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Exploring Service Excellence Training: Developing the Professional Competence of Waitstaff at Small-Scale Restaurants in Bali

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ABSTRACT

Small-scale restaurants in tourist destinations confront a dual operational burden. Operators must meet international service quality standards despite limited staffing and operational vulnerability. This study aims to comprehensively explore the sociopsychological dynamics of service excellence training implementation on the transformation of waitstaff competence and its contribution to customer loyalty. Applying an exploratory qualitative approach, this research involved 30 waitstaff classified into novice and senior groups across ten restaurants in Bali. Data collection was executed through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and the application of a strict marketing variable isolation protocol. The results showed that the training effectively restored understanding of food service procedures as a means to mitigate operational dysfunction. The role-play simulation method proved capable of eliminating cultural awkwardness by integrating standardized language with local warmth. Furthermore, providing limited autonomy successfully accelerated the customer's emotion de-escalation phase. Nevertheless, the findings revealed an adaptation disparity. Novice waitstaff demonstrated strong adaptability and learning, whereas senior waitstaff were hindered by entrenched work habits and hierarchical ego. Ultimately, this competency enhancement was shown to increase the guest return visit rate on its own. In conclusion, service excellence training is not merely a technical transfer but an essential strategic driving factor for competitive advantage. This study recommends shifting to tactical daily briefings and positioning senior employees as role models to improve customer retention in the local culinary business ecosystem.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation; Customer Loyalty; Service Excellence; Small-Scale Restaurants; Waitstaff Performance.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality industry constitutes a labor-intensive sector highly dependent on human resource reliability. Operational success in this industry is not evaluated solely by the quality of physical culinary products. Instead, this success indicator is fundamentally determined by the employees' capability to deliver service experiences. Front-line employee performance acts as the primary determinant of corporate competitiveness within a competitive market (Sharma & Bhat, 2020). Investment in employee training has been proven to positively impact the enhancement of individual performance and overall organizational productivity (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014; Abdelhamied, 2019). Meeting these competency standards is essential for businesses to maintain operational sustainability. Consequently, human resource training and development programs play a strategic role. These programs ensure that employees acquire the technical and psychological skills relevant to contemporary industry dynamics (Ferdiansah, 2024; Jusi & Azwar, 2025; Yanti & Isyanto, 2025).

Optimal service delivery requires a comprehensive understanding of the service excellence concept. Zeithaml et al. (1990) established the theoretical foundation that service quality is strictly determined by the discrepancy between customer expectations and their actual perceptions of the service received. Management's failure to bridge this gap severely damages business reputation. This concept requires service quality dimensions that obligate employees to demonstrate reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and adequate physical appearance (Bilqis et al.,

2025). At a practical level, every interaction between guests and employees represents a moment of truth. These interactions determine whether a business entity succeeds in delivering a high-value experience or results in disappointment.

Implementing service excellence is highly challenging and complex in micro, small, and medium enterprises in the culinary sector. Small-scale restaurants in prominent tourist destinations such as Bali encounter a dual operational burden. They must balance international quality standards against limited operational resources. The local culinary sector holds a strategic role in supporting sustainable tourism and promoting regional gastronomic identities (Syahrial & Anjarsari, 2023; Syahrial et al., 2025). Despite this, small-scale restaurant operators confront vulnerable managerial hierarchies and multitasking demands placed upon their employees (Wahid & Hardjono, 2021). These operational conditions are further exacerbated because employees must maintain a consistent work rhythm amidst unpredictable fluctuations in tourist arrivals (Abdi et al., 2025).

Resource limitations in small-scale restaurants lead to specific issues concerning waitstaff competence and resistance. As the primary contact point, the waitstaff bears full responsibility for social interactions and the operational fluidity of food service. Empirical evidence indicates a significant discrepancy between customer expectations and local waitstaff performance. They are frequently impeded by entrenched routines (Towoliu, 2025). Provided training frequently prioritizes technical theories while neglecting the cultural awkwardness of employees who are accustomed to local kinship-based hospitality styles (Medra, 2024). Consequently, standardized communication instructions are often perceived as a threat, resulting in rigid operational behavior. Furthermore, seniority ego and internalized motor habits render small-scale restaurants highly susceptible to customer complaints. This vulnerability is primarily caused by delayed crisis response rates during peak visitation periods (Nursad, 2022).

The resolution of these waitstaff competency issues cannot be precisely diagnosed by relying exclusively on mechanical approaches or quantitative questionnaires. The evaluation of training effectiveness must uncover underlying dimensions. These dimensions encompass psychological dynamics, ego defense mechanisms, and behavioral responses of employees when confronting actual pressure in the service area. Understanding the barriers to adopting training materials requires an approach that extracts factual experiences directly from the service providers. Rigorous descriptive analysis and participatory observation are indispensable. This methodological step aims to identify the primary causes of senior employee resistance and to assess the efficiency of complaint resolution objectively. An exploratory qualitative approach constitutes the most appropriate instrument for an in-depth analysis of the complex interactions between training theories and the daily sociopsychological realities of the waitstaff in the field.

Previous studies have examined the impact of training on service quality. However, the majority of these investigations remain dominated by parametric quantitative evaluations within large-scale corporate hospitality ecosystems (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014; Abdelhamied, 2019). An empirical study conducted by Vardan (2024) confirmed that waitstaff training can enhance aggregate service performance. Nevertheless, that study did not direct its analysis toward the sociological dynamics and the variations in learning absorption caused by internalized work habit reflexes among employees. Conversely, applied research at the local level predominantly publishes the statistical success of community service programs. Such research rarely provides a rigorous theoretical dialogue concerning the seniority ego of employees in response to operational changes (Lubis et al., 2024; Hariyani et al., 2025; Suntari & Ratnasih, 2025). Addressing this literature gap, the present study offers theoretical novelty by qualitatively investigating the responses of waitstaff to service excellence training. This novelty focuses on deconstructing the cultural awkwardness of local waitstaff and verifying the efficiency of limited autonomy in crisis management. Additionally, this research isolates marketing variables to measure the pure impact of training on customer loyalty within small-scale culinary business environments.

Based on the preceding rationale, this study aims to explore the implementation of service excellence training in reconstructing the professional competence of waitstaff within the context of small-scale restaurants in Bali. Specifically, the analysis focuses on evaluating waitstaff perceptions of the effectiveness of training in mastering technical food service procedures. This study also identifies the psychological challenges inherent in transforming communication skills. Furthermore, the research analyzes the transformation of professional ethics concerning the reduction of complaint resolution duration, alongside evaluating the variation in learning absorption between novice and senior waitstaff groups. Ultimately, this study synthesizes how these integrated professional competencies definitively contribute to the actualization of customer loyalty and satisfaction. By achieving these objectives, this research is expected to establish a precise managerial framework for micro-business operators to design effective human resource interventions.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative approach with an exploratory design (Creswell, 2013). This design aimed to comprehensively analyze the sociopsychological dynamics, perceptions, and behavioral transformations of waitstaff in response to service excellence operational training. This specific design was selected because the fundamental objective of the research was not to test regression hypotheses or mechanically measure the magnitude of influence. Instead, the study focused on extracting the factual meanings and cultural barriers formed by the training intervention. Selecting this design gave the researchers rigorous analytical flexibility to capture social nuances, ego defense mechanisms, and operational adaptation

barriers. Such sociopsychological variables are generally undetectable through scaled questionnaire instruments. The research was conducted across ten small-scale restaurants operating within prominent tourist destinations in Bali. The determination of this locus was based on the operational vulnerability profile of small-scale restaurants. These entities exhibit constrained managerial hierarchies and demand multitasking from their employees, yet they continuously face international-standard service quality expectations from foreign tourists.

The research subjects consisted of thirty waitstaff selected using a purposive sampling technique (Spradley, 2016). The determination of this informant quantity fulfilled the methodological adequacy requirements to achieve data saturation in descriptive qualitative research. To facilitate a precise comparative analysis regarding learning absorption, the informants were strictly classified into two contrasting work experience segments. The first segment comprised novice waitstaff with under two years of employment. This group was projected to measure the flexibility rate of learning adaptation without the burden of entrenched habits. The second segment consisted of experienced waitstaff with over five years of employment. This group was specifically observed to analyze hierarchical pride, seniority ego, and the hindrance of past motor reflexes against new operational standards.

Data sources in this study were extracted through two primary, continuous, and cross-validating techniques. First, the researchers conducted unstructured in-depth interviews. These interviews aimed to transparently extract the waitstaff's perceptions regarding training effectiveness, cultural awkwardness in utilizing standardized language, and attitude shifts when confronting complaining guests. The interview design was deliberately structured flexibly to establish a secure environment. This environment allowed the waitstaff to articulate their psychological resistance without the fear of managerial sanctions. Second, rigorous direct non-participant observation was conducted in the front-of-house area. This phase aimed to monitor the disciplinary application of food service procedures and record the factual duration of customer complaint resolution. Field observation notes acted as an essential empirical proxy. These notes verified the alignment between the attitudinal claims articulated by the waitstaff during interviews and their reflexive actions when confronting actual operational pressure.

To maintain the integrity of evidence regarding the impact of training on customer loyalty indicators, this study strictly implemented an external variable isolation protocol. The researchers and management ensured that no marketing variables interfered with the data during the observation and evaluation period. Management suspended the launch of large-scale price promotion programs and the overhaul of the restaurant's primary menu. This methodological control guaranteed that fluctuations in increased guest visitation were purely the result of human resource interaction quality. All collected raw data were subsequently processed using thematic qualitative analysis. The data were reduced, categorized into the five research question focuses,

and presented by synthesizing field findings with relevant theoretical frameworks. To guarantee the validity of the conclusion, this study employed a source triangulation technique (Miles et al., 2014). This technique cross-referenced statements between waitstaff and restaurant managers. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was also employed to align the subjective narratives from interviews with the objective evidence of crisis management duration in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Employee Perception Regarding Training Effectiveness in Mastering Food Service Procedures

Mastering standard operating procedures is the foundation of delivering excellent service in the hospitality industry. In the context of small-scale restaurants, technical training interventions are focused on reinforcing basic food service competencies to ensure front-line employees demonstrate uniform actions when serving customers. Unlike star-rated hotels that possess specific divisions of labor, small-scale restaurants exhibit a high degree of operational vulnerability. This vulnerability is triggered by the limited quantity of human resources. These conditions require every waitstaff member to be able to multitask when responding to fluctuating guest arrivals. Therefore, mastering technical preparation procedures is not merely a visual aesthetic demand. These procedures are essential to prevent operational dysfunction. Field evaluations showed that the training program successfully rebuilt waitstaff's understanding of the front-of-house workflow. Employees began to perceive preparation routines as a strategic element determining daily operational fluidity. This new understanding directly increased employees' self-confidence when interacting with guests, especially during peak operational hours.

We measured training effectiveness through the perspectives of the majority of research subjects. A total of 78% of the interviewed subjects stated that food service training was highly effective in transforming their perspectives on *mise-en-place* procedures (equipment preparation) and food serving sequences. Employees recognized that a precise equipment arrangement before restaurant operations had a direct impact on service speed. This preventive action also helped them conserve their physical energy amid high work-rhythm demands. This transformation of cognitive understanding and behavior was explicitly articulated by an experienced waitstaff member with the initials KD. They reflected on the fundamental changes in their work patterns following participation in the technical training session:

"Prior to the training, we frequently arranged tables haphazardly and only searched for cutlery after guests had ordered, resulting in exceptionally slow service. We now understand that ensuring the readiness of all dining equipment in advance significantly assists us in focusing our attention on the guests without the necessity of repeatedly returning to the kitchen."

This factual narrative confirmed the conceptual postulate of Walker (1996). The concept holds that *mise-en-place* and adherence to service stages are the foundation for successful interactions between employees and guests. The success of small-scale restaurant employees in implementing these technical procedures aligns with previous empirical findings. Previous research demonstrated that procedural discipline among waitstaff is directly proportional to overall service effectiveness (Ransun et al., 2025; Suryana et al., 2026). Nevertheless, deeper data exploration revealed the presence of technical constraints among a minor fraction of employees. Approximately 22% of the total subjects expressed confusion when applying theory to actual practice. This occurred due to the minimal portion of physical simulations during the classical training sessions. This condition of technical barriers confirmed training operational guidelines that necessitate periodic direct demonstrations. Continuous simulation is required to ensure that service standards are thoroughly internalized by each waitstaff member (Xenia, 2025).

The theoretical and practical mastery of technical procedures provides a strong initial foundation for enhancing aggregate restaurant operational quality. Ananda et al. (2023) argue that enhancing basic competencies through technical training is a strategic driver. This factor results in significantly higher professional performance in local culinary business environments. Furthermore, the capacity of front-line employees to execute food service procedures without error constitutes an absolute prerequisite. This prerequisite is aimed at achieving comprehensive operational excellence and customer satisfaction (Abdelhamied, 2019; Vardan, 2024). Although operational technical mastery has shown significant improvement, implementing service excellence in the field requires more than motor skills. At the implementation stage, employees face internal psychological barriers and the demands of attitudinal adaptation that require advanced communication skills.

B. The Dynamics of Adaptation Challenges and the Transformation of Employee Communication Skills

Mastering precise operational procedures during the preparation stage is not enough to ensure comprehensive service excellence. The subsequent challenge faced by employees in small-scale restaurants specifically concerns psychological and social interaction. Interpersonal communication constitutes the primary instrument in the tourism industry that dictates the quality of the guest experience. However, the operational dynamics of small-scale restaurants frequently constrain the space for formal education. Based on data extraction results, approximately 30% of the informants complained about the limited training time allocated by management. This spatial and temporal limitation triggered the urgency for a more applied material delivery method. Such an approach must not focus exclusively on theory and must be able to change employee communication behavior in the front-of-house area directly.

This condition became increasingly complex when management confronted the phenomenon of adaptation reluctance from nearly half of the research subjects. A proportion of 45% of the informants demonstrated psychological resistance toward the new communication standards. The majority of this rejection originated from employees with longer tenures. The waitstaff perceived that the informal communication style they had previously applied was adequate and relevant to the local restaurant concept. Within the sociocultural context of local hospitality, service interactions are generally founded on the principles of kinship and personal proximity between hosts and guests. The demand to use more standardized, polite, and corporatized service language was often perceived as a threat. There was a concern that adjusting this operational language would eliminate the warmth and original characteristics of the small-scale restaurant. They experienced profound cultural awkwardness, as transparently articulated by a senior waitstaff member with the initials YN:

“Initially, I felt exceedingly rigid because I had to utilize standard greeting phrases and excessively lengthy menu-offering techniques. We have been accustomed for years to conversing casually with guests because this is not a large hotel restaurant; therefore, it felt like being forced to become a robot, and it required a considerable amount of time to adjust.”

The waitstaff’s reluctance to alter these entrenched communication habits did not constitute a form of operational insubordination. This condition represented a manifestation of psychological barriers in the new knowledge acquisition process. [Wahid and Hardjono \(2021\)](#) elucidated that the knowledge absorption process within the culinary business is highly susceptible to human resource resistance. This resistance occurs because individuals feel constrained by their operational comfort zones. In the context of a bustling tourism destination like Bali, the demand for adaptation to new service standards frequently collides with fluctuating daily work rhythms. Such operational pressure triggers mental fatigue among employees ([Abdi et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, the difficulties in implementing human resource development programs within small-scale restaurant environments must be understood and anticipated. Management must apply a sustainable and participatory approach, rather than merely providing one-way communication instructions ([Pusdastra, 2024](#)).

To address communication barriers and manage the training time constraints, the restaurant management implemented a role-play simulation. This tactical approach proved effective in eliminating the waitstaff’s cultural awkwardness. The method succeeded not by forcing employees to memorize standardized scripts rigidly. Conversely, this method provided a secure environment for employees to align standard operational greeting phrases without sacrificing the smiles and warmth characteristic of local hospitality. Field evaluations indicated that approximately 40% of the informants reported a significant transformation in

their non-technical verbal abilities. This competency enhancement was evident in their mastery of active listening techniques and the utilization of more professional body language. The success of this simulation method aligns with the findings of [Medra \(2024\)](#). That study demonstrated that case demonstrations outside peak hours can optimally accelerate service communication fluency.

This transformation in communication skills confirmed the conceptual frameworks of [Luo et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Waqanimaravu and Arasanmi \(2020\)](#). Both studies underscored that interactive training methods and managerial support prove essential in shaping employees' capabilities to respond to customers. The implementation of this integrated workplace-based training model evidently reduced local waitstaff resistance ([Towoliu, 2025](#)). Ultimately, the success of integrating professional communication standards with local hospitality identities became an essential psychological capital for the waitstaff. This capital is essential to entering a significantly riskier stage: enforcing professional ethics when handling guest complaints and dissatisfaction.

C. The Transformation of Professional Ethics and the Efficiency of Complaint Handling Procedures

The success in aligning cultural barriers within verbal communication provides a strong sociopsychological foundation for the waitstaff. However, operational realities in the hospitality industry do not invariably proceed without incidents. The testing point of service quality resides in the capacity of front-line employees to manage crises, particularly when confronting guest complaints. In small-scale restaurants with limited managerial hierarchies, waitstaff often make immediate decisions. They are required to resolve issues without the ability to escalate them to supervisors. Therefore, the establishment of professional ethics and empathy through training becomes the primary defense instrument. This step is essential to prevent the escalation of customer dissatisfaction into a detrimental business reputation crisis.

The effectiveness of the training program in formulating a crisis management mindset was solidly recorded through the narratives of the research subjects. A total of 82% of the informants reflected a mindset transformation from a defensively inclined attitude to a more empathetic one when confronting customers expressing complaints. Employees began to understand that a complaint does not constitute a personal attack against their performance. These complaints were interpreted as an expression of unfulfilled guest expectations. This paradigm shift was authentically articulated by a waitstaff member with the initials AR, who elucidated their psychological response alteration when facing direct pressure from customers:

“Previously, when a guest was angry due to delayed food or incorrect orders, I would also panic and tend to defend myself. Following the training, I was instructed to position myself as the guest and sincerely apologize first. Evidently, when we respond calmly and empathetically, the guest’s emotions subside significantly faster.”

This cognitive and ethical transformation evidently projected onto the enhancement of factual performance efficiency within the front-of-house area. Field observations confirmed the waitstaff’s subjective claims with highly measurable empirical findings. The average complaint resolution time dropped sharply, from fifteen minutes to seven minutes after training. Operationally, this duration reduction specifically refers to the customer emotion de-escalation phase and the achievement of a solution agreement. This duration does not indicate the physical time consumed by the kitchen to recook the dishes. This resolution acceleration occurred because the waitstaff no longer exhausted operational time arguing or seeking justifications. Conversely, they directly executed the crisis protocol tactically. In a small-scale restaurant ecosystem with strict budgets, this complaint-resolution autonomy was designed in proportion. This autonomy constitutes a limited authority strictly regulated within the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). The waitstaff was given immediate flexibility to address guest disappointment with minor compensation. They were authorized to provide complimentary beverages or desserts without managerial approval. Meanwhile, main course replacements remained rapidly coordinated through the kitchen command line (Xenia, 2025; Suryana et al., 2026). This policy proves that waitstaff empowerment can instantly restore guest trust without disrupting the restaurant’s cost efficiency structure (food cost).

The conversion of ethics into operational efficiency directly validated universal service quality parameters. The reduction in conflict resolution duration constitutes an empirical manifestation of the responsiveness dimension. On the other hand, the waitstaff’s sincerity represents the empathy dimension conceptualized by Zeithaml et al. (1990). Within small-scale restaurant ecosystems, the speed of responding to crises with empathy is the key to salvaging deteriorating service interactions (Depierraz, 2025; Hariyani et al., 2025). Prichard (2025) asserted that service training does not merely teach politeness. The training equips employees with tactical protocols to control highly pressurized situations. Furthermore, the achievement of this crisis resolution aligns with the success documentation of Lubis et al. (2024). That study demonstrated that the consistent integration of professional ethics can elevate the quality of problem-solving across various restaurant business typologies (Bilqis et al., 2025; Suntari & Ratnasih, 2025).

In aggregate, the mastery of professional ethics and the speed of complaint resolution establish a resilient operational reliability standard for small-scale restaurants. The capacity of employees to transform negative situations into

memorable service recovery experiences constitutes an essential achievement of the training program intervention. Nevertheless, further investigation into this transition process revealed a new managerial reality. The material absorption rate and the speed of operational adaptation were evidently not distributed evenly among all service employees. This phenomenon obligates the analysis to examine the dynamics of work experience differentiation specifically. This approach was conducted to analyze the readiness disparities between novice and senior employee groups in responding to the training intervention.

D. The Differentiation of Absorption Capacity and Training Responsiveness Based on Work Experience

The achievement of technical, communication, and complaint-handling ethical competencies constitutes an indicator of managerial intervention success at an aggregate level. Nevertheless, a more in-depth qualitative evaluation revealed an anomaly regarding the equitable distribution of these skills in the field. Implementing a uniform training program resulted in significantly different rates of material absorption and operational adaptation among the participants. This disparity was not founded upon the employees' formal education levels; rather, it was strongly constructed by their tenure and prior empirical experience factors. This reality necessitates data triangulation to measure the extent to which experience acts as a strategic driving factor or, conversely, as an inhibiting factor in the service excellence transformation process.

The analysis of the novice waitstaff group, or those with under two years of employment, demonstrated highly positive results. This group recorded an adaptivity rate and an operational responsiveness enhancement of 45% post-training. This high absorption rate indicates exceptional learning adaptation flexibility. Novice waitstaff do not yet have ingrained work habits so that they can absorb new operational standards without the bias of past habits. They tend to exhibit high self-verification motivation and absolute compliance with new instructions. The openness to this training intervention was clearly articulated by a novice waitstaff member with the initials BZ, who elucidated their experience in absorbing food service and communication materials:

"Because I have not been employed in this industry for a long time, I felt significantly assisted by the standardized guidelines from the training. I did not need to guess how to greet or respond to guest complaints, as all the procedures were distinctly clear, and I simply followed those directives without any burden."

A contrasting condition was conversely discovered within the senior waitstaff group who had been employed for over five years. The responsiveness enhancement in this group only reached 25%. This figure reflects the existence of adaptation barriers in the new skill adoption process. This deceleration was not caused by low intellectual capacity. The barrier resulted from the high

burden of abandoning entrenched work habits that they had considered correct for years. This situation was further complicated by the presence of seniority ego or hierarchical pride. Within the local work culture, psychologically, more experienced employees frequently feel they understand field dynamics better than the newly taught theoretical standards. During normal operating hours, senior waitstaff applied the training theories proficiently. However, when the restaurant confronted a surge in guests, the ego and previous habits re-dominated their operational behavior. They unconsciously experienced regression and reverted to compromising work patterns to accelerate movement. This proves that theoretical mastery in the training room is not necessarily directly proportional to operational reflex alteration in the field.

This absorption disparity phenomenon can be precisely analyzed using the training evaluation framework of [Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick \(2006\)](#). From the perspective of this theory, both novice and senior waitstaff successfully achieved Level 2 (Learning). This stage is characterized by an enhancement in theoretical knowledge. However, in the Level 3 (Behavior) evaluation, senior waitstaff experienced learning transfer barriers. This condition was caused by the absence of a work climate and mentoring methods sensitive to their social structure. Employees who have long stayed within their comfort zones require specific mentoring after training. Management needs to position them as role models, rather than as learners who are patronized through classical instructions. This recognition of seniority will trigger a moral responsibility within them to demonstrate correct procedures to junior waitstaff. The successful transfer of learning into actual work routines is essential. This success determines whether a training program can deliver an impact on the company's operational performance ([Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014](#); [Sharma & Bhat, 2020](#)).

The discovery of this differentiation provides a strategic evaluation foundation for small-scale restaurant management. Human resource training and development can no longer be viewed as a routine administrative agenda. This program must be managed as a human capital innovation strategy that directly impacts productivity ([Ferdiansah, 2024](#); [Yanti & Isyanto, 2025](#)). To overcome this discrepancy without disrupting operational margins, management needs to restructure its mentoring methods. Intensive mentoring for senior employees does not need to be designed as costly, specific face-to-face sessions. Such mentoring can be organically integrated into the daily tactical briefings before the restaurant operates. Through brief yet consistent daily mentoring by the management, performance enhancement can be experienced equitably by each individual ([Jusi & Azwar, 2025](#)). Ultimately, the entire waitstaff hierarchy will standardize its service levels into a solid, unified competency. If this is achieved, the restaurant's operational quality will reach an optimal level. This uniformity of professionalism will subsequently become the primary determining factor in shaping guest

perceptions. This directly contributes to the comprehensive creation of customer loyalty and satisfaction.

E. The Synthesis of Waitstaff Professional Competence Contribution to Customer Satisfaction

The achievement of waitstaff competency uniformity technically and sociopsychologically ultimately leads to one absolute objective, namely the creation of customer satisfaction. Within the small-scale restaurant ecosystem acting as an integral part of a tourism destination, service excellence interactions cannot be separated from efforts to construct local gastronomic identities. Competent front-line employees function as the primary representations translating culinary product quality into high-value dining experiences (Syahrial & Anjarsari, 2023; Syahrial et al., 2025). Therefore, the final evaluation of the training program's effectiveness must be based on facts. This measurement reflects the extent to which employees' internal transformation creates positive perceptions and guest loyalty in the service area.

The impact of these positive perceptions was strongly confirmed through direct customer feedback indicators. Based on primary data extraction, a total of 62% of informants reported an increase in receiving verbal appreciation from guests post-training. This appreciation generally referred to the waitstaff's accuracy in guiding menu selection, speed in responding to needs, and their proactive attitude when serving. This alteration in the interaction atmosphere, becoming more professional and warmer, was clearly recorded through the triangulation observation of a restaurant manager with the initials LM:

"Since the waitstaff commenced implementing the new service standards, we have received significantly more direct compliments at the tables. Guests feel highly valued because the waitstaff no longer merely deliver food but are genuinely present and attentive to every detail of their needs during their stay here."

The customers' verbal appreciation did not merely constitute a social interaction formality. This action represents an initial empirical indicator of long-term loyalty formation. Subsequent observations of operational routines documented a 28% surge in the guest return visit rate after the training program was consistently implemented. This surge in return visits was directly correlated with improvements in human resource quality, rather than by external marketing variable interventions. During the observation period, management confirmed the absence of large-scale price promotion programs and main menu overhauls. Furthermore, the validity of this finding was reinforced by interaction patterns in the field. Returning guests did not merely seek food; they explicitly recognized, personally greeted, and sought specific waitstaff who had previously left a profound service impression. This factual data, isolated from marketing bias, validated the postulates of Abdelhamied (2019) and Lassoued et al. (2022). Their studies

asserted that investment in human resource training proportionally contributes to customer retention. Furthermore, the waitstaff's success in creating personally satisfying dining experiences became the primary determining factor. This experience encourages guests to re-select the same restaurant amidst the fierce competition of the local culinary industry (Nursad, 2022; Vardan, 2024).

This guest loyalty enhancement reflects customer perceptions of improved operational reliability. The waitstaff's disciplined application of operational procedures eliminated uncertainty variables that frequently lead to complaints (Suryana et al., 2026). Theoretically, the integration of the waitstaff's technical and ethical competencies successfully met customer expectations in full. This confirmed the literature synthesis of Bilqis et al. (2025). This study is also supported by empirical evidence from various applied research indicating that the systematic enhancement of human resource skill quality is consistently directly proportional to service quality improvement in restaurant business entities (Lubis et al., 2024; Suntari & Ratnasih, 2025).

Overall, the synthesis of these five evaluation stages proves that service excellence training is not merely a linear technical improvement instrument. This intervention is a strategic driver that transforms cognitive capacity, overcomes psychological resistance, and builds crisis ethics. This training also brings employees' experiential differences together into a cohesive operational team. Once the foundation of waitstaff professionalism is firmly established, customer satisfaction and loyalty are no longer achieved by chance. They become a logical inevitability of a superior operational system. The empirical findings from these dynamics provide a solid operational foundation for drawing conclusions and policy recommendations in the final stage of the research.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of service excellence training within the small-scale restaurant ecosystem is not merely a technical knowledge transfer instrument. This activity constitutes an essential sociopsychological intervention to reconstruct human resource professionalism. Fundamentally, this training proved effective in instilling an awareness of the importance of food service procedures as a mitigation mechanism. This understanding is essential to prevent operational dysfunction amidst employee limitations. Furthermore, the success of the role-play simulation method was capable of reducing psychological barriers in the form of the waitstaff's cultural awkwardness. Employees aligned the use of standardized operational language without sacrificing the kinship principles and personal warmth characteristic of local hospitality. The synthesis of these two achievements provided a strong foundation of self-confidence for front-line employees when they faced tourist arrival fluctuations.

This cognitive transformation directly improved operational efficiency, particularly in customer complaint crisis situations. This research proved that the internalization of empathetic values successfully triggered a waitstaff attitude shift from initially defensive to more solution-oriented. The provision of limited autonomy regulated within operational standards granted the waitstaff flexibility to accelerate the guest's emotion de-escalation phase. This autonomy significantly reduced conflict resolution duration without detrimental effects on the restaurant's cost efficiency. Nevertheless, the in-depth evaluation discovered that this training's absorption capacity was heavily influenced by tenure. Novice waitstaff demonstrated a high level of learning adaptation flexibility, whereas senior waitstaff experienced adoption barriers due to the misalignment between new standards, their entrenched work habit reflexes, and their seniority ego. This finding confirms that a uniform training approach is not entirely effective in overcoming sociological hierarchical disparity gaps in the workplace.

In aggregate, the standardization of technical, communication, and crisis resolution ethical competencies provided an absolute contribution to the creation of guest loyalty. Empirical validation conducted through strict control of marketing variables proved that the surge in the customer return visit rate was purely driven by service interaction quality. At the operational level, guests explicitly sought and personally recognized the waitstaff. These findings confirm the primary conclusion that investment in human resource capacity development in small-scale restaurants is highly urgent. Amidst the fierce competition in the tourism industry, competency interventions are essential and directly create competitive advantage and customer retention. Service quality is no longer a complementary attribute but rather the primary determinant of local culinary business survival.

Based on these conclusions, there are several concrete follow-up actions and managerial recommendations that can be implemented by small-scale restaurant operators. Management is advised to abandon theoretical classical training patterns and transition to a tactical daily briefing mentoring approach. Specifically to overcome senior employee resistance, management needs to position them as role models through consistent daily directions. This policy is expected to convert seniority ego into a moral responsibility to mentor novice employees. Furthermore, the authorization of minor compensation explicitly written in the work guidelines must be maintained continuously and periodically reviewed. This aims to train the waitstaff's intuitive acuity in resolving guest dissatisfaction elegantly and efficiently.

At a more macro level, this study provides policy implications for regional governments and tourism sector stakeholders. Culinary-based micro-business empowerment programs must not be focused exclusively on physical capital assistance or digital marketing. The government must prioritize subsidies for service excellence training and certification programs specifically adapted for the small

business ecosystem. Academically, this study recommends further research utilizing a longitudinal study approach. This study is required to measure employees' persistence and memory retention of training materials over an extended period. Future studies are also expected to incorporate moderating variables such as transformational leadership. Integrating this new variable is essential to expand the scientific scope of human resource development in the local hospitality industry.

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