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PENGUATAN LITERASI MASYARAKAT TENTANG BAHAYA HUMAN TRAFFICKING DI DESA BERAKIT, KABUPATEN BINTAN

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Strengthening Intercultural Communication Skills of Hotel Receptionists Through a Community-Based Tourism Approach in Lanta Nice Beach Resort, Thailand

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Abstract: Intercultural communication competence is essential for hotel receptionists working in multicultural tourism destinations. This study examines how community-based tourism (CBT) principles can strengthen intercultural communication skills among receptionists at Lanta Nice Beach Resort, Thailand. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observational notes, and document analysis related to guest interactions and cultural events. The findings show that CBT-oriented engagement enhances receptionists' cultural awareness, communication adaptability, and problem-solving abilities when serving international guests. Participation in cultural activities, such as Christmas and New Year events, also facilitates reciprocal cultural learning between staff and visitors. Improved intercultural competence contributes to higher service quality and a more culturally inclusive guest experience. This study highlights the potential of CBT as a capacity-building strategy for frontline hospitality workers and offers insights for resorts seeking to strengthen guest satisfaction and promote sustainable tourism practices.

Keyword: Intercultural Communication; Hotel Receptionists; Community-Based Tourism; Cultural Mediation; Hospitality Management

INTRODUCTION

Tourism remains one of the world's largest and fastest-growing sectors, contributing significantly to national income, employment creation, and socio-cultural exchange (UNWTO, 2023). As part of the tourism system, the hospitality industry plays an essential role in shaping tourist experiences through the quality of services delivered by frontline employees. Among these employees, hotel receptionists hold a strategic position because they serve as the first point of contact for guests and act as intermediaries between visitors and the broader service ecosystem (Baum, 2019). Their ability to communicate effectively across cultures is increasingly recognized as a core competency necessary to ensure guest satisfaction, resolve misunderstandings, and promote positive destination images (Hansen et al., 2021).



In multicultural tourism destinations such as Thailand, intercultural encounters occur frequently due to the high diversity of international visitors. Research shows that frontline hospitality employees often face challenges related to language differences, cultural norms, guest expectations, and communication styles (Chang, 2021; Kim & McKercher, 2022). These challenges can impact service delivery if employees lack intercultural communication skills, which include cultural awareness, adaptability, empathy, and the ability to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries (Deardorff, 2020). Consequently, hospitality organizations must adopt capacity-building strategies that strengthen these competencies to ensure a culturally inclusive service environment.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as an effective approach to enhancing intercultural understanding by promoting reciprocal learning between tourism stakeholders, including hotel staff, local residents, and international tourists (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). CBT-oriented practices encourage employees to engage with local cultural knowledge, participate in community events, and interpret cultural values for visitors—thereby positioning frontline workers as cultural mediators. Within hotel settings, integrating CBT principles can strengthen service quality while simultaneously supporting the cultural sustainability of local communities (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2022).

Lanta Nice Beach Resort in Thailand represents a multicultural hospitality environment where receptionists regularly interact with guests from Germany, France, China, Russia, and other countries. Such diversity demands high levels of intercultural competence to manage differing expectations related to communication etiquette, service formality, and cultural interpretations of hospitality. Moreover, receptionists frequently participate in culturally oriented guest activities, such as Christmas and New Year celebrations, which further expose them to cross-cultural interactions and opportunities for cultural facilitation.

Despite the increasing importance of intercultural competence in hospitality, limited research has explored how CBT-oriented engagement can serve as a structured platform for developing these skills among hotel receptionists. Most existing studies focus on general service quality or cultural sensitivity training but do not link these competencies to community-based tourism frameworks.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how intercultural communication skills of hotel receptionists can be strengthened through CBT principles, using Lanta Nice Beach Resort as a case study. Specifically, the study examines (1) the intercultural challenges encountered by receptionists, (2) their roles as cultural mediators in guest interactions, and (3) the contribution of CBT-related activities to their communication competence. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on intercultural communication in hospitality, while offering practical insights for hotels seeking to improve staff capacity and promote sustainable and culturally inclusive tourism practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication, frontline hospitality work, and community-based tourism (CBT) is essential to explain the role of hotel receptionists as cultural mediators in multicultural destinations. This literature review discusses four key areas: (1) intercultural communication competence, (2) hospitality frontline roles, (3) community-based tourism frameworks, and (4) the integration of CBT into intercultural capacity-building within hospitality settings.

2.1 Intercultural Communication Competence in Tourism and Hospitality

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2020). ICC includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions such as cultural awareness, empathy, linguistic ability, and adaptive communication strategies. In tourism contexts, miscommunication often arises due to differing norms, values, and expectations between hosts and guests (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2019). Frontline hospitality employees—including receptionists—must therefore possess ICC to manage diverse interactions, interpret guest needs, and mitigate conflicts (Hansen et al., 2021). Recent studies emphasize that ICC enhances service performance, guest satisfaction, and the perceived authenticity of tourism experiences (Kim & McKercher, 2022). However, the development of ICC among hospitality workers is uneven, especially in small or independent properties that lack formal cultural training programs.

2.2 Frontline Service Roles in Hospitality

Receptionists serve as the “face” of hotel operations and their interactions significantly affect guest perceptions (Baum, 2019). As frontline agents, they perform administrative tasks such as check-in, payments, and inquiries, while simultaneously acting as emotional laborers who maintain composure, provide reassurance, and project hospitality values (Wong & Wang, 2020). In multicultural tourism destinations, receptionists must also navigate cultural differences in expressiveness, politeness rules, time orientation, and service expectations (Chang, 2021). Several scholars note that frontline employees often compensate for communication gaps between international guests and other hotel departments, effectively taking on the role of cultural mediators (Gao & Mattila, 2016). This intermediary function requires not only technical and interpersonal skills but also deep cultural sensitivity.

2.3 Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a Cultural Exchange Framework

Community-Based Tourism is defined as a tourism model wherein local communities actively participate in planning, managing, and delivering tourism experiences (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). CBT emphasizes cultural sustainability, empowerment, and reciprocal learning between hosts and visitors. Beyond its community development value, CBT has been recognized for its capacity to foster intercultural encounters that promote mutual

understanding (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2022). CBT activities—such as cultural festivals, traditional cuisine demonstrations, and local storytelling—create platforms where hospitality employees can engage with cultural knowledge and relay this knowledge to tourists. Thus, CBT functions both as a community-empowerment mechanism and an informal intercultural training environment for tourism workers.

2.4 Integrating CBT into Intercultural Skill Development in Hospitality

Recent literature highlights the potential of experiential learning in developing ICC among tourism workers (Wood & Wilton, 2021). Participation in community events, collaboration with local cultural groups, and involvement in festivals allow frontline staff to practice cultural interpretation and cross-cultural facilitation in real settings. Such exposure strengthens adaptive communication skills, enhances cultural empathy, and improves the ability to negotiate cultural differences (Nguyen & Cheung, 2022). Despite its promise, research linking CBT explicitly to intercultural capacity-building for hotel employees remains scarce. Most studies focus on CBT's community impact rather than its role in professional skill development. This gap underscores the importance of exploring how CBT-oriented engagement—such as that practiced at Lanta Nice Beach Resort—can systematically strengthen ICC among receptionists and enhance service inclusivity in multicultural hospitality destinations.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how intercultural communication competence among hotel receptionists can be strengthened through Community-Based Tourism (CBT) engagement at Lanta Nice Beach Resort, Thailand. A case study approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth examination of real-life practices, contextual dynamics, and cultural interactions within a natural hospitality environment (Yin, 2018).

Data were gathered using three complementary techniques to ensure depth and triangulation:

1. In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with **six receptionists** and **two managers** directly involved in guest relations and cultural activities. Questions focused on intercultural challenges, communication strategies, participation in CBT activities, and perceptions of cultural mediation roles.

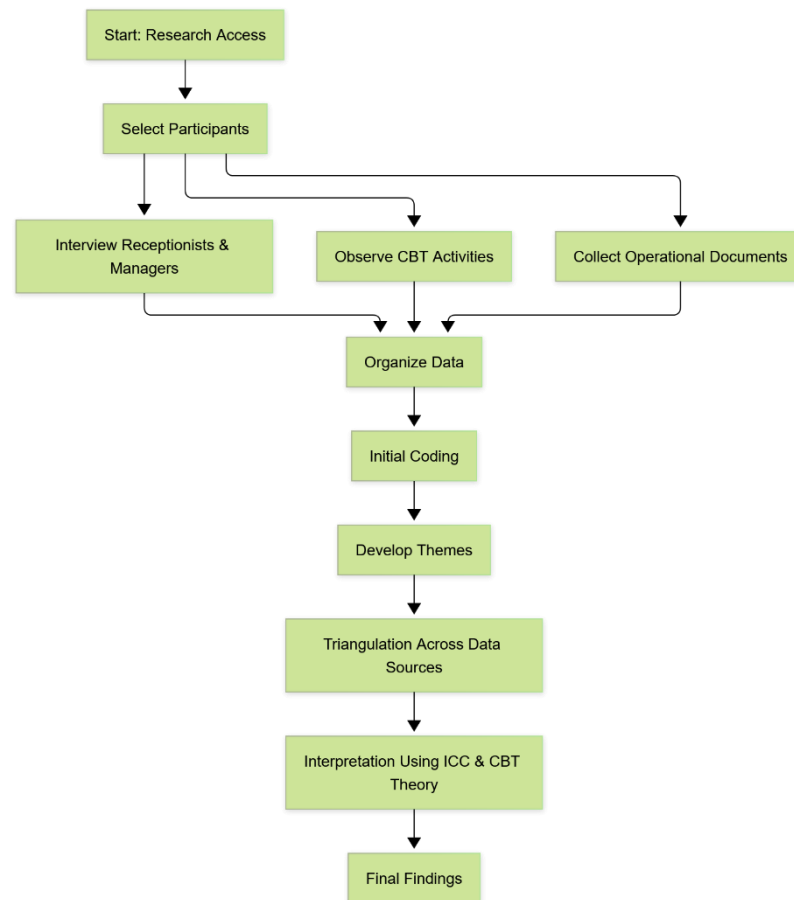
2. Participant Observation

The researcher participated in guest-facing cultural programs such as Christmas celebrations, New Year events, and traditional Thai culinary demonstrations. Field notes captured communication behaviors, staff-guest interactions, and cultural interpretation practices.

3. Document Analysis

Operational documents—including standard operating procedures (SOPs), guest feedback, internal training guides, and promotional materials—were analyzed to understand organizational expectations and cultural positioning.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved coding transcripts, identifying meaning units, clustering



codes into themes, and interpreting themes in relation to intercultural competence and CBT frameworks. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents strengthened the credibility of findings.

Figure 1. Research Method Step

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

This study examined the role of receptionists at Lanta Nice Beach Resort, Thailand, in facilitating intercultural encounters and strengthening guest experience through community-based tourism (CBT) activities. Three major themes emerged from interviews, observations, and document analysis: (1) cultural mediation in frontline service, (2) intercultural challenges in guest interactions, and (3) experiential learning through CBT-based activities.

1. Receptionists as Cultural Mediators in Service Encounters

Receptionists demonstrated responsibilities that extended beyond administrative tasks such as check-in, reservations, and guest inquiries. They frequently acted as cultural mediators, interpreting cultural norms, explaining local practices, and assisting guests in navigating unfamiliar behaviors. For example, they were responsible for bridging communication gaps between

international tourists and staff members who had limited English proficiency, ensuring smooth service delivery. Receptionists also clarified cultural expectations to guests, such as the Thai preference for polite speech, non-confrontational communication, and customary hospitality gestures. These interactions show that receptionists play an important role in shaping tourists' understanding of local culture and reducing misunderstandings that may arise due to cultural distance.

2. Intercultural Challenges Faced by Receptionists

Receptionists encountered recurring challenges related to cross-cultural communication. Differences in communication etiquette emerged as a significant issue. Guests from Western countries tended to express complaints openly and directly, often expecting immediate responses and transparent explanations. In contrast, Asian tourists especially from China, frequently communicated dissatisfaction indirectly or through non-verbal cues. These variations sometimes caused confusion among frontline staff who were accustomed to Thai cultural norms emphasizing politeness and emotional restraint.



Figure 2. Cultural Festival in Lanta Nice Beach

Additionally, differences in comfort standards and holiday rituals contributed to varying guest expectations. During high-season events such as Christmas and New Year celebrations, European and American tourists expected elaborate decorations, music, and festive atmospheres, while Asian guests valued simpler celebrations. These differences required receptionists to adjust their communication style and service approach according to the cultural background of each guest.

3. Experiential Learning Through Community-Based Tourism Activities

Receptionists' participation in CBT-oriented events provided valuable experiential learning that enhanced their intercultural communication competence. For instance, involvement in Christmas Eve celebrations, New Year festivities, and Thai culinary demonstrations created opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange between staff and guests. Through these events, receptionists practiced interpreting cultural symbols, explaining local traditions, and engaging guests in shared experiences.

Cooking sessions featuring Thai cuisine where staff explained ingredients and preparation methods, created a space for cultural dialogue. Guests expressed curiosity about Thai spices, flavors, and cooking techniques, enabling receptionists to serve as cultural interpreters. These activities strengthened their confidence, cultural knowledge, and adaptive communication skills, contributing to more meaningful interactions with international visitors.

4.2 Discussion

The findings align with Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) theory (Deardorff, 2020), which emphasizes the importance of adaptability, cultural self-awareness, empathy, and communication flexibility. Receptionists at Lanta Nice Beach Resort demonstrated these competencies in practice. Their ability to adjust to various communication norms direct, indirect, expressive, or restrained, reflects the behavioral dimension of ICC. Similarly, their role in clarifying cultural expectations mirrors the cognitive and affective components of the model.

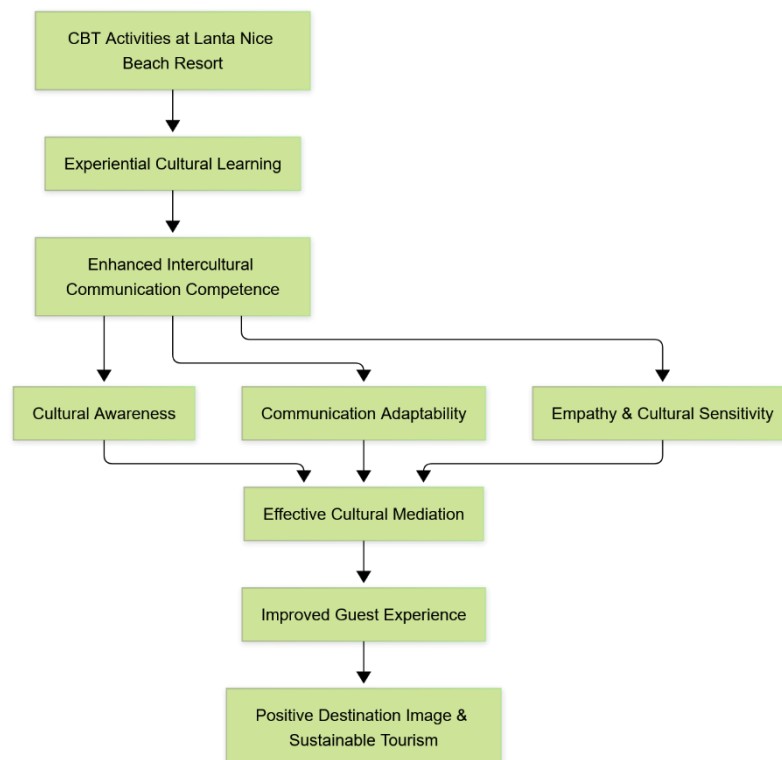


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Intercultural Communication Competence Development through Community-Based Tourism Engagement

The study also confirms that CBT serves as an effective experiential learning platform that strengthens ICC among frontline hospitality workers. CBT promotes reciprocal cultural learning by encouraging direct engagement with cultural events, traditions, and shared social experiences (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). Participation in festive celebrations and culinary demonstrations enhanced receptionists' cultural awareness and expanded their interpretive skills, enabling them to serve as more effective cultural mediators.

Moreover, the findings demonstrate that CBT contributes not only to community empowerment but also to capacity building among hospitality staff, a dimension that remains underexplored in tourism literature. Receptionists gained knowledge about both local culture and global cultural expectations, enabling them to deliver more inclusive and culturally sensitive service. This strengthens destination competitiveness by enhancing the quality of guest experiences and building a welcoming, multicultural environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that receptionists at Lanta Nice Beach Resort play a crucial role as cultural mediators in facilitating meaningful interactions between international guests and the local community. Through participation in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) activities, receptionists develop key components of intercultural communication competence, including cultural awareness, communicative adaptability, and empathy. These competencies enable them to effectively navigate cultural differences, enhance service encounters, and contribute to a more inclusive guest experience. The findings highlight that CBT serves not only as a community empowerment mechanism but also as an experiential learning platform that strengthens the intercultural capacity of frontline hospitality workers. Strengthening these competencies ultimately supports sustainable tourism development by fostering positive destination images and improving cross-cultural understanding. Future research may validate this conceptual model across multiple destinations or explore quantitative measures of intercultural competence among hotel employees.

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