training for GROs an important step in strengthening the trust of international guests.

b. Affective Loyalty: Oliver (1999) defines affective loyalty as emphasizing a customer's emotional attachment to a service. Findings at the Borobudur Hotel in Jakarta indicate that simple GRO actions, such as smiling, friendly greetings, polite language, and personal attention, can foster a sense of comfort and appreciation in guests. Empathetic communication, both verbal and nonverbal, has been shown to be effective in building relationships despite language barriers. Conversely, a lack of cultural sensitivity and limited communication can create emotional distance, thus hindering the development of loyalty. Therefore, strengthening GROs' interpersonal communication skills and cross-cultural awareness is key to creating sustainable affective loyalty.

c. Conative Loyalty: According to Oliver (1999), the conative loyalty dimension is the phase when customers demonstrate a strong commitment to repeat visits. Findings at the Borobudur Hotel in Jakarta indicate that effective communication by Guest Relations Officers (GROs), particularly through the use of professional English, and persuasive strategies at the checkout stage play a significant role in strengthening guest intention to return. However, language barriers remain a barrier that reduces the quality of interactions and potentially weakens the formation of conative loyalty. Therefore, improving staff's foreign language competence and intercultural sensitivity is considered essential to creating a personalized and inclusive service experience.

d. Action Loyalty: The action loyalty dimension according to Oliver (1999) is the peak stage of loyalty, where customers consistently return to the service. At Hotel Borobudur Jakarta, GRO personal interactions, English-language communication, recording of guest preferences, and post-visit follow-up have been shown to strengthen emotional bonds and encourage repeat visits. Language barriers for non-English speaking guests reduce the quality of interactions, personal experiences, and motivation to return, while also impacting participation in providing positive reviews. Therefore, strengthening language competency and inclusive communication are key to building sustainable action loyalty and enhancing the hotel's reputation.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that foreign language skills of Guest Relations Officers (GROs) at Hotel Borobudur Jakarta play a crucial role in building loyalty among international guests. Professional and communicative GROs create a positive guest experience, although communication barriers persist for guests with limited English proficiency. While consistent appearance, information resources, and service contribute to guest satisfaction, language barriers can diminish understanding of guest needs and the quality of personal interactions. Consequently, guests fluent in English tend to demonstrate higher levels of loyalty, while non-English speaking guests are more likely to feel neglected and reluctant to revisit.

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