

French Language Proficiency in Hospitality Education and Industry: Perspectives from Students, Alumni, and Industry Practitioners

Rizki Amelia^{1*}, Antonius Adi¹

¹Hotel Business Program,
Universitas Agung
Podomoro, Jakarta

Abstract

Foreign language competence is a critical professional skill in the globalised hospitality industry, where intercultural communication plays a central role in service quality. While English remains dominant, additional language skills—particularly French—are increasingly valued in luxury and international hospitality contexts. However, there is limited empirical research on how French-language education aligns with industry expectations in emerging tourism markets such as Indonesia. This study addresses that gap by analysing the perceptions of students, alums, and industry practitioners regarding the importance of French language proficiency for employability and curriculum relevance. A quantitative survey was conducted with 155 respondents, including 138 from academic communities and 17 from the hospitality sector. Results show that although students find French linguistically challenging, both academic and industry groups recognise its strategic value for career advancement. The study contributes to the literature by linking language competence, perceived employability, and curriculum alignment in vocational hospitality education. Practical implications include the need for more communicative, contextual, and industry-integrated language instruction.

Keywords: French language, hospitality education, employability, curriculum alignment, multilingual competence

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalised world, the hospitality industry has become one of the most culturally diverse and linguistically demanding sectors. The constant flow of international travellers, coupled with the expansion of multinational hotel chains, requires professionals who can navigate complex intercultural service interactions. Language, in this context, is not merely a communicative tool—it is a gateway to building rapport, trust, and guest satisfaction in service delivery (Liu, 2024; Perevozchikova et al., 2023; Sarwari et al., 2024).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2023), the hospitality and tourism sector contributes over 10% to global GDP and supports one in ten jobs worldwide. This economic significance is matched by its operational complexity, where effective service often depends on employees' ability to communicate in guests' preferred languages. Although English has long been the lingua franca in international hospitality, relying solely on English is no longer sufficient in a competitive, multicultural market (Baum, 2006). Multilingualism, especially in languages associated with luxury and cultural prestige such as French, is increasingly viewed as a valuable professional asset.

France holds a unique position in the global hospitality industry. Beyond its historical association with diplomacy and high culture, French remains central to the language of fine dining and luxury service, with terms like *à la carte*, *maitre d'hôtel*, and *concierge* embedded in international hotel operations. Moreover, France is one of the top five outbound tourism markets globally, with French-speaking travellers also originating from Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada. These

Correspondence address:

Rizki Amelia

Email : rizki.amelia@podomorouniversity.ac.id

Address : Hotel Business Program, Universitas Agung Podomoro, Jakarta

guests often expect service in their native language, making French language competence a strategic differentiator—particularly in high-end hotels in Asia, including Indonesia. In response to this trend, some hospitality schools, including Podomoro University, have integrated French into their curricula to enhance students' intercultural and communicative competence. The inclusion of French aims to prepare graduates for employment in international hotel chains and luxury resorts operating in Southeast Asia. However, despite institutional efforts, the effectiveness and Relevance of French instruction in vocational education remain underexplored—especially in emerging hospitality markets like Indonesia.

A growing body of literature highlights a persistent mismatch between academic preparation and industry expectations in hospitality education (Juliastuti et al., 2023; Noviyanti, 2024; Rahmawati, 2023). While universities may offer foreign language courses, they are often based on traditional, grammar-focused models that do not equip students with the real-time, interpersonal communication skills required in professional settings. Studies suggest that language instruction should move toward communicative, experiential, and task-based learning to simulate authentic guest interactions such as check-ins, complaints, and concierge services (Preksha & Kaur, 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Moreover, the use of digital simulations and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) modules is increasingly advocated to strengthen learners' readiness for global service environments (Colomar & Menn, 2024; Trujillo & Román, 2024).

Despite this shift in pedagogical discourse, empirical studies examining the role and perceived value of French language competence in hospitality education—particularly from both student and industry perspectives—remain limited. This gap is especially evident in Southeast Asia, where French is not a dominant second language but plays a strategic role in international tourism. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following interrelated issues: (1) how students and alumni of Podomoro University perceive the learning of the French language in relation to their career aspirations in hospitality, and (2) how industry practitioners assess the relevance and value of French language proficiency in hiring and daily operations. By examining these dual perspectives, this research aims to bridge academic and industry expectations and inform the design of more effective, industry-aligned language curricula in hospitality education.

Ultimately, this study contributes to broader discussions on employability, multilingual competence, and curriculum alignment in vocational education. It offers practical recommendations for rethinking how language education—especially in non-English languages—can be better contextualised to support students' career readiness in global service industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Competence in Hospitality: From Communication to Competitive Advantage

Foreign language competence has become a cornerstone of service excellence in today's global hospitality industry. In service encounters where interpersonal communication defines guest experience, language plays both an operational and emotional role (Baum, 2006). It enables staff not only to convey information but also to establish trust, manage expectations, and personalise service delivery. Multilingualism enhances intercultural adaptability—allowing hospitality professionals to anticipate guest needs and avoid cultural misunderstandings. This strategic role of language in hospitality is reinforced by empirical research. Hotels employing multilingual staff report higher guest satisfaction scores and stronger customer loyalty. Similarly, 64% of hospitality employers across Europe consider foreign language skills a key hiring criterion. In regions such as Southeast Asia, which receive large volumes of tourists from Europe and East Asia, the capacity to manage multilingual service encounters is not optional—it is operationally essential. This elevates language competence from a support skill to a driver of competitive advantage.

Recent studies have further affirmed this connection. Foreign language knowledge is increasingly viewed as a differentiating factor in both recruitment and career advancement within international hospitality environments (Чепурна et al., 2024). Language proficiency not only improves direct communication with guests but also contributes to emotional intelligence, cultural literacy, and staff flexibility across roles and departments (Lyulka & Nazarenko, 2025). Moreover, multilingual employees are seen as cultural mediators who embody the global mindset demanded by high-end service brands (Normuratova, 2023). To translate these strategic benefits into learning outcomes, hospitality education must evolve. Traditional grammar-based instruction is insufficient for preparing students to perform in fast-paced, guest-facing roles. Instead, scholars advocate for communicative, experiential, and project-based learning approaches that simulate real-world tasks such as check-ins, complaint handling, and menu presentations (Lyulka & Nazarenko, 2025; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These methods foster not only linguistic proficiency but also industry-aligned communicative readiness.

Furthermore, foreign language education in hospitality should be reframed as a multi-competence framework that integrates multilingual and multicultural skills. As (Normuratova, 2023) argues, graduates need to be equipped not only with vocabulary and grammar but also with the soft skills needed to navigate diverse cultural norms in team-based and client-facing settings. This integration supports professional agility and cross-cultural service fluency. Digital technologies also play an increasingly important role in enhancing language competence. Virtual simulations, internet-based resources, and video-mediated exchanges have been shown to improve spontaneous communication, intercultural awareness, and confidence in authentic service contexts (Colomar & Menn, 2024; Черныш et al., 2024). These tools align with the demands of hybrid and globally networked hospitality workplaces. Ultimately, effective hospitality curricula must embed foreign language training within industry-relevant experiential learning frameworks. By combining communicative pedagogy, intercultural education, and digital tools, institutions can develop graduates who are not only proficient in language but also professionally competitive, globally adaptable, and capable of delivering service excellence in multilingual environments (Σιγάλα et al., 2023; Черныш et al., 2024).

The Strategic Position of French in Global Hospitality

French holds a uniquely strategic position in the global hospitality sector, not only as a language of communication but also as a symbol of cultural capital and professional refinement. Historically associated with haute cuisine, diplomacy, and luxury, French has shaped much of the specialised lexicon of global hospitality, with terms such as menu, à la carte, sommelier, and concierge embedded in service culture worldwide (Doris, 2023). Its presence in 29 countries and its status as an official language in prominent international organisations reflect its enduring global relevance. From a market perspective, Francophone travellers represent a significant demographic in international tourism. France is consistently among the top three outbound tourism spenders, with French-speaking visitors from Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada further expanding this segment. These guests often seek destinations that offer linguistic and cultural familiarity, prompting hospitality businesses in Asia—including Indonesia—to prioritise hiring staff proficient in French. In such contexts, French competence becomes a marker of prestige, signifying attentiveness to elite service standards and enhancing brand image.

Beyond its communicative utility, French proficiency serves as a professional signalling mechanism—connoting elegance, global orientation, and readiness to serve high-end clientele (Rovira, 2025). Scholars argue that this linguistic capital enhances employability in competitive hospitality environments by aligning with the values of international hotel brands such as Accor, Sofitel, and Club Med (Doris, 2023). Thus, French language skills offer both symbolic and practical advantages in cosmopolitan service encounters. These strategic benefits, however, require structured educational support to be realised. Formal language education pathways—bolstered by curriculum design, institutional funding, and competency frameworks—are essential to producing graduates with industry-relevant French proficiency (Baco et al., 2023; Doris, 2023). Research emphasises the importance of action-oriented, communicative pedagogy, in which French is taught through real-world hospitality scenarios such as guest check-ins, fine-dining service, and problem resolution (Lin et al., 2023). This approach moves beyond grammar drills to emphasise fluency, pronunciation, and cultural appropriateness in dynamic service contexts.

Equally critical is institutional investment in high-quality French-language programs. Public-private partnerships, long-term planning, and funding mechanisms are necessary to sustain robust offerings within hospitality curricula (Doris, 2023). Teacher development programs—particularly in Francophone contexts—must also be aligned with vocational goals, ensuring instructors are equipped to deliver contextualised, workplace-oriented French instruction (Baco et al., 2023). Moreover, French language learning must be embedded within the multilingual and multicultural realities of global hospitality. As (Rovira, 2025) notes, contemporary tourism involves diverse linguistic flows, and graduates must navigate interactions not only in French but across languages in complex, cross-cultural environments. Understanding how French functions alongside English, Mandarin, Arabic, and other languages is key to building intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and delivering inclusive guest experiences. In sum, French language competence in hospitality is not an academic add-on but a strategic workforce asset. It signals cultural sophistication, strengthens service personalisation, and expands graduates' career pathways in international hospitality. To unlock its full potential, hospitality programs must treat French not simply as a language course but as an integrated component of professional readiness, supported by communicative pedagogy, institutional strategy, and global industry alignment (Baco et al., 2023; Doris, 2023; Lin et al., 2023; Rovira, 2025).

Language Education in Vocational Higher Education

Effective foreign language education in vocational settings—such as hospitality and tourism—requires a paradigm shift from traditional grammar-centric instruction to a communicative, contextualised, and learner-centred pedagogy. Scholars such as (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) advocate for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL), emphasising language use in realistic professional scenarios. These approaches yield higher learner retention and functional fluency compared to conventional linguistic instruction. This pedagogical transition is essential in hospitality education, where graduates must perform in high-stakes, multilingual service environments. However, many universities still rely on theoretical linguistics, resulting in a mismatch between academic preparation and workplace expectations. To bridge this gap, experiential models—including industry-based internships, dual-language simulations, and project-based learning—have gained prominence. These models are grounded in constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that knowledge is most effectively acquired through social interaction and authentic engagement.

Recent research in vocational English and foreign language education further reinforces this position. Integrating language instruction with professional content areas enhances learners' acquisition of disciplinary language practices, which are crucial for handling service tasks in real-world hospitality settings (Li, 2024; Mao, 2024; Yang, 2025; Zhu, 2024). This integrated approach develops situated communicative competence, enabling students to confidently manage tasks such as guest check-ins, complaint handling, and menu explanation—all essential for employability. At the heart of this reform is the cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—a core objective of modern vocational language education (Demianenko & Moroz, 2023; Zhu, 2024). ICC encompasses not only linguistic ability but also cross-cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability—key attributes for navigating culturally diverse service encounters. Scholars emphasise embedding ICC into curriculum content, instructional methods, and assessment models to foster graduates' global readiness (Liudmila et al., 2024; Mao, 2024).

To operationalise these aims, scholars advocate for career-oriented instruction that links language skills to students' long-term professional trajectories (Belousov, 2023; Yang, 2025). Experiential projects, bilingual service-learning, and performance-based assessments are recommended to replicate the communicative pressures of hospitality workplaces while providing formative feedback. In parallel, the rise of digital pedagogy has significantly expanded the possibilities of language instruction. Tools such as virtual exchanges, online simulations, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), and conversational AI bots enable learners to practice spontaneous communication in immersive, multilingual environments (Jin, 2023; Savochkina & Zhukova, 2023; Zhang, 2024). These technologies not only increase learner motivation but also enhance ICC by enabling authentic intercultural engagement beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, teacher professionalisation and the development of robust ICC assessment frameworks are critical to ensuring that language instruction aligns with evolving industry standards (Demianenko & Moroz, 2023; Liudmila et al., 2024). Investment in teacher training, curriculum reform, and institutional support mechanisms will be necessary to scale and sustain high-quality language programs within hospitality faculties. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of integrated, hospitality-oriented language curricula that combine linguistic proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, and digital literacies. By aligning language education with authentic service encounters and labour market demands, vocational institutions can better equip graduates to thrive in multilingual, multicultural, and digitally mediated global hospitality environments (Jin, 2023; Mao, 2024; Yang, 2025; Zhang, 2024; Zhu, 2024).

Language Competence as a Driver of Employability

Language competence is increasingly recognised as a strategic asset in the 21st-century labour market, particularly in service industries such as hospitality, where interpersonal communication is central to value creation. Multilingual graduates not only enjoy higher employability rates but also command 10–15% higher starting salaries compared to monolingual peers. In competitive global markets, language proficiency operates as both a skill and a signalling mechanism, denoting professionalism, cognitive flexibility, and international readiness. In hospitality, language skills are directly tied to career entry, mobility, and advancement. Multilingual staff enhance organisational agility, improve guest satisfaction, and drive brand loyalty in international hotel chains. Beyond functional communication, language ability intersects with broader employability constructs—including intercultural communication, emotional intelligence, and a global mindset—all of which are increasingly valued in guest-facing and cross-functional roles (Lee et al., 2023; Mouboua et al., 2024).

At the regional policy level, language competence is embedded within frameworks such as the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) on Tourism Professionals, which stipulates that proficiency in an international language—beyond English—is a prerequisite for cross-border employment within ASEAN. This reinforces the notion that language education is not merely academic enhancement but a gateway to regional labour mobility and international workforce integration. However, research also indicates a discrepancy between students' perceived language competence and industry expectations, particularly in communicative fluency, service-specific terminology, and intercultural responsiveness (Lee et al., 2023; Perevozchikova et al., 2023). While students may achieve formal certification, they often struggle to perform effectively in dynamic, real-world service settings. This gap underscores the need to embed employability-focused language instruction within hospitality education.

To address this, curriculum design must integrate disciplinary language practices and employment-oriented communicative tasks that reflect actual workplace interactions—such as guest check-ins, complaint handling, and upselling in multiple languages (Liu, 2024; Mouboua et al., 2024). Internship-based instruction, simulated service encounters, and targeted modules (e.g., French for front-office operations or food & beverage service) are essential for cultivating both linguistic proficiency and industry relevance. Furthermore, empirical analyses of job advertisements and hiring patterns affirm that foreign language skills are not ancillary but central to hospitality employment pathways (Liu, 2024). Employers increasingly expect job candidates to possess ready-to-deploy communication capabilities tailored to culturally diverse environments. As such, hospitality curricula must embed foreign language instruction into experiential learning ecosystems, combining language training with internships, simulations, and reflective assessment practices (Lee et al., 2023; Sarwari et al., 2024). In this regard, institutions such as Podomoro University, which prioritise industry-linked and experiential learning, are well-positioned to integrate language education as a core employability strategy. Embedding French language instruction within the broader framework of intercultural competence and professional readiness not only enhances graduates' marketability but also aligns with regional mobility agendas and global service standards.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the perceptions of students, alums, and hospitality industry practitioners regarding the relevance and importance of French language competence in both educational and professional hospitality settings. This design was selected because it allows systematic measurement and comparison of observable phenomena, such as attitudes, motivations, and perceptions, without establishing causal relationships. Instead, it focuses on describing current conditions and perspectives to generate practical insights aligned with real-world demands (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2017). An online survey was chosen as the primary data collection method due to its efficiency and broad reach, particularly in major hospitality hubs such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Bali. The anonymity of online responses also helped minimise social desirability bias, encouraging participants to respond candidly (Bryman, 2016). The research process unfolded in three phases: the development and validation of the research instrument, the distribution and collection of survey data, and the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative responses.

Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study consisted of 155 individuals selected through purposive sampling. This technique was used to ensure that the respondents possessed relevant knowledge and experience in relation to the study's objectives. Among them, 138 were students and alumni from the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Podomoro University, and 17 were practitioners currently employed in hotels, resorts, and travel agencies. This sample was intentionally composed to reflect perspectives from both educational and industrial domains, thereby facilitating a comparative understanding of the relationship between hospitality education and workplace expectations regarding language competence. Demographically, 63 per cent of the participants identified as female and 37 per cent as male, a distribution that reflects the general gender composition of hospitality-related academic programs in Indonesia. The majority of student and alums respondents were affiliated with Hotel Management and Hospitality Business programs, while others were affiliated with Tourism Business and Events Management. The industry respondents held a variety of roles, including front-office operations, food and beverage services, human resources, marketing, and event coordination. Despite the moderate sample size, the composition enabled meaningful interpretation of general patterns and intergroup comparisons, consistent with the goals of descriptive research.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to explore experiences and perceptions of French language learning and its role in employability. The instrument was developed with reference to key literature in foreign language pedagogy, hospitality education, and professional competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It was structured into four main sections: demographic information, learning experiences, perceptions of language difficulty and motivation, and perceived relevance of the French language in the job market. The first section gathered demographic and background data, including gender, academic program, and professional role. The second section focused on participants' experience with French language education, including duration, methods, and satisfaction levels. The third section examined perceptions of the language's complexity — particularly in grammar and pronunciation — as well as motivational aspects. The final section assessed the perceived Relevance of French language competence in professional settings, particularly in relation to hiring, promotion, and performance in hospitality roles.

All items in the second to fourth sections were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree). This structure enabled the quantification of subjective responses and facilitated statistical analysis of central tendencies and distribution patterns. To ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness, the draft questionnaire was reviewed by three academic experts in hospitality management, applied linguistics, and educational research. Their feedback informed revisions in phrasing, item clarity, and sequencing. A pilot test involving 15 hospitality students was conducted to assess reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). The final version of the instrument also included several open-ended questions designed to capture participants' personal reflections and contextual insights. These qualitative responses were intended to complement the quantitative data, offering depth and narrative to support the interpretation of statistical trends.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over four weeks in April 2025. The survey was administered online via Google Forms and disseminated through institutional communication channels, student and alumni groups, and professional hospitality networks, including the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) and LinkedIn. Each invitation included a brief explanation of the study's purpose, a statement of confidentiality, and an estimate of the time required to complete the survey. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Of the 162 responses initially received, seven were excluded for incomplete or inconsistent answers, leaving 155 valid responses for analysis. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 10-12 minutes. The data were subsequently exported into Microsoft Excel and SPSS for processing and analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify central tendencies, frequencies, and percentage distributions. These measures provided a numerical overview of participants' experiences and attitudes toward French-language education in the hospitality context. Cross-tabulations were conducted to compare responses between student/alumni and practitioner groups, revealing potential similarities and differences in perceptions across academic and professional environments. In addition to the statistical analysis, the qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were examined using thematic analysis, following the methodology proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved multiple readings of narrative responses to identify recurring themes, such as learning motivation, perceived instructional challenges, and the practical relevance of language skills. These themes were then grouped into meaningful clusters, providing deeper insights into the learning context and its implications for employability and curriculum design.

This mixed-method approach, which integrated quantitative measurement and qualitative interpretation, enabled a holistic understanding of how French language competence is perceived and valued in hospitality education and industry practice. By combining numerical analysis with contextual nuance, the research methodology offered both reliability and depth in addressing the study's core questions. The following section presents the results of this analysis and discusses how the findings align with current literature on language education, employability, and professional competence in the hospitality sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student and Alumni Perceptions

The analysis of responses from students and alumni revealed a complex set of attitudes toward learning French in hospitality education, characterised by strong recognition of its strategic value but tempered by widespread perceptions of linguistic difficulty and pedagogical limitations. A significant majority—86% of students and alumni respondents—classified French as either complex or challenging to learn. This perception was supported by qualitative explanations highlighting two significant challenges: grammatical complexity and phonological unfamiliarity. Respondents frequently cited the intricacies of verb conjugation, gendered nouns, and syntactic irregularities, as well as difficulties with pronunciation and listening comprehension, which they described as more cognitively demanding than English or Bahasa Indonesia. These findings are consistent with linguistic studies that position French among the more structurally demanding languages for Indonesian learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Despite these challenges, a majority—68%—acknowledged that proficiency in French enhances employability, particularly in international hotel chains such as Accor, Sofitel, and Club Med, where French remains a preferred language for guest interaction. This recognition reflects an awareness of language as a form of cultural capital and a differentiator in the job market, as well as the professional advantages of multilingualism in global hospitality careers. However, when respondents were asked to reflect on their actual language outcomes, only 48% reported achieving a functional level of communicative competence after completing their French courses. This discrepancy suggests a gap between curricular intentions and instructional outcomes. Analysis of open-ended responses pointed to pedagogical limitations, such as a focus on grammar drills rather than spoken interaction, insufficient contact hours, and a Lack of immersive, real-world practice. As one student noted:

"The course would be more effective if we could practice through real simulations or role-plays related to hotel operations rather than focusing mainly on grammar exercises."

A critical insight emerged from alumni who had undertaken industry internships, especially in environments that allowed for interaction with French-speaking guests. These respondents reported greater confidence in their French and emphasised the value of experiential, context-rich learning. This finding reinforces the relevance of (Kolb, 1984) experiential learning theory, which posits that skills are most effectively acquired through authentic engagement in real-world tasks.

Furthermore, students and alumni expressed a desire for more industry-oriented approaches to language education, including role-play, language immersion, and integration with work-integrated learning components. This aligns with the broader pedagogical shift advocated in hospitality language literature—toward communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and practical fluency (Demianenko & Moroz, 2023; Rahmawati, 2023). While students and alums clearly value French as a professional asset, they also perceive shortcomings in the current instructional model, particularly in its ability to prepare them for real-world communication in hospitality settings. These findings suggest an urgent need for pedagogical innovation that reorients language instruction toward experiential, communicative, and industry-aligned approaches—an agenda further substantiated by the perspectives of industry practitioners discussed in the following sections.

Industry Practitioners' Perspectives

Industry practitioners strongly endorse French language competence as a professional asset in the hospitality sector. Among the 17 hospitality professionals surveyed, 88% rated French proficiency as either "important" or "very important", indicating that multilingual communication is increasingly perceived as a core competency for guest-facing roles. Respondents highlighted several operational areas where French language skills are most applicable, particularly in positions involving direct interaction with international guests. Roles such as front office staff, guest relations officers, concierges, and food and beverage service personnel were consistently mentioned as requiring both linguistic dexterity and cultural sensitivity. One respondent, a guest relations manager at a five-star resort in Bali, remarked:

"Guests from France and francophone countries appreciate it when staff greet them in French—it creates immediate rapport and trust."

This reflection illustrates the symbolic and relational dimensions of language use in hospitality, where communication shapes not only the efficiency of service delivery but also the emotional connection that defines guest satisfaction. Analysis of multilingualism as a vehicle for intercultural mediation, especially in service experiences grounded in personalization and empathy. From a recruitment standpoint, 70% of practitioners stated they would prioritize hiring a candidate with French proficiency when qualifications are otherwise equal. This preference stems from practical considerations: employees with foreign language skills

can cater to a broader range of guests, reduce reliance on interpreters, and navigate service disruptions more effectively. Beyond operational benefits, respondents linked language competence with professionalism, confidence, and cultural awareness—traits that enhance an organisation's brand identity and service ethos. These insights align with (Baum, 2006) findings on how multilingualism supports not only internal communication but also brand differentiation in competitive hospitality markets.

A particularly notable theme emerging from qualitative responses is the association between French and luxury service standards. Respondents noted that familiarity with French terminology commonly used in fine dining and high-end hotel operations—such as *mise en place*, *à la carte*, or *menu du jour*—enhances staff credibility and elevates the guest experience. In this context, French functions as both a practical skill and a marker of prestige, contributing to the symbolic capital required in luxury service environments. As one executive summarised, "French is not just a language; it is part of the service culture." This dual role of French—as an operational tool and a signifier of refinement—supports earlier theoretical assertions regarding its enduring position in global hospitality discourse. Even as English remains the dominant working language, French retains symbolic and functional relevance, particularly in establishments catering to European guests or seeking to maintain an image of cosmopolitan elegance.

In addition to these reflections, several practitioners expressed interest in closer collaboration with universities, especially in developing contextualised, operationally relevant language training. Practitioners emphasised that graduates often arrive with general language knowledge but cannot apply it in dynamic service interactions. Targeted programs—focusing on hospitality scenarios, role-playing, and terminology specific to hotel operations—were seen as key to closing this gap. Collectively, these insights affirm a strong industry demand for graduates equipped with practical language skills, intercultural awareness, and situational communication competence. The alignment between industry needs and student aspirations—both of which recognise the gap between language instruction and real-world demands—signals an opportunity for curricular innovation through industry-academic partnerships, experiential modules, and professionally aligned assessments.

Comparative Insights

The findings of this study align closely with international trends that highlight the strategic role of multilingual competence in enhancing employability and service quality in the hospitality sector. In both European and Asian contexts, foreign language proficiency—particularly in widely spoken international languages such as French—has been positively correlated with improved employment outcomes, professional mobility, and cross-cultural service effectiveness. For instance, hospitality graduates proficient in two or more foreign languages reported 23 per cent higher employability rates than their monolingual peers. In parallel, institutions in Malaysia and Thailand that integrate foreign language certification programs—such as the *Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française* (DELF) for French or the HSK for Mandarin—have demonstrated stronger graduate placement records in multinational hospitality enterprises. These findings reinforce the premise that foreign language education, when embedded as a core element of vocational training, contributes significantly to workforce competitiveness and operational readiness.

What distinguishes these successful models is the integration of language learning with practical, profession-specific applications, often referred to as French for Specific Purposes (FSP). Unlike general language instruction, FSP is tailored to authentic industry scenarios, enabling students to acquire communicative competencies directly applicable to service contexts. For example, modules such as French for Front Office Operations might include vocabulary and expressions for welcoming guests, managing bookings, and handling complaints. At the same time, French for Food and Beverage Service may focus on menu presentation, wine recommendations, and proper etiquette for customer interaction. This task-based and situational learning approach is supported by (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), who argue that communicative relevance and contextual practice significantly enhance both language retention and learner motivation.

Comparative evidence also indicates that graduates from programs incorporating workplace exposure—such as internships, industry simulations, and role-play exercises in the target language—tend to develop higher levels of fluency, confidence, and intercultural sensitivity. Employers in these settings express greater confidence in hiring candidates who demonstrate not only technical know-how but also the linguistic and interpersonal agility required in global service environments. This contrasts with institutions that treat language education as peripheral or elective, which often fail to produce graduates capable of executing bilingual or culturally nuanced service tasks effectively. In this light, the findings from Indonesia—particularly from Podomoro University—reveal similar challenges and opportunities. While students recognise the importance of French for career advancement, there remains a gap between curricular content and real-world

communication demands, particularly in spoken fluency and contextual use. Industry feedback further amplifies this concern, emphasising the need for operational language competence over theoretical knowledge. Therefore, aligning French language instruction with hospitality-specific functions is not only pedagogically sound but also strategically necessary. It responds to the evolving needs of the industry, supports graduate employability, and positions language education as a cornerstone of professional formation in tourism and hospitality. The comparative lens strengthens this conclusion, showing that contextualised, experiential, and industry-aligned language curricula are instrumental in preparing graduates to thrive in multilingual, multicultural, and service-intensive work environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal convergence among students, alumni, and industry perspectives on the strategic importance of French language competence in hospitality, while also highlighting critical gaps in instructional delivery and practical application. The discussion below synthesises these insights within the broader theoretical and pedagogical frameworks outlined in the literature.

The Perceived Value of French: Alignment Between Stakeholders

A central insight from both learner and practitioner responses is the strong recognition of French as a language of prestige, differentiation, and global employability. Language in hospitality functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a marker of cultural fluency and service quality. This was reflected in the data: 68% of students and alums acknowledged the career-enhancing potential of French, and 88% of industry respondents affirmed its importance for frontline and luxury service roles. These findings resonate with global research, which positions foreign language proficiency—especially in culturally significant languages such as French—as a competitive asset in international hospitality. Notably, industry practitioners emphasised the symbolic capital of French in high-end contexts, where its association with elegance, fine dining, and exclusivity enhances brand image and guest experience. In this respect, the alignment between academic perceptions and employer expectations underscores the relevance of French language education in hospitality curricula, particularly when it is positioned as a professional tool rather than a purely academic subject.

The Proficiency Gap: Between Curriculum Goals and Outcomes

Despite the acknowledged importance of French, only 48% of students and alumni reported achieving functional communicative competence by the end of their studies. This signals a persistent misalignment between curriculum objectives and learning outcomes, echoing critiques in the literature about traditional grammar-focused approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The difficulties learners cite—particularly in grammar, pronunciation, and limited oral exposure—suggest that pedagogical strategies have not kept pace with the real-world communicative demands of the hospitality industry. This gap is further illustrated by student feedback requesting more role-plays, service simulations, and experiential opportunities. Such recommendations are consistent with the constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978)(Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasises learning through meaningful social interaction. Similarly, alums who participated in internships or had exposure to French-speaking guests reported greater confidence in and greater application of their language skills. These insights point to the need for curriculum redesign that prioritises situational fluency and applied language use through French for Specific Purposes (FSP) modules and integrated industry practice.

Curriculum Relevance: Lessons from Comparative Contexts

The international comparisons presented in the study reinforce the importance of embedding foreign language education within vocational and professional frameworks. Institutions in Malaysia, Thailand, and Europe that combine language certification with service-focused instruction have demonstrated superior employability outcomes (Perevozchikova et al., 2023). These models reflect best practices in vocational language education, where communicative competence is developed through task-based, digitally supported, and contextually grounded pedagogy (Jin, 2023). In contrast, the Indonesian context—while showing institutional commitment to global readiness—continues to rely heavily on classroom instruction with limited operational immersion. Podomoro University's inclusion of French in its hospitality curriculum represents a progressive step, but the findings suggest the need for deeper integration between language education and experiential industry engagement. This includes opportunities for co-teaching with industry partners, French-language internships, and simulation-based assessments that reflect real-world service challenges.

Toward Industry-Academic Collaboration and Reform

The study also highlights opportunities for closer collaboration between universities and the hospitality sector to co-develop responsive language programs. Employers expressed willingness to support training initiatives aligned with operational realities, signalling potential for dual-delivery models, guest lectures, and workplace-based language learning. In doing so, academic institutions can ensure that language education is not isolated from the industry's evolving linguistic and intercultural demands. From a policy perspective, these findings support the call for greater investment in language education as part of Indonesia's tourism and workforce development agenda. French, as a language of both international diplomacy and luxury service, offers a niche yet powerful avenue for enhancing the country's human capital competitiveness in global hospitality.

Implications

The results of this study yield several significant implications for vocational higher education in hospitality, particularly regarding curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and academic–industry collaboration. They also inform broader strategic considerations concerning language policy and workforce development in multilingual service economies. First, the findings underscore the need for pedagogical reform in how foreign languages, particularly French, are taught within hospitality programs. While students and alums clearly recognize the value of French language competence for professional advancement, their limited communicative fluency upon graduation suggests a misalignment between intended learning outcomes and actual instructional practices. Traditional grammar-focused approaches appear insufficient to prepare students for the interpersonal demands of guest-facing roles. Therefore, hospitality institutions must begin to reframe language learning as a form of vocational training, emphasizing communicative, experiential, and context-specific methodologies. Instruction that replicates realistic service interactions—such as check-ins, restaurant service, complaint resolution, or concierge dialogue—can more effectively bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and workplace application.

Second, the implications for curriculum developers are obvious. The integration of French for Specific Purposes (FSP) into hospitality education offers a promising avenue for enhancing both student motivation and graduate employability. Curriculum design must be informed by the operational realities of the hospitality industry, embedding foreign language learning directly within professional modules rather than treating it as a supplementary or elective component. Additionally, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) should be framed as a core outcome of language instruction. As this study reveals, linguistic proficiency alone is insufficient in multilingual service environments; students must also acquire the cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, and adaptive communication skills necessary to perform confidently and appropriately in cross-cultural encounters.

Furthermore, the study reveals an opportunity for deeper collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners. Industry practitioners not only value French language skills but also express a willingness to support more specialized and context-driven language training. This convergence of interest suggests a strategic rationale for universities to engage the hospitality industry in co-developing language modules, providing real-world learning contexts, and offering work-integrated learning experiences. Such partnerships could lead to more targeted, operationally relevant training and help ensure that language instruction reflects current service expectations and employer preferences. At a broader policy level, the findings support the argument that foreign language education should be recognized as a key pillar of human capital development in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Given the global and multicultural nature of these industries, language competence enhances not only employability but also national competitiveness in international tourism markets. Therefore, governments and educational authorities should consider investing in programs that promote language training as a strategic asset. This could include expanding access to international certification schemes, incentivizing multilingual curriculum development, and aligning national vocational qualifications with international language standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

This study highlights the transformative potential of well-integrated, context-sensitive, and industry-aligned language education in hospitality programs. By placing greater emphasis on communicative competence, experiential learning, and intercultural sensitivity, institutions can better equip their graduates for success in a globalized service economy where language is not only a medium of communication but also a marker of professionalism, cultural competence, and service excellence.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both academic and industry stakeholders strongly affirm the strategic importance of French language competence within hospitality education and professional practice. While many students and alumni at Podomoro University perceive French as a linguistically demanding subject, they nonetheless recognize its substantial value in enhancing employability, international mobility, and professional distinction. This dual perception—of difficulty and strategic importance—reveals a meaningful paradox: the challenge of learning French does not deter motivation but instead reinforces its value as a long-term investment in professional capital. From the perspective of industry practitioners, the study underscores the economic and relational value of multilingualism in service-oriented environments. Employers consistently emphasized that language proficiency, particularly in French, directly impacts guest satisfaction, brand perception, and customer loyalty. French-speaking staff are perceived as delivering more personalized, empathetic, and culturally sensitive service—hallmarks of luxury hospitality. These findings align with prior research, which positions multilingualism as both an operational necessity and a strategic advantage in global hospitality settings.

A critical insight emerging from this study is the pedagogical gap between current instructional practices and the communicative competencies required in the workplace. Although the French language curriculum at Podomoro University provides essential foundations, it appears insufficient in fostering operational fluency or spontaneous communicative ability. Respondents called for more experiential and interactive learning methods—such as simulation-based training, conversation practice, and immersion through internships or industry collaboration—that mirror real-world hospitality contexts. Addressing this gap is crucial to ensure that language education aligns with the dynamic needs of the hospitality industry. The findings also reinforce the idea that foreign language education should be integrated within a broader framework of employability and intercultural competence. To achieve this, institutions like Podomoro University should expand partnerships with industry actors, language centres, and international stakeholders to co-create contextualised, practice-oriented French-language programs. Collaborations with organisations such as the Alliance Française or French hospitality brands (e.g., Accor, Club Med) could provide students with greater authenticity, credibility, and global exposure.

While this study focuses specifically on French, its implications extend to the broader challenge of multilingualism in hospitality education. As global tourism markets continue to diversify, demand for professionals proficient in Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish, and Japanese is likely to grow. Future research should consider comparative studies across languages to identify which competencies offer the highest professional returns in specific regional or service contexts. Longitudinal research could also investigate how sustained language proficiency influences career mobility, role diversification, and long-term earnings, thereby positioning language learning as both an educational and economic asset. In conclusion, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on language education in hospitality by validating the continued relevance of French, highlighting the instructional gaps between academia and industry, and offering a clear direction for curriculum enhancement. For institutions such as Podomoro University, adopting a communicative, industry-integrated, and culturally embedded approach to language instruction is essential to prepare graduates who are not only linguistically proficient but also globally competent, professionally adaptable, and competitive in the international tourism and hospitality workforce.

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