

Developing an integrated service training model for local restaurant waiters: Evidence from Manado, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development in Manado has stimulated rapid restaurant growth, yet improvements in human resources have not kept pace, particularly among local waiters whose service competence remains limited. Existing training programs are often generic, insufficiently contextualized, and unable to accommodate participants' different educational and work backgrounds. This study aims to develop an integrated service training model specifically designed for waiters in local restaurants. A mixed-methods approach was employed was employed combining questionnaires, observations, and interviews with customers, restaurant owners, and waiters. Survey data were analyzed descriptively to identify gaps between service expectations and performance, while qualitative data were examined thematically to explore service problems and training needs. The findings indicate a clear discrepancy between customers' high expectations and the actual service performance of local waiters, particularly in communication, product knowledge, service etiquette, and problem-handling. The proposed integrated model groups participants based on prior education and experience, and applies differentiated training methods: basic training (video presentation/vestibule), intermediate training (role-play), and advanced training (case studies and managerial problem-solving). Competencies are assessed at each stage and recognized through certification at different levels. The model is considered practical and relevant for aligning training content with participant needs, preventing training fatigue, and generating clearer competency outcomes. This study contributes to vocational education and tourism by demonstrating how workplace-based training can be structured, competency-oriented, and certification-ready, while supporting local workforce readiness and service quality improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized as a labor-intensive industry in which human resources play a decisive role in shaping visitor experience and destination image (Baum, 2015; Kim & Baker, 2024). Service encounters between workers and tourists strongly influence satisfaction, loyalty, and overall perception of a destination (Ivyanno U. Canny, 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008). In restaurant settings, hospitality attitudes such as friendliness, empathy, politeness, and professionalism become essential components of service quality standards (Amoozegar et al., 2025; Ivyanno Utama Canny, 2013).

Manado has positioned tourism as a strategic development priority, accompanied by rapid growth in accommodation and restaurant facilities (Langi et al., 2024; Pemerintah Kota Manado, 2022). However, this expansion has not been matched by adequate development of local human resources (Towoliu et al., 2017). Many local restaurant workers still lack basic competencies in communication, product knowledge, service etiquette, and problem-solving skills (Towoliu et al., 2016). Consequently, restaurant owners tend to recruit employees from outside the region, reinforcing the perception that local workers are not yet ready to compete in the service sector. This

situation is problematic because culinary tourism has increasingly become one of the city's featured attractions (Sukartini et al., 2024).

The literature on service quality emphasizes that customer satisfaction is shaped by both the quality of the product and the manner in which services are delivered (Amoozegar et al., 2025). Models such as SERVQUAL identify reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles as critical dimensions of service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016). Similarly, technical and functional service quality jointly influence organizational image and customer perceptions (Grönroos, 1984). Studies across various contexts indicate that weak service assurance and empathy may reduce customer trust and satisfaction, underscoring the importance of structured service training (Marković et al., 2010; Tan et al., 2014). Training, therefore, becomes a strategic intervention to improve competence, behavior, and professionalism (Salas et al., 2012). Training is intended to enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes so that workers can perform their tasks effectively and meet industry standards (Dessler, 1997; Simamora et al., 2017). Evidence also shows that effective training contributes to higher productivity, safer workplaces, and stronger customer relationships (Gegenfurtner et al., 2020).

Despite this, most training programs and studies focus on hotels and large hospitality chains, while local or independent restaurants receive limited attention (Blume et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2011). Existing training models are often generic and not tailored to workers' educational backgrounds, experience levels, or the specific service contexts of local restaurants (Salas et al., 2012). As a result, training can become repetitive, less engaging, and unable to produce measurable improvements in competency because the learning content is not sufficiently aligned with participants' workplace needs and characteristics (Blume et al., 2010; Gegenfurtner et al., 2020; Knowles et al., 2014). This study addresses this gap by developing an integrated service training model specifically designed for waiters in local restaurants in Manado. The model integrates competency assessment, participant grouping based on background, context-based training content, and competency certification.

Beyond industry relevance, this study also contributes to the field of education—particularly vocational and technical education (TVET). The proposed model illustrates how workplace-based training can be aligned with competency-based learning, assessment standards, and certification mechanisms (Billett & Billet, 2011). It offers practical implications for curriculum development, partnership between schools and industry, and the design of training programs that are authentic, engaging, and responsive to labor-market needs (Caves et al., 2021). By focusing on local workforce readiness, the proposed model not only supports the tourism sector but also strengthens vocational learning pathways and lifelong professional development (UNESCO, 2022).

In addition, strengthening waiter competencies is closely related to the broader agenda of vocational and lifelong education. Contemporary TVET systems are expected not only to prepare graduates for initial employment but also to support continuous upskilling and reskilling throughout their careers in response to changing industry demands (UNESCO, 2022). Workplace-based training models, therefore, should integrate clearly defined learning outcomes, assessment mechanisms, and certification processes within a competency-based framework that is recognized by employers and industry stakeholders (UNESCO, 2022). When training is aligned with national competency standards and qualification frameworks, workers gain clearer career pathways, greater mobility opportunities, and a stronger professional identity (Cedefop, 2023). Furthermore, competency-based and workplace-oriented training contributes to workforce readiness by ensuring that learning remains relevant to labor-market needs and professional practice (Caves et al., 2021). Consequently, this study offers insights into how restaurant service training can be structured to remain practical and industry-responsive while remaining grounded in educational theory, workplace learning principles, and competency-based approaches.

Furthermore, the development of an integrated training model has strategic implications for tourism governance and local policy. Local governments frequently invest heavily in physical infrastructure and promotion, yet human resource development often remains fragmented and project-based. A systematic model that links needs assessment, training design, implementation, evaluation, and certification can help ensure sustainability and accountability in training initiatives. Such a model also encourages collaboration among stakeholders, including restaurant associations,

tourism offices, vocational institutions, and training providers. In this sense, the study contributes to discussions on how tourism development should be balanced between infrastructure growth and human capital development.

Finally, the findings of this study are expected to enrich academic discourse regarding service quality training in emerging tourism destinations. Most existing frameworks originate from large international hotel chains and may not be directly applicable to local restaurant contexts with limited resources. By examining waiter training in community-based restaurants, this research highlights challenges, including diverse educational backgrounds, informal work cultures, and limited exposure to formal training. At the same time, it demonstrates that with appropriate instructional design, meaningful improvement in competence and service attitudes can still be achieved. Thus, the study advances both theoretical understanding and practical innovation in restaurant service training.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of restaurant service competencies and training needs (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The mixed-methods approach was selected because quantitative data alone could identify measurable patterns and trends but could not fully explain the underlying attitudes, behaviors, and competency development processes of participants (Greene et al., 1989). Qualitative findings were therefore used to explore how and why such changes occurred, providing contextual explanations for the quantitative results (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021). The study adopted the principle of complementarity, whereby quantitative survey data offered measurable evidence of service gaps and training outcomes, while qualitative insights enriched the interpretation and understanding of these findings (Fetters et al., 2013; Greene et al., 1989). By integrating both forms of evidence, the research was able to identify service deficiencies, determine training needs, and evaluate the proposed integrated training model more comprehensively and systematically (Guetterman et al., 2015).

The research was conducted at selected local restaurants in two culinary clusters in Manado: Sabua Bulu Malalayang and the Megamas area. These locations were purposively selected because they represent popular culinary destinations that frequently interact with domestic and international visitors, yet still rely heavily on local workers with varied educational and work backgrounds. Participants consisted of waiters and stakeholders (restaurant owners/managers and customers) who were directly involved in service interactions. Inclusion criteria focused on individuals in active front-line service roles, ensuring that the data reflected authentic service practices and challenges.

Data were collected using three main techniques: questionnaire-based surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observations. The survey captured customer perceptions and expectations regarding service quality, using indicators adapted from service quality literature (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles). In-depth interviews were conducted with selected customers, workers, and key stakeholders to obtain deeper explanations about service gaps, perceived problems, and expectations regarding training. Observations were conducted in natural service settings to document waiter behavior, communication patterns, responsiveness, and problem-handling practices.

Instrument development followed several stages. Survey items were adapted from validated service-quality instruments and adjusted to the local restaurant context. Interview guides were structured around themes of competence, training experience, and service challenges. Observation sheets focused on indicators of knowledge, skills, and attitude during service encounters. All instruments underwent expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, and revisions were made in response to feedback. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey data, while interview and observation data were coded and grouped thematically to identify recurring patterns.

The findings from the three data sources were then triangulated to inform the design of the integrated service training model. Needs identified in the field were translated into training components, including participant grouping, learning content, instructional strategies, and certification mechanisms. The model was developed to be practical, context-sensitive, and aligned

with principles of competency-based education. Ethical considerations included ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality, and using the findings solely for research and development. Through this methodological approach, the study produced a model that is theoretically grounded and empirically responsive to the real conditions faced by local restaurant workers in Manado.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are derived from survey data, interviews, and field observations conducted in two major culinary destinations in Manado: Sabua Bulu Malalayang and Mega Mas Manado. Sabua Bulu Malalayang is a well-known traditional culinary area located along the coast of Malalayang, Manado City. Even before its formal development as a designated culinary destination, the area had already attracted large numbers of local residents and visitors, particularly on weekends and public holidays. Malalayang Beach is a popular tourist attraction because of its convenient location near the city center and its scenic coastal landscape. Visitors can also enjoy views of Bunaken National Park, one of Manado's most prominent marine tourism destinations, from the shoreline.

In the vicinity of Malalayang Beach, residents often sell typical Manado dishes, such as Pisang Goreng, Manado Porridge, Tahu Isi, and Mie Cakalang. The people of Manado are very happy to spend the weekend or holiday in this area. Therefore, during holidays, traffic in this area will be congested. Sabua Bulu Malayayang Manado was held on July 30, 2012, and was arranged by the Mayor of Manado. At the time of the inauguration, 46 field creative merchants (*pedagang kaki lima*) were operating in the location, organized and receiving government assistance, and supported by PT Sinar Sosro through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Program.

The Megamas Region is a coastal reclamation area of 36 Ha, built by PT. Megasurya Nusalestari. From its history, the reclamation process itself began in 1996. The Megamas Region concept is an integrated Business and Tourism Area. In the Megamas Manado area, there are shops, malls, and trade centers, as well as restaurants along the Mega Mas beach. Construction of the mall began in 2000. To date, it has been present in this Megamas Area, with hundreds of store units comprising 4 (four) types of stores distinguished by building width and style: Mega Style, Mega Profit, Mega Bright, and Mega Smart. The shops in the Megamas area have become prestigious, as the buildings are constructed to high specifications, particularly with respect to construction and safety, and the location is highly strategic, situated in the BoB (Boulevard on Business) area. In the Megamas Area, a culinary area was established that offers a variety of local, Nusantara, and international cuisines. Local culinary entrepreneurs who invest in competing culinary fields provide specialized services in the Minahasa region.

Result from Questionnaire-based Survey

A total of 116 respondents completed the questionnaire; 97.50% were from North Sulawesi (Manado, Minahasa, Sangir, Bolmong, and Bitung), and 2.50% were from outside the province. They came from Bogor and Ternate. The respondents' professional categories were: 28.45% private-sector employees, 25.86% government officials, 19.83% students, 13.79% professionals, and 6.90% entrepreneurs. Guests expect high service quality when visiting or ordering from a restaurant menu, as evidenced by their expectations for waiter service at a local restaurant in Manado. This set expectations for guests: 60% had very high expectations, 36% had high expectation, 3% were somewhat expecting, and 1% were not expecting. No respondents reported having no expectations (Figure 1).

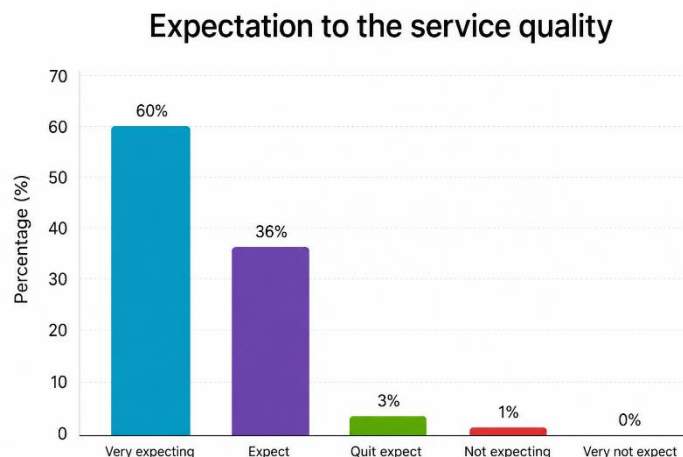


Figure 1. Expectation of the Service Quality

Service quality significantly affects guest satisfaction, even when guests are willing to pay more when they feel well served (Homburg et al., 2005). At certain stages, it will affect the formation of customer loyalty to the product, thereby reducing the long-term cost of product promotion. This means that the business benefits when guests or customers are satisfied, and that it provides a free promotional channel. A satisfied guest will refer the next prospective guest, thereby forming a positive chain of word-of-mouth promotion (Widyaratna et al., 2001; Yang, 2017). However, in practice, high expectations for service quality are inversely associated with outcomes. The following performance results were assessed by respondents: 5% very satisfied, 38% satisfied, 30% quite satisfied, 21% less satisfied, and 6% not satisfied (Figure 2).

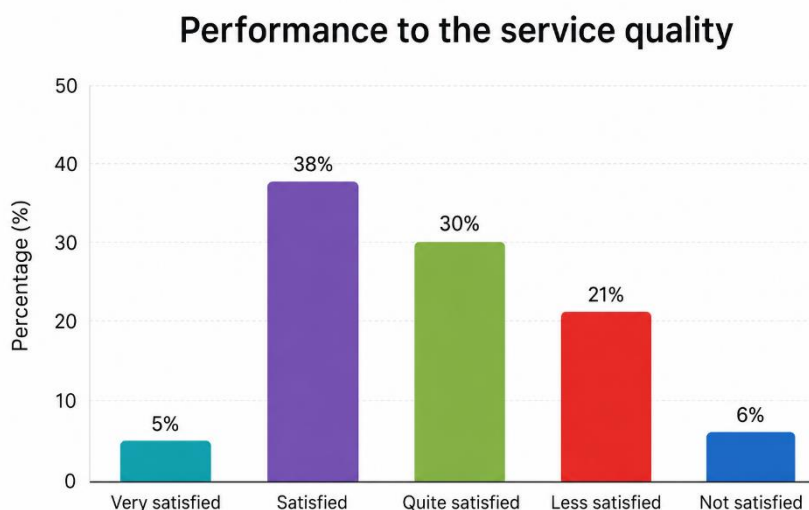


Figure 2. Performance of the Service Quality

In line with research from Towoliu et al. (2017) on the quality of service from staff working in various local restaurants in Manado City. Through a SERVQUAL approach with five dimensions of service: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The research found that the quality of service workers at local restaurants remains well below customer expectations, with a service expectations-average service performance gap of -1.14, indicating that service quality is perceived negatively and requires improved service worker performance.

Result from the Interview

Information was collected from several interviewees who had eaten at the culinary site. They were selected because they could articulate the benefits derived from a local culinary experience. In-depth interviews were conducted with 5 individuals using a snowball technique. At the time of the interview, the transcript was transcribed and coded in accordance with the research objectives and interview questions. Quotations (translated into English by the author) "written in italics surrounded by double quotes" to indicate that these are the words of the informant.

The participants strongly support the development of tourism in the city of Manado, with the necessary tourism facilities and infrastructure, but they are also concerned about the readiness of local workers in the Tourism Industry. The informants expressed concern and hoped that workers in the Culinary Industry should be trained to improve their behavior, knowledge, and skills. The participant also sincerely hopes that the industry will not fire its employees but will continue to provide training. Local governments and the culinary industry should collaborate with training providers to develop employee training programs. The demand to provide the best service is needed to sustain guests or tourists:

"As a resident of Manado, I highly appreciate that the local government and the private sector have built various tourism facilities and infrastructure, in Manado city, ...but I also need to express my concerns about the workers in the local Industry who need to improve their knowledge and skills.... I expect the government and the private sector to work with educational institutions that provide culinary training services to train the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of local workers working in local restaurants."(local community).

Other informants also provide evidence that waiters in the local culinary industry, on average, lack the competence to perform their role. They are recruited by relatives or close relatives, with no background in tourism education. To improve Manado's image as a culinary destination, informants advise the local government and local restaurant or culinary owners to train waiters by entrusting them to a hospitality training institution. They also reminded that hospitality is very important for the development of tourist destinations.

Thus, the quality of service among workers at local restaurants requires improvement. The academic participant also notes that local workers fall far short of the service standards expected in the hospitality industry. In addition, they highlighted the training methods for employees in the hospitality industry, including the culinary field. It was disclosed that the training provided remained unchanged, with no improvement in training methods, resulting in saturation. According to informants, the training did not pay attention to the method, and the background of the trainees:

"I know that the waiters generally work under the quality service standards. I have also observed several times that I have eaten at local restaurants, but I have asked them whether they have received training; they answered yes, yet the presentation of the material is always the same. Bored, besides that, we have been getting the same material beforehand getting more training, we are reunited with new participants with the material we've got before, ... we are bored sir ... I agree with their opinion that surely each of us who are given any briefing of any given period with the same materials and methods will surely be bored ... (Academics).

A criticism of the quality of service of waitress workers in local restaurants, as well as monotonous training materials providers, and the lack of development of training methods. However, this has become an appropriate input for improving widely accepted learning and training models.

Result from Observation

As a region designated as a culinary tourist destination, Mega Mas and Sabua Bulu Malalayang are becoming the primary focus of tourists visiting Manado City. Located in downtown Manado and adjacent to the Bunaken National Park, this area has a strategic value for the development of culinary tourism. However, human resource readiness, as a leading factor, is essential to balancing the development of tourism infrastructure. Regarding the readiness of local workers in the culinary industry, observational results indicate that workers lack basic service skills, have

limited product knowledge, and exhibit disrespectful behavior that undermines guests' interests (Hsiao et al., 2016). Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of observations of workers at local restaurants in the culinary sector.

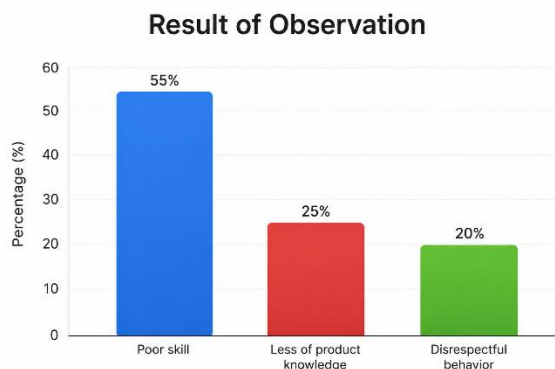


Figure 3. Result of Observation

The basic things that are categorized in low skills for example: when guests visiting guests are not addressed, do not invite in and sit, guests are not offered menus, not interactive in talking with guests, communication is not polite, then to knowledge of the product, When guests ask about the menu: ingredients from their food products do not know, even until the menu is sold out even sometimes the waiter had to ask first to the kitchen. Regarding negative behavioral categories, when guests seek assistance, they tend to be apathetic; even when their complaints are ignored, they are left to take their own actions (Siu et al., 2013). Thus, these observations indicate that the skills, knowledge, and behaviors of waiters in local restaurants require training to enhance employee competence.

Integrated Training Model

The poor quality of service in local restaurants may be attributed to an imbalance in tourism development, where greater attention is often given to physical infrastructure and destination attractiveness than to the development of human resources and service competencies (Baum, 2015). Sustainable tourism development requires a balanced approach that integrates destination attractiveness with the continuous development of a skilled and professional workforce capable of delivering high-quality visitor experiences (Kim & Baker, 2024). Tourism is widely recognized as one of the world's largest industries and remains a strategic sector in Indonesia due to its substantial contribution to economic growth, employment, and regional development (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2024). As a complex industry, tourism comprises multiple interconnected components, including accommodation, restaurants and food services, transportation, attractions, travel agencies, and other supporting services that collectively shape tourists' experiences and destination competitiveness (Leiper, 2004). Consequently, improving service quality in local restaurants should be viewed as an integral part of broader tourism development efforts rather than as an isolated organizational issue.

As an emerging tourism destination that promotes tourism as a leading sector, Manado requires a competent local workforce supported by recruitment and training processes that consider educational background, work experience, and the competency requirements of the culinary industry. However, the development of human resources in local restaurants has not kept pace with the growth of tourism and restaurant businesses, particularly among local waiters whose service competencies remain limited (Towoliu et al., 2017). In practice, recruitment in local restaurants often relies on recommendations from family members or close relatives, even when prospective workers lack relevant tourism education and adequate training experience (Towoliu et al., 2017). This condition may reinforce the perception that local workers are not yet fully prepared to compete in the restaurant service sector, especially when restaurants and franchise operations increasingly employ workers from outside the region (Towoliu et al., 2017). In the long term, such recruitment and competency

gaps may weaken the competitiveness of regional culinary tourism, as service quality and employee–tourist interactions are critical to the overall tourist experience and destination image (Kim & Baker, 2024).

One practical solution for local restaurant owners is to provide training for their employees. Recruiting new workers who already possess the skills required by the restaurant can be challenging due to the limited availability of educational and training institutions that prepare qualified personnel for the hospitality and culinary sectors. In Manado, there are only a limited number of tourism-related educational institutions, and these institutions offer training across various areas of competence within the tourism industry. Furthermore, recruiting workers from outside the region is often not a feasible option for local restaurant owners because it may involve additional costs, such as higher salaries, accommodation, and relocation expenses. Consequently, local restaurants are encouraged to invest in the development of their existing workforce through structured training programs that enhance service competencies and align employee skills with industry standards.

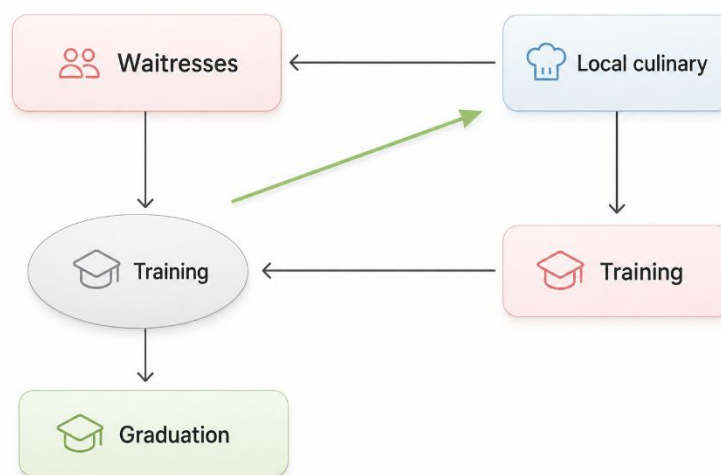


Figure 4. Previous Model Training

Employee training in local restaurants is necessary, given the impact of service quality on the region's tourism industry. Which training model best aligns with the industry's needs and accommodates the diverse backgrounds of employees in local restaurants? Based on the observation that the pattern of training approach for employees in the hospitality industry, including culinary, is general, where the training service provider institution places trainees who already have a skill education background and the participants who do not have the skills and educational background and who have experience in their work are placed in the same training session. Then the coach presented the same method of the training method to all the trainees. The training results for all participants are awarded the same award, with no differentiation in disagreement. In models like this, which are always valid today, participants tend to have education and work experience because the application of materials and methods is the same. In Figure 4, a model of the training approach generally applies.

The figure was developed based on a qualitative analysis conducted by the researcher through an observational approach over several years at a training institution that provides training and competency assessment programs in the hospitality sector, including food and beverage production, food and beverage service, front office, and housekeeping. The existing training model is illustrated in Figure 5. In practice, culinary industry stakeholders contact the training institution to request training services. The institution then recruits and gathers participants for training without taking into account differences in educational background or prior work experience. Participants are assembled in a single training setting and receive the same training program regardless of their individual characteristics. Upon completion of the training, participants are awarded a training completion certificate.

The disadvantages of the model training approach are: (1) the generalized method of training provided, which may be lectures, video presentations, role-plays, or simulations; and (2) participants are placed in the same class exercises regardless of educational background or work experience of the participants; (3) the likelihood of participants who have the experience to be saturated with training; (4) a training completion certificate, only to mention one word, is "pass". The virtues of this model are practical, do not require much time or effort, and can accommodate large numbers of participants. Building on the previous approach, we propose a model of integrated development, grounded in observations and supported by theories of training and human resource development. Figure 5 presents the proposed integrated waiter training model, where the following explanation is given:

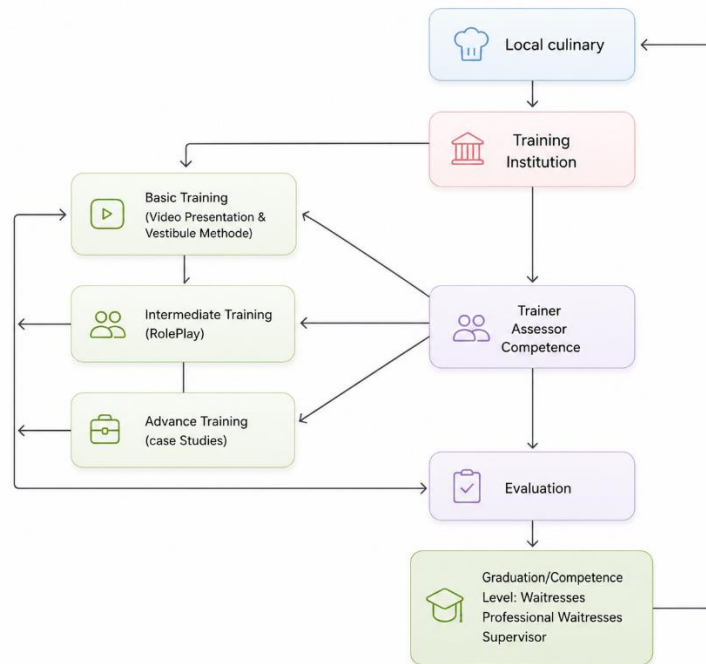


Figure 5. Integrated Service Training Model

The culinary industry contacts the training institute to assess competencies; the training implementing agency then requests participant data from the culinary business before the training begins. Next, training institutions will review participant data, including educational backgrounds and work experience, as required. After that, the institution will submit the data to the coach, who already holds a certificate of assessors, to divide the class based on the data received from the participants. Institutions, through competency assessors, review files simultaneously and divide participants based on biographical data: those with an appropriate educational background or work experience, those with no work experience, or those who are new to the workforce.

The class will then be divided based on verified biographical data to train or test participants' abilities. Participants who have never received training and have no education that supports them will attend the Basic Training classes and receive training methods, video presentations, or a vestibule. Those with an educational background but no work experience, or those who have just entered the industry, will participate in Intermediate-level training and receive instruction through methods such as role-play and simulation. Lastly, experienced professionals would attend advanced training courses and receive instruction in solving industry cases and in managerial approaches.

The process continues to the training stage, which can take 2-3 days, depending on the training requirements and the required competence level. On the last day, they will be evaluated to receive a graduation certificate. In the graduation status, the training institutes will be given, each with a different grade. The last statement passed as a waitress, then graduated as a professional

waiter, and also graduated as a supervisor. Once the evaluation process is complete and participants have received their certificates, they will return to the culinary industry.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the service quality of waiters in local restaurants in Manado remains relatively low, as evidenced by a negative gap between customer expectations and actual performance. This finding suggests that customers are generally not satisfied with the quality of service they receive. Improving waiter competence is therefore essential, particularly because restaurant service is integral to the tourism experience and influences destination image. The integrated service training model developed in this study offers a practical solution to strengthen waiters' competence. The model enables the identification of existing skills, provides targeted training based on participants' backgrounds, and recognizes competencies through certification. This approach not only supports service improvement but also encourages continuous professional development. Beyond the restaurant context, the findings have broader implications for the tourism industry. Strengthening local human resources is crucial to ensuring that tourism growth is inclusive, competitive, and sustainable. Therefore, collaboration among local governments, restaurant owners, vocational institutions, and training providers is strongly recommended to implement and scale the model. Future initiatives should consider institutionalizing this training within ongoing workforce development programs in the tourism sector.

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