

“AI IS MY ALL-IN-ONE ASSISTANT”: NAVIGATING AI-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN MULTILINGUAL HOTEL SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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Abstract

The growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has transformed communication in the hospitality industry. While previous studies have primarily examined AI in language learning, limited attention has been paid to its role in multilingual workplace interactions. This study explores how hotel staff utilize AI tools to support guest communication and navigate multilingual service encounters. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved 14 hotel staff members from Awann Sewu Boutique Hotel & Suite, Semarang, Indonesia, who participated in an English for Hospitality Industry training program. A questionnaire was used to map participants' AI use and inform the purposive selection of participants, while a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with seven selected participants served as the primary source of qualitative data. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that AI functions as a communication assistant that helps staff overcome linguistic barriers, communicate across multiple languages, and improve service efficiency. At the same time, participants recognized both the opportunities and limitations of AI-assisted communication, emphasizing the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs and the continuing importance of empathy, interpersonal interaction, and human judgment. The study highlights the growing significance of multilingual communication competence, digital communication literacy, and strategic AI use in hospitality settings. These findings offer practical implications for the training of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and hospitality English instruction in increasingly technology-mediated workplaces.

Keywords— artificial intelligence, digital communication literacy, ESP, hospitality industry, multilingual communication

1. Introduction

The increasing integration of AI technologies into workplace communication carries important implications for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training and hospitality English instruction. Traditionally, English has been regarded as the dominant medium of international communication in

hospitality contexts, and research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has therefore emphasized the importance of developing employees' communicative competence in English (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023). However, contemporary hospitality workplaces are increasingly multilingual, requiring employees to communicate not only in English but also with guests who speak a wide range of other languages. Consequently, effective hospitality communication increasingly involves flexible multilingual communication strategies rather than English proficiency alone. Meanwhile, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed professional communication across many industries, including hospitality. AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, Gemini, and other large language model-based tools are increasingly used to assist employees in translating messages, generating responses, and facilitating multilingual communication during customer interactions (Kumawat et al., 2025; Ng, 2012; Wang et al., 2025).

Previous studies in ESP, particularly in hospitality industry have mainly focused on functional language skills required in frontline service encounters, such as greeting guests, handling reservations, responding to complaints, providing information, and maintaining professional interaction during customer service exchanges (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012). These studies emphasize that effective communication, politeness, and cross-cultural interactional competence are essential components of quality hospitality service. Similarly, many subsequent studies on hospitality communication have shown that language proficiency directly influences customer satisfaction, service quality, and organizational reputation because communication constitutes a central component of guests' overall service experience (Scerri & Presbury, 2022; Wagner, 2018; Walelign, 2019; Vásquez, 2011). These findings suggest that communication in hospitality contexts involves both transactional and relational functions, requiring employees to strategically adapt their language use to diverse guest expectations and multilingual interactions. In fact, communication in hospitality settings is often more complex than merely using grammatically accurate English. In many multilingual tourism contexts, hotel staff encounter guests who speak different languages and possess varying levels of English proficiency. As a result, communication frequently involves negotiation of meaning, code-switching, translation practices, and the use of multimodal resources to achieve mutual understanding. This phenomenon reflects what Canagarajah (2013) terms *translingual practice* and what García & Wei (2014) conceptualize as *translanguaging*, whereby multilingual speakers flexibly mobilize their entire linguistic repertoires rather than treating languages as separate and bounded systems. In hospitality settings, such practices enable employees to navigate multilingual service encounters, negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries, and respond more effectively to the diverse communicative needs of guests.

The increasing digitalization of communication has further reshaped interactional practices in hospitality workplaces. Communication is no longer limited to face-to-face interaction but increasingly occurs through digital platforms such as messaging applications, online booking systems, and social media channels. In this context, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have emerged as important mediational tools in professional communication. AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexicity, and automated writing assistants are increasingly used to support multilingual communication by helping users translate messages, generate responses, and refine language in real time. Recent studies suggest that AI-mediated communication can improve efficiency, enhance linguistic accuracy, and support more cooperative interaction in workplace settings (Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2024). Similarly, Kasneci et al., (2023) and Kohnke et al., (2023) argue that generative AI tools can support users in organizing ideas, improving language quality, and increasing confidence in communication tasks. In fact, conversational AI technologies have increasingly reshaped hospitality communication through chatbots, virtual assistants, and large language model-based systems that support multilingual customer interaction and service delivery (Aransyah et al., 2026). Studies on conversational AI in hospitality settings demonstrate that AI-mediated communication is commonly used to facilitate customer inquiries, reservation management, personalized

guest interaction, and multilingual communication support across hotel services (Athikkal & Jenq, 2022; Li et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, the adoption of AI technologies in hospitality communication has gradually increased alongside the digital transformation of the tourism and hotel industry. Recent studies indicate that Indonesian hotels have begun implementing AI-based communication systems such as chatbots, automated customer service platforms, and multilingual digital assistance to improve operational efficiency and guest experience (Dolang & Setiawan, 2025). Research on hotel chatbot implementation in Indonesia further shows that AI technologies are increasingly used to support front office communication, particularly in handling guest inquiries, reservation services, and multilingual interaction during peak operational periods (Hidayat & Setiawan, 2024). Similarly, studies on AI-based hospitality systems in Indonesia reveal that AI-assisted communication can enhance service responsiveness, personalize guest interaction, and support customer engagement in technology-mediated service environments (Padri et al., 2025). Furthermore, Indonesian hotel employees increasingly perceive AI tools as useful for enhancing English communication and confidence in workplace interactions (Febbyriane & Febrianto, 2025). These developments suggest that AI is becoming an increasingly important communicative resource within Indonesian hospitality settings, where employees are expected to navigate multilingual interaction while maintaining efficient and professional service communication.

From a sociocultural perspective, technological tools play a significant role in mediating human action and interaction. Vygotsky (1978) argues that human cognition and social activity are mediated through cultural artifacts and tools. In multilingual workplace contexts, AI tools may therefore function as mediational resources that help employees navigate communicative challenges and accomplish interactional goals. Rather than merely replacing human communication, AI technologies may shape how users negotiate meaning, perform professional roles, and manage service interactions. This perspective is particularly relevant in hospitality settings, where communication requires not only linguistic competence but also politeness, empathy, emotional sensitivity, and responsiveness to guests' needs. Despite these potential benefits, the integration of AI into workplace communication also raises important concerns. Kasneci et al. (2023) emphasize that while AI can support language use and learning, excessive reliance on such tools may reduce opportunities for users to develop independent communicative competence and critical language awareness. In addition, AI-generated communication may create ambiguity regarding authenticity and authorship. Hohenstein et al. (2023) found that AI-assisted communication is sometimes perceived as less sincere and less trustworthy, particularly in emotionally sensitive interactions. Such concerns are highly relevant in hospitality contexts, where personalized interaction and emotional connection are essential components of service quality.

Although previous studies have explored AI in language learning and workplace communication, particularly in hospitality settings in Indonesia, several important gaps remain. Much of the existing literature focuses on AI as a pedagogical tool for enhancing language proficiency, communicative competence, or academic performance rather than examining its role in authentic workplace communication (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Tlili et al., 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Furthermore, research on AI-mediated communication in hospitality contexts remains limited, particularly in multilingual environments where communication involves flexible language practices rather than English-only interaction. The experiential dimensions of AI-assisted communication, including communication strategies, confidence, technological dependence, and perceptions of professionalism, also remain underexplored in EFL contexts such as Indonesia. Consequently, little is known about how hotel staff strategically integrate AI tools into real multilingual service encounters with guests (Simatupang & Supri, 2024).

To address these gaps, this study explores how hotel staff use AI tools to navigate multilingual communication in hospitality settings. Specifically, this study investigates the communication strategies employed by hotel staff through AI-mediated interaction with guests, the perceived benefits and challenges

of using AI tools in service encounters, and the ways AI technologies shape multilingual workplace communication practices. By focusing on participants' lived experiences in authentic service contexts, this study is expected to contribute to the growing discussion on AI-mediated communication, translanguaging practices, and workplace interaction in ESP and hospitality research. This study is guided by the following research questions: 1) How do hotel staff use AI tools in multilingual hotel service encounters? 2) What AI-mediated communication strategies do hotel staff employ when interacting with guests from different linguistic backgrounds? 3) How do hotel staff perceive the benefits and challenges of using AI tools in multilingual workplace communication? 4) What implications does AI-mediated communication have for ESP training and hospitality English instruction?

This study is significant theoretically, empirically, and practically as it contributes to current discussions on AI-mediated communication, multilingual workplace interaction, and ESP in hospitality contexts. Theoretically, this study extends Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective by examining AI tools as mediational resources that shape communication practices in multilingual hotel service encounters. It also contributes to translanguaging theory proposed by García & Wei (2014), highlighting how hotel staff strategically combine linguistic and technological resources to communicate with guests from diverse language backgrounds. Empirically, this study addresses the limited research on AI use in authentic workplace communication, especially in multilingual hospitality settings. Previous studies have mainly focused on AI in educational contexts and language learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023), while research in the field of hospitality has traditionally emphasized functional communication skills such as greeting guests and handling complaints (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012). Therefore, this study expands existing research by exploring how hotel staff actually use AI tools during real service interactions.

2. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how hotel staff use AI tools in multilingual hotel service encounters. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and communication practices in authentic workplace settings rather than to measure variables quantitatively. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), qualitative research is suitable for investigating social phenomena from participants' perspectives and for developing an in-depth understanding of contextualized experiences. In addition, case study research enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). This design was therefore appropriate for examining AI-mediated communication practices in the hospitality industry, particularly within multilingual service interactions involving hotel staff and guests.

2.2. Samples/Participants

The study was conducted during an English for Hospitality Industry training program involving 30 hotel staff members from Awann Sewu Boutique Hotel & Suite, Semarang, in May 2026. Of these, 14 staff members voluntarily completed the questionnaire and served as the primary participants for the study. They represented various hotel departments, including Food and Beverage, Front Office, Housekeeping, Maintenance, and Marketing, and reported using AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT and translation applications to support communication with guests. Subsequently, seven participants were purposively selected for a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) based on their experiences with AI-assisted communication and their ability to provide rich information relevant to the study. Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich participants who could offer valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015).

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participant	Department	Length of Service	Frequency of Interaction with Foreign Guests	Languages Commonly Used with Guests	AI Tool Most Frequently Used
P1	Marketing	< 1 year	Rarely	Indonesian, English	Other AI application
P2	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Sometimes	English	ChatGPT
P3	Food and Beverage	4–6 years	Sometimes	Indonesian, English	ChatGPT
P4	Front Office	4–6 years	Very often	Indonesian, English	ChatGPT
P5	Maintenance	4–6 years	Sometimes	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	Not reported
P6	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Rarely	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	Not reported
P7	Front Office	4–6 years	Very often	Indonesian, English	Not reported
P8	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Sometimes	English	Other AI application
P9	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Sometimes	Indonesian	Other AI application
P10	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Very often	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	ChatGPT
P11	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Rarely	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	Not reported
P12	Housekeeping	4–6 years	Often	Indonesian	Not reported
P13	Maintenance	4–6 years	Rarely	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	Other AI application
P14	Food and Beverage	1–3 years	Sometimes	Indonesian, English, Other Languages	Meta AI

Two of the researchers (authors 1 and 2) had been serving as regular instructors in the English for Hospitality Industry training program at Awann Sewu Boutique Hotel & Suite, Semarang prior to the study. This position enabled prolonged engagement with the research setting and facilitated access to participants. As a result, participants were already familiar with the researchers, which contributed to the development of rapport and encouraged more open discussions during the focus group sessions. At the same time, the researchers remained aware of their dual roles as instructors and researchers and therefore maintained reflexivity throughout the research process to minimize potential bias in data collection and interpretation.

2.3. Instruments

Data were collected through a questionnaire and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). A questionnaire was distributed to all 30 participants at the beginning of the study to obtain preliminary information regarding their use of AI tools in workplace communication. The questionnaire included items related to

participants' personal and professional background (5 items), their familiarity with AI tools (5 items), frequency of use (2 items), types of AI applications used (2 items), communication strategies (3 items), perceived benefits and challenges of using AI in multilingual hotel service encounters (4 items). The questionnaire comprises of closed-ended questions (multiple-choice, frequency scales, and five-point Likert-scale items) together with several open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words. The questionnaire served as an initial mapping instrument and assisted the researchers in identifying potential participants for the FGD. The questionnaire responses were examined to identify participants representing varying levels of AI experience, frequency of AI use, and perceived confidence in multilingual communication. Based on these responses, seven participants with diverse experiences were purposively selected for the FGD to ensure a broad range of perspectives. The FGD was subsequently employed as the primary instrument to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and communication strategies related to AI-mediated communication. FGD is particularly useful for generating rich data through group interaction and discussion among participants who share similar experiences and enabling the researchers to explore participants' shared experiences and generate rich data through group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1997). Considering the need for participants to share deep and meaningful stories comfortably, the FGD was conducted in the Indonesian language. Based on the questionnaire responses, seven participants were purposively selected to participate in a single FGD session because they could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The discussion focused on participants' use of AI tools, communication challenges, perceived benefits, multilingual communication strategies, and the implications of AI use for hospitality communication. The FGD was conducted in Indonesian to allow participants to express their views comfortably and in greater depth. The session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

2.4. Data analysis

Questionnaire responses were first analyzed descriptively to map participants' AI usage patterns and support the purposive selection of Focus Group Discussion participants. Thematic analysis was subsequently applied to the FGD transcripts, following six phases: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Questionnaire findings were then used to contextualize and triangulate the themes emerging from the FGD. First, the questionnaire responses and the FGD recording were reviewed to familiarize the researchers with the data. The FGD recording was subsequently transcribed, and both data sources were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying recurring patterns related to AI use, multilingual communication strategies, perceived benefits, communication challenges, and views on AI-assisted interaction. The codes were then organized into broader themes that captured participants' experiences of using AI in multilingual hotel service encounters. Finally, the themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to relevant theories and previous studies on AI-mediated communication, multilingual communication, workplace communication, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing themes emerging from the questionnaire and FGD data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The analysis of questionnaire responses and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) data revealed four major themes regarding hotel staff's use of AI in multilingual service encounters: (1) AI as an essential communication support tool, (2) AI-mediated communication strategies in multilingual interactions, (3) opportunities and limitations of AI-assisted communication, and (4) AI as a learning companion rather than a replacement for human interaction. The summarized results can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Summary of Findings

Theme	Evidence from Questionnaire	Evidence from FGD	Interpretation
AI as an Essential Communication Support Tool	Most participants reported using AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, Google Translate, Meta AI, and other translation applications to support communication with guests.	Participants described AI as a helpful tool for translating messages, understanding foreign languages, and communicating with guests who could not speak Indonesian or English.	AI has become an important communicative resource that supports frontline hotel staff in daily service interactions.
AI-Mediated Communication in Multilingual Service Encounters	Participants indicated that they frequently encountered guests speaking languages other than English, particularly Asian languages. AI was commonly used to overcome language barriers.	Participants reported using Google Translate and similar applications when interacting with guests who spoke Mandarin or other unfamiliar languages.	AI functions as a bridge for multilingual communication rather than merely supporting English communication.
Perceived Benefits of AI Use	Participants reported that AI helped them understand foreign languages, formulate messages, communicate more efficiently, and increase confidence when interacting with guests.	Participants described AI as “very helpful” and emphasized its role in facilitating communication and completing service tasks successfully.	AI contributes to greater communication effectiveness, efficiency, and confidence in multilingual workplace interactions.
Challenges and Limitations of AI	Several participants identified translation inaccuracies, contextual misunderstandings, and technological limitations as challenges in using AI.	Participants explained that AI sometimes produced inaccurate translations, failed to detect speech correctly, or struggled with rapid speech and unfamiliar accents.	Although useful, AI-mediated communication remains imperfect and requires human judgment and monitoring.
Human Communication Remains Essential	Participants considered interpersonal communication and language skills important despite the availability of AI tools.	Participants consistently stated that face-to-face interaction, practice with experienced speakers, and real communication situations were more valuable than relying solely on AI.	AI is viewed as a supportive assistant rather than a replacement for human interaction and language learning.

Implications for Language Training	Participants identified English proficiency, digital literacy, AI use, and communication skills as important workplace competencies.	Participants suggested that future training should combine language learning with AI-assisted communication strategies and exposure to diverse accents and multilingual situations.	Hospitality language training should integrate AI literacy, multilingual communication competence, and practical workplace communication skills.
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3.1.1 AI as an Essential Communication Support Tool

The findings indicate that AI has become an important communication support tool in participants' daily work. Questionnaire data showed that many participants regularly used AI-powered applications, particularly ChatGPT, Google Translate, and other translation tools, to assist them in communicating with guests. The FGD further revealed that participants relied on AI when encountering communication difficulties, especially when interacting with guests who did not share a common language with them. Participants viewed AI as a practical resource that enabled them to communicate more effectively and efficiently. One participant explained:

"As long as the foreign guests can speak English, we just stick to English. But if it's a tougher language like Mandarin, we usually just use Google Translate." (Participant 4, FGD, Jun 2, 2026; authors' translation)

Similarly, another participant emphasized the usefulness of AI in workplace communication:

"Using AI is pretty helpful." (Participant 8, FGD, June 2, 2026; author's translation)

"It's very helpful. Especially if they don't speak Indonesian or English at all." (Participant 6, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

These responses suggest that AI has become integrated into participants' communication practices and is perceived as an accessible solution for overcoming language-related challenges in hotel service encounters.

3.1.2 AI-Mediated Communication in Multilingual Service Encounters

A prominent finding emerging from both data sources is that AI was primarily used to facilitate multilingual communication rather than merely support English communication. Although English remained an important language in hospitality settings, participants reported that many foreign guests, particularly those from Asian countries, did not always communicate in English. Consequently, communication challenges often involved languages other than English, and participants frequently employed AI-assisted translation as a communication strategy. Rather than relying solely on their own English proficiency, they used AI tools to negotiate meaning and maintain service interactions with guests speaking different languages. Participants explained that AI tools were frequently used as mediating resources when neither Indonesian nor English could serve as a shared language between staff and guests. Translation applications were commonly employed to facilitate mutual understanding and ensure effective service delivery.

As previously said, a participant stated:

"Yes... For more difficult languages, like Chinese, it's a real challenge. We just use Google Translate for Indonesian to Chinese." (Participant 7, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

Another participant described how AI was used when communication in English became difficult: *"Let's just use Google Translate if we're struggling to talk. The main thing is to get things done."* (Participant 5, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

These accounts indicate that AI functions as a mediating tool that enables hotel staff to navigate multilingual service encounters. In other words, AI functions not merely as a tool for English communication but as a strategic resource for managing multilingual service encounters. The findings therefore extend the discussion beyond English communication and highlight the importance of multilingual communication competence in contemporary hospitality workplaces.

3.1.3 Opportunities and Limitations of AI-assisted Communication

Although participants generally perceived AI positively, they also acknowledged several limitations associated with its use. Questionnaire responses identified translation accuracy and contextual appropriateness as recurring concerns. Similar issues emerged during the FGD discussions. Participants reported instances in which AI-generated translations failed to convey the intended meaning accurately. Some participants also experienced difficulties when AI applications misinterpreted speech input or failed to recognize particular accents.

"The main challenge is that Google Translate often mistranslates what we mean. It happens both ways, even Mandarin to Indonesian when interacting with Chinese guests. They just need to speak very slowly so the AI can detect it properly, since the tool struggles when someone talks fast." (Participant 1, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

"Yeah, totally agree. Sometimes what the AI translates is just completely out of context." (Participant 10, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

In addition, participants noted that communication challenges sometimes persisted even when English was used because of variations in pronunciation and accent.

"Sometimes even when people speak English, it's still difficult to understand them. Like people from Liverpool, their accent is just completely different. We might honestly need a tool to help us catch those kinds of accents." (Participant 9, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

"Exactly. When someone has a strong accent, it can be really tough to follow." (Participant 3, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

These findings suggest that AI cannot fully eliminate communication barriers. While AI enhances communicative efficiency, effective communication still requires users to evaluate, monitor, and adjust AI-generated outputs according to the interactional context.

3.1.4 AI as a Learning Companion Rather Than a Replacement for Human Interaction

The final and most prominent theme concerns participants' perceptions of AI as a supportive assistant rather than a substitute for human communication and language learning. While participants acknowledged the usefulness of AI applications, they consistently emphasized the continuing importance of face-to-face interaction, practice, and human guidance in developing communication skills. Several participants described AI as a complementary resource that supports learning and communication but cannot replace direct interaction with more experienced speakers or trainers.

One participant described ChatGPT as:

"When it comes to work, I think ChatGPT is just a tool. It still can't replace face-to-face interaction." (Participant 12, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

Similarly, another participant expressed a preference for face-to-face learning:

"I prefer learning face-to-face. Like, whenever we have foreign guests, I love practicing directly with them, so I can get a better handle on it. And it helps me understand better." (Participant 14, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

Participants also emphasized the value of interacting with more experienced individuals, explaining that direct communication provided opportunities for immediate feedback and clarification. As one participant stated:

"With more experienced people around, you can just ask them directly whenever you have any questions." (Participant 1, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of emotional and interpersonal dimensions of communication that cannot be fully replicated by AI:

“For me, when you're dealing with guests, it's all about the emotion and being spontaneous.”
(Participant 5, FGD, June 2, 2026; authors' translation)

These findings indicate that participants do not view AI as a replacement for human communication. Instead, AI is perceived as an “all-in-one assistant” that facilitates communication and learning while human interaction remains central to professional development and quality hospitality service. This perspective reflects participants' recognition that successful communication in hospitality involves not only linguistic accuracy but also relational and interpersonal dimensions that technology cannot fully replicate.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that AI has become an important mediational resource in multilingual hotel service encounters. Rather than functioning merely as a language-learning tool, AI was used by participants to facilitate communication, overcome language barriers, and support service delivery in interactions with guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In this sense, the findings contribute to current discussions on AI-mediated communication, multilingual communication, ESP in hospitality, digital communication literacy, and AI-informed language learning.

As shown in the first theme, AI was utilized as an essential communication support tool. It indicates how participants integrated AI applications such as ChatGPT and Google Translate into their daily workplace communication. This finding supports recent research suggesting that AI technologies are increasingly being integrated into workplace communication as collaborative assistants that help employees navigate communicative demands and solve interactional problems, rather than functioning merely as tools for educational purposes (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025; Kasneci et al., 2023; Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2024; Wang & Goel, 2024). From a sociocultural perspective, AI can be understood as a mediational tool that enables individuals to accomplish communicative tasks that might otherwise exceed their current linguistic resources (Engeström, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). The participants' accounts indicate that AI assisted them in understanding guest requests, producing messages, and conveying information more effectively. These findings align with previous studies reporting that AI-supported communication can enhance users' confidence, efficiency, and perceived communicative competence (Kasneci et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023). In the context of hospitality services, where timely and accurate communication is essential for customer satisfaction, AI appears to function as a practical workplace resource that supports service performance.

The second theme, AI-mediated communication in multilingual service encounters, extends current discussions on multilingual communication in hospitality contexts. While many ESP studies have traditionally emphasized English as the dominant medium of international hospitality communication (Blue & Harun, 2003; Jenkins, 2014; Kim et al., 2023; Prachanant, 2012; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023), the findings reveal that participants frequently encountered guests who spoke languages other than English, particularly various Asian languages, highlighting the multilingual realities of contemporary hotel service encounters and the need for flexible communicative practices beyond English alone (Canagarajah, 2013; Mariani et al., 2019; Liang, 2024; Williamson & Chen, 2018). Consequently, communication challenges were not always related to English proficiency but often involved the absence of a shared language. Participants responded to these challenges by strategically combining human linguistic resources with AI-assisted translation tools. This finding can be interpreted through the lens of translanguaging, which views communication as the flexible deployment of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources to achieve communicative goals (García & Wei, 2014). Rather than relying exclusively on English, participants employed AI to move across languages and facilitate understanding during service encounters, suggesting that AI has become part of multilingual workers' translanguaging repertoires (Canagarajah, 2020; Canagarajah, 2025; Tour et al., 2025; Wei, 2018). The findings therefore suggest that multilingual communication competence in hospitality may

involve not only language proficiency but also the ability to strategically mobilize technological resources to negotiate meaning across languages.

The third theme highlights both the opportunities and limitations of AI-mediated communication. Consistent with previous studies, participants reported that AI facilitated communication, improved efficiency, and reduced barriers when interacting with guests from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). However, participants also identified challenges related to translation inaccuracies, contextual misunderstandings, and speech-recognition problems. These concerns support previous findings that AI-generated communication may not always be reliable and therefore requires human monitoring, critical evaluation, and contextual judgment to ensure that communicative outcomes remain accurate, appropriate, and responsive to situational demands (Dietvorst et al., 2015; Hohenstein et al., 2023; Ji et al., 2023; Logg et al., 2019; Mahmud et al., 2022). The findings further demonstrate that communication difficulties may persist even when AI is available, particularly when users encounter unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, or culturally specific expressions. Such findings reinforce the argument that effective workplace communication involves more than linguistic accuracy; it also requires contextual awareness, interpersonal sensitivity, and critical judgment. In this regard, participants' experiences reflect the growing importance of digital communication literacy, which refers to the ability to evaluate, interpret, and use digital technologies effectively and critically in communication contexts (Greene et al., 2014; Ng, 2012; Park & Kim, 2024; Silvhiany et al., 2021). The findings therefore suggest that hospitality employees require not only language skills but also the ability to critically assess AI-generated outputs and make appropriate communicative decisions.

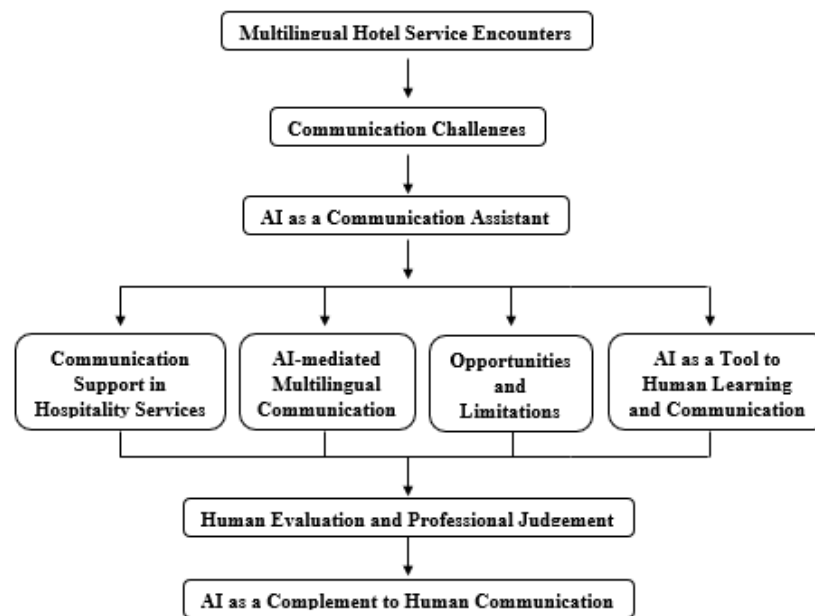
The final theme, AI as an assistant rather than a replacement for human learning and interaction, represents one of the most significant findings of the study. Although participants acknowledged the usefulness of AI, they consistently emphasized the continuing importance of face-to-face communication, interaction with experienced speakers, and direct learning experiences. This finding challenges popular narratives that portray AI as a substitute for human expertise and instead supports emerging research suggesting that AI functions most effectively as a collaborative partner in learning and communication (Chim et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Luckin, 2018; Zhang et al., 2024). Participants viewed AI as a supportive resource that could facilitate communication and learning but could not replace the emotional, relational, and spontaneous dimensions of human interaction. This perception is particularly relevant in hospitality contexts, where service quality depends not only on the transmission of information but also on empathy, rapport building, and emotional labor (Goleman, 2005; Hochschild, 2012; Huang & Rust, 2021). The findings therefore suggest that AI-informed language learning should be conceptualized as a complementary rather than replacement-oriented approach, in which AI augments rather than substitutes for human interaction, social participation, and experiential learning (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022; Luckin, 2018; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Taken together, the findings have important implications for ESP training and hospitality English instruction. Traditional hospitality English courses have primarily focused on developing linguistic competence for common service encounters (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012). However, the increasing presence of AI-mediated communication suggests that hospitality employees now require additional competencies related to multilingual communication, digital communication literacy, and AI-assisted interaction. Future ESP programs may therefore need to move beyond language instruction alone and incorporate training on the strategic and critical use of AI tools in workplace communication. Such an approach would better reflect the realities of contemporary hospitality workplaces, where communication increasingly involves interactions among human speakers, multiple languages, and digital technologies.

Overall, the four emerging themes demonstrate that AI functions as a communicative tool that facilitates multilingual service encounters in hospitality settings. However, AI-assisted communication is most effective when supported by employees' language proficiency, professional judgment, and interpersonal competence. Figure 1 below summarizes the relationships among the four themes discussed.

The model illustrates how multilingual communication challenges in hotel service encounters encourage employees to utilize AI as a communication assistant, while simultaneously recognizing both its affordances and limitations. Ultimately, participants positioned AI as a complementary resource that supports, rather than replaces, human communication and professional interaction.

Figure 1. Emergent Conceptual Model of AI-Mediated Communication in Multilingual Hotel Service Encounters



Implications:

- ESP Training
- English for Hospitality Industry
- Digital Communication Literacy
- AI-informed Language Learning
- Multilingual Communication Competence

4. Conclusions

This study explored how hotel staff at Awann Sewu Boutique Hotel & Suite utilized AI tools in multilingual service encounters. The findings revealed that AI has become an important communication assistant that supports employees in understanding guest requests, translating information, and producing messages across different languages. The study identified four major themes: AI as a communication assistant in hospitality services, AI-mediated communication in multilingual service encounters, the opportunities and limitations of AI-assisted communication, and AI as a complement rather than a replacement for human learning and interaction. While AI helped participants overcome linguistic barriers and communicate more efficiently, participants also emphasized the need for human judgment to evaluate AI-generated outputs and highlighted the continuing importance of interpersonal communication, empathy, and direct learning experiences. These findings suggest that effective communication in contemporary hospitality settings requires not only language proficiency but also multilingual communication competence, digital communication literacy, and the ability to strategically use AI tools in workplace interactions. However, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was

conducted in a single hotel setting, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other hospitality contexts. Second, although 30 staff members participated in the training program, only 14 completed the questionnaire and subsequently seven participated in the focus group discussion. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific insights into AI-mediated communication practices rather than broad generalizations. Third, the findings were derived from participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions rather than direct observations of workplace communication. The study also did not include guest perspectives, guest satisfaction data, or recordings of actual service interactions. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting staff experiences instead of providing direct evidence of improved service quality or customer satisfaction. Furthermore, because the researchers were also involved as instructors during the English for Hospitality Industry training program, participants may have been inclined to provide more positive responses in spite of being encouraged to openly share their views. Despite these limitations, the findings offer important implications for ESP training and hospitality English instruction. Hospitality training programs should move beyond a sole focus on English language proficiency and incorporate multilingual communication strategies, digital communication literacy, and the critical use of AI tools in workplace communication. As AI increasingly becomes part of employees' communicative repertoires, training should also develop learners' ability to evaluate AI-generated outputs and use such tools strategically and responsibly. Future research could examine AI-mediated multilingual communication across different hotels and hospitality settings. It could also include guest perspectives and direct observations of service interactions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how AI supports communication in authentic hospitality workplaces.

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