English Competence and Self-Efficacy of Hotel Front-Liners: A Snapshot of Hotel Industry during Pandemic Outbreak

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Abstract

This study aimed at describing the English competence and self-efficacy of hotel front-liners by employing descriptive qualitative research with a case-study as its approach. 14 participants were involved. 50-item test, 10-item self-efficacy questionnaire and 15-item additional questionnaire served as source of information were analyzed on the basis of each category made. Results showed some categories of score range found: ≥80, 70-79, 60-69, 50-59, 50≤. Those with a score range of ≥80 received the highest percentage: 46.2%. Meanwhile, there were at least 23.1% of the participants with a score range of 70-79. A score range of 60-69 received 15.4% of the participants. In the meantime, 7.7% of the participants were in a score range of 50-59. Lastly, it was also found 7.7% of the participants were in a score range of 50≤. For self-efficacy, 4 specific situations were recorded with high percentages. The first was they felt certain to handle their nervousness when facing foreign guests with 69.2%. Secondly, the participants, 69.2%, felt doubtful when applying good organization of ideas. Thirdly, feeling doubtful, 61.5% took place when facing difficult or tough topics with customers. Lastly, 61.5% of the participants experienced the same feeling of doubts as they applied good grammar in their speaking.

I. Introduction

Pandemic outbreak brings huge impacts to all sectors of industry including hospitality industry for the past two years in Indonesia. At least, Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia recorded foreign tourist visits declined up to 11.8% during January-February 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Even worst, in February 2020, the visits dropped up to 28.85%. At the same time, the room occupancy rate was only 49.2% in average for all starred-hotels. Based on the data released by the Association of hotel and restaurant of Indonesia, it was recorded 1.674 hotels stopped its operation in April, 2020. The outbreak of this virus has an impact of a nation and Globally (Ningrum et al, 2020). The presence of Covid-19 as a pandemic certainly has an economic, social and psychological impact on society (Saleh and Mujahiddin, 2020). Covid 19 pandemic caused all efforts not to be as maximal as expected (Sihombing and Nasib, 2020).

As a preliminary survey to Hotel X in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, a trend of foreign customer visit was reported from 2017 until 2021. The graph below shows that there was a decline as much as 9.6% from 2017 to 2018. The following year dropped to 40.5% and this gave quite big of loss for the hotel in their foreign customer visit. As coronavirus disease (COVID)-19 pandemic struck in 2020, the visit plummeted up to

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82.5% and still remained declining to 37%. The trend of foreign customer visit's decline can be seen in Figure 1.
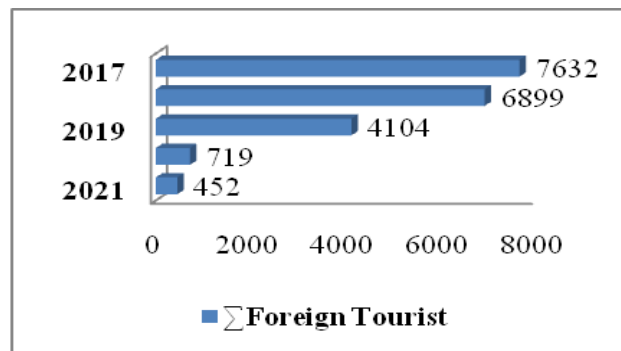

***Figure 1.** A Drop Trend of Foreign*
Customer Visit during Pandemic Outbreak

Due to the extreme condition during COVID-19 pandemic, fierce competition among hotels was inevitable in order to survive in such an unpredictable and uncertain situation in all around the world. Therefore, an exemplary service plays an important role and the key to win the competition. To achieve this goal, hotel front-liners are the first layer and become an important part in hotel industry. Their role is so important that can make a customer repeat his visit for any purposes. Interactions with customers frequently take place when they want to stay in. Topics on asking room rates, facilities, specific requests for food, tourist destinations, giving complaints and many other things during their stay have been daily conversation which a front-liner has to deal with. Mouth-to-mouth promotion normally happens to attract more customers for the hotel. Meanwhile, disappointment can be spread quickly and give negative impact towards the hotel where they stay in (Rumekso, 2004). Communicating what the hotel can provide for the customer is one of the main job descriptions of the front-liner (Tarmoezi and Manurung, 2000). Therefore, knowing proper language as an embedded competence as well as being able to apply it in their daily routines is one thing to bear in mind for excellent service (Hollandsworth, 1987).

II. Literature Review

Literature review contains a description of the theory, findings and other research materials obtained from reference materials to be used as the basis for research activities. The description in this literature review is directed to develop a clear framework of thinking about solving the problems that have been described previously in the formulation of the problem (Pandiangan, 2015; Pandiangan, 2018). Literature review contains reviews, summaries, and author's thoughts on several library sources (can be articles, books, slides, information from the internet, etc.) about the topic discussed, and is usually placed at the beginning of the chapter (Pandiangan et al., 2018; Pandiangan, 2022). The results of research conducted by other researchers can also be included as a comparison of the results of the research that will be tested here. All statements and/or research results that are not from the author must be sourced, and the procedure for referring to library sources follows the established rules (Pandiangan et al., 2021). A good literature review must be relevant, current (last three years), and adequate.

2.1 English Competence: Common Ground for Hospitality Industry

A study conducted by Datu (2019) addressed the issue of english proficiency of hotel front-liners. The study involving 10 hotels in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia revealed a perception of hotel leaders towards their front-liners' english competence. The perspective of the 5-star hotel the leaders upon the english passing grades were supposed to be 80 in score. Additionally, the 4-star and 3-star hotel had 70 for their passing grade. However, the findings showed that the front liners' english competence was below the expected passing grade for it ranged from 70-80 in average for the 5-star hotels, meanwhile, the grade ranging from 60-70 in average was for the 4-star hotels. Lastly, the grade from 50-60 in average was for the 3-star hotels.

Springsteen (1993) pointed out a notion that it is necessary to use english formally with stranger and people with higher status. This implied the english competence is really crucial for the front-liners to master and have the confidence in using it. One of the findings in the writer's preliminary survey, Hotel X still had visitors from overseas that should be taken care of for their needs. A total of 215 of foreign guests were from many different parts of the world. The big four foreign guests visiting Hotel X were from China, France, Philippines, and United States. The rests were from India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Spain, Thailand, Yaman, Australia, Netherlands, Singapore, Korea, Rusia, Saudi Arabia, Tajkistan and UK. In details, China had 41% of the population as the foreign guests visiting Hotel X. Second big four was France that got 15% of the total population. Phillipines received 11% of the total population and the last was US that had 10% of the population as foreign guests visiting Hotel X. The spread can be seen in Figure 2.
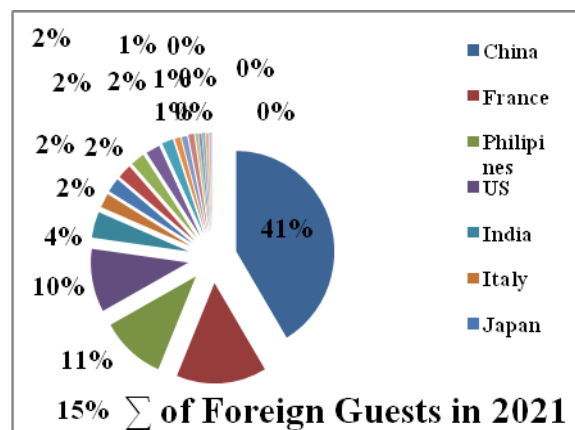

***Figure 2.** The Country of Origins of the Foreign Guests of Hotel X*

The chart strongly confirms the necessity for the Hotel X front-liners to give their best service towards the foreign customers especially in a condition where all hospitality industries suffer from the pandemic. Profile of foreign guests really came from varieties of nations and therefore, language requirements, according to Richterich (1983), are those that come from the use of language in a variety of situations in the social lives of individuals. Consequently, the use of informal language was unacceptable. In order to meet the english requirements of hotel industry for specific employment sectors, they ought to learn english for specific purposes to assist their work depending on their needs and interests. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:8), the primary role of the learners' needs and attitudes toward learning is highlighted in english for specific purposes (ESP). Because each sector has a different demand for english based on the professional role in the workplace, english for specific purposes (ESP) is required. What it counts is being

being aware of the needs (Huttchinson and Waters, 1987:53). Once it is achieved, a direction to give better service is on the way and must be entailed by further efforts.

Previous studies have shown evidence that exemplary service must be taken into an important consideration. The first study was conducted in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. 40 hospitality employees involved and it was found english competence was a troublesome for them when facing foreign guests (Milaningrum et al., 2019). Communication skills were considered as the urgency to be taken off. For solution, they came up with 4 steps: preparation, problem formulation, english training and mentoring as well as evaluation program. Still related to the urgency of excellent service, Widyaningsih (2018) conducted her study at the Abadi Hotel, Yogyakarta, Middle Java, Indonesia. The study was to search detailed information in regards with hotel management's efforts to improve its service quality. Findings such as providing scholarship for further study intended to outstanding employees and holding communication skill training were parts of the proposal. These efforts were made to meet the requirements of Yogyakarta Tourism Professional Certification Institution (LSP).

2.2 Self-Efficacy in Oral Communication

Besides communication competence, Self-efficacy is another essential issue recognized as a classical quality. Self-efficacy is a component of Bandura's theory (1977), and it is defined as a person's belief in their ability to perform something related to them. In other words, self-efficacy is the belief that people have in their ability to do the things they set out to do, to achieve their goals, and to do tasks competently (Dornyei, 2005). According to Aregu (2013), students rarely speak english in class since speaking requires a great deal of awareness and other communicative factors. Furthermore, Hamouda (2012) identifies several variables that cause students to be cautious in their speaking performances, including anxiety, a lack of enthusiasm, shyness, and low self-efficacy in their abilities to communicate.

In the meantime, speaking is an essential ability for interacting with others. Speaking is a crucial feature of engagement and language acquisition, according to Encalada and Sarmiento (2019). Other experts, studies Saeed et al. (2016) define speaking as a type of oral communication of language applied for communication with others. Furthermore, speaking is a means of expressing thoughts and opinions, giving instructions, solving difficulties, improving speaking proficiency, and maintaining a relationship or friendship (Juhana, 2012). Mostly, novice learners/speakers find it difficult to cope with the elements as previously described. As a result, one of the challenges individual experiences in speaking performance is low self-efficacy.

Language performance and self-efficacy are frequently linked. Azrein et al. (2011) conducted an investigation related to self-efficacy. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to look into the link between self-efficacy, learning strategy, and performance in four basic competencies. The findings of the study revealed there was a substantial link between learning strategy and student accomplishment. Chen (2007) points out that learners with a high level of self-efficacy when learning a foreign language most likely overcome some hurdles in learning and producing the language, and they perceive unsuccessfulness as a lack of effort, knowledge, as well as abilities (Chen, 2007).

III. Research Method

To obtain detail descriptions of the english competence as well as the level of self-efficacy of the front-liners of Hotel X, this study used a qualitative method applying a case study in order to get deep information for the respective goals. Qualitative research is research that is descriptive and tends to use analysis. Process and meaning are highlighted in qualitative research (Octiva et al., 2018; Pandiangan et al., 2022; Tobing et al., 2018). The theoretical basis is used as a guide so that the research focus is in accordance with the facts on the ground. Qualitative methods, as the name indicates, are methods that do not involve measurement or statistics (Octiva et al., 2021). Because the natural sciences have had such sounding success with quantitative methods, qualitative methods are sometimes looked down upon as less scientific. Case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon (Asyraini et al., 2022; Octiva, 2018; Pandia et al., 2018). Case studies are commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research. 13 Hotel X front-liners and 1 Training Manager participated in this study. Of the 13 respondents, 6 front-liners were male and 7 of them were female with different lengths of work at the hotel. It was recorded that 5 front-liners have been working for 6 years. 3 front-liners were indicated to have been working for 7 years and the same number of front-liners has been working for 4 years. Meanwhile, 1 front-liner was recorded to have been working for 5 years at the hotel. Lastly, there was only 1 front-liner who has been working 3 months.

The first step to do in the study was to coordinate and to have a discussion with the Training Manager for three main purposes: (1)to build the rapport, (2)to get the profile of the front-liners, and (3)to set up the schedule for focus group discussion (FGD) with the front-liners. In building the rapport, target language use (TLU) and specific target language use (SSTLU) for front-office field were drawn. The second step was to design the test that covered the TLU and SSTLU in order to measure their english competence and to prepare the item. The test was constructed for 50 items consisting of 3 main components; vocabulary, phrase, and dialogue. Also, a set of self-efficacy questionnaire modified from the Bandura's self-efficacy's scale (Bandura, 1977) was also prepared. The modified questionnaire consisted 10 items with a scale of 1-5. To complete data, another 15-item questionnaire for seeking deep information was also given.

The results of 50-item test, 10-item self-efficacy questionnaire and 15-item additional questionnaire served as source of information and were later analyzed, categorized and described on the basis of each category made. The analysis and descriptions then became the way to answer the two research questions described in the beginning.

IV. Result and Discussion

The goals of this study are to describe the english competence as well as the level of level of self-efficacy of Hotel X front-liners. From the test designed on the basis of the target language use (TLU) of front-office division, the results can be described as the followings. In total, there were 13 participants attending the test where in terms of age they were diverse. From the profile, there were 53.8% of the participants aged between 25-30 years. This was the highest percentage of all range of age. On the second rank, participants aged between 31-35 years old were 23.1%. The same amount of percentage, 7.7%, was for those whose age between 15-20 years old, 21-24 years old and 36-40 years old. In terms of gender, most participants were female since they were 53.8% of them and the male ones

were 46.2%. Looking at the percentage, it seems that Hotel X preferred female to male staff. The described profile of the participants can be seen in the Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Percentage of Age

Age	%
15-20 Years	7.7
21-24 Years	7.7
25-30 Years	53.8
31-35 Years	23.1
36-40 Years	7.7
	100.0

Table 2. Percentage of Male and Female

Gender	∑	%
∑ Male	6	46.2
∑ Female	7	53.8
	13	100.0

Interestingly, the age range was perceived by the user (the training manager) described as follows Table 3.

Table 3. Perceived Performance by User

Age Range	Descriptions of Perceived Performance
18-20 years	Fresh graduate, inexperienced, high motivation, not confident to communicate with guests, still unable to handle complaints correctly, still need more guidance and supervision
21-24 years	Enough experience, high motivation, better communication with guests, skillful enough to handle tasks, not yet confident to handle guests, still need more guidance and supervision
25-30 years	Sufficient experience, high motivation, confident in communicating with guests, able to handle guest's complaint well
≥31 years	High experience, very confident to communicate with guests and able to handle complaints well

As described from the table, the more the age the participants were, the more confident they were to communicate with guests and better in handling their complaints as well. Thus, the key competence of this industry mainly laid on communication skills. To check further, a set of pre-test was prepared. It contained 50 items and comprised 3 elements: vocabulary, phrase and expression. They were all related to front-office target language use. Of all sections, the section of Expression received the highest percentage of correct items. Second rank was phrase with 35.8% of the correct items and lastly, Vocabulary received the lowest percentage, 27% of the correct items. Expression and

Phrase section got the first and second highest percentage because they were exposed more in their daily activity. Another way to say, it was much easier for them to remember expressions and phrases in context. The distributed percentage can be seen in the following Figure 3.
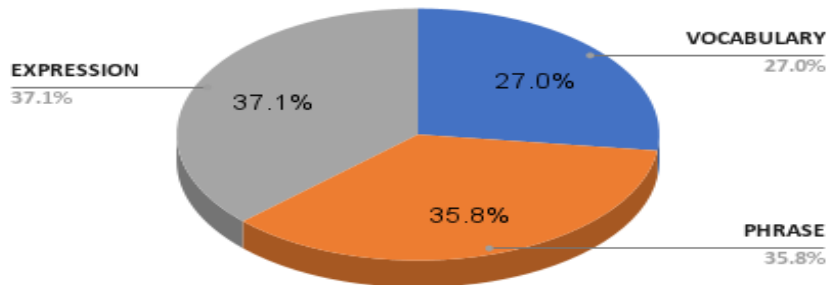

Figure 3. Distribution of Vocabulary, Phrase, and Expression

When looking at the test result, all the sections were combined and each total score was calculated to the equivalent of 100. The detail of the final score is as the following Table 4.

Table 4. The Final Score

Participant	Length of Work	Score for Each Component			Total	Final Score
		Vocab <= 20	Phrase <= 15	Expression <= 15	∑50	
1	7 Years	12	15	15	42	84
2	5 Years	6	13	15	34	68
3	4 Years	12	15	15	42	84
4	7 Years	13	15	13	41	82
5	6 Years	8	15	12	35	70
6	6 Years	17	15	13	45	90
7	7 Years	10	15	15	40	80
8	4 Years	11	15	15	41	82
9	6 Years	6	9	12	27	54
10	6 Years	13	13	11	37	74
11	3 Months	11	13	15	39	78
12	6 Years	7	9	15	31	62
13	4 Years	3	9	11	23	46

As broken-down into a more detail of the participants' range score, 46.2% of the participants obtained a range of score ≥80. This means almost half of the participants reached a good english competence since they could respond all the three sections with the majority of correct responses. In the meantime, for a score ranging 70-79, there were 23.1%. The effort to upgrade the participants with this score range seems to be much easier since the score was closed to the expected score; 80. Meanwhile, there were 15.4% of the participants that received a score ranging from 50-59. The same percentage was given to a score range between 50-59 and 50≤. When combined the three lowest score ranges, at least, there were 30.8% of the participants and furthermore this group needs more attention

for their english upgrade from the management. The description can be seen in the following Table 5.

Table 5. Percentage of Score Range

Score Range	%
≥80	46.2
70-79	23.1
60-69	15.4
50-59	7.7
50≤	7.7
Total	100

Besides the english competence, this study also concerned to investigate their self-efficacy since it was important factor for english learning. The self-efficacy test was based on the Bandura's and for the purpose of the study it was modified with only 10 items given to the participants. The results of the self-efficacy test can be described as the followings.

1. The first item questioned if the participants spoke english precisely and accurately when communicating with customers. 53.8% of the participants claimed to be doubtful to speak english precisely and accurately when communicating with customers. The amount of percentage was more than half of the participants and therefore should be an issue since they found themselves unconfident of their own english. Meanwhile, 30.8% of them agreed that they spoke english precisely and accurately. Those who confirmed to agree totally were 7.7% and the same amount of percentage, 7.7%, confirmed to disagree to have spoken english precisely and accurately when communicating with customers. The last group also required extra efforts in order for them to respond customers' needs as a part of excellent service in hospitality industry.

2. When asked whether they spoke english with the customers fluently, 46.2% of the participants claimed to be hesitant if they did it. Though a bit lower in percentage, this showed that this group needed an attention since their self-perception could prevent them from speaking more actively and in turn led to less maximum of service to customers. Consistent with the first question, there were 30.8% of the participants agreed they had the competence of speaking english with the customers fluently. 15.4% of them claimed themselves to totally agree they had the english fluency. Only 7.7% of the participants claimed to disagree themselves if they were fluent in speaking english with the customers.

3. The next item was to ask the participants if they used correct tone and intonation when speaking english with customers. Unlike the first and second question, 46.2% of participants claimed that they applied the correct tone and intonation already. However, a group with doubts with this competence was 38.5%. They were not sure if they used correct tone and intonation in their english. Furthermore, 7.7% of them confirmed they did not have the confidence to have the competence. Yet, another 7.7% claimed they were completely sure they had applied the correct tone and intonation when speaking english with customers.

4. The ability to speak english even though they were nervous was also asked to the participants. The results were 69.2% of the participants claimed to have the ability even in such a condition. From question 1 up to 4, this situation received the highest percentage of those perceived themselves with the ability. It can be inferred from this fact that though nervousness stroked they were able to maintain their english

competence in front of the customers. Their length of working period had shaped their mindset and ability to control it. Similar to the previous questions, a group of doubtful participants always existed where 23.1% of them at least confirmed themselves belonged to this group. Furthermore, though small percentage, a group of participants that really claimed to have the competence was also present with 7.5%.

5. Another item to be asked to the participants was whether they always spoke english well when they had a tough or difficult topic to talk about. So far, the percentage of a group with doubts of this competence received the highest amount: 61.5%. This situation gave them more challenge and therefore they were unsure with their speaking competence. Meanwhile, 15.4% of the participants claimed to have the competence although another 15.4% stated the opposite. Lastly, 7.7% of the participants confirmed to really have the competence though they had to face a difficult or unusual topic.

6. The next item to ask was if they had the confidence to speak english with customers. For this competence, 53.8% of the participants were sure to speak english with confidence. Even so, there was still a group who were doubtful with the competence and it received 30.8% of the participants. Another group received 15.4% for their strong confidence to speak english with the customers.

7. When asked if they varied their vocabularies in their speaking, 53.8% of them confirmed to be doubtful. 38.5% of them agreed to have the competence. In the meantime, only 7.7% of the participants claimed strongly to have the ability when using english with the customers. For this context, it is clear that their perception upon the ability to use variety of vocabulary was still an issue.

8. Whether the participants applied a good structure of english was also asked with the following results. 61.5% of the participants claimed unsure to have applied good grammar in their speaking. It was understandable since they admitted to focus more on speaking rather than the grammar. However, there were at least 15.4% of the participants who claimed themselves to have applied good grammar when speaking. On the contrary, 15.4% of them disagree if they applied it.

9. When the participants were asked about their responses if they were able to find suitable vocabulary in speaking english, 46.2% of them confirmed to always be able to find the vocabulary needed in the context. Meanwhile, 38.5% of the participants were doubtful to find suitable ones when communicating in english with customers. A strong response was made by a group that claimed to always find suitable vocabulary in the situation where they had to face the customers and it received 15.4%.

10. The last item to be asked was how they organized their ideas in speaking. When asked if they put the ideas systematically. The highest percentage referred to a claim of being doubtful to have the competence; 69.2%. It was similar to question no.4 receiving the same amount of percentage. Secondly, 23.1% of them agreed they spoke english systematically. Strong response was also made by 7.7% of the participants claiming to speak english with a good organization.

From the descriptions of results of the participants' self-efficacy test, at least, a few situations received high percentage of all items asked in the test. They can be summarized as follows.

1. Being able to speak english though they were nervous in facing the customers. Previously described, there were 69.2% of the participants claiming to have the ability that was also closely related to length of work they experienced.

2. When facing difficult or tough topics, 61.5% responded to be doubtful with their own competence in such a situation. Generally, the topics came impromptu and as a

consequence they gave them more challenging context to respond. Thus, they were unsure of themselves to speak english well in the context.

3. When asked if they used good grammar in speaking english, 61.5% of the participants confirmed they felt doubtful. The reason was because they focused more on speaking to respond the situation they had at the time.

4. A situation where they had to communicate in english with their customers in a good organization of thoughts received a high percentage in as much as 69.2%, for those who felt unsure if they applied it.

In short, the order of high percentages occurred in some specific situations and can be seen in the following Table 6.

Table 6. Self-Efficacy Status

No.	Specific Situation	Self-Efficacy Status	Percentage
1	Feeling nervous when facing customers.	Feeling certain to be able to handle.	69.2
2	Applying good organization of ideas.	Feeling doubtful.	69.2
3	Facing difficult or tough topics when speaking with customers.	Feeling doubtful.	61.5
4	Applying good grammar.	Feeling doubtful.	61.5

V. Conclusion

Pandemic outbreak has impacted all sectors of industries including hospitality industry. Consequently, many hotels have to make some adjustment including to lay off their employees in order to survive in such a difficult situation. Tight competition is inevitable and therefore excellent service considers important to "win" the competition. Since hospitality industry counts so much on interactions between the staff and customers, therefore communication competence is an essential element for them to have. This important requirement was inevitable including Hotel X where this study was conducted. According to the preliminary survey, Hotel X had received quite good number of foreign visitors for the past one year. Around 215 visitors coming to Hotel X both for pleasure and business should be taken care of. In this case, good impressions should be made and it was the front-liners that played this very important role.

Since all front-liners face the foreign visitors, therefore this study aimed at finding details of their english competence as well as their self-efficacy level to face them. The findings showed some categories of score range found; ≥80, 70-79, 60-69, 50-59, 50≤. Those with a score range of ≥80 received the highest percentage; 46.2%. Meanwhile, there were at least 23.1% of the participants with a score range of 70-79. A score range of 60-69 received 15.4% of the participants. In the meantime, 7.7% of the participants were in a score range of 50-59. Lastly, it was also found 7.7% of the participants were in a score range of 50≤. Furthermore, though a score range of ≥80 received the highest percentage, it was still under 50% and therefore an attention from the management was a need. An improvement should also be made for those with a score range of 70-79 and 60-69. Though a score range of 50-59 and 50≤ got the lowest percentage, to address the issue of giving an exemplary service, there should be efforts done to upgrade their competence so they could compete with others and give the best for the foreign guests coming to the hotel.

Not only the english competence, self-efficacy was also an important factor determining the participants' english competence. The findings had shown there were also

categories of specific situation that caused them both high and low self-efficacy. At least, 4 specific situations were recorded with high percentages. The first was they felt certain to handle their nervousness when facing foreign guests with 69.2%. Secondly, the participants, 69.2%, felt doubtful when applying good organization of ideas. Thirdly, feeling doubtful, 61.5% took place when facing difficult or tough topics with customers. Lastly, 61.5% of the participants experienced the same feeling of doubts as they applied good grammar in their speaking. Of the four specific situations, it appeared that handling nervousness when speaking with foreign guests was the only situation, they were sure of handling it and the rests were more doubts of their own competence in facing the described situations.

Since this study applied a descriptive qualitative method with a case study as its approach, limitations existed and therefore a generalization cannot be made. In order to have solid information under the same issue, a further study was suggested with different participants from the same category of hotel. Additionally, number of participants should also be added so results can be compared and better conclusion can be made. Also, a more specific category of participants joining in the further study can also be considered either from the length of working experience or level of participants within the management so that more specific results can be drawn.

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