

English Communication Challenges Faced by Bellboys During Group Check-In and Check-Out Processes at Lovina Beach Club & Resort

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is an essential aspect of hospitality services, particularly for bellboys who interact directly with international guests during group check-in and check-out processes. However, communication with guests from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may create various challenges that affect service effectiveness. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the English communication challenges encountered by bellboys during group check-in and check-out processes at Lovina Beach Club & Resort. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Data were collected through non-participant observation using an observation checklist and semi-structured interviews involving two bellboys who had direct experience in handling international group guests. The collected data were analyzed through transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns of communication challenges. The findings revealed five major English communication challenges, namely limited English proficiency, accent and pronunciation differences, ambiguity in guest messages, cultural differences, and environmental challenges such as crowded situations and noise during group guest handling. These challenges were influenced by both linguistic factors and operational conditions in the hospitality setting. The study concludes that effective communication in hospitality depends not only on English language proficiency but also on the ability of bellboys to adapt their communication to different guest characteristics and service situations.

Keywords

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1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is one of the essential elements in the hospitality industry because it enables hotel employees to deliver services efficiently, build positive relationships with guests, and enhance guest satisfaction (Madera et al., 2014; Shermatov, 2026). In addition, effective communication during guest arrival is particularly important because the quality of the check-in experience influences guests' first impressions and overall satisfaction with

hotel services (Busser et al., 2022). As the tourism industry continues to grow and hotels increasingly serve international visitors, English has become the primary language used in interactions between hotel employees and guests from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Ariyati, 2022; Yogyanti et al., 2025; Pinsirikul et al., 2023).

Therefore, hospitality employees are expected not only to possess technical skills but also to communicate effectively in English to ensure that guest needs are understood and services are delivered appropriately. Bellboys are expected to communicate clearly and appropriately because communication problems may influence service effectiveness and guest experience (Salim et al., 2024; Suardana & Sulistya, 2024). However, communication difficulties may occur due to limited vocabulary, differences in pronunciation, accent variations, unclear messages, and environmental conditions during busy operational situations (Al-jufri et al., 2024; Phomtham et al., 2023).

Effective communication in hospitality does not only depend on language knowledge but also on the ability to use language appropriately according to the situation. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, explaining that communication requires more than grammatical knowledge. It also involves the ability to understand social contexts, adjust language use, and communicate appropriately based on different situations. This concept is relevant in hospitality because employees interact with guests from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, requiring them to manage communication effectively.

Furthermore, Canale & Swain (1983) expanded the concept of communicative competence by proposing that effective communication consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. These components enable individuals not only to produce grammatically correct utterances but also to convey messages appropriately and maintain effective interactions in different communication contexts. In the hospitality industry, these competencies are essential because hotel employees, particularly bellboys, must communicate accurately, respond to guests' requests, and adapt their communication to different operational situations and guest characteristics.

Previous studies have examined the role and performance of bellboys in hotel operations. Kesuma et al (2021) found that bellboys handling group guests' luggage during check-in had implemented established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). However, the study also indicated that operational conditions could create challenges affecting service processes. Furthermore, Salim et al. (2023) highlighted that bellboys play an important role in supporting guest satisfaction through luggage handling and guest assistance. The study emphasized that front office employees contribute to creating positive guest experiences because they become one of the first points of interaction between guests and hotels. Similarly, Suardana & Sulistya (2024) found that bellboys are required to provide accurate, careful, and efficient services during check-in and check-out processes. The study emphasized the importance of professionalism, speed, and accuracy in handling guest belongings to maintain service quality.

Previous studies have also investigated English communication in hospitality settings. Phomtham (2020) reported that hotel employees frequently experienced communication difficulties when interacting with international guests due to differences in accents, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Similarly, Al-jufri et al. (2024) that limited English proficiency remained one of the major barriers affecting communication

between hotel staff and foreign guests, emphasizing the importance of English communication skills in delivering quality hospitality services. Furthermore, Yogyanti et al. (2025) revealed that English communication barriers continue to influence service quality in Indonesian hotels, particularly in interactions involving international tourists. These studies demonstrate that English communication challenges remain a common issue in the hospitality industry and highlight the need for hospitality employees to possess not only adequate English proficiency but also effective communication skills to interact with guests from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Although previous studies have examined bellboys' duties, service quality, and operational procedures, few studies have specifically explored the English communication challenges encountered by bellboys when handling international group guests during check-in and check-out processes. Therefore, this study aims to identify the English communication challenges faced by bellboys during group check-in and check-out processes at Lovina Beach Club & Resort. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following research question: What English communication challenges do bellboys face while handling group guests during check-in and check-out processes? The findings are expected to provide practical insights for improving bellboys' English communication skills and supporting better service quality in the hospitality industry.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design to explore English communication challenges experienced by bellboys during group check-in and check-out processes. The participants in this study were two bellboys at Lovina Beach Club & Resort selected through purposive sampling based on the principle of information richness. They were chosen because of their direct involvement in handling international group guests and their extensive experience in group check-in and check-out procedures. One participant had four years of experience, while the other had five years of experience, enabling them to provide rich and relevant information regarding English communication challenges encountered in daily hotel operations. Both participants were regularly involved in luggage handling, guest assistance, room information delivery, and other front-line services for international guests. Given the specific focus of this qualitative study, these participants were considered sufficient to generate in-depth data, and the interviews and observations yielded consistent findings, indicating that the collected information adequately addressed the research objectives.

Data were collected through non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The observation was conducted during the researcher's internship period at Lovina Beach Club & Resort using an observation checklist. The checklist was developed based on the indicators of English communication challenges identified in the literature and was used to record communication situations experienced by the bellboys while interacting with international guests during group check-in and check-out processes. The interview was conducted to obtain in-depth information regarding the participants' experiences and perceptions of the communication challenges they encountered. The collected data were analyzed through four stages: transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation. The interview and observation data were compared through data triangulation to identify consistent patterns of English communication challenges encountered by the bellboys during group check-in and check-out processes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several English communication challenges experienced by bellboys during group check-in and check-out processes at Lovina Beach Club & Resort. Based on observation and interviews with two bellboys, the challenges were categorized into language-related challenges and situational challenges.

English Communication Challenges Faced by Bellboys

To provide an overview of the observed communication challenges, the results of the observation are presented in Table 1. The observation was conducted during the researcher's internship period using an observation checklist developed from the indicators of English communication challenges identified in the literature. The findings presented in the table serve as preliminary evidence and are subsequently explored in greater depth through the interview findings.

Table 1. Types of communication Challenges

No.	Challenges	Subject 1	Subject 2
1.	Interpersonal and Language Challenges		
	1.1 English Proficiency		
	a. Limited Vocabulary	✓	✓
	b. Difficulty in Understanding Spoken English	✓	✓
	c. Poor comprehension	✓	✓
	1.2 Accent and Pronunciation	✓	✓
	a. Different in Accent	✓	✓
	1.3 Ambiguity	✓	✓
	a. The use of unclear or ambiguous terms	✓	✓
	1.4 Cultural Differences		
	a. Differences in communication style	✓	✓
2.	Environmental and Physical Challenges		
	2.1 Noise Pollution		
	a. Crowded Environment	✓	✓

Based on the observation results presented in Table 1, several English communication challenges were identified. To obtain a deeper understanding of these challenges, the findings from the semi-structured interviews are presented and discussed in the following section. The first challenge identified was limited English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary. Both participants experienced difficulties when they needed to explain information or respond to specific guest requests. Subject 1 stated:

"Sometimes I know what I want to explain, but I have difficulty finding the right words in English, especially when guests ask detailed questions."

Similarly, Subject 2 stated:

"Handling group guests is different from individual guests because many guests arrive at the same time. We need to manage luggage, give information, and communicate quickly because the situation can become busy."

This statement shows that communication challenges were influenced not only by English proficiency but also by operational conditions during group services. During the researcher's internship period, bellboys were observed using short and simple English expressions when giving room directions or luggage instructions to group guests in order to maintain effective communication. These findings suggest that limited vocabulary combined with time pressure became one of the main English communication challenges encountered during group check-in and check-out processes.

During the researcher's training period, bellboys were observed using short and simple English expressions when giving room directions or luggage instructions to group guests. This finding supports Hymes (1972) concept of communicative competence that bellboys may understand the guest's needs but experience difficulties in expressing responses accurately.

These findings further indicate that the challenge extends beyond limited vocabulary to the bellboys' ability to apply English appropriately in real service situations. From the perspective of communicative competence, limited vocabulary reflects constraints in grammatical competence, while the use of short and simple expressions demonstrates strategic competence that enables bellboys to maintain communication despite linguistic limitations. This suggests that effective communication in hospitality depends not only on English proficiency but also on the ability to adapt language to operational demands and guest needs. This finding is also supported by Pinsirikul et al. (2023), who found that hotel employees frequently experience vocabulary limitations and listening difficulties when interacting with international guests. The study emphasized that continuous English communication training is necessary to improve employees' confidence and service effectiveness in multilingual hospitality settings.

Another challenge identified was differences in guests' accents and pronunciation. Both participants explained that international guests spoke English with different accents, making it difficult to understand messages quickly during service interactions. Subject 1 explained:

"Yes, sometimes. Some guests have strong accents, and their pronunciation is different from what I usually hear. It makes me need more time to understand their message."

He further explained that guests with Chinese and British accents were sometimes difficult to understand because their pronunciation differed from the English pronunciation he usually heard. Similarly, Subject 2 stated:

"Yes, sometimes. Guests from different countries have different accents. Some accents are easy to understand, but some are more difficult because the pronunciation is different."

Subject 2 also explained that Australian guests often spoke very quickly, making it difficult to distinguish words and understand the intended message. During the researcher's internship period, bellboys were observed listening carefully, asking guests to repeat information, and confirming messages when encountering unfamiliar accents. These findings indicate that accent and pronunciation differences affected communication effectiveness, particularly during busy group guest services where quick responses were required.

These findings suggest that accent differences become more challenging because bellboys must process information accurately within a limited time while simultaneously

handling multiple operational responsibilities. Consequently, effective communication requires not only listening skills but also strategic competence, such as repetition and confirmation, to minimize misunderstanding and maintain service quality during group guest handling. A similar finding was reported by Phomtham et al. (2023), who found that differences in English accents and speech rate remain among the most common communication barriers experienced by hotel employees when serving international guests. These conditions require employees to apply clarification and confirmation strategies to minimize misunderstanding during service encounters.

The findings also revealed that ambiguity in guest messages became another communication challenge. Both participants explained that guests sometimes delivered incomplete or unclear information, making it difficult to understand their actual requests. Subject 1 stated:

"Yes, sometimes guests only give short information, so the meaning is not clear. For example, they ask something but do not explain the details."

According to Subject 1, this situation frequently occurred when guests requested rooms without explaining details such as room type, preferred floor, or other specific preferences. Similarly, Subject 2 explained:

"Yes, sometimes guests only mention the main point, but the details are not clear. For example, they ask for help with luggage but do not explain which luggage or where they want it delivered."

During the researcher's internship period, guests were observed giving brief requests during busy group arrivals, requiring bellboys to ask follow-up questions before providing assistance. These findings indicate that ambiguity resulted not only from language differences but also from incomplete information provided by guests, increasing the possibility of misunderstanding during service interactions.

This finding indicates that ambiguity does not always originate from the bellboys' English ability but may also result from incomplete or unclear information provided by guests. During the researcher's training period, some guests were observed providing brief or incomplete requests, requiring bellboys to ask additional questions before delivering the requested service. This finding is consistent with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which emphasizes the importance of providing clear and sufficient information to achieve effective communication.

This finding also demonstrates that successful communication in hospitality is a collaborative process between guests and service staff. When guests provide incomplete information, bellboys must actively negotiate meaning through clarification before delivering the requested service. Therefore, communication effectiveness relies not only on guests' message clarity but also on the bellboys' strategic competence in obtaining accurate information and preventing service errors. These findings are consistent with Thongphut & Kaur (2023), who argued that clarification, repetition, and explicit confirmation are important communication strategies in hospitality interactions because they help ensure mutual understanding between employees and international guests.

Another communication challenge identified was cultural differences in communication styles between bellboys and international guests. Both participants explained that guests from different countries had different expectations regarding how information should be delivered. Subject 1 explained:

"Yes, because every guest has a different communication style. Some guests are more direct, while others need more explanation and a more polite way of speaking."

This statement indicates that bellboys needed to adjust their communication style depending on the guests' cultural background and communication preferences. Similarly, Subject 2 stated:

"Yes, I think every guest has different habits when communicating. Some guests like short and direct explanations, but some guests want more detailed information."

He further explained that some Chinese guests preferred short and direct explanations because they had limited English proficiency, whereas many European guests preferred more detailed information before following instructions. During the researcher's internship period, international guests were observed demonstrating different communication preferences, requiring bellboys to adapt both their language and communication style. These findings suggest that communication challenges were influenced not only by language ability but also by cultural differences and guest expectations.

These findings imply that communication effectiveness is strongly influenced by sociocultural adaptation. Bellboys are required to adjust their communication style, level of explanation, and politeness according to guests' cultural backgrounds and communication preferences. This reflects sociolinguistic competence, indicating that successful guest interactions depend not only on language ability but also on sensitivity to cultural differences within international hospitality settings. This finding also reinforces the argument of Madera et al. (2014) that hospitality employees must develop intercultural communication competence to provide services that accommodate guests from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This finding supports Hall's (1976) theory that communication patterns are influenced by cultural background. This finding indicates that communication challenges are not only caused by language differences but also by differences in communication styles and expectations.

The final communication challenge identified was environmental conditions, particularly noise and crowded situations during group guest handling. Subject 1 explained:

"Usually when many guests arrive together, the lobby becomes crowded. Many people talk at the same time, so sometimes it is difficult to hear clearly."

He further explained that overlapping conversations during one group arrival caused difficulty in hearing guests' room numbers correctly, requiring him to ask guests to repeat the information. Similarly, Subject 2 stated:

"The difficult situation is when many guests arrive together. The lobby can become noisy because many people talk at the same time, and we also need to communicate quickly."

According to Subject 2, communication became more challenging because bellboys needed to carry luggage, escort guests, and answer questions from several guests simultaneously. During the researcher's internship period, the researcher also observed that crowded lobbies and multiple conversations reduced the clarity of communication between bellboys and guests. These findings indicate that environmental conditions became an important communication barrier because they affected both message delivery and message comprehension during group check-in and check-out processes.

Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that operational conditions in hotels directly influence communication effectiveness. During group arrivals, bellboys are required to manage luggage, provide directions, and respond to several guests simultaneously. Such multitasking, combined with environmental noise, increases the possibility of communication breakdowns. Therefore, communication success depends not only on employees' language competence but also on their ability to adapt communication strategies under dynamic workplace conditions. Similarly, Busser et al. (2022) emphasized that operational conditions during guest arrival require employees to communicate efficiently while maintaining service quality. Therefore, communication competence becomes increasingly important in busy hospitality environments where multiple guest interactions occur simultaneously.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English communication challenges experienced by bellboys arise from the interaction between linguistic competence, sociocultural adaptation, and operational service conditions. These findings support Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which emphasizes that effective communication requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Hall's (1976) theory, indicating that communication effectiveness is influenced by cultural background and guests' communication preferences. They also align with Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, highlighting the importance of providing clear and sufficient information to avoid misunderstanding, as well as Shannon and Weaver's (1949) communication model, which explains how environmental noise and operational conditions may interfere with message transmission. Therefore, effective communication in hospitality depends not only on English proficiency but also on the ability to integrate grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence in responding to diverse guest needs and dynamic workplace situations.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that bellboys at Lovina Beach Club & Resort encountered several English communication challenges when handling international guests during group check-in and check-out processes. The challenges identified were related to English proficiency, accent and pronunciation differences, ambiguity in guest messages, cultural differences, and environmental factors such as crowded situations and noise in the lobby. The findings indicate that English proficiency challenges mainly occurred when bellboys needed to explain detailed information or respond to specific guest requests due to limited vocabulary. In addition, differences in guests' accents and pronunciation created difficulties in understanding spoken English, particularly when interacting with guests from different linguistic backgrounds. Communication challenges also arose when guests provided incomplete information or unclear instructions, requiring bellboys to seek clarification before providing assistance. Furthermore, differences in communication styles among guests from different cultural backgrounds, together with busy operational conditions during group check-in and check-out processes, affected the effectiveness of communication.

Overall, this study concludes that English communication in hospitality services is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and environmental factors. These findings highlight that communication effectiveness depends not only on English language proficiency but also on

the ability of bellboys to understand guest messages and adapt to various communication situations during guest service interactions. Based on the findings of this study, future researchers are encouraged to broaden the scope of the research by involving participants from different hotels or hospitality settings to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of English communication challenges in the hospitality industry. Future studies may also investigate communication challenges encountered when serving different categories of guests, such as individual guests, VIP guests, or long-stay guests, to examine whether different service contexts create different communication challenges. In addition, future research may explore other aspects of English communication, such as communication strategies, intercultural communication competence, or the effectiveness of English training programs for hospitality employees, to enrich the existing body of knowledge in hospitality communication.

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