

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies

A. Definition of Excellent Service

Excellent service has long been recognize as a strategic priority in the corporate world, particularly when it comes to building positive client experiences. Kotler and Keller (2023) argue that great service is not determined solely by the quality of products it also depends on how customers perceive their interactions with service providers. This experience typically encompasses factors such as responsiveness, reliability, and the nature of employee-customer interactions.

In this context, an organization ability to consistently meet or exceed consumer expectations is what defines truly excellent service. When achieved, this level of performance strengthens the company's reputation and deepens client loyalty. Several interrelated factors have been identified as the defining elements of exceptional service.

While F&B service quality has attracted considerable research attention, how the specific features of hotels and local cultural contexts shape service delivery has received less scrutiny. Reisinger and Turner (2003) argue that in hospitality settings, cultural values and the local environment significantly influence what guests expect. Even so, little is known about how these cultural nuances are actually woven into the daily service routines of mid-scale hotels. This study examines how Aston Inn Batu approaches excellent service, looking at both institutional procedures and the personal, compassionate interactions that go beyond standard expectations.

Zeithaml et al. (2022) propose five core dimensions that shape service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible evidence.

- a. **Reliability** is described as the ability to consistently provide promised services.
- b. **Responsiveness** is referred to as the willingness to assist customers and deliver prompt service.
- c. **Assurance** is associated with employee knowledge and courtesy that help build customer trust.
- d. **Empathy** is shown through the individual attention provided to customers.
- e. **Tangibles** or physical evidence refer to the environment and materials supporting service delivery.

All of these dimensions are believed to contribute significantly to how customers perceive service quality.

B. Elements of Excellent Service

Excellent service goes beyond simply meeting customer expectations it fulfils needs thoroughly and leaves a lasting impression. Kaur and Singh (2023) describe excellent service as built from five interconnected dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, each contributing to how customers ultimately perceive service quality.

- a. Tangibles refer to the physical components of service equipment, staff appearance, facilities, and printed communication materials. Ali et al. (2023) found that strong tangible elements significantly improve customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty, especially in hospitality where aesthetics and cleanliness carry high value.
- b. Reliability is the ability to deliver promised services consistently and accurately. Choudhury et al. (2023) found that organisations demonstrating reliable service are far more likely to earn and retain customer trust.

- c. Responsiveness reflects a genuine readiness to assist promptly and helpfully. Kumar and Gupta (2024) found that quick responses raise satisfaction considerably particularly in hospitality, where service speed is a key benchmark.
- d. Assurance relates to the courtesy and competence employees display, which together build client confidence. Smith et al. (2023) link high assurance levels to stronger customer relationships and greater satisfaction.
- e. Empathy involves providing personalized attention and demonstrating genuine awareness of individual client needs. Johnson and Lee (2023) found that empathy in customer service strengthens the emotional dimension of the experience and deepens loyalty.

C. Factors Affecting F&B Service Quality

Service quality is fundamental to customer satisfaction and loyalty in the food and beverage industry. Research has identified several key factors that consistently influence it:

- a. **Food Quality:** Flavour, presentation, and freshness all have a meaningful impact on guest satisfaction. When food is excellent, satisfaction and repeat business naturally follow.
- b. **Speed of Service:** How quickly food and beverages are served is a key satisfaction driver, particularly in busy dining environments where guests expect prompt attention.
- c. **Staff Interaction:** Employees' professionalism, communication skills, and attitudes shape the guest experience significantly. Friendliness and attentiveness tend to create a stronger, more positive service impression.
- d. **Environment:** Cleanliness, ambiance, and a well-maintained physical atmosphere directly support guest comfort and overall satisfaction.
- e. **Service Management:** Effective management, including structured training and clear operational procedures, raises overall service performance.

- f. **Menu Availability:** A diverse, accessible menu that caters to a range of tastes and dietary preferences contributes to higher satisfaction and perceived service quality.
- g. **Price:** Reasonable pricing relative to quality is closely linked to guest satisfaction. When guests feel they are getting value for money, loyalty tends to follow.

D. Implementation of Excellent Service

Delivering excellent service requires more than good intentions it involves coordinated, strategic effort at every level of the organization. In the F&B sector, this execution is crucial for improving customer happiness, building loyalty, and strengthening brand identity.

a. Employee Training

Staff should receive comprehensive training covering service standards, product knowledge, and communication techniques. Soft skills development including empathy, active listening, and professional conduct is equally important.

b. Clear Service Standards

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provide the structural backbone of consistent service delivery. All staff should apply the same service expectations so that guests receive a uniform experience regardless of who serves them.

c. Focus on Product Quality

Sourcing high-quality, fresh ingredients forms the foundation of premium F&B service. Regular menu updates and innovation help the establishment keep pace with evolving customer preferences.

d. Listening to Guest

Guest feedback should be gathered actively through surveys, suggestion boxes, or direct conversation. Complaints, when handled promptly and constructively, can be turned into opportunities to deepen guest trust.

e. **Creating a Pleasant Environment**

A pleasant environment maintained through attention to cleanliness, lighting, music, and comfortable seating enhances the overall guest experience. Thoughtful touches and convenience features strengthen this further.

f. **Use of Technology**

Digital systems such as online ordering and CRM tools improve service efficiency and allow for more personalized interactions. Data analytics can be used to tailor services based on actual customer behaviour and preferences.

g. **Strong Service Culture**

Management plays a decisive role in service culture by modelling excellence and encouraging positive behaviour, leaders set the tone for the whole team. Reward systems that recognize outstanding performance reinforce these values and sustain motivation.

E. Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Service Delivery

Communication is widely recognized as a foundational element of service delivery in the hospitality industry. According to Knapp and Hall (2010), human communication consists of two major channels: verbal communication, which encompasses spoken and written language, and non-verbal communication, which includes body language, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, tone of voice, and poletics. Both channels work simultaneously and interactively to shape the overall impression a guest receives during a service encounter.

1. Verbal Communication Strategies

Verbal communication in hospitality service encompasses the choice of words, tone, clarity, and responsiveness used during guest interactions. DeVito (2016) identifies several key verbal communication strategies relevant to service delivery, including active listening, the use of polite and inclusive language, clear order

confirmation, and empathetic verbal responses when guests express dissatisfaction. In the food and beverage context, verbal strategies such as greeting guests by name, confirming orders accurately, and providing proactive information about waiting times have been shown to significantly enhance perceived service quality (Susskind & Viccari, 2011). Furthermore, the ability to adapt language register shifting between formal and informal speech depending on the guest's cues is considered an advanced verbal competency that distinguishes excellent service providers from average ones.

2. Non-Verbal Communication Strategies

Non-verbal communication has been described as the transmission of meaning through channels other than spoken or written words. Mehrabian (1971) famously argued that a substantial portion of emotional meaning in face-to-face communication is conveyed through body language and vocal tone rather than words alone. In a hospitality context, non-verbal cues serve multiple functions: they signal attentiveness and readiness to serve, convey warmth and approachability, and reinforce or contradict verbal messages. Ayu and Ramadhan (2021) specifically emphasize that non-verbal behaviors such as sustained eye contact, a genuine smile, open body posture, and appropriate physical proximity are critical components of service excellence in the food and beverage sector. These cues help staff communicate care and professionalism without verbal interaction, which is particularly important during busy service periods or cross-cultural encounters where language barriers may exist.

3. The Integration of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication in Excellent Service

The most effective service interactions are those in which verbal (Sudiran et al. 2025) and non-verbal communication are aligned and mutually reinforcing. Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016) describe this alignment as “communicative congruence,” arguing that

inconsistencies between what is said and how it is expressed non-verbally such as apologizing verbally while displaying closed or dismissive body language erode guest trust and undermine service recovery efforts. In the hotel food and beverage context, staff who demonstrate communicative congruence are better positioned to manage difficult guests, deliver personalized service, and create emotionally memorable dining experiences. Hotels that embed communication training into their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) covering both the content of verbal interactions and the expected non-verbal behaviors are therefore more likely to achieve consistent service excellence across all guest touchpoints (Lashley & Morrison, 2000).

Research in cross-cultural hospitality settings further confirms that non-verbal sensitivity is especially critical when serving guests from diverse cultural backgrounds, as expectations around eye contact, physical distance, and gesture interpretation vary widely across cultures (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). For mid-scale hotels such as Aston Inn Batu, which serve both domestic and international guests, developing staff competency in culturally adaptive verbal and non-verbal communication represents a key strategic advantage.