

Intervening for Good: Governmental Intervention for Enhancing Service Worker Capability in Hospitality Business

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ABSTRACT: In the vibrant world of hospitality, the workforce serves as the pillar of regional tourism growth. The symbiotic relationship between hotel staff, the service providers, and guests, the consumers, is at the heart of this industry. Hotels, therefore, must continually enhance their staff quality, as they are the hotel's living embodiment. Recognizing this, the Indonesian government has implemented certification programs through the Tourism Office to maintain service standards. This study delves into the impact of such interventions on service quality. It juxtaposes the self-evaluation of workers (n=325) post-intervention with customer perceptions (n=454), revealing a positive correlation between government intervention, employee self-assessment, and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Government Intervention; Marketing; Human Resources; Hotel; Certification; Service Quality

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important sector in the economic development of a region and the hospitality workforce is a crucial element in realizing the tourism potential (Bondarenko et al., 2019). The interaction that occurs between guests as users and hotels as providers of products and services creates a close relationship that affects the image of a destination (Rodríguez-Victoria et al., 2017). Furthermore, the hospitality workforce is the spearhead of tourism development in an area (Bani-Melhem et al., 2018). This is due to the close relationship created from the interaction between guests as users and hotels as providers of products and services (Yang, 2012). In this context, the quality of service provided by the hospitality workforce is a determining factor for customer satisfaction (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Wai Lai, 2019).

Recognizing the strategic role of the hospitality workforce, the Indonesian government pushes the campaign to increase the service quality standards by the Bill No. 10-2009 on Tourism. Competency certification in tourism, especially hospitality, is further regulated by Indonesian Government Regulation No. 52, 2012. This law encourages local governments to involve themselves in the certification process to ensure the quality of the workforce is in accordance with predetermined standards. In order to improve the effectiveness of the certification policy, the Makassar City Tourism Office, Indonesia, designed a hotel customer satisfaction survey activity. The main objective is to measure the impact of certification on customer perceptions and satisfaction with the hospitality workforce. This understanding is expected to be the basis for the government in making strategic policies to improve the quality of tourism services. This study advances the policy of Tourism Office by establishment of critical intervention controls, such as customer perceptions of the hospitality workforce before and after certification, the effectiveness of measurement tools in reflecting competency development, the potential for customer turnaround, and the extent to which customer recommendations can affect hotel reputation. The survey is then presented for academic conversation.

In the realm of service marketing, the role of government intervention, particularly in the form of service worker certification, is a burgeoning area of interest (Khan & Callanan, 2017). This intervention transcends the traditional regulatory framework, emerging as an innovative mechanism to augment service quality, fortify customer retention, and stimulate economic return (Davis & Robinson, 2006). The certification process acts as a conduit for equipping service workers with the requisite competencies, thereby directly enhancing service quality (Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral, 2019). This enhancement precipitates elevated levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are pivotal to customer retention (Fida et al., 2020). Furthermore, satisfied and loyal customers are inclined towards positive word-of-mouth and repeat patronage (Rita et al., 2019), both of which contribute to revenue augmentation and profitability enhancement (Omoregie et al., 2019). Consequently, government intervention via service worker certification instigates a virtuous cycle of quality enhancement, retention improvement, and return maximization, rendering it an indispensable

strategy in the contemporary competitive service landscape (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2022). This theoretical proposition, backed by empirical evidence, contributes significantly to the marketing literature by elucidating the role of government intervention in service marketing and its downstream effects on customer retention and economic return. This research opens new avenues for further exploration and provides actionable insights for policy-makers and practitioners alike.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Service-Profit Chain

The Service-Profit Chain (SPC) analysis is a strategic corporate analysis that proposes a relationship between profitability, customer loyalty, and employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity (Heskett et al., 2008; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). This analysis attempts to capture theoretical and empirical opportunities previously not covered in various other models of sustainable excellent performance. As a management theory in the service industry, Heskett et al. (2008) started from the empirical phenomenon of the 70s-80s where most companies focused on efforts to achieve significant market share. Meanwhile, the new era of service sector makes the frontline employees who directly interact with customers, to be the focus of companies for maximum results, thus widening the gap competition. The chain in SPC exhibits the delicate proposition relationships that "profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty. Loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is largely influenced by the value of service provided to customers. Value is created by satisfied, loyal, and productive employees. Employee satisfaction, in turn, results primarily from high-quality support services and policies that enable employees to deliver results to customers".

Rucci et al. (1998) released a paper in the Harvard Business Review by examining the success factors of Sears. It is revealed that the excellent performance occurs from the logic and culture of the company with an dettered focus on customers. They observe the relationship between employee behavior and customer satisfaction, which ultimately leads to improved financial performance. One of the main features in SPC is the existence of a satisfaction mirror/reversal effect, where employee satisfaction will affect customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction will cause a mirrorreversal effect where customer satisfaction will encourage the emergence of employee satisfaction because employees feel happy and satisfied when customers are also satisfied (Yee et al., 2010). The intricate chains are also supported in the following study despite it needs a caution (Kamakura et al., 2002).

METHODOLOGY

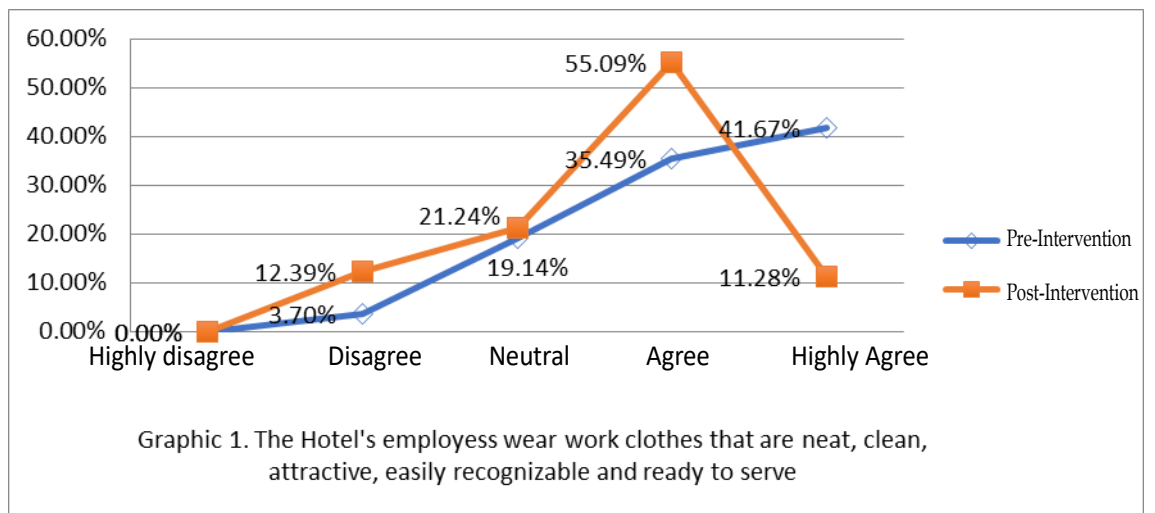
This research uses a survey method by utilizing questionnaires and interviews. The population studied was hotel customers in Makassar City,

Indonesia, with purposive selection of samples based on certain considerations. In the data analysis, first the customer's perception of the hospitality workforce before and after certification will be measured using the index as a measuring tool. Furthermore, the potential for customer switching can move from one hotel to another. Likewise, customer recommendation potential will be measured by looking at the extent to which customers are willing to recommend the hotel to their colleagues, using a certain scale as a reference. Overall customer satisfaction will be evaluated through descriptive statistical analysis. Qualitative questions from customers will be answered through descriptive data analysis. Data collection is conducted using Google Forms or online survey platforms to ensure speed and ease of response from various locations that may be difficult for enumerators to reach. This data analysis aims to conclude the impact of certification on hotel customer satisfaction and provide policy input to the Indonesian Tourism Office.

The implementation of the first and second stages of the survey produced data that was divided according to the time stages of its implementation. The first stage is the customer survey stage to assess their response to the quality of service of hotel employees who have not been certified as many as 325 respondents. The second stage was the implementation of a customer satisfaction survey on the quality of service of hotel employees after they were certified as many as 454 respondents. There were eight (8) optional questions, and one (1) descriptive question on various issues. The eight optional questions will be responded with 5-point Likert scale. The result is accumulated and to exhibit an index of psychological perception.

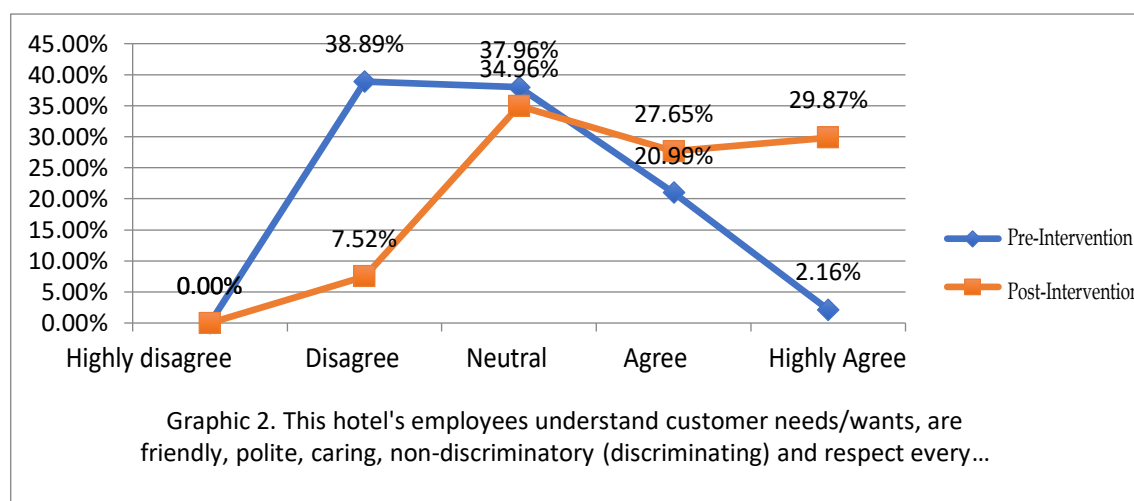
RESULTS

This study presents the first element of tangible variables in hotel services that manifest in company operations. Graphic 1 present how the hotel employees perceive their tangible form of service as evident from their physical presentation. The post intervention measures the customer perspectives after the certification.



Based on the data collection in the first and second stages above, it is clear that for the first question regarding the overall form of service of hotel employees, the majority of respondents as much as 41.67% strongly agreed with the form of service based on the data obtained in the first stage (blue line). This result shows that prior to the implementation of certification, customers strongly agreed that the ability of hotel employees to realize real service was at the best level. The results obtained were then compared with the results of the second phase of the study (red line). The results of the survey on 454 respondents indicated that there was a decrease in the index of customer confidence in hotel employees regarding the realization of their services. However, there was a noticeable increase of 55.09% on the index to four. This indicates that hotels are able to improve their service standards so that they can be positively perceived by customers.

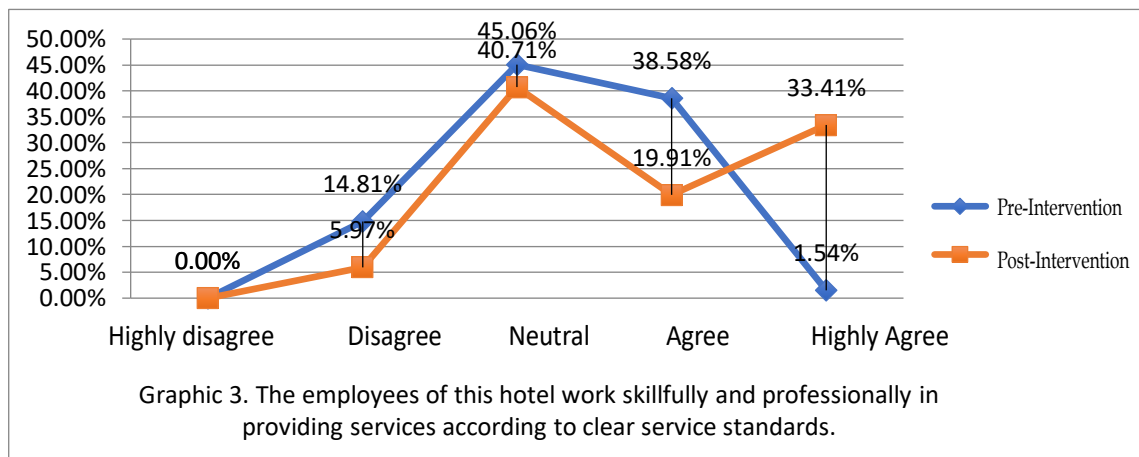
This result is a serious anomaly, and raises the question of whether the certification program actually reduces the ability of hotel employees to deliver real services? This result needs in-depth qualitative investigation but it is suspected that hotel employees are not able to properly apply the competency standards covered by the certification that has been obtained, or the standard operational procedures of certified employees need to be adjusted so that their abilities can be used continuously. This becomes clear because the second stage survey data shows a very large increase from index 4, and there is a large shift from responses at index 5 to index 4. This shows that although the ability of hotel employees is good, adjustments to standard operational procedures are needed so that these abilities can be continuously applied. Schneider, White, and Paul stated that in a service industry such as hotels, a Service Climate is needed that is able to unite the perceptions of managers, employees, and in line with customer desires (1998). The results of the second phase of the survey are expected to have barriers from the standardization of new standard capabilities through certification.



The second question that this survey tries to dissect is the quality of hotel employee service in terms of human touch, namely the empathy factor of

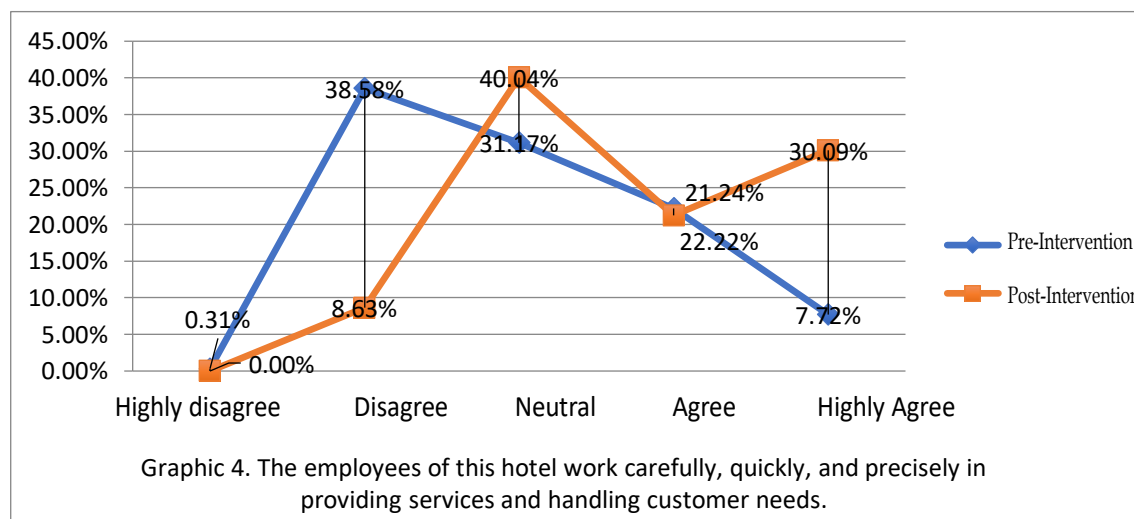
employees in increasing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The descriptive statistical test results indicate quite positive results. In the first phase of the survey, it appears that most of the responses show low index values, which are in the 1-3 range, where the highest number of 38.98% of customers rated the ability of employees to provide services from a sincere manner is poor, namely at index 2. This shows that employees are not able to provide wholehearted service to customers. The customers as the party interacting with the hotel employees seem to be able to capture this phenomenon. The results of the first phase of the study indicate this.

The results of the second stage survey even indicate a shift from thinking that the empathy factor of the hotel employees is poor to very good. This is evident because the first phase of the survey showed a large number of customers who thought that the empathy factor of the employees was poor, and the second survey showed a relatively large shift in the index from poor to excellent. These results further corroborate that the certification program is able to encourage an increase in wholehearted service from employees. This is very important because hotels that have employees with a level of engagement or a sense of unity with work that is manifested in sincerity at work are able to drive better organizational performance (Schaufeli et al., 2006). These results support the role of certification in increasing the capacity of the hospitality tourism workforce.



Questions related to the quality of service of employees in providing services that are carried out professionally are issues that try to be discussed in this section. The results of the first phase of the survey indicated that the reliability of hotel employees in providing quality services before being certified was at index 3 and followed by index 4. This result shows that the ability of hotel employees is already at a fairly good level. Although the perception of customers who assess the reliability of employees is very good or at index 5 is very low, these results show that the hotel's role in strengthening its resources has been running quite well. The phenomenon that needs to be resolved is the very large number of customers who still doubt the ability of employees, which appears in index 3 as the highest choice. Therefore it can be concluded that:

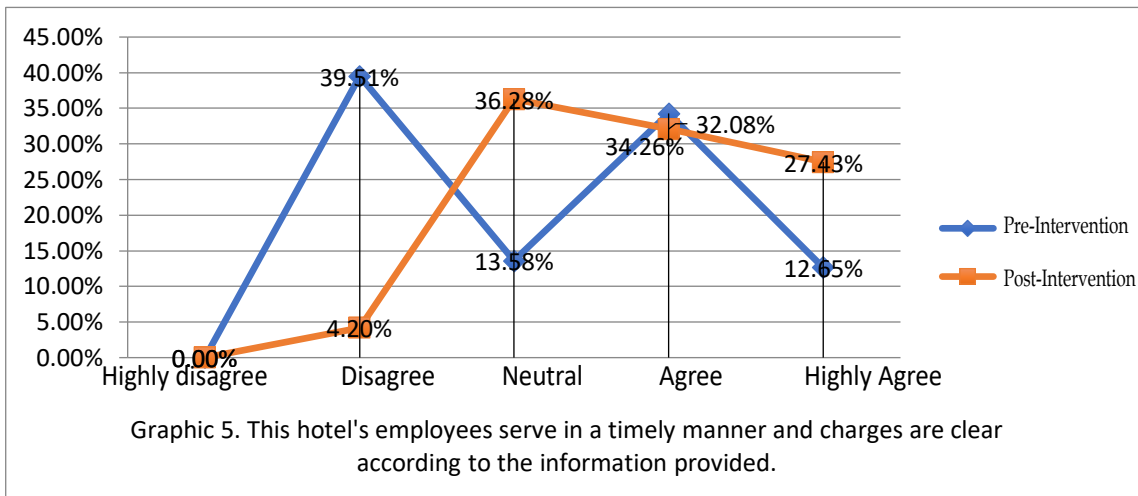
In the second stage, data was collected from customers to assess how the employees had progressed after the certification process. The survey results showed a positive trend where there was a significant increase in employee reliability where the highest index was index 5 which increased drastically. This improvement was particularly noticeable because in the first stage, out of 325 customers who provided data, only 5 people or 1.54 percent strongly agreed that the employees had performed their duties professionally and well. In the second stage, the participation rate at index 5 increased dramatically to 151 people or 33.41%. This is an achievement that should be appreciated even though the customers who chose index 3 were the largest. However, the results of the second phase of the survey imply the conclusion that the certification activity was able to reduce the level of customers who were hesitant about the reliability of employees, and increase the points of indexes 4 and 5:



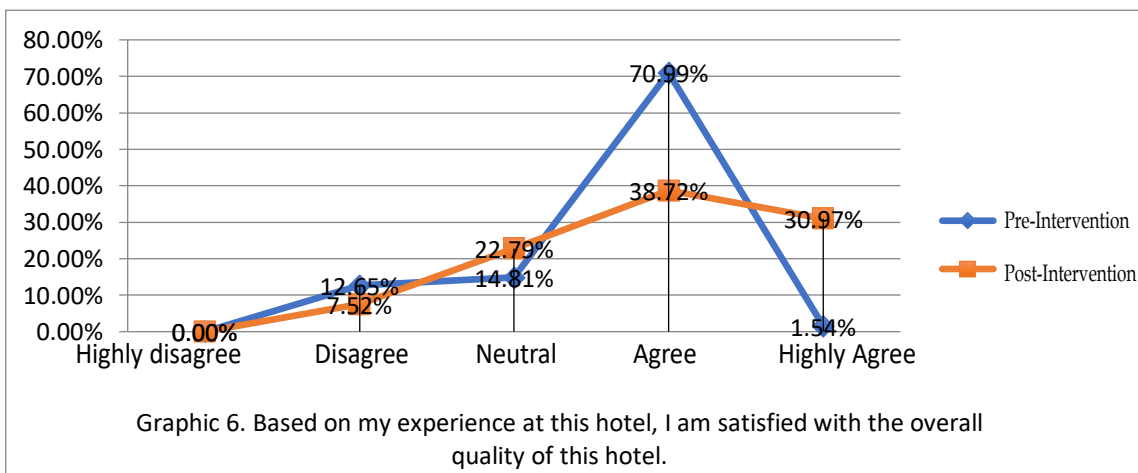
The following issue related to the ability of hospitality workforce employees is Responsiveness or employee responsiveness in resolving customer needs quickly and appropriately. The results obtained show the perception of the majority of consumers who disagree if the employees are responsive enough to meet their needs. This result indicates poor service quality related to responsiveness to consumers, as opined by 35.58% of respondents. The next customer response shows a medium response selection or assumption that employee responsiveness to customer needs is 31.17%. The two results above contribute 65% and above of the overall customer response. Overall, the average response was of the opinion that employees were not able to provide responsive service quality in handling their needs.

The implementation of the second phase of survey activities to capture customer perceptions of service quality in terms of hotel employee responsiveness to customer needs quickly provides quite interesting results. Positive results can be captured from the overall response. This can be seen from 40.04% of respondents who chose point 3 or index 3, followed by index 5 or very good. This result is considered positive because there is a descriptive shift to a

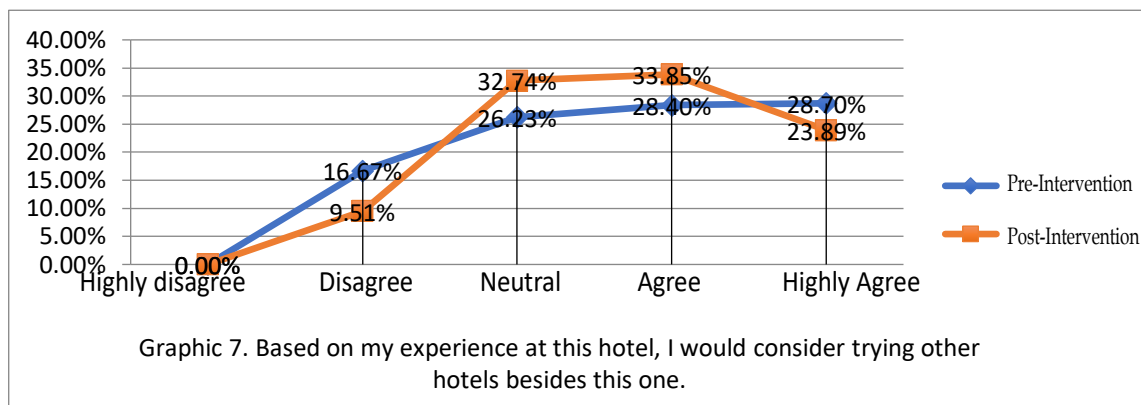
higher direction, where responses on indexes 3, 4, and 5 increase drastically and are followed by a decrease in negative responses to employee abilities.



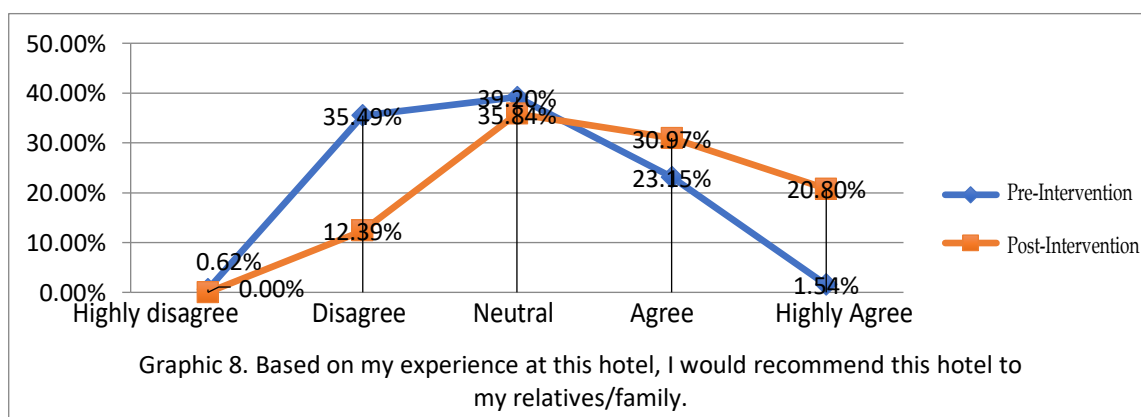
The first stage survey provides results that show the largest response is in index 2 of 39.51% of responses, followed by index 4 of 32.08%. The magnitude of this negative response indicates that customers think that hotel employees are not able to serve in a timely manner with clear costs according to the information provided by the hotel. The negative impression of customers regarding the quality of hotel services is opposed by the positive impression of visitors on index 4 which states that they agree with the hotel's ability to provide good performance guarantees. In the second stage of the survey, customer responses were taken regarding the quality of service displayed by post-certification employees. The test results indicated that customer responses were at index 3, followed by indexes 4 and 5. A positive trend can be seen from the reduction in responses at index 2 which in the first survey occupied the highest place. In the second survey activity, the index shifted to 3 and then 4 and 5. Therefore, the certification intervenes to ensure that the capabilities of the hospitality workforce meet the expectations expected by the community.



The first phase of the survey showed that 70.99% of customers responded positively to the overall service of the employees or at index 4 followed by index 3. This very large number shows a fairly absolute and very important result that the hotel workers have been able to meet customer expectations when making transactions at the hotel. The results of the second phase of the survey show interesting changes. On the one hand, there was a decrease in index 4, but an increase in index 5 followed. This means that customers who are very satisfied with the hotel after the certification process has increased very significantly. This finding clearly indicates that certification activities as mandated by the law are can significantly increase the potential of the tourism workforce.



The next component tested tries to examine the negative impressions felt by customers that can encourage them to leave the hotel. In particular, the inability to meet expectations or other factors can cause customers to make switching choices on hotel occupancy rates. The switching intention of customers in before the certification was held was at index 5. This shows that customers are very ready to move to another hotel due to certain issues in their stay. The finding after certification reveals a decrease in the customer switching intentions at index 4 indicating an improvement of service.



The last survey question asked customers related to the intention or expectation of customers to stay at the hotel. This point shows the intention to continue to trust the hotel they have stayed in, or even increase transactions at

that place. at the highest level, the customer will recommend the hotel to his relatives. The results of the first phase of the study that tested customer responses related to their loyalty showed that the response was on index 3. This indicates customer hesitation to recommend the hotel. the next customer choice is on index 2 or disagree to recommend the hotel to their relatives. At the next stage reveals no sign of change. Satisfied customers will not necessarily return to the hotel, but loyal customers will not move and even increase the number of transactions at the hotel. Table 1. compiles the finding for objective recapitulation.

Tabel 1. Overall Index Conclusion

Variable	Pre-Certification	Post-Certification	Decision
Tangibility of Services	4	4	Increasing Trend
Employee Empathy	2	3	Increasing Trend
Reliability	3	3	Increasing Trend
Responsiveness	2	3	Increasing Trend
Assurance	2	3	Increasing Trend
Customer Satisfaction	4	4	Increasing Trend
Switching Cost	4	4	Decreasing Trend
Customer Loyalty	3	3	Increasing Trend

This study also collects descriptive data from the customers' qualitative recommendation for possible improvements as evident in Table 2.

Table 2. The Customer Written Recommendation

No.	Pre-Intervention Customer Response
1	The service
2	Room facilities and room cleanliness
3	The most important part of hotel service is the receptionist
4	More bad service overall
5	The towel is not clean enough
6	The room service sometimes takes a long time when called

After the intervention program, the customers who provided a hotel testimony are also recorded and the results reveal a focus on room service, as evident in Table 2. The service workers' certification program is a commendable initiative that elevates the hospitality staff's skills and competencies. Through pertinent training and assessment, the program enables them to offer superior service and gratify the customers. The program's outcomes manifest in the augmented quality and performance of the hospitality workforce, which also ameliorates the customers' perceptions of the hotels they lodge in. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted considerable challenges to the hospitality sector, such as travel constraints, diminished demand, and health and safety issues. These challenges may jeopardize the advantages of the certification program and necessitate supplementary measures to guarantee the resilience and recovery of the industry.

Table 2. The Customer Response Post-Intervention

No.	Responses
1	Replace the furniture and mattresses that are not soft enough anymore
2	Breakfast is good, despite it is always run out
3	satisfyingly comfortable
4	Unlucky due to the smoking room
5	Friendly service
6	have often stayed here and always comfortable
7	Satisfactory
8	My family and i really enjoyed our vacation at this hotel.
9	Sufficient and appropriate
10	Simply
11	Pay more attention to room cleanliness and comfort
12	Service
13	Very satisfied
14	Already in accordance with the existing rate
15	Interior Design and qibla direction are necessary

DISCUSSION

Survey results show a negative trend in customer satisfaction prior to certification, indicating a need for improvement in service quality, however, after certification there was a significant increase in service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty. There was also a decrease in customer switching intentions, indicating the effectiveness of the certification program in retaining customers. Recommendations for return occupancy were low before certification and increased afterwards indicating the positive impact of the program. Descriptive analysis highlighted the important role room service plays in influencing customer satisfaction, suggesting that improvements in this aspect can have a positive impact on customer perceptions of service quality.

The Service-Profit Chain (SPC) theory, as proposed by (Heskett et al., 2008; Kamakura et al., 2002), provides a robust theoretical framework to understand the impact of service worker certification. The theory posits that internal service quality, which can be enhanced through certification, leads to employee satisfaction. Satisfied employees are more productive and deliver superior service, leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty, and ultimately, profitability (Liu & Yang, 2021; Punjaisri et al., 2009; Schneider, 1980). Empirical studies provide compelling evidence in support of this theory. For instance, a study by Lin et al. (2021) found a strong link between employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, and profitability in a large retail bank. Similarly, a study by Kamakura et al. (2002) found that employee satisfaction significantly influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty in the automobile industry. These studies underscore the importance of service worker certification in enhancing internal service quality and its downstream effects.

Government intervention in the form of service worker certification can play a crucial role in enhancing internal service quality. This endeavor not only enhances service quality but also boosts employee confidence and satisfaction in

motion of the service-profit chain. The impact of service worker certification extends beyond service quality to customer retention and economic return (Yao et al., 2019). Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal to the company, leading to repeat business and positive word-of-mouth, both of which contribute to increased revenue and profitability (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Sulmi et al., 2021).

While the existing literature provides strong support for the service-profit chain theory and the role of service worker certification, there is scope for further research. Future studies could explore the impact of different types of certification programs, the role of continuous training and development, and the impact of service worker certification in different industries and cultural contexts. Such research would not only contribute to the academic literature but also provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

FURTHER STUDY

The suggested improvements to the questionnaire data delivery system and email survey method in this study may face limitations, such as potential technical constraints and customer data security concerns. The technical implementation of the improved delivery system needs to be further evaluated to identify obstacles and possible solutions. Similarly, in-depth research on data security and strategies to address customer concerns in email survey delivery can provide greater insight into their impact and effectiveness.

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