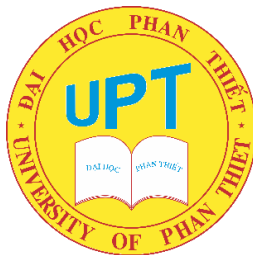


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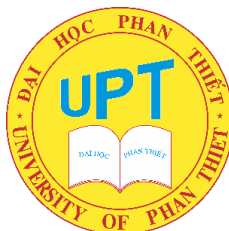
PHAM MINH HUNG

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE
AND ITS POSITIVE IMPACT ON GUEST SATISFACTION
IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY OF LAM DONG:
A CASE STUDY OF BAMBOO VILLAGE RESORT**

**MASTER'S GRADUATION PROJECT
MAJORED IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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SCIENCE INSTRUCTOR'S NAME(s):

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Lam Dong Province - 2026

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Pham Minh Hung

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I confirm that the work presented in this Master's Graduation Project entitled **"ICC and Its Positive Impact on Guest Satisfaction in the Hotel Industry of Lam Dong: A Case Study of Bamboo Village Resort"** has been performed and interpreted solely by myself.

I am submitting this Statement of authorship for my Master's Graduation Project titled **"ICC and Its Positive Impact on Guest Satisfaction in the Hotel Industry of Lam Dong: A Case Study of Bamboo Village Resort"** in the fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's degree in English Language at the University of Phan Thiet. I solemnly declare that this Master's Graduation Project represents my own work, conducted under the guidance of Ms. Tran Thi Quynh Le, Ph.D., and that it has not been previously submitted for any other degree at the University of Phan Thiet.

I affirm that the ideas, concepts, and content presented in this project are my own, and any external materials or sources have been appropriately referenced in accordance with the academic standards of the University of Phan Thiet. I have not engaged in any form of plagiarism, misrepresentation, or unethical conduct during the research, writing, or presentation of this project. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the intellectual property rights of any external materials used in this project have been respected and adhered to. Any permission required for the use of copyrighted materials has been obtained.

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ABSTRACT

From the ancient times to today's globalized world, the hotel industry serves a very diverse clientele from varied cultural backgrounds. Effective intercultural communication competence (ICC) is academically believed to be most important in ensuring positive guest experiences, loyalty, and favorable ratings and recommendations. This thesis looks into the significance of staff ICC and its positive impact on guest satisfaction in hotel industry, exploring the hotel front-line staff's and guests' perspectives on ICC in an culturally-diverse service environment, and consequently providing practical recommendations for improving staff ICC while serving travelers from many countries in the world. This thesis employs a mix of qualitative and quantitative study approach to provide an in-depth understanding of staff perspectives with interviews and thematic surveys and situational observations being used. This thesis finds out that the majority of the staff possess adequate ICC that help them conveniently deal with cultural encounters and challenges to effectively serve travelers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This thesis also recognizes that ICC's intangible service aspects rather than tangible service aspects have more favorable influence on guest satisfaction. Practically, this thesis provides further valuable insights for the industry management and hoteliers, offering real-life, evidence-based recommendations for improving ICC in training and practices. The thesis can also serve as an empirical model for other hospitality businesses and similar cultural contexts, contributing to improved guest satisfaction and staff performance.

Keywords: *hotel industry, intercultural communication competence, tangible and intangible services.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP	2
ABSTRACT	3
TABLE OF CONTENT	4
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Background of the study	6
1.2 Rationale of the study	6
1.3 Statement of the problem.....	8
1.4 Research objectives and questions.....	9
1.5 Significance of the study.....	11
1.6 Scope of the study.....	13
1.7 Limitations of the study	17
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.1 Theoretical framework.....	20
2.2 Conceptual framework.....	23
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	25
3.1 Research design	25
3.2 Research setting and participants.....	25
3.3 Research instruments	28
3.4 Data collection procedures.....	34
3.5 Data analysis plan	36

3.6 Ethical considerations	36
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	38
4.1 Results	38
4.2 Discussions	44
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	46
5.1 Interpreting the findings.....	46
5.2 Comparison with previous study	46
5.3 Theoretical implications	47
5.4 Practical implications.....	47
5.5 Limitations	48
5.6 Recommendations for future researches	49
References.....	52

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The concept of ICC has long been defined as an essential area of study within applied linguistics, communication studies, and hospitality management. In theory, ICC refers to the ability of individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). It encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, such as cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity and misunderstandings.

In service industries, particularly hotel industry, where guest and staff interaction is constant and diverse, ICC becomes a key determinant of both service quality and customer satisfaction. The hospitality industry thrives on effective ICC, as hotels and resorts cater to a diverse clientele from different cultural backgrounds. ICC is crucial for enhancing guest experiences, resolving conflicts, and ensuring high-quality service delivery (Deardorff, 2006). Staff members, who are at the forefront of guest interactions, play a key role in navigating cultural differences and managing cross-cultural encounters.

This thesis aims to explore the perspectives of staff members in the hotel industry on the importance of ICC, the challenges they may face in cross-cultural interactions, and their perceptions of how ICC influences service quality. In the meantime, this thesis also focuses on guests' viewpoint on the staff ICC and on whether strong ICC would positively affect guest satisfaction. By focusing on the experiences of hotel staff and guests, this thesis will provide practical insights for improving ICC training and strategies in the hotel industry.

1.2 Rationale of the study

The rationale for this study stems from the cultural diversity within the global hotel industry, where daily intercultural encounters between staff and guests circle around service delivery. While traditional hospitality literature prioritizes tangible

assets like facilities and pricing, it often overlooks the critical role of ICC, or reduces it merely to language proficiency.

This research addresses that gap by moving beyond a narrow linguistic focus to include essential competencies like adaptability and empathy. In the context of Vietnam's rapidly growing tourism sector, there is a apparent lack of empirical evidence regarding how ICC influences guest satisfaction.

Consequently, this study is vital for developing both academic knowledge and practical management strategies to help local hotels remain competitive by fostering positive, culturally resonant guest experiences. Thus, this study is justified on three following grounds.

1.2.1 Theoretical need

The theoretical need for this study arises from the necessity to enrich hospitality literature by integrating ICC into the analysis of guest satisfaction. While traditional models like SERVQUAL focus on functional dimensions such as reliability and responsiveness, they often overlook the cultural differences that shape international guest perceptions.

By applying the frameworks of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), this research not only looks beyond mere language proficiency but also to emphasize the role of attitudes, cultural self-awareness, and adaptability in service delivery. This approach bridges the gap between intercultural communication theory and hospitality management in reality, expressing service encounters as culturally-related interactions rather than purely functional exchanges.

Fundamentally, the study positions ICC as a vital determinant of service quality, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding satisfaction in increasingly globalized multicultural environments.

1.2.2 Practical need

The practical need for this study is driven by the growing demand for culturally sensitive services in a globalized tourism market. While hotels often prioritize operational efficiency, service quality can still be undermined by cultural

misunderstandings regarding communication styles or service expectations. By applying Deardorff's (2006) framework focusing on openness, cultural knowledge, and adaptability and considering Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, hotels can better adapt their services to meet with diverse guest cultural expectations. This research provides hoteliers with evidence-based insights to integrate ICC into staff training and standard operating procedures.

Fundamentally, providing front-line employees with these skills allows hotels to deliver more highly satisfactory service, encouraging the guest loyalty and gaining the competitive advantage necessary for success in international tourism.

1.2.3 Contextual need

The contextual need for this study comes from the necessity to develop localized knowledge that reflects Vietnam's unique hospitality landscape. While global service models are widely available, there are little relevant studies and research done with relation to emerging markets like Vietnam.

While destinations like Mui Ne, Lam Dong attract more international tourists from an increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds, the intersection of local service quality standards and global guest expectations creates a multicultural environment where standardized Western frameworks may be insufficient or worst even failed. By focusing on ICC within the Vietnamese context, this research generates real-life insights that help local hotels adapt global theories to suit local realities, conditions and standards.

Thus, this study provides a reference model for other rapidly developing tourism markets, supporting Vietnam's efforts to enhance its international competitiveness through culturally responsive and high-quality service delivery.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The hospitality industry thrives on delivering exceptional guest experiences, with guest satisfaction serving as a critical measure of success. While many factors such as facilities, amenities, and pricing would be expected to technically contribute to satisfaction, interpersonal communication between hotel staff and guests often

plays a decisive role. In today's globalized tourism market, where guests come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, effective communication is not only a matter of language proficiency but also of ICC.

Despite its importance, ICC is not always prioritized in hotel staff training and strategies. Many hotels emphasize technical service skills but pay limited attention to ICC, leaving staff unconfident to navigate through cultural differences and encounters regarding different guests' expectations, and interaction styles. This gap can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or even conflicts, negatively affecting guest satisfaction.

Scholarly research has addressed service quality and customer satisfaction extensively, however, the apparent correlational link between staff ICC and guest satisfaction in the hotel industry remains under-explored. This gap is particularly evident in Asian contexts such as Vietnam, where empirical research on the relationship between staff ICC and guest satisfaction is limited and minimal.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the insufficient understanding of how ICC among hotel staff influences guest satisfaction in the hotel industry, particularly in the context of Vietnam's growing international tourism sector.

1.4 Research objectives and questions

1.4.1 Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between ICC of hotel staff and guest satisfaction within the hotel industry. In the context of increasing globalization and cultural diversity in tourism, effective intercultural communication has become a critical factor influencing service quality and guest experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the intercultural capabilities of front-line employees contribute to shaping guests' perceptions and overall satisfaction.

To achieve this overarching aim, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the ICC levels of hotel staff, focusing on knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This includes identifying strengths and gaps in their ability to navigate cultural differences and adapt during guest interactions.

2. To evaluate guest satisfaction across both tangible dimensions (facilities and amenities) and intangible dimensions (staff behavior, responsiveness, and communication).

3. To analyze the impact of ICC on guest satisfaction, determining how cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability influence the overall guest experience and service quality.

4. To provide practical recommendations for hotel management on integrating ICC into staff training and development programs to enhance competitive advantage in the international market.

1.4.2 Research questions

To achieve the above research objectives, this study seeks to address key questions that explore both the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction, as well as practical implications for the hospitality industry.

1. How significant is the impact of ICC on guest satisfaction in the hotel industry?

Research question explanation: This question aims to examine the overall impact of hotel staff's ICC on guests' perceptions and satisfaction levels. It focuses on determining whether higher levels of ICC, which encompass cultural knowledge, communication skills, and intercultural attitudes, are associated with more positive guest experiences. The analysis also considers how ICC contributes to both tangible and intangible aspects of service quality, with particular emphasis on communication effectiveness, empathy, and adaptability in multicultural interactions.

2. What practical strategies can be recommended for hotel managers to improve ICC and, consequently, guest satisfaction?

Research question explanation: This question seeks to translate research findings into actionable insights for hotel management. It focuses on identifying

effective strategies for enhancing staff ICC, such as targeted training programs, intercultural communication workshops, and continuous professional development initiatives. Additionally, the study explores how hotels can integrate ICC into their organizational practices, including recruitment, performance evaluation, and service standards. The ultimate goal is to provide practical recommendations that help improve service quality, strengthen guest satisfaction, and enhance the hotel's competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized tourism market.

1.5 The significance of the study

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to hospitality management and intercultural communication. Theoretically, it bridges a critical gap by integrating established ICC frameworks, specifically those of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), into the analysis of guest satisfaction, moving beyond traditional operational efficiency to highlight the importance of cultural dimensions in service encounters.

Practically, the research provides hotel managers with evidence-based strategies for front-line staff training, focusing on cultural awareness and adaptability to reduce misunderstandings and improve guest experiences.

Furthermore, the study is highly relevant to emerging markets like Vietnam, offering real-life contextual insights that help local hotels enhance service quality and maintain competitiveness in an increasingly globalized tourism environment.

1.5.1 Theoretical significance

Theoretically, this study advances the literature by integrating established ICC models from Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) into the hospitality framework, positioning intercultural competence as a vital determinant of guest satisfaction. While traditional research often focuses on operational efficiency, this approach highlights how cultural elements such as communication styles, empathy, and adaptability shape service encounters, particularly in non-Western contexts like Vietnam.

By bridging ICC, customer behavior, and service management, the research moves beyond standardized models to offer a more nuanced understanding of service delivery as a culturally embedded interaction. Ultimately, it addresses a significant gap in the literature and provides a theoretical foundation for future studies exploring the complex cultural dynamics of the global hospitality industry.

1.5.2 Practical significance

Practically, this study provides actionable insights for hotel managers navigating an increasingly globalized market where effective cross-cultural communication is a critical determinant of service success. By applying frameworks like Deardorff's (2006), the research highlights the necessity of developing core competencies such as cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability particularly among front-line staff.

These findings offer an evidence-based foundation for designing comprehensive training programs and refining human resources practices, including recruitment and performance evaluations, to prioritize ICC. Fundamentally, enhancing staff ICC allows hotels to deliver more personalized, culturally responsive service, reducing misunderstandings and fostering the guest satisfaction and loyalty essential for maintaining a competitive advantage in the global hospitality industry.

1.5.3 Contextual significance

Vietnam's rapid emergence as a major Southeast Asian destination makes it a vital context for studying intercultural hospitality encounters. With a surge in arrivals from Europe and Northeast Asia, the industry has shifted into a dynamic multicultural environment where effective communication is paramount. This study focuses on key tourist hubs like Mui Ne, Lam Dong where frequent interactions between local staff and international guests provide a rich setting to examine how ICC influences satisfaction.

As an emerging market with refining service standards, Vietnam presents a unique opportunity to identify gaps in intercultural training compared to established global destinations. Primarily, the insights gained in this study would offer broader

implications for other developing regions facing similar challenges in maintaining service quality within an increasingly globalized tourism landscape.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study focuses on examining the relationship between ICC of hotel staff and guest satisfaction within the hotel industry. To ensure clarity and feasibility, the scope of the research is defined in terms of content, participants, location, and methodology as follows:

Firstly, in terms of content, the study concentrates on the role of ICC as a key independent variable influencing guest satisfaction. ICC is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising intercultural knowledge, communication skills, and intercultural attitudes. Guest satisfaction, as the dependent variable, is assessed through both tangible aspects such as facilities, room quality, and amenities and intangible aspects such as communication effectiveness, staff behavior, and overall hospitality experience. Other factors that may influence guest satisfaction such as pricing, brand reputation or location are not the primary focus of this study.

Secondly, in terms of participants, the research involves two main groups: hotel staff and hotel guests. Hotel staff, particularly front-line employees, are examined to evaluate their level of ICC, while hotel guests are surveyed to measure their satisfaction with the staff ICC they experienced and the services they received. The study primarily targets staff who have direct interaction with international guests and guests who have experienced hotel services during their stay.

Thirdly, in terms of location, the study is conducted in selected hotels in Phan Thiet, a well-known tourist destination in Vietnam. This location is chosen due to its increasing number of international visitors and its relevance as a multicultural service environment. However, the findings may be generalized cautiously to similar tourism destinations within Vietnam and other emerging markets.

Finally, in terms of methodology, the study adopts a quantitative research approach using structured questionnaires to collect data from respondents. Statistical methods such as descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression are employed to

examine the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction. While the quantitative approach allows for measurable and generalizable findings, it may not capture deeper qualitative insights into individual experiences or perceptions.

In summary, this study is limited to examining the impact of ICC on guest satisfaction within a specific geographical and industrial context. These boundaries are necessary to maintain focus and ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

1.6.1 Industry context

Within the global hospitality sector, particularly in growing markets like Vietnam, service quality depends heavily on navigating the complexities of a diverse international clientele. While cultural diversity expands market potential, it also introduces challenges in communication and service expectations that technical skills alone cannot resolve. Front-line staff serve as the primary contributors to the guest experience; consequently, their ability to manage intercultural interactions often dictates first impressions and long-term loyalty. This highlights the critical importance of ICC, which allows personnel to adapt their behavior and maintain cultural sensitivity.

Essentially, investing in culturally responsive service practices is essential for hotels to ensure guest satisfaction and remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market.

1.6.2 Geographic focus

Vietnam's rapid emergence as a major Southeast Asian destination makes it a significant and favorable context for studying intercultural hospitality encounters. With a surge in arrivals from Europe and Northeast Asia, the industry has shifted into a dynamic multicultural environment where effective communication is becoming important and decisive.

This study focuses on key tourist hubs like Mui Ne, Lam Dong where frequent interactions between local staff and international guests provide a rich setting to examine how ICC influences satisfaction. As an emerging market with developing

service standards, Vietnam presents a unique opportunity to identify gaps in intercultural training compared to established global destinations.

Purposely, the insights gained here offer broader implications for other developing regions facing similar challenges in maintaining service quality within an increasingly globalized tourism landscape.

1.6.3 Participants

The study involves two primary participant groups essential to intercultural service encounters: hotel staff and international guests. The staff participants consist of front-line employees such as receptionists, concierge, and customer service personnel who are central to the assessment of ICC due to their frequent, direct interactions with culture-diverse clientele.

Conversely, the international guest participants provide critical evaluative feedback on both tangible and intangible service aspects, reflecting a wide range of cultural expectations and satisfaction levels. By studying these two relevant perspectives, the research effectively links the service provider's intercultural competencies with the customer's perception of quality and outcomes, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive analysis of the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction.

1.6.4 Variables in the research

This study examines the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry. In this research, ICC is considered the independent variable, while guest satisfaction serves as the dependent variable. The concept of ICC is based on the theoretical frameworks developed by Michael Byram (1997) and Darla K. Deardorff (2006), who describe intercultural competence as a multidimensional ability that enables individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. According to these frameworks, ICC consists of three main dimensions: intercultural knowledge, which refers to an individual's understanding of different cultures and communication practices; intercultural skills, which involve the ability to adapt behavior and communication

strategies in intercultural situations; and intercultural attitudes, which include openness, respect, empathy, and a willingness to engage with cultural diversity.

Guest satisfaction in this study is evaluated through both tangible and intangible aspects of the hotel experience. Tangible elements include the physical facilities, room quality, cleanliness, and other visible services provided by the hotel. Intangible elements involve factors such as communication quality, staff responsiveness, professionalism, empathy, and the ability of employees to understand and meet the expectations of guests from different cultural backgrounds. While tangible aspects contribute to the overall impression of service quality, intangible interactions often play a crucial role in shaping guests' perceptions and emotional responses during their stay.

The study is built on the assumption that hotel staff who possess higher levels of intercultural communicative competence are better equipped to interact with international guests in a respectful, effective, and culturally appropriate manner. Employees with strong intercultural knowledge can better understand cultural differences and avoid misunderstandings, while those with well-developed intercultural skills can adapt their communication styles to meet the needs of diverse guests. In addition, positive intercultural attitudes help staff demonstrate respect, patience, and empathy, which are essential qualities in customer service. As a result, guests are more likely to feel valued, understood, and comfortable throughout their stay. By examining the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction, this study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of hotel staff contribute to service quality in a multicultural environment. The research proposes that higher levels of intercultural competence can lead to more positive guest experiences, greater satisfaction with hotel services, and stronger intentions to return or recommend the hotel to others. Fundamentally, the study highlights the importance of developing intercultural competencies among hospitality employees as a strategy for improving service outcomes, enhancing guest loyalty, and maintaining competitiveness in an increasingly globalized tourism industry.

1.7 Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction in the hotel industry, given the circumstances of an emerging tourist destination like Mui Ne, Lam Dong together with limited localized studies, several limitations must be acknowledged.

1.7.1 Geographical limitation

This study is geographically limited to hotels operating within Vietnam, with data primarily collected from selected hospitality establishments located in popular tourist destinations such as Mui Ne, Lam Dong. Vietnam has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's fastest-growing tourism markets, attracting an increasing number of international visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds. This dynamic tourism environment makes Vietnam an appropriate setting for examining the role of ICC in the hospitality industry. However, the findings of this study are inevitably influenced by the unique sociocultural, economic, and operational characteristics of the Vietnamese hospitality sector. Factors such as local service practices, workforce composition, cultural values, management styles, and guest expectations may shape how intercultural communication is performed and perceived within hotel settings.

As a result, the conclusions drawn from this research may not be directly applicable to hotels operating in other countries or regions. Hospitality organizations in different parts of the world often function under distinct cultural norms, business environments, tourism infrastructures, and service standards. For instance, hotels in highly developed tourism destinations may have more extensive intercultural training programs, greater experience serving international guests, and different approaches to customer service management. Similarly, guest expectations and communication preferences can vary significantly across cultures, which may influence the relationship between staff intercultural competence and guest satisfaction. Therefore, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize the findings of this study beyond the Vietnamese hospitality context.

1.7.2 Sample limitation

Due to time and resource constraints, this study's generalizability is limited by its focus on a specific number of hotels in Mui Ne, Lam Dong, which may not reflect the broader hospitality industry. The sample primarily includes a small number of accessible front-line staff and international guests, potentially omitting the perspectives of domestic guests or managerial staff.

Additionally, the use of convenience sampling rather than random selection may introduce bias and affect the representativeness of the findings. While the sample size is adequate for the current research scope, future studies should utilize larger, more diverse populations across multiple regions to enhance the reliability and broader application of the results.

1.7.3 Self-reported data

This study's reliance on self-reported data from surveys and interviews introduces potential biases, most notably social desirability bias, where staff may overestimate their ICC and guests may provide responses influenced by politeness. Subjectivity further complicates the findings, as individual cultural backgrounds and experience levels can lead to varying interpretations of service standards and survey items.

Additionally, response biases such as the tendency toward agreement or neutral answers may affect data reliability. To mitigate these issues, the study ensures participant anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honesty.

While self-reporting is a standard practice for measuring perceptions, future research should integrate more objective methods, such as direct observation or customer feedback analysis, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the staff-guest interaction.

1.7.4 Focus on front-line staff

This study focuses on front-line employees, such as receptionists and concierge staff, due to their direct role in intercultural communication and guest experience. While this focus captures the most visible interactions, it excludes back-

office personnel including housekeeping, kitchen, and maintenance teams whose contributions to room quality and operational efficiency are equally vital to guest satisfaction.

Because service excellence relies on interdepartmental coordination, limiting the scope to front-facing roles provides a focused but incomplete view of the hotel's organizational ecosystem. Nevertheless, the emphasis on front-line staff is justified by the study's objective to examine direct communicative encounters.

Future research should adopt a more holistic approach, incorporating back-of-house staff and internal systems to fully understand how all hotel functions collectively influence satisfaction in a multicultural environment.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the importance of ICC within an emerging tourism destination. The findings contribute to the growing sector of literature on intercultural communication and hospitality management by providing evidence from a developing tourism market that has received relatively limited scholarly attention.

Furthermore, the research highlights the practical significance of developing intercultural skills among hotel employees to enhance service quality and guest satisfaction in culturally diverse environments. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this research in different geographical locations, including both developed and developing tourism destinations, to compare findings across various cultural and organizational contexts. Such comparative research would help strengthen the generalizability of existing knowledge and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how communicative competence influences guest experiences in the global hospitality industry.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 Intercultural communication competence

ICC is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures, a vital skill in the hospitality industry. Widely recognized as a multidimensional construct, ICC comprises knowledge which is understanding cultural norms, skills which is adapting verbal and non-verbal cues, attitudes which is the openness and respect, and motivation which is the proactive engagement.

Deardorff's (2006) framework emphasizes that ICC is a dynamic, ongoing process where internal shifts like empathy and flexibility lead to better external communication. In practice, staff with high ICC can interpret diverse communication styles and personalize service to meet specific cultural expectations.

According to Grobelna (2015), intercultural competence is a crucial skill in the hospitality industry because employees frequently interact with guests from different cultural backgrounds. The ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences can enhance communication effectiveness, improve service quality, and contribute to positive guest experiences.

Ultimately, ICC is a critical professional competency that directly drives service quality and guest satisfaction in a globalized market.

2.1.2 Guest satisfaction in the hotel industry

Guest satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of whether a service meets or exceeds a guest's expectations (Oliver, 1980). It is driven by two primary frameworks: the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, which posits that satisfaction results from comparing prior expectations to actual performance, and the SERVQUAL Model, which measures quality through tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

Badu-Baiden, F., Agyeiwaah, E., & Osei, B. A. (2025) examined ICC among tourism and hospitality students in Macau and found that cultural diversity awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity were significant predictors of ICC. The authors argued

that hospitality organizations increasingly require employees who can interact effectively with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds.

While physical facilities are important, intangible interpersonal interactions with front-line staff are often the most significant drivers of satisfaction. Because these interactions are culturally influenced, guest expectations regarding politeness and communication styles vary. Consequently, staff who demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability are more likely to achieve positive . Ultimately, managing both tangible standards and intercultural interpersonal competencies is essential for maintaining a competitive advantage in the global hospitality market.

2.1.3 Intercultural communication in hotel industry contexts

Hotels act as cultural contact venues where staff must navigate diverse languages, values, and behavioral norms. While this diversity is a hallmark of global tourism, it increases the risk of miscommunication when behaviors are filtered through one's own cultural framework (Pizam, 1999). Differences in eye contact, physical distance, and high-context versus low-context communication styles can lead to service failures if not managed with intercultural awareness.

Front-line employees with high ICC are better equipped to adapt their styles, demonstrate empathy, and handle service recovery effectively (Mattila, 2006). This adaptability fosters trust and ensures guests feel respected, driving long-term loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Beyond individual talent, organizational training in cultural awareness is essential for improving service quality (Sharma & Wu, 2015).

The hospitality industry is characterized by frequent interactions between employees and guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently, ICC has become a critical professional skill that enables employees to communicate effectively and appropriately, minimize cultural challenges and misunderstandings, and deliver culturally responsive services. Previous studies have suggested that higher levels of ICC contribute to better service encounters and guest satisfaction (Grobelna, 2015; Koc, 2021)

Primarily, developing ICC allows hotels to turn cultural challenges into opportunities for personalized, high-quality service and competitive advantage.

2.1.4 Linking ICC and guest satisfaction

The relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction is rooted in the quality of service encounters. According to the Service-Profit Chain Model (Heskett et al., 1994), employee competence drives service quality, which ultimately leads to customer loyalty and profitability. In a multicultural environment, ICC is a vital component of this competence, enabling staff to deliver personalized culturally sensitive service that creates positive emotional experiences.

ICC serves as a mediator between standardized service delivery and guest perception; employees who demonstrate stronger empathy and adaptability add value that technical skills alone cannot provide. While studies in Western and East Asian contexts (Barrett & Davidson, 2010; Kim & Choi, 2016) confirm a positive correlation between ICC and satisfaction, a significant research gap remains in Southeast Asia.

Lam, R., Cheung, C., & Lugosi, P. (2021) find that employees' cultural and emotional intelligence significantly influence guest satisfaction, and that guests evaluate service quality partly through their perceptions of staff cultural adaptability.

Roodhi et al. (2025) positions that ICC positively influences tourist satisfaction. Communication skills and interaction quality partially mediate the relationship. High-quality intercultural interactions enhance satisfaction among international visitors.

This study addresses that gap by examining how ICC influences guest satisfaction within Vietnam's unique cultural landscape, specifically among front-line staff in Mui Ne's four-star hotels to enhance service quality in a globalized market.

2.1.5 Research gap

Despite growing literature on ICC and service outcomes, several gaps currently appear.

First, research remains insufficient in Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Vietnam, which limits or even differentiates with the generalizability of Western-focused findings to this rapidly growing tourism market.

Second, many studies oversimplify ICC by equating it solely with language proficiency, thereby neglecting critical dimensions such as cultural knowledge, empathy, and adaptability.

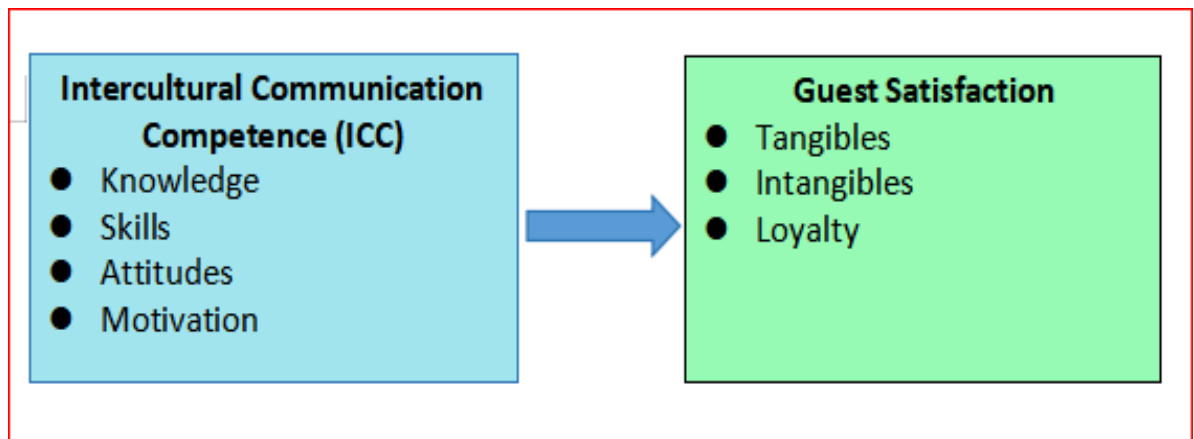
Third, there is a lack of empirical, data-driven evidence directly linking staff ICC to guest satisfaction in real-world hotel settings. This study addresses these deficiencies by adopting a multidimensional perspective and quantitative methods to examine how intercultural competence influences guest experiences in four-star hotels in Mui Ne, Lam Dong, Vietnam.

2.2 Conceptual framework

This study posits that ICC is a significant predictor of guest satisfaction. ICC is conceptualized as a multidimensional independent variable comprising knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation while guest satisfaction serves as the dependent variable, encompassing both tangible facilities and intangible interpersonal interactions.

The framework assumes a direct, positive relationship that higher ICC enables staff to better interpret cultural signals and adapt their service, leading to superior interaction quality. Established in the Service-Profit Chain Model, this logic suggests that in the inherently interpersonal world of hospitality, ICC acts as the primary pathway through which service quality is delivered and perceived.

Substantially, employees who demonstrate cultural empathy and flexibility create more meaningful guest experiences, offering the basic grounds for the research hypothesis and empirical analysis.



Picture 2.1 *The linking between ICC and guest satisfaction*

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study uses a mixed-methods research design to examine the hotel staff's perception of ICC and how staff ICC relates to the satisfaction levels of guests. By using both quantitative and qualitative methods together with observations on guest-staff interactions, the study is able to present a view of the topic that is broad and includes many details. There are measurable statistical patterns in the data, and there are individual accounts of experiences. On the quantitative side, the study uses a cross-sectional survey to gather data from the staff and guests at a four star hotel in Mui Ne, Lam Dong.

In order to provide more information beyond those numbers, the study also include a qualitative part that consists of interviews with staff and guests. In the conversations, participants are able to describe how they encounter service in the hotel, the challenges that arise from cultural differences but also how they perceive communication.

Because this design is correlational, the study identifies how the variables change at the same time. By combining data, the study is a presentation of a perspective that is balanced and contains much information. The study use this approach to assess the range and the specific details that are necessary to understand how cultural agility is a factor in hospitality.

To summarize, this research design is appropriate for the objectives of the study. In addition, it is a method that allows for an analysis of the role of ICC in guest satisfaction that is extensive as well as thorough.

3.2 Research setting and participants

The study was conducted at Bamboo Village Resort, a four-star resort located 38 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Mui Ne, Lam Dong, Vietnam. This resort was selected as the research setting due to its strong reputation as an international tourist venue, where a large proportion of guests come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As

a result, the resort provides a highly relevant context for examining ICC in real service encounters.

The hotel was purposely chosen because it represents a section of the hospitality industry that is highly exposed to intercultural interactions. Front-line staff at the resort including receptionists, restaurant staff, guest service employees, and Spa therapists who regularly engage with international guests, making ICC a critical component of their daily work. This setting therefore offers valuable opportunities to observe and measure how ICC is applied in practice and how it influences guest perceptions.

This study utilized convenience and purposive sampling to survey front-line hotel staff and international guests, ensuring a focus on those directly involved in intercultural service delivery and evaluation. These groups were selected to capture real-world interactions within an international hospitality environment, providing a direct link between staff communication behaviors and guest satisfaction.

Two groups of participants include:

3.2.1 Hotel staff

The study purposely selected 30 front-line employees who are from 25 to 35 years old having from 2 to 5 years of hospitality experience. The participants were chosen based on their frequent interaction with the guests, including receptionists, guest relation agents, restaurant servers, and Spa therapists whose face-to-face communication directly shapes guest satisfaction. By intentionally including staff with diverse professional backgrounds and levels of intercultural exposure, the study captures a broad range of competencies essential for delivering effective, culturally sensitive service in an international hotel setting.

Table 1. Staff participants' demographic information

Department	Reception	Guest relation	Restaurant	Spa
Male (n = 14)	2	2	10	
Female (n = 16)	3	2	7	4

3.2.2 Hotel guests

A selection of fifty (50) hotel guests participated in this study. The participants were primarily international travelers visiting Vietnam for leisure purposes, with the majority coming from European countries like Germany, Russia, Britain, France etc. On average, these guests stayed at the resort for approximately five to seven nights, providing them with sufficient time to experience various aspects of the hotel's services and interact with staff across different departments and outlet of service.

The inclusion of international guests is particularly important for this study, as they represent diverse cultural backgrounds and communication expectations. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into how ICC among hotel staff influences service experiences and overall satisfaction. By focusing on guests who recently stayed or are still staying at the hotel, the study ensures that their evaluations are based on fresh and relevant experiences.

The study looks for guests who were available and willing to complete a post-stay survey. These guests could be recommended for selection by the staff after their interactions during the guests' stay in the hotel. This approach allowed for efficient data collection within the operational aspects of the hotel environment. Although method may limit the generalizability of the findings, it is considered suitable for research in real-life hospitality settings.

Overall, the selected group of hotel guests provides a relevant and practical basis for measuring guest satisfaction in intercultural service encounters, well supporting the objectives of the study.

Table 2. Guest participants' demographic information

Nation	Russia	Germany	France	Poland	Britain	Sweden
Male (n = 27)	7	6	5	4	3	2
Female (n = 23)	6	5	4	3	2	3

3.3 Research instruments

Data for this study will be collected using a combination of structured surveys and semi-structured interviews to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research variables.

The quantitative phase use standardized questionnaires distributed to both hotel staff and guests, designed to measure levels of ICC and guest satisfaction through Likert's scale. To complement these numerical findings, the qualitative phase involves related interviews conducted with both staff and guests. These interviews allow participants to share feedback, comments for evaluation of their service encounters, providing rich, contextual insights into the challenges and successes of intercultural communication that surveys alone might miss.

In addition, in order to consolidate the data relevant and necessary for the thesis, the study included close situational observations of interactions between staff and guests when guests experience service under-expectation, language barriers appear, cultural challenges or misunderstanding happen, or even worst, guest's service complaints arise. The study also observe how staff communicate with guests

to provide the guests with the hotel's service outlet information, resort facility regulations, current offers by guests' own language printouts. The selection of guests' popular and traditional cuisine for serving meals in the hotel is also regularly noticed.

By collecting data from both groups through several ways, the study achieves a more balanced and validated perspectives on the relationship between staff skills and the guest experience.

3.3.1 Staff's ICC questionnaire

The staff ICC questionnaire was produced after a great deal of observations on daily interactions between staff and guests, with the format adapted from the frameworks developed by Deardorff (2006) and Chen and Starosta (2000), as these models are widely recognized in the field of intercultural communication. They were selected to provide a solid theoretical basis for assessing intercultural competence among hotel employees. The questionnaire focuses on four main dimensions including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation. Together, these dimensions reflect the ability of staff members to communicate and interact effectively with guests from different cultural backgrounds.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure participants' responses because it allows attitudes and competence levels to be quantified in a simple and practical way. Several items were revised to make the wording clearer and more suitable for the hospitality setting. Particular attention was given to situations that employees commonly encounter when serving international guests. This helped ensure that the questionnaire reflected real workplace experiences rather than abstract concepts.

In general, the instrument provides a useful method for evaluating intercultural communicative competence in the hotel industry. The data collected from the questionnaire can be used to investigate whether higher levels of intercultural competence are associated with greater guest satisfaction and improved service quality.

Section 1: Staff information

1. Department: ☐ Front Office ☐ Customer care ☐ Food & Beverage ☐ Spa
2. Years of working experience: ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–3 years ☐ More than 3 years

Section 2: Intercultural communication competence

1. I communicate with international guests clearly and politely.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
2. I can accurately understand the needs and requests of guests from different cultures.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
3. I show respect for guests' cultural backgrounds when communicating with them.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
4. I maintain professionalism and friendliness when interacting with international guests.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
5. I feel confident and comfortable communicating with guests from different cultures.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
6. I believe my communication skills contribute to guest satisfaction.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
7. I can adapt my communication style to meet guests' cultural expectations.
☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

Figure 3.1 Staff's ICC

3.3.2 Staff's ICC interviews

In addition to the surveys, interviews with hotel staff will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their daily experiences and challenges when interacting with guests across cultures, and how they overcome them successfully. These conversations allow employees to explain the real-world cultural challenges they face and the specific ways they handle guest needs, as well as what training and skills they especially need to consolidate their ICC.

By talking directly with the staff, we can better understand how their communication skills actually work in practice and identify any difficulty that a simple survey might miss.

3.3.3 Guest satisfaction survey

Section 1: Guest information (optional) 1. Nationality: _____ 2. Length of stay: ☐ 1–2 nights ☐ 3–5 nights ☐ More than 5 nights Section 2: Communication & Satisfaction 1. Staff communicated with me clearly and politely. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 2. Staff understood my needs and requests accurately. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 3. Staff showed respect for my cultural background. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 4. Staff communicated with professionalism and friendliness. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 5. I felt comfortable communicating with the staff. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 6. Overall, I am satisfied with the service provided by the resort staff. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree 7. My experience at this resort met or exceeded my expectations. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree
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Figure 3.2 Guest satisfaction questionnaire

3.3.4 Guest satisfaction interviews

To get the guest's perspective, interviews with hotel guests will also be conducted to better understand their satisfaction. These conversations allow guests to describe their personal experiences with the staff and how well they felt understood during their stay.

By listening to their stories, we can see exactly which communication behaviors made them feel welcome and identify the specific moments where staff skills truly improved their overall experience.

3.3.5 The reliability of the questionnaires

Prior to handing out the questionnaires to 30 (thirty) front-line staff and 50 (fifty) in-house guests, a reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the internal consistency and suitability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of the items measuring staff's ICC and guest satisfaction. This step was necessary to verify that the questionnaire items consistently reflected the underlying constructs and were appropriate for use in the main study. Only after the instrument achieved acceptable reliability levels, the finalized questionnaires distributed for official data collection.

Before conducting inferential surveys, the internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. This reliability test ensured that the items within each construct such as ICC dimensions and Guest Satisfaction were measuring the same underlying concept consistently. Only scales achieving a coefficient of 0.70 or higher were considered acceptable for further analysis.

Table 3.1 Cronbach's alpha analysis for staff ICC questionnaire

<i>Case Processing Summary</i>			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	30	100,0
	Excluded ^a	0	,0
	Total	30	100,0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

<i>Reliability Statistics</i>		
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	
,712	7	

Table 3.2 Cronbach's alpha analysis for guests' satisfaction questionnaire

<i>Case Processing Summary</i>			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	50	100,0
	Excluded ^a	0	,0
	Total	50	100,0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

<i>Reliability Statistics</i>		
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	
,709	7	

3.4 Data collection procedure

The data collection process was conducted systematically to ensure high response rates while maintaining strict ethical standards. The procedure was divided into the following four phases.

3.4.1. Administrative permission

Before initiating the study, formal approval was sought and obtained from the hotel's executive management. This stage involved a briefing on the study's objectives and an agreement on the timeline to ensure that data collection activities did not interfere with daily hotel operations or the guest experience.

3.4.2 Staff surveys

Primary data from the workforce was gathered through structured surveys. To minimize work-related stress and ensure focused responses, surveys were distributed specifically during scheduled shift breaks. The research emphasized that participation was voluntary, and staff members were given a private space to complete the questionnaires to avoid any perceived pressure from supervisors.

3.4.3 Guest surveys

To capture a comprehensive view of service quality, guest surveys were administered using a hybrid approach:

In-person: Hard copies were provided at the front desk during the checkout process for immediate feedback.

Digital: Electronic surveys were dispatched via email to guests who had recently completed their stay, allowing for convenience and a higher reach across different demographic segments.

3.4.4 Ethical considerations and consent

The integrity of the data was protected through a rigorous consent framework. Before any data was recorded, all participants were presented with an informed consent briefing that outlined the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. To encourage honest feedback and protect respondent identity, all participation was kept strictly anonymous, with no personally identifiable information (PII) linked to the final datasets.

3.5 Data analysis plan

To analyze the data, the study use a mixed-methods approach.

First, the survey data will be processed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to find links between staff skills and guest happiness.

Second, the interviews with staff and guests will be reviewed to find common themes and stories that explain the survey results.

Finally, I will combine both sets of information to get a clear, well-rounded picture of how communication impacts the guest experience.

3.6 Ethical considerations

To maintain the highest standards of research integrity and ensure the protection of all involved parties, this study was conducted in strict accordance with established ethical protocols. The following measures were implemented to safeguard the rights and well-being of the participants:

3.6.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Participation in this research was voluntary. Prior to any data collection, potential respondents were provided with a comprehensive overview of the study's objectives, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty or prejudice. Informed consent was formally obtained from every participant, ensuring they were fully aware of the research context before contributing.

3.6.2 Privacy and data protection

To ensure the study remained ethical and secure, the anonymity and confidentiality of everyone involved were strictly maintained. No names or personal details were linked to the survey or interview answers, so participants could share their honest views without worry.

All information was kept strictly private, and I reported the findings in a way that grouped everyone's answers together. This makes it impossible to trace any specific comment or opinion back to a single staff member or guest.

3.6.3 Data control and security

The data collected throughout this process were used solely for academic purposes related to the completion of this thesis. To prevent unauthorized access or

data breaches, digital files were kept in secure, encrypted storage environments, access was restricted exclusively to the primary researcher, and physical records, where applicable, were stored in locked facilities.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Levels of staff ICC

The assessment of ICC among hotel staff revealed generally moderate to high proficiency levels, particularly within the affective domain. This was most evident in positive professional attitudes, such as a deep-seated respect for cultural diversity and an underlying openness toward various global perspectives. Furthermore, staff demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation, characterized by a proactive willingness to engage and interact with international guests.

However, these competence levels were not uniform across the board; significant variations were observed based on individual professional backgrounds. Specifically, factors such as the length of staff experience, the nature of their specific job positions, and the extent of their prior exposure to formal intercultural training played a decisive role in determining the sophistication of their communicative capabilities.

Figure 4 shows that even though more than a half of the staff (53% neutral) could not confirm that they could adapt their communication style to meet guests' cultural expectations, but a bit more than 3/4 of the staff still believed that they feel confident and comfortable communicating with guests from different cultures.

Moreover, more than three-quarters of the staff (30% strongly agree and 50% agree) answered that they could accurately understand the needs and requests of guests from different cultures. Most importantly, 60% of the staff strongly agreed that they showed respect to guests' cultural backgrounds when communicating with them.

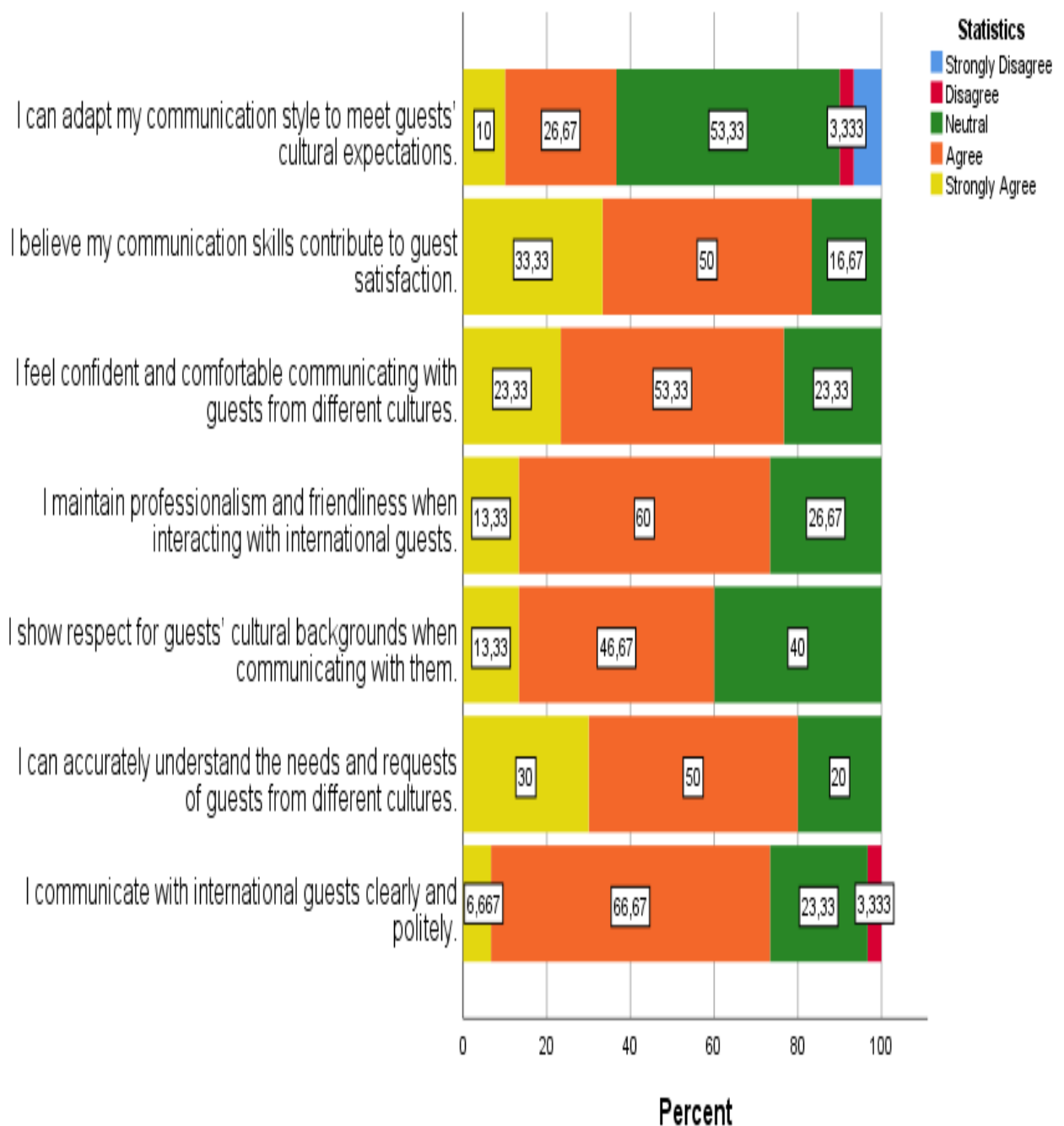


Figure 4.1 Survey of staff's intercultural communication competence

4.1.2 ICC-related staff interviews

When asked “What cultural or communication challenges do you face most when serving international guests?”, serving international guests daily, many staffs responded that sometimes communication difficulties and cultural differences existed

but both the staffs and the guests manage to understand each other with patience and the desire to get across, and with translating tools and apps occasionally.

Additionally, to the question “What skills do you think are most important for communicating effectively with international guests?”, while some staffs had difficulty recognizing the skills, the majority of the staff said that being polite and patient are important while good listening skills would help and also significant are understanding the guests’ body language and showing mutual sympathy.

Most importantly, answering the question “In your opinion, how does intercultural communication affect guest satisfaction?”, a great deal of the staff believed that good communication would make the guests feel comfortable, welcome and happier with the resort’s services.

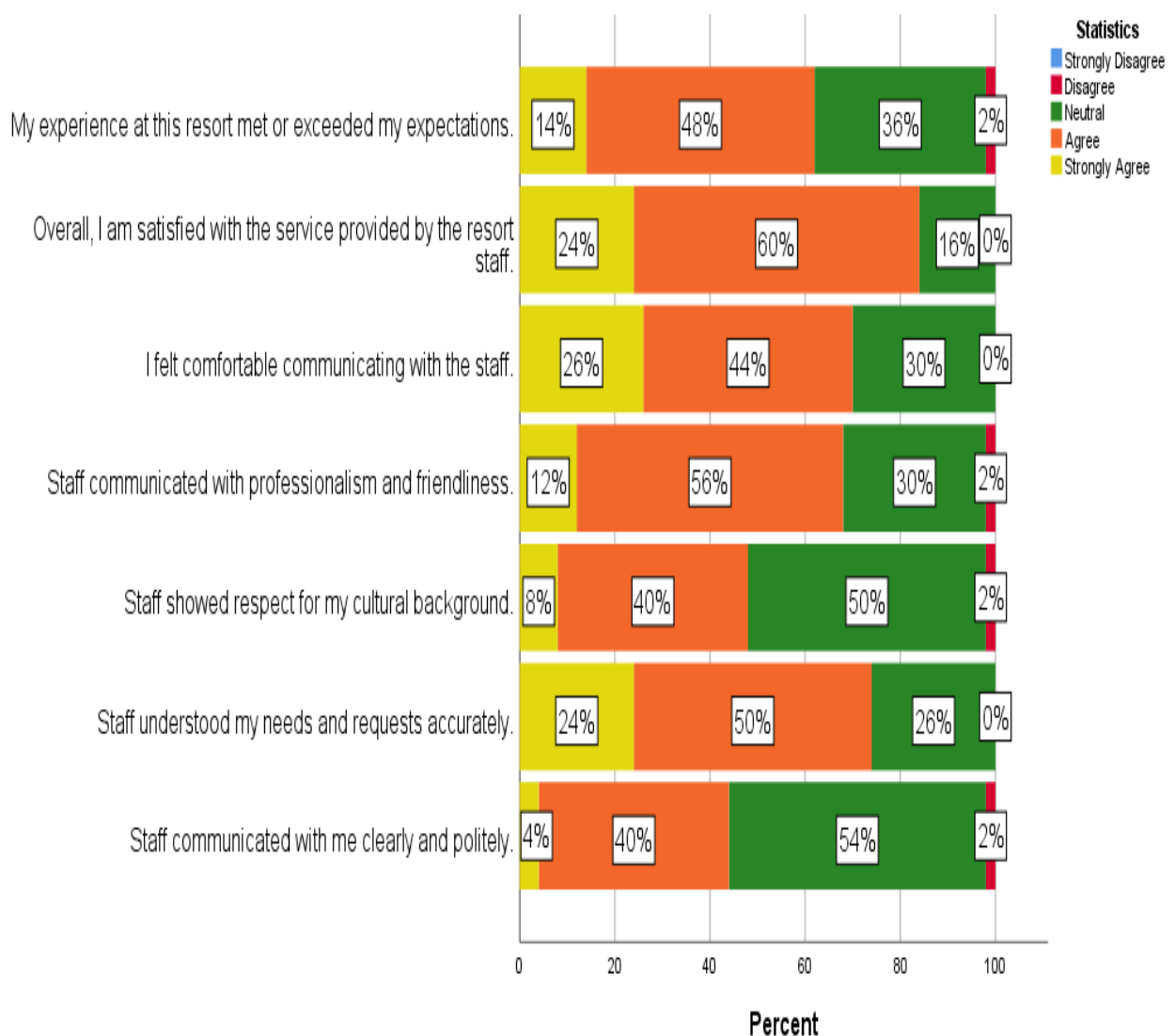
4.1.3 Levels of guest satisfaction

The evaluation of guest satisfaction scores indicates a generally positive reception of the hotel’s offerings, though a clear distinction emerged between physical and interpersonal service delivery. Guests expressed high levels of satisfaction with tangible service aspects, consistently praising the standard of cleanliness, the quality of on-site facilities, and the premium nature of the provided amenities.

In contrast, satisfaction regarding intangible service aspects such as staff empathy, situational adaptability, and nuanced communication styles was less consistent. These interpersonal dimensions were found to be highly dependent on the individual staff member's level of ICC.

Consequently, while the hotel’s physical environment meets high guest expectations, the perceived quality of the service experience fluctuates based on the staff’s ability to navigate cultural nuances and communicate effectively with a diverse international clientele.

Figure 5 shows that just nearly half of the guests believed that staff showed respect for their cultural background (8% strongly agree and 40% agree), and even though more than half of the guests (54% neutral) were not certain if staff



communicated with them clearly and politely, nearly two-thirds of the guests felt that their experience at the resort met or exceeded their expectations

Figure 4.2 Guests’ perception of staff’s ICC

4.1.4 Interviews of guests’ perspectives on staff’s ICC

From the guests’ point of view, while answering ICC relevant questions, many guests appreciated the clear and polite communication and the kind patience by the staffs that contributed to their comfortable and enjoyable stay.

For the first interview question, “Can you describe a specific moment during your stay where a staff member made you feel particularly welcome?”, many guests said that the moment they remembered most were the receptionists who greeted them

in their native language and the customer care agents who checked on their comfort daily.

For another one, when asked, “During your stay, how would you describe the way hotel staff communicated with you?” many guests answered that the staffs communicated politely and clearly with great patience.

Beside, when answering the question “Did the staffs show respect and sensitivity toward your cultural background?” quite a few guests believed that many staffs were kind, polite, and respectful to them. One guest even said, “There was a mix-up with my meal requirements, but the waiter was so patient and culturally aware that he turned a mistake into a great experience. His attitude saved the evening.”

Furthermore, the interviews also focus on how interpersonal communication often outweighs physical amenities in shaping guest satisfaction. When asked about their stay, many guests highlight that while high-quality facilities are expected, it is the personal effort and cultural empathy of the staff that leave a lasting impression.

In particular, when asked “When choosing a hotel, how much do you value staff communication skills compared to the physical facilities?” a majority of the guests responded that facilities are standard across four-star hotels, but the way staff handles their request was what made their stay. One guest even stressed that he would take a smaller room with helpful staff over a suite with cold service any day.

In addition, to the prominent question “Overall, how did staff interpersonal communication influence your satisfaction with the hotel?” the majority of the participant guests responded that the staffs’ fine communication skills and respect for the guests’ cultural background made their stays more enjoyable and satisfied.

These favorable answers to these questions significantly reflected the fact that personal interactions often matter more than physical facilities. While guests expect quality amenities, they emphasize that the ICC such as a staff member’s cultural empathy or patience during a misunderstanding is what truly defines a great stay.

Many respondents noted they would choose a hotel with modest rooms and excellent communication over a luxury resort with cold service. These answers show

that the feeling of being genuinely understood culturally is the most important factor in their overall satisfaction.

4.1.5 Relationship between ICC and guest satisfaction

The analysis confirms a positive and statistically significant correlation between staff ICC and overall guest satisfaction, suggesting that as staff proficiency in navigating cross-cultural interactions increases, there is a corresponding and measurable rise in guest contentment.

Furthermore, ICC is studied to serve as a potent predictor of the guest experience. Among the various dimensions of ICC, specific skills and attitudes emerged as the most influential drivers of this relationship. In particular, the staff's ability to utilize adaptability and conflict resolution skills, combined with foundational attitudes of empathy and openness, proved to be the primary factors in enhancing the quality of international guest encounters and fostering a superior service perception.

Even though it seemed that the more resort's staff were expected to be able to adapt their communication style to meet guests' cultural expectation, they showed moderate to high confident levels of ICC, particularly in attitudes such as respect for cultural diversity, and confidence and willingness to interact with international guests. A big number of the staff asserted that they could accurately understand the needs and requests of guests from different cultures. Variations existed based on staff experience, position, and prior exposure to intercultural training.

Despite the significant indication by the guests that less than half of the staff showed respect for their cultural background, the guests still perceived that many staff communicated with professionalism and friendliness and they understood their needs and requests accurately. These positive perception made the guests felt comfortable communicating with the staff and most importantly a significant number of the guests experienced overall positive satisfaction at the resort.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study offer significant theoretical contributions, primarily by providing empirical validation for established frameworks of intercultural interaction within the hospitality sector. By demonstrating that heightened competence in cross-cultural settings directly enhances service quality perceptions, the results confirm the practical utility of Deardorff's Process Model of ICC. This model posits that internal shifts in attitude such as openness and empathy lead to effective and appropriate external behaviors, which this research identifies as key drivers of guest satisfaction.

Furthermore, the results reinforce the Service-Profit Chain theory, illustrating a clear linkage where employee-level ICC acts as a critical antecedent to customer-level outcomes. This data suggests that ICC is not merely a soft skill but a fundamental component of service value that directly influences guest satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty.

Consequently, this study bridges the gap between intercultural communication theory and service management, establishing ICC as a vital predictor of organizational success in a globalized market.

4.2.2 Practical implications

The research findings suggest several actionable strategies for industry practitioners looking to leverage ICC as a competitive advantage. Primarily, hotel managers should view investment in ICC training programs not merely as an elective expense, but as a strategic necessity that directly correlates with improved guest satisfaction scores. By formalizing these programs, organizations can bridge the gap between technical service delivery and the nuanced interpersonal needs of a global clientele.

Furthermore, these findings indicate a need for a shift in human resource strategies. Recruitment and promotion policies should be refined to prioritize

intercultural competence as a core requirement, placing it on equal footing with traditional technical expertise and linguistic proficiency. Beyond the hiring phase, the implementation of regular workshops is essential, specifically those targeting empathy, non-verbal communication cues, and cross-cultural conflict management. Such targeted professional development ensures that staff remain adaptable and culturally sensitive, yielding a significant payoff in long-term guest relations and institutional reputation.

4.2.3 Contribution to hospitality research

The study makes a significant contribution to the broader field of hospitality research by providing much-needed empirical evidence from the Vietnamese tourism sector. As Vietnam continues to emerge as a global travel hub, the current academic literature regarding ICC within this specific geographic and cultural landscape remains markedly limited. By situating the research here, the study fills a critical gap in the existing body of knowledge, offering a localized perspective that challenges or supports Western-centric service models.

Furthermore, these findings enrich comparative hospitality literature by illustrating the profound impact of cultural context on the dynamics of staff–guest interactions. The research demonstrates that "service quality" is not a universal constant but is instead a socially constructed outcome shaped by the cultural backgrounds of both the provider and the receiver. Ultimately, this work provides a framework for understanding how Vietnamese cultural values such as communication styles and social hierarchies intersect with global service standards to influence overall service outcomes.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Interpreting the findings

The results show that when staff have strong intercultural skills, guests are much happier. This supports the Service-Profit Chain, which says that when employees are good at their jobs, the service becomes more valuable to the guest. This also matches Deardorff's model, which highlights that being able to adapt and show empathy is the real competence to being effective with people from different cultural backgrounds.

A key finding here is that a staff member's cultural-focused attitude and skills matter much more than just knowing facts about a guest. In other words, guests care more about how they are treated than what information the staff knows about the guests. For example, a guest will appreciate a staff member who is patient and respectful much more than one who simply knows a few cultural little facts.

Because of this, hotels should focus their training on soft skills and emotional intelligence. Instead of just teaching staff lists of what they must and must not do, training should help them become more flexible and emotionally aware, as these are the qualities that truly make a guest feel welcome and satisfied.

5.2 Comparison with previous studies

The current findings reinforce a growing body of academic literature, showing a strong consistency with the work of Kim and Choi (2016), Barrett, and Davidson (2010), both of whom established that ICC is a fundamental driver of guest satisfaction within the international hotel sector.

However, this research offers a significant scholarly advancement by shifting the geographical and cultural focus to Vietnam. As an emerging global tourism destination, Vietnam represents an under-researched context where traditional hospitality values intersect with rapidly diversifying international tourism standards.

By providing empirical evidence from this specific region, the study validates the universal applicability of ICC theories while filling a critical gap in the literature regarding Southeast Asian service norms.

5.3 Theoretical implications

This study serves as a critical bridge between abstract communication theory and the practical realities of the service sector. By demonstrating that ICC is a primary engine of guest satisfaction, the research validates the adaptability of Deardorff's (2006) model within a high-stakes commercial environment. It moves the conversation beyond academic theory, positioning ICC not just as a valuable social asset, but also as a fundamental soft skill essential for the success of service industries in an era of strong globalization.

Furthermore, the study refines our understanding of professional competency. It argues that in any industry characterized by high cultural diversity, the traditional definition of "expertise" must be expanded to include intercultural adaptability. By proving that relational skills such as empathy and behavioral flexibility outperform technical or factual knowledge, the research offers a new theoretical foundation for what constitutes a highly skilled service professional nowadays.

5.4 Practical implications

The study's findings provide a strategic road-map for hotel management, shifting the focus from traditional operational metrics to human-centric competencies. Since ICC directly influences guest satisfaction, it should be integrated into the core pillars of human resource management.

5.4.1 Training and development

Management must evolve beyond basic language instruction or "etiquette checklists." Effective training programs should focus on experiential learning, using role-play and simulation to cultivate deep-level soft skills such as empathy, cognitive flexibility, and cross-cultural awareness. These programs should teach staff not just what to say, but how to recalibrate their behavioral style to meet the diverse emotional and cultural expectations of international guests.

5.4.2 Strategic recruitment

Hiring managers should treat intercultural competence as a top priority right from the start of the recruitment process. Instead of assuming these skills can just be

taught to anyone after they are hired, recruiters should use specific interview methods like asking for real-life examples of how a person handled a tricky situation or using judgment tests to find people who are naturally open-minded and adaptable.

This approach ensures you are hiring people who already have the right mindset for working with different cultures, rather than trying to build it from h later on.

5.4.3 Performance valuation

Investing in ICC is much more than just a basic training cost; it is a smart move that helps a hotel succeed in the long run. In today's world, guests come from many different backgrounds, and being able to understand their unique needs is what makes a brand stand out.

When employees are trained to handle cultural differences, they can communicate more clearly and avoid simple mistakes that might upset a guest. This makes every visitor feel respected and truly welcome.

For the hotel, this means better reviews, fewer complaints, and more guests who want to return. Ultimately, building these skills gives the business a real advantage in the global market by showing that they provide world-class service to everyone.

5.4.4 Managerial insight

ICC is much more than just a training cost; it is a smart move for a hotel's long-term success. In today's global market, being able to understand and respect different cultures is what sets a brand apart from its competitors.

When staff members know how to handle cultural differences smoothly, they avoid awkward mistakes and make every guest feel truly welcome. This builds a strong reputation for excellent service, which keeps international travelers coming back and helps the business grow in a competitive world.

5.5 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it has three main drawbacks.

First, because it only captures a single moment in time, it shows a connection between staff skills and guest satisfaction but cannot prove that one causes the other.

Second, the use of surveys means that some participants may have given biased or overly positive answers about their own abilities.

Finally, since the research focused only on a specific region in Vietnam, the findings might not apply to hotels in other parts of the country or, on a larger scale, on the world. Future studies should track these trends over a longer period and across more diverse locations to get a clearer picture.

5.6 Recommendations for future researches

To build upon the current findings and address the identified limitations, the following directions for future research are recommended.

5.6.1 Longitudinal and impact studies

Future research should move beyond the limitations of cross-sectional studies and adopt longitudinal research designs to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and guest satisfaction. Longitudinal approaches allow researchers to collect data over an extended period, making it possible to observe changes and developments that occur over time. This method can provide stronger evidence regarding the direction and nature of the relationship between staff intercultural competence and service outcomes.

One particularly valuable approach would be to examine guest satisfaction levels before and after the implementation of specific ICC training programs for hotel employees. By monitoring staff performance and guest feedback at multiple stages, researchers can assess whether improvements in intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes lead to measurable enhancements in guest experiences. Such an approach would also help identify the time required for training outcomes to become visible in day-to-day service interactions, often referred to as the “lagged effect” of training interventions.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies can provide a more accurate assessment of the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of ICC development initiatives. Rather than capturing only a single snapshot of employee competence, researchers would be able to evaluate whether the benefits of training are maintained over time and whether continued professional development is necessary to sustain high levels of intercultural competence. This would offer valuable insights for hotel managers seeking to allocate resources effectively toward staff development programs.

By adopting longitudinal designs, future research can establish a clearer causal relationship between investments in ICC training and improvements in guest satisfaction, service quality, and customer loyalty. Such evidence would strengthen the theoretical understanding of intercultural competence within the hospitality industry while also providing practical guidance for organizations aiming to enhance their competitiveness in increasingly multicultural tourism environments.

5.6.2 Methodological triangulation

While quantitative methods are valuable for identifying general patterns and relationships between variables, they may not fully capture the complexity of intercultural interactions that occur in hospitality settings. Therefore, future research should consider incorporating qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or in-depth case studies involving both hotel staff and guests. By allowing participants to share their experiences in their own words, qualitative methods can provide richer and more detailed insights into how ICC influences service encounters and guest perceptions.

In particular, qualitative inquiry can help uncover the specific situations and interactions in which intercultural competence plays a decisive role in shaping the guest experience. These “critical incidents” may include moments of misunderstanding, cultural adaptation, conflict resolution, or exceptional service recovery, where an employee’s ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries directly affects guest satisfaction. Examining such incidents in detail would enable researchers to move beyond statistical relationships and gain a deeper

understanding of the practical ways in which intercultural competence is demonstrated in real-world hospitality environments.

Furthermore, qualitative data can reveal the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of intercultural communication that are often difficult to measure through surveys alone. Hotel employees frequently engage in emotional labor, requiring them to manage their emotions, demonstrate empathy, and adapt their communication styles to meet the diverse expectations of international guests. Through interviews and focus group discussions, researchers can explore the challenges staff face when serving culturally diverse customers, the strategies they use to overcome communication barriers, and the emotional demands associated with maintaining high service standards.

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, future studies can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between intercultural competence and guest satisfaction. A mixed-methods approach would not only strengthen the validity of research findings but also provide a more nuanced picture of how intercultural interactions influence service quality, guest experiences, and overall hospitality performance. Such insights could help hotel managers design more effective training programs and create service environments that better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse international clientele.

5.6.3 Diversification of industry contexts

To enhance generalizability, future studies should expand their scope to include a wider variety of hotel types, such as boutique hotels, budget hostels, and eco-resorts.

Comparing ICC's impact on different service delivery would help determine if guests' expectations for intercultural adaptability depends on price point or the specific nature of the hospitality attributes.

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