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English Language Proficiency and Tourist Trust in Saudi Arabian Hotels: The Mediating Role of Communication Clarity

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ABSTRACT: Hotel guests routinely make consequential decisions on the basis of short conversations with employees. They disclose personal information, accept payment conditions, rely on directions, report security concerns, and trust staff to resolve failures in an unfamiliar environment. In Saudi Arabia's increasingly international hotel market, many of these encounters occur in English. This article develops a conceptual model explaining how employees' English proficiency may contribute to tourist trust through communication clarity. It distinguishes cognitive trust, grounded in perceptions of ability and reliability, from affective trust, grounded in perceived care and benevolence. The article argues that English proficiency influences cognitive trust when it enables employees to understand requests, provide accurate explanations, confirm commitments, and communicate uncertainty responsibly. It influences affective trust when pragmatic and interactional competence allow employees to listen without impatience, acknowledge inconvenience, and adapt communication to the guest. Communication clarity is proposed as the principal mediator, while service-recovery quality, role visibility, encounter risk, guest language proficiency, and hotel communication systems operate as contingencies. The model rejects accent-based or native-speaker definitions of competence and treats functional intelligibility, listening, occupational vocabulary, pragmatic appropriateness, and repair as the relevant dimensions. A multi-source research design is proposed using role-based language assessment, guest surveys, observed encounters, and follow-up measures of promise fulfilment. The article concludes that hotels should not treat English training as a cosmetic hospitality skill. It is part of risk management and relationship building, but it creates trust only when clear language is matched by correct information, operational authority, and reliable follow-through.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trust is woven into the hotel experience. Guests arrive with luggage, payment details, travel documents, schedules, health needs, family arrangements, and expectations formed before the encounter. They often know little about the organisation's internal procedures and may be unfamiliar with the local environment. The hotel therefore becomes both an accommodation provider and an information centre. A guest must decide whether an employee's explanation is accurate, whether a promise will be kept, whether a complaint is being taken seriously, and whether private or sensitive information will be handled responsibly.

These judgements are made through communication. The physical quality of a room matters, but guests also interpret the words, tone, timing, and structure of staff responses. An unclear explanation of a deposit may create suspicion even when the policy is legitimate. A vague answer about transport may make a competent hotel appear disorganised. During a service failure,

a fluent but evasive response may reduce trust more sharply than a modestly phrased but honest explanation. Language is thus not a decorative layer placed over hotel operations. It is one of the main ways in which guests infer what the organisation knows, intends, and is capable of doing.

The issue is particularly relevant to Saudi Arabia. Tourism growth and the diversification of destinations have increased the number of international guests using hotels for religious, leisure, business, heritage, event, and transit purposes. The hotel sector includes international chains, local brands, resort properties, serviced apartments, and smaller establishments with different staffing models and levels of standardisation. English often functions as a shared language among guests and employees who may have different first languages. Saudi tourism research indicates that speaking, listening, occupational vocabulary, and the ability to explain services are central workplace needs (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Al-Malki, 2023; Aldosari et al., 2025).

Yet the connection between English proficiency and trust is frequently assumed rather than explained. A simple claim that "better English increases trust" is theoretically weak. It overlooks the fact that proficiency is multidimensional, that tourists differ in their own language abilities, and that a clear message can reveal either competent service or an unfavourable policy. It also risks confusing accent familiarity with actual communicative effectiveness. Most importantly, it leaves the mechanism unspecified. Guests do not trust a test score; they trust, or distrust, the person and organisation they encounter.

This article argues that communication clarity is the main pathway through which English proficiency can shape tourist trust in Saudi hotels. Clarity means more than grammatical correctness. It is the guest's perception that the employee has understood the issue, supplied relevant and accurate information, distinguished confirmed facts from uncertain ones, and explained what will happen next. Clear communication reduces ambiguity and allows guests to evaluate whether the hotel is dependable. When clarity is accompanied by respectful listening and an appropriate response to emotion, it can also communicate care.

The article differentiates cognitive and affective trust. Cognitive trust rests on reasoned judgements of competence, reliability, integrity, and predictability. Affective trust develops through perceived concern, responsiveness, and relational warmth (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). The distinction is valuable because English proficiency may contribute to each form through different features. Precise listening, accurate terminology, and structured explanation may support cognitive trust. Empathic acknowledgement, tactful phrasing, and patient repair may support affective trust. Fluency without care may build one form weakly while undermining the other.

The central model also places language within the hotel system. An employee cannot communicate clearly if the policy itself is contradictory, the booking record is incomplete, or the employee lacks authority to offer a remedy. Likewise, limited individual proficiency can be partly supported by plain-language scripts, translated documents, visual information, multilingual colleagues, and escalation procedures. Trust is created by the alignment of language, information, and action. The article therefore examines both employee capability and organisational communication infrastructure.

The discussion proceeds in six stages. It first reviews trust in hotel service relationships and then defines functional English proficiency for hotel work. It next explains communication clarity and its connections to cognitive and affective trust. A set of propositions integrates these relationships and identifies moderators. The final sections outline a research design and draw implications for selection, training, policy communication, complaint management, and hotel governance.

2. TRUST IN THE HOTEL SERVICE RELATIONSHIP

Trust becomes important when one party is vulnerable to another. In hotels, vulnerability arises because guests depend on the provider for access, safety, privacy, information, and the fulfilment of future promises. They may pay before receiving the complete service, leave possessions in the room, ask staff to arrange transport, or rely on advice about local conditions. Organisational trust theory commonly links trustworthiness to perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). These elements are readily visible in hotel encounters, but they are rarely observed directly. Guests infer them from behaviour.

Ability concerns whether the employee and hotel can perform the promised service. Clear answers, correct records, realistic time estimates, and competent problem diagnosis can signal ability. Benevolence concerns whether the provider appears to care about the guest's interests rather than merely completing a transaction. Patience, acknowledgement, and adaptation may signal benevolence. Integrity concerns whether explanations are honest, policies are applied consistently, and promises are credible. Employees display integrity when they avoid inventing answers, admit when verification is needed, and do not make commitments they lack authority to keep.

Cognitive trust is especially important during early encounters because guests have limited relationship history. They look for cues that the employee is knowledgeable and that the organisation is predictable. Research on service relationships shows that perceived competence and credibility contribute to cognitive trust, while interpersonal warmth and concern contribute more strongly to affective trust (Johnson & Grayson, 2005; Coulter & Coulter, 2002). The two forms are connected but not interchangeable. A guest may consider a receptionist technically capable yet emotionally indifferent, or personally kind yet unable to solve the problem.

Relationship-marketing research positions trust as a foundation for commitment and loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). In hotel settings, however, the relationship may be brief. Trust can still matter because the guest makes repeated decisions within the stay: whether to accept advice, purchase additional services, leave valuables, report a concern, or return in the future. Affective ties may not become deep, but a sense of being respected and protected can influence satisfaction and recommendation. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) also show that the role of trust may vary between relational and more transactional customers, suggesting that repeat guests and first-time visitors should not be treated as identical.

Hotel trust is both interpersonal and institutional. Guests may trust a particular employee while distrusting the property's procedures, or trust the brand while doubting a specific response. English communication can connect these levels. Employees often speak on behalf of the organisation, explaining policies, documenting commitments, and interpreting system decisions. When different staff members provide inconsistent information, the problem becomes institutional. The guest may conclude that the hotel lacks coordination even if each employee is individually polite.

Service-quality studies in hotels emphasise the combined importance of interaction, physical environment, and outcome (Akbaba, 2006; Wilkins et al., 2007). Trust should therefore not be detached from actual performance. A clear explanation of why a room is unavailable may reduce uncertainty, but it does not erase the failure. Communication can moderate the interpretation of an outcome, not transform every poor outcome into high quality. The most sustainable trust emerges when language accurately represents a service system that follows through.

3. DEFINING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY FOR HOTEL WORK

General proficiency scales provide useful broad descriptions, but hotels need a functional account tied to specific encounters. Front-desk employees explain room types, payment conditions, identification requirements, facilities, check-in times, local transport, and complaint procedures. Reservation staff negotiate dates and rates. Restaurant teams discuss ingredients and dietary needs. Housekeeping employees respond to requests, while security and maintenance staff may need to explain urgent actions. Each role requires a different combination of language functions.

Functional proficiency in hotel work contains at least six dimensions. Listening accuracy allows employees to understand names, numbers, dates, room details, accents, and indirect requests. Intelligibility allows the guest to follow the employee without excessive effort. Occupational vocabulary supports precise reference to hotel products and procedures. Interaction management helps the employee organise the exchange, ask focused questions, and signal next steps. Pragmatic competence enables polite refusal, apology, reassurance, and explanation. Repair competence allows misunderstanding to be identified and resolved through repetition, paraphrase, confirmation, writing, or other resources.

These dimensions reflect the broader concept of communicative competence, in which grammar is one component rather than the whole (Canale & Swain, 1980). Hospitality language is professional because it combines informational and relational work (Blue & Harun, 2003). Saying "Your room is not ready" performs a factual function, but the quality of the encounter depends on what follows: recognition of the inconvenience, a reliable estimate, an explanation of available facilities, luggage assistance, or an alternative. A grammatically correct sentence can still be pragmatically inadequate.

Listening deserves particular emphasis. Hotel training often concentrates on what employees should say, yet many failures begin because the guest's request is misheard or oversimplified. International guests may use unfamiliar pronunciation, non-standard grammar, indirect language, or culturally specific assumptions. The employee must identify the practical meaning without humiliating the speaker. Confirmation strategies such as repeating the date, spelling a surname, or summarising the request are markers of professionalism rather than signs of low ability.

Accent should not be used as a substitute for proficiency. English in international hotels is often a lingua franca among multilingual speakers. Research on English as a lingua franca shows that accommodation and negotiation are central to success (Jenkins et al., 2011). A familiar accent may make processing easier for some guests, but accent prejudice can distort appraisal.

Hotels should judge whether speech is intelligible to a diverse audience and whether the employee can adjust when it is not understood.

Proficiency is also situational. Employees may perform well in routine check-in conversations but struggle during a payment dispute, security concern, or emotionally charged complaint. The difference reflects both language complexity and cognitive load. Non-routine encounters require employees to process new information, manage emotion, consult systems, and make decisions while speaking. Assessment and training should therefore include escalating levels of complexity rather than a single rehearsed dialogue.

Finally, English proficiency is not a licence to improvise. A fluent employee who gives an unsupported answer may appear confident initially but create later distrust. Responsible communication includes epistemic boundaries: "I need to confirm that with my supervisor" may be more trustworthy than an immediate but uncertain reply. Proficiency supports trust when it makes accurate knowledge, uncertainty, and responsibility visible.

4. COMMUNICATION CLARITY AS THE MEDIATING MECHANISM

Communication clarity is the guest's perception that the exchange has produced a shared and usable understanding. Four elements are central. First, semantic clarity means that words, numbers, and conditions are intelligible. Second, structural clarity means that the explanation is logically ordered. Third, procedural clarity means that the guest knows what action will occur, who is responsible, and when it should happen. Fourth, epistemic clarity means that confirmed information is distinguished from estimates, possibilities, or matters still being checked.

This definition is relational. A message is not clear merely because the employee considers it simple. Clarity is achieved when the interlocutors reach sufficient shared understanding for the service task. Employees can test this through confirmation, questions, written details, or a concise summary. The need for checking increases when the consequence of error is high, such as payment, transport departure, medication storage, accessibility, or safety.

English proficiency can support clarity by expanding the employee's ability to understand, select, and reformulate information. It can reduce lexical searching, ambiguous phrasing, and unproductive repetition. Yet proficiency affects trust only if guests experience the resulting message as relevant and credible. Long or sophisticated explanations may reduce clarity when a concise answer would be more useful. The goal is not linguistic display but reduced uncertainty.

Clarity is closely linked to cognitive trust. Guests infer ability when employees identify the issue accurately and explain the solution in a coherent manner. They infer integrity when conditions are disclosed rather than hidden and when limitations are stated honestly. They infer predictability when responsibilities and times are specified. Trust in a service provider is strengthened when information reduces perceived risk and demonstrates dependable behaviour (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

Clarity can also support affective trust, although the pathway is less direct. A clear response shows that the employee has invested attention in understanding the guest. Personalised summaries - "You need a quiet room because your child is sleeping, and you also need to leave by 6 a.m." - communicate both comprehension and concern. However, clarity without relational sensitivity may sound cold. A hotel employee can provide an accurate rule in a way that makes the guest feel dismissed. Affective trust therefore requires pragmatic competence in addition to informational clarity.

The strongest test occurs during service recovery. The guest may be angry, the facts may be disputed, and the available remedies may be constrained. Clear recovery communication follows a sequence: listen to the account, identify the core failure, acknowledge its effect, explain what can be verified, present options, obtain agreement, and confirm follow-up. Language proficiency helps at each stage, but trust depends on alignment between the explanation and the eventual remedy. A beautifully phrased apology followed by no action is likely to intensify distrust.

Clarity also has an inter-employee dimension. Hotel service is delivered across shifts and departments. Notes, handovers, booking records, and internal messages determine whether the next employee understands what was promised. A guest who must retell the same problem may perceive that the hotel does not listen. English proficiency in customer-facing conversation should therefore be accompanied by concise written documentation, particularly in multilingual teams. Internal clarity sustains external trust.

5. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS

The proposed model positions role-relevant English proficiency as an antecedent of communication clarity. Clarity then influences cognitive and affective trust, which contribute to perceived service quality, satisfaction, recommendation, and revisit intentions. The model includes direct and conditional paths because some aspects of proficiency, such as relational warmth, may affect affective trust beyond clarity, while clear communication cannot fully compensate for an adverse outcome.

Proposition 1: Role-relevant English proficiency is positively associated with guest-perceived communication clarity in Saudi hotel encounters.

The phrase role-relevant is essential. A housekeeping employee and a revenue manager need different repertoires. The association should be strongest when assessment tasks resemble the encounter being evaluated. A general test may underestimate employees with strong occupational routines or overestimate employees whose academic knowledge does not transfer under service pressure.

Proposition 2: Communication clarity mediates the positive relationship between English proficiency and cognitive trust.

This pathway reflects the guest's inference that the employee is able, honest, and predictable. Listening accuracy helps identify the problem; occupational vocabulary supports precision; interaction management produces an orderly explanation; and repair prevents small misunderstandings from becoming operational errors. Together these features make competence perceptible.

Proposition 3: Pragmatic and interactional competence influence affective trust both indirectly through clarity and directly through perceived care.

Affective trust is unlikely to arise from information alone. Employees must acknowledge inconvenience, avoid blame, and adapt the response to the guest's emotional and practical circumstances. Minor grammatical errors should have little negative effect when the employee is intelligible, respectful, and responsive. By contrast, polished language accompanied by impatience may undermine affective trust.

Proposition 4: Cognitive trust has a stronger effect on quality judgements in high-risk or consequential encounters, whereas affective trust has a stronger effect in emotionally charged recovery encounters.

The type of vulnerability changes across situations. Payment disputes, security questions, and transport arrangements foreground competence and accuracy. Noise complaints, illness, family stress, and perceived disrespect may foreground care. Many failures involve both, but their relative importance can be tested.

Proposition 5: Service-recovery quality strengthens the effect of communication clarity on post-failure trust only when the promised remedy is fulfilled.

This proposition guards against a communication-centred bias. Clarity may temporarily reassure the guest, but follow-through validates or invalidates the message. A longitudinal design should therefore distinguish immediate trust after the conversation from trust after the promised action.

Proposition 6: The positive effect of English proficiency on clarity is weaker when hotel policies, records, or interdepartmental communication are inconsistent.

Individual language skill cannot resolve contradictory information. When the reservation system, front desk, and finance department apply different conditions, a proficient employee may communicate the contradiction more clearly without being able to remove it. Organisational alignment is therefore a boundary condition.

Proposition 7: Multilingual support resources strengthen the relationship between proficiency and clarity by enabling effective repair, but poorly integrated digital translation weakens trust when it conflicts with human explanations.

Translation applications, written policies, pictograms, and multilingual colleagues can extend communicative capacity. They should be judged by whether they help the guest reach an accurate understanding. Switching to another resource is not a failure if it is done confidently and transparently. Trust may decline, however, when translated material and employee explanations produce different rules.

Proposition 8: Guest English proficiency and prior hotel experience moderate the relationship between employee proficiency and perceived clarity.

Guests with high English proficiency may notice imprecision that others do not, while guests with limited proficiency may benefit more from simplified language, visual confirmation, and slower pacing. Experienced international travellers may understand standard hotel procedures with little explanation, whereas first-time visitors need more contextual guidance. The employee's performance must be evaluated in relation to the communicative partnership.

A final contingency concerns the visibility of the employee's role. Guests often attribute the words of a uniformed employee to the hotel as a whole, even when that employee has limited decision authority. This creates a representational burden: the staff member must explain both the service issue and the boundary of the role. Hotels can reduce confusion by giving employees clear escalation language and by ensuring that supervisors do not contradict information already provided without explanation. Where a correction is necessary, the organisation should take ownership rather than suggesting that the frontline employee alone caused the problem.

The model also predicts asymmetry. High proficiency may produce only modest gains during a simple, successful check-in because the guest's basic expectations are already met. Low clarity during a serious failure, by contrast, can cause a disproportionate loss of trust. Research should therefore examine nonlinear effects rather than assuming that each increase in proficiency has the same value. The greatest returns may come from ensuring a minimum functional threshold across all staff and advanced capability among employees who handle complex, sensitive, or escalated encounters.

Table 1. Trust-building pathways in hotel communication

Employee capability	Immediate interactional outcome	Trust inference	Illustrative hotel context
Listening and confirmation	Correct identification of the request	Ability and attentiveness	Booking dates, room type, dietary request
Occupational vocabulary	Precise explanation of options and conditions	Competence and predictability	Deposits, upgrades, cancellation, facilities
Pragmatic competence	Respectful refusal, apology, or limitation	Benevolence and integrity	Late check-out, unavailable room, policy exception
Interaction management	Ordered exchange and visible next steps	Control and reliability	Complaint handling, queue management, transport arrangement
Repair competence	Misunderstanding detected and resolved	Honesty and adaptability	Unfamiliar accent, ambiguous request, digital translation
Written handover	Promise recorded across shifts and departments	Institutional reliability	Maintenance follow-up, lost property, special arrangements

6. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION

A future study should use a multi-source, multi-stage design. The first stage would map critical communication events in participating Saudi hotels through interviews, policy review, complaint logs, and observation. Events could include reservation changes, check-in, payment explanation, local recommendations, dietary clarification, room problems, transport coordination, lost property, security concerns, and complaint escalation. Mapping would ensure that the language assessment reflects actual work rather than generic textbook dialogues.

The second stage would assess employees through standardised but realistic simulations. Each participant could complete a routine task, a complex information task, and a recovery task. Raters would score comprehension, intelligibility, accuracy, occupational vocabulary, pragmatic appropriateness, interaction management, and repair. The rating protocol should explicitly exclude native-like accent as a criterion. Inter-rater reliability would be reported by dimension, and examples should be used to train raters to distinguish grammatical error from communicative breakdown.

The third stage would collect guest evaluations after real encounters. Survey items would measure clarity, cognitive trust, affective trust, perceived service quality, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. Cognitive trust items could concern competence, accuracy, honesty, and dependability; affective trust items could concern care, goodwill, and felt security. The survey should also record the nature and importance of the encounter, whether a problem occurred, the guest's English proficiency, first language, prior visits, and familiarity with hotel procedures.

A fourth stage would verify outcomes. For encounters involving a future promise, guests could receive a brief follow-up after the expected completion time. Did the room change occur? Was the taxi arranged? Did maintenance return? Was the charge corrected? This step would allow the analysis to distinguish communicated assurance from validated reliability. Hotel records, where consent and privacy rules permit, could provide additional confirmation.

The resulting data are hierarchical: encounters are nested within employees, employees within departments, and departments within hotels. Multilevel structural equation modelling could estimate the indirect path from proficiency to trust through clarity while accounting for organisational conditions. Cross-level variables might include training investment, availability of multilingual resources, policy clarity, employee autonomy, staffing pressure, and hotel category. Multi-group comparisons could examine first-time versus repeat guests and routine versus recovery encounters.

Qualitative analysis would remain necessary. Selected recordings or detailed observational notes could show how clarity is jointly achieved. Researchers might examine confirmation checks, reformulation, pauses, interruptions, note-taking, screen sharing, or transfers to colleagues. Guest interviews could explore why a response felt trustworthy or evasive. Employee interviews could reveal cases in which policy ambiguity, not language difficulty, caused the problem. These data would prevent the statistical model from treating all communication failures as deficits in the employee.

Ethical design should protect staff from punitive use of research scores. Employees need to know whether their assessment is developmental, confidential, and separate from routine appraisal. Guests should consent to any recording, and personally identifiable booking or payment information must not enter the research dataset. Reporting should focus on patterns and systems rather than naming hotels, employees, nationalities, or accents in a stigmatising manner.

7. MANAGERIAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Hotels should begin by replacing broad job advertisements such as "excellent English required" with role-specific communication profiles. A front-office profile might specify understanding booking details, explaining payment conditions, giving directions, handling complaints, and recording follow-up. A restaurant profile might emphasise ingredients, allergies, recommendations, and service recovery. Clear profiles make recruitment fairer and training more focused.

Selection should include short work samples. Candidates can be asked to clarify an ambiguous booking, explain a policy, or respond to a guest who has not understood. Evaluators should score task completion, listening, clarity, and repair rather than accent prestige. This approach is more likely to identify employees who can communicate under realistic conditions and less likely to reward rehearsed self-presentation.

Training should integrate language and operations. Employees learn best when they practise with the actual policies, systems, room categories, maps, menus, and complaint procedures they use. Language instructors and hotel supervisors should collaborate so that phrases are accurate and employees understand the operational reason behind them. Training materials should include variation rather than a single perfect script, because guests describe the same need in many ways.

Communication clarity can be designed into the service. Hotels can provide concise bilingual policy summaries, visual explanations of deposits, written confirmation of transport, allergy cards, maps, and message templates. Employees should have approved language for stating uncertainty and escalation: admitting the need to verify information should be treated as responsible conduct. Supervisors should respond quickly when employees seek help; otherwise staff will be encouraged to guess.

Complaint management requires both emotional and informational discipline. Employees need to acknowledge the guest's experience without using empty apologies, identify the requested outcome, explain what can be done, and record the commitment. Recovery scripts should be flexible enough to sound human but structured enough to prevent missing steps. Managers should audit whether promises survive shift changes and departmental transfers.

Internal English communication deserves as much attention as guest-facing speech in multilingual hotels. A well-handled conversation can still fail if the employee's note is vague. Handover templates should record the issue, agreed action, responsible person, deadline, and guest contact preference. Short, standardised written English can increase institutional reliability even when staff members have different proficiency levels.

Hotels should also monitor the relationship between language demands and employee well-being. High interaction loads in a second language can be tiring, particularly during peak periods and conflict. Rotations, accessible supervisory support, and realistic staffing can reduce pressure. Training should build confidence without implying that every communication difficulty is the employee's fault. Guests, policies, technologies, and organisational constraints all shape the encounter.

At sector level, hotel schools and university programmes in Saudi Arabia can use needs-based curricula that connect English to guest trust. Existing research already identifies speaking, listening, and occupational tasks as priorities (Al-Malki et al., 2022; Al-Malki, 2023; Mohammed & Sanosi, 2024). Programmes can extend this work by assessing clarity, ethical explanation, complaint interaction, and documentation. Internships should include reflective analysis of real communication problems rather than only hours of placement.

8. DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The model's main theoretical contribution is to specify communication clarity as a bridge between employee capability and guest trust. This prevents two simplifications. The first is linguistic determinism: the belief that better English automatically produces better service. The second is operational reductionism: the belief that only the final outcome matters. Hotel guests experience both. They need the right action, but they also need to understand what is happening and whether the provider can be relied upon.

The distinction between cognitive and affective trust further clarifies why technically precise communication may not feel hospitable, and why warmth without competence may not reassure. Hotels must develop both. The balance may vary across encounters, but neither can be dismissed. In high-risk situations, clear and accurate information is essential; in emotionally difficult situations, the manner of communication shapes whether the guest feels protected or abandoned.

Several limitations require acknowledgement. The proposed relationships may differ by hotel category, guest nationality, travel purpose, price expectations, and duration of stay. Employees with stronger English may also have more experience or education, creating confounding effects. Guest ratings may reflect accent preferences or cultural stereotypes. Future research must measure these influences rather than treating perception as automatically fair.

The model also focuses on English while hotel communication is multilingual. Some guests will prefer Arabic or another language, and English may be an imperfect shared resource for both parties. Comparative research should examine when multilingual staffing, professional interpretation, or digital tools provide better outcomes. It should also explore how hotels decide which languages to prioritise without excluding smaller visitor groups.

Finally, trust can be misplaced. Clear and fluent communication may make an incorrect statement sound credible. For this reason, outcome verification and policy accuracy are indispensable. The ethical objective is not to teach employees to appear trustworthy. It is to help them communicate trustworthy practice.

9. CONCLUSION

English proficiency can contribute to tourist trust in Saudi Arabian hotels, but its influence operates principally through what guests experience as clear, responsible, and considerate communication. Listening, occupational vocabulary, interaction management, pragmatic competence, and repair allow employees to reduce uncertainty and make hotel capability visible. Communication clarity supports cognitive trust by signalling ability, integrity, and predictability; relational sensitivity supports affective trust by signalling care.

The relationship remains conditional. Language cannot repair contradictory policies, absent authority, or broken promises. Hotels should therefore combine role-based language development with plain-language service design, accurate information,

reliable handovers, and follow-through. The appropriate ambition is not accent conformity or verbal polish. It is an encounter in which the guest understands the situation, the employee understands the need, and the hotel's words remain aligned with its actions. Evaluated in this way, English proficiency becomes a practical component of hotel governance: it helps prevent avoidable error, exposes uncertainty before it turns into a promise, and gives guests a fair basis for deciding whether the provider deserves their confidence.

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