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ROLE OF ELC (ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION) SKILLS IN J & K HOTEL
INDUSTRY: AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

In modern world of globalized borderless economy, effective communication plays a very crucial role for a smooth successful functioning of any industry. English has today emerged as a language of business and trade and is accepted as a proper standard for communication. It is this variety of communication which ensures a balance between organizational objectives, success and profitability. Since English is the language of the globalized business world, effective and excellent communication and adequate English language competency is essential in any hotel industry for better guest experience and better efficiency; productivity and profitability. Good communication skills help in strengthening the ties between the guests and the hotel staff which finally proves beneficial to the overall growth of the hotel industry. Pertinently, tourism industry constitutes one of the fastest growing sectors and a major revenue earner not only in the J&K but also all over the India. Like other places, here in J and K also, hotel industry constitutes an integral part of its tourism industry which is diverse in nature for it accommodates employees and guests, with diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Hotel industry is the core service industry which revolves around people and their interactions and experiences. Hence, communication skills form the essential component of this industry.

This paper therefore discusses in depth ELC (English Language communication) skills in the hotel industry. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the significance of proper communication skill methods in the hotel industry of the J&K and to understand the contribution of English language competency skills of the employees towards organizational efficiency, services and productivity. In short, the paper will throw light on the role the ELC skills play in the hotel industry of the state.

Key Words: Tourism industry, hospitality, communication skills, better services, organizational efficiency

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Take advantage of every opportunity to practice your communication skills so that when important occasions arise, you will have the gift, the style, the sharpness, the clarity, and the emotions to affect other people.
– Joseph Priestley

If you want to take full advantage ... there is only one way to do it; learn English.... - David Crystal

Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for the people will them and be influenced by them for good or ill. – Buddha

Main Argument

An Oxford dictionary defines hospitality as friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. It also defines it as relating to or denoting the business of entertaining clients, conference delegates, or other official visitors. However, professionally speaking, hospitality is a harmonious mixture of tangible and intangible components – food, beverages, beds, ambience and the environment; and the behavior of staff. In the past few years, the J&K has been recognized for its unique prospects in tourism sector. As such, there has been tremendous growth of hotel industry in the State. We must not forget that the J & K State especially has been widely known for its hospitality over the ages. They don't leave any stone unturned for providing the best services to the guests. While treating guests, it has been observed that the people of the state exhibit their selflessness and genuine warmth. These people have been declared highly hospitable by many foreign tourists and travelers in their travelogues. This has primarily made the hospitality industry of the state one of finest industries in the world. Though it has evolved over the centuries yet a lot needs to be done for there have been tremendous changes in it due to the competition among hotels. Today the tourist or the traveler looks for standardized and customized experience with the hotel of his / her choice. His / Her choices, expectations, awareness, standards and sensitivity have also increased. In such a scenario, one feels that communication competence of the hotel staff requires scholarly attention. Hence, this study focuses on the hotel sector of the tourism industry of the state. It proves that better communication skills add more strength and better health to the overall organization which finally improves its performance and customers' satisfaction.

The hotel owners should remember that their industry is a service based industry wherein human factor has a vital role to perform. It is the complementary efforts of the hotel staff and the physical infrastructure which can make the hotel an enviable attraction for customers. None can also deny the fact that communication skills constitute an essential and integral part of hospitality industry. Among many other requisite qualifications, the hotel staff should have a good command over English language. Regarding those who are already in the system, it is strongly recommended that there is a great need of providing training to such staff especially regarding communication skills for that would definitely enable the industry to excel and forge ahead. The need for proper English language communication skills is important for the tourists foreign or locals who arrive here come from varied linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It is therefore important that the staff of this industry be properly equipped with strong communicative competence for making the overall management strong and profitability of the hospitality industry a successful endeavour.

In the contemporary times, the J&K experienced a significant departure from the traditional tourist practices by adopting modern means and ways for strengthening it and thereby enhancing the economic stability of the hotel industry. Like many other parts of the world, here also many initiatives were taken by the government for strengthening and improving the tourism for it has been one of the greatest contributors to the overall economic growth in the state and the trend continues. Various programmers and initiatives of the government were launched with an aim to improve the hospitality industry in the J&K during a few past years finally enabled the state to emerge as a great attraction in the tourism map of the world.

After randomly distributing the questionnaire among the hotel staff and the tourists, it was found that the importance of English language skills vary from person to person within the system i.e., from one staffer to the other. For instance, in the responses, for a waiter, 'pleasant disposition' and 'service oriented' were considered as the most important, 'courtesy' as second most important and 'English Language proficiency' as the least important. For a receptionist, 'pleasant disposition', 'English proficiency' and 'courtesy' were ranked as the most important. For management personal, 'English language proficiency' and 'service oriented' were declared as the most important. For reservation staff, the most significant feature is their competence in English language followed by features like 'courtesy', 'service oriented' and 'pleasant disposition'. Regarding activity coordinator, it is recommend that he should not only be 'service oriented' but also should possess 'pleasant disposition' along with 'good English language skills'. This should be followed by other features like courtesy etc. Finally, for housekeeping staff, it was stated in the questionnaire by the respondents that they should be 'service oriented' possessing 'courtesy', 'pleasant disposition' and 'English language proficiency'. Thus, the employment of proper communication skills in the hospitality industry of the state is an important aspect that ensures satisfaction of the management, staff and customers .

Communication is vital to the customer because it imparts a feeling of satisfaction as he pays for the product and for the service being offered. Communication in hotel industry covers mainly two areas: customer service and the interactions between the staff and management (Barrows & Powers, 2008). A proper coordination between the two is hence vital for customer satisfaction / high quality services expected of the industry. In fact, good and proper communication skills among the hotel employees and the management also add value to the services and the products being offered. Good communication between staff and management is the epitome of communication in this sector because it is passed to the level of communication between staff and guests (Andrews, 2007).

Potential clients in any hotel setting expect to find a cool and lovely environment so as to willingly spend their money on such a facility. A happy and relaxed atmosphere assures the management and staff that their guests will return and recommend their facility (Baum, 2006). Communication skill in the hotel industry, therefore, plays a major role in the establishment of relationships between members of organizations and those who visit these organizations. Organizations rely on culture and communication methods to ensure trust and satisfaction among their members (Andrews, 2007). Through proper communication, it becomes possible to see into the problems in the hotel system and then through it only necessary steps are taken to ensure smoother and satisfactory quality services for customers. In a service-oriented sector such as the hotel industry, it is necessary that communication skills are given proper attention and emphasis for both written and spoken types so that the sector runs smoothly for its service delivery depends on how nicely the information is passed on to its customers. After conducting a survey, the researchers found that like the other states, the J&K's hotel managements recognize the importance of communication skills in the hospitality sector of the state and are hence ready to spend good sums of money for training their employees especially on English language skills with a special focus on written or oral communication but unfortunately only a small percentage of employees willingly undergo in-house training. Our study proves that the hospitality industry in J&K primarily relies on oral communication for making business transactions. It also involves convincing potential clients about the uniqueness of the services and products available in the hotel. Though we have seen that oral and written forms of communication in hotels in the J&K State are not used in similar proportions yet effective communication skills help in increasing customer satisfaction, job satisfaction, safety, productivity and profitability and then it also adds to the overall business turnover of the hotel. Effective communication should therefore be aimed at starting from the lowest level so that the information reaches purposefully to everyone. We need to remember that either oral or written skills of communication are used within the organization to pass information from one person to another.

In J&K hotels, oral communication is the most common form of passing information – be it the introduction of a new customer to the menu or giving details about a guest room, oral communication is the most common practice here. It is vital for even passing the data on to colleagues and calling people to an

urgent meeting. In view of the aforesaid, employees in this sector must develop necessary communication skills to fulfill the tourist / guest requirements. For hospitality organizations, internal written English communication serves as the nerve center, which if not functions properly, leads to loss of guests and eventually the organization fails. It is the satisfied guests who lead to a stronger and more competitive market position, customer loyalty and increased profits. For achieving tourist satisfaction, the system requires an understanding of performance and expectations. Proper written English communication skills are of high importance to hospitality practitioners at different levels. Besides oral communication, written communication skill also plays a significant role for if properly used in the organization, it enhances effective performance of its employees, which in turn results in better growth, high performance and greater output. Written English communication also enhances a sense of work satisfaction and promotes interpersonal relationship through the use of powerful words, messages and presentation. Effective communication means effective handling of the organization's concerns. The Hotel Industry also must have an organized communication policy and channel for its speedy and effective communication within and outside the organization. This would prevent delays and create harmony and a good working environment by eliminating misunderstandings, confusions and distortions of information. In the present globalized world, it has now been seen that due to IT, proper English Language communication skills have gained more space even in hotel industry of the J&K state. It has to provide first class services to the guests/customers. This can be done once its employees are heavily filled with a strong linguistic competence especially that of English language. The study revealed that effective use of English communication skills not only help in providing better services and satisfactory performance but also increase growth and profitability of the organization. Further, the researchers found that English language competence is more important for those who do not often come into direct contact with hotel guests such as the reservation staff and hotel management personnel. Language is thus the most important medium of human communication, since through it we express information, ideas, emotions, attitudes and so many other things (Petrovska, 2010). The main finding in the whole research process is the argument that those who work or aspire to work in the hotel industry of the state must have good ELC (English Language Communication) skills for these are important in general in such an industry. Now we know that good ELC (English Language Communication) skills constitute a significant pre-requisite for a career in hotel industry of the state. According to David Crystal:

English is a global languagea language is global when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country.... To achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few(or no) mother-tongue speakers. (Crystal, 2003)

English language, being the language of the universe or the world is accepted as the formal medium of communication. This fact is fully endorsed and accepted by hoteliers, academia and aspirants alike across the world.

On the whole, this study highlights the significance of communicative competence especially English language skills for the hotel industry of the state of J & K and the career of hoteliers. It is needed for optimizing placement, promotion, incentives and personal branding. The need of the hour is that the industry, the academia and the students should join hands for launching and proposing such English language courses both within the hotels and in various colleges / universities of the state for preparing such a human resource which proves an asset not only for the hotels of the State but also the country as a whole so that our tourism / hospitality industry would emerge as one the best in the whole world. This alone can enable us to produce the best staff for both hospitality and tourism industry which provides employments to lakhs of people every year and has possibility to adjust more in the times to come.

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