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## From Paradise to Excellence: Enhancing Tourist Service Quality Through Community-Based Mentoring in Lombok's Tourism Destinations

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation and outcomes of a comprehensive mentoring program designed to enhance tourist service quality in Lombok's community-based tourism destinations. Despite Lombok's natural beauty and cultural richness positioning it as a premier tourist destination in Indonesia, service quality inconsistencies have limited its competitiveness in the global tourism market. Through participatory action research conducted over ten months across four major tourism areas—Senggigi, Kuta, Gili Islands, and Sembalun—this study engaged 68 tourism service providers including accommodation operators, tour guides, restaurant staff, and local artisans in structured mentoring interventions. Data collection integrated training workshops, on-site coaching, mystery guest evaluations, tourist satisfaction surveys, and in-depth interviews with stakeholders. Findings reveal significant

improvements in three critical dimensions: professionalization of service delivery through enhanced communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and problem-solving capabilities; integration of local cultural values with international service standards to create authentic yet professional tourist experiences; and development of collaborative networks among service providers fostering knowledge sharing and collective quality improvement. The study demonstrates that culturally grounded, community-based mentoring approaches can effectively bridge the gap between traditional hospitality practices and contemporary tourism service expectations.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Lombok, an island in West Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia, has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's most promising tourism destinations, offering spectacular natural landscapes ranging from pristine beaches and coral reefs to volcanic mountains and traditional Sasak villages (Ismawati et al., 2022). The island's tourism sector has experienced remarkable growth over the past two decades, with international visitor arrivals increasing from approximately 200,000 in 2000 to over 3 million in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Indonesia, 2020). This expansion reflects deliberate government strategies positioning Lombok as a premier alternative to neighboring Bali, emphasizing sustainable tourism development that balances economic growth with environmental conservation and cultural preservation. However, as Kamsma and Bras (2000) observe, rapid tourism development in developing regions often creates tensions between growth imperatives and service quality maintenance, particularly when local communities lack adequate preparation and capacity to meet international tourist expectations. The Indonesian government's designation of Lombok as one of ten priority tourism destinations under the national tourism development agenda has intensified these challenges, creating urgent needs for systematic capacity building among local tourism service providers to ensure that infrastructure development is matched by corresponding improvements in service quality and visitor experience (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024b).

Service quality in tourism represents a complex, multidimensional construct encompassing technical competence, interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to create memorable experiences that exceed tourist expectations. Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the influential SERVQUAL framework identifying five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Subsequent research has expanded this framework for tourism contexts, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, personalization, and cultural interpretation in creating distinctive destination experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010). In community-based tourism destinations like Lombok, where much of the tourism infrastructure is operated by

local entrepreneurs and family businesses rather than international hotel chains, service quality depends heavily on individual competencies and collective community capacity rather than standardized corporate protocols (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024a). This creates both opportunities and challenges: opportunities for authentic, culturally grounded hospitality that distinguishes the destination from homogenized global tourism products, but challenges in achieving consistency, professionalism, and alignment with international service expectations that influence tourist satisfaction and destination reputation (Muhsyanur, 2022).

Preliminary research and tourist feedback from Lombok reveal persistent service quality concerns that limit the destination's competitiveness and sustainability. Common complaints documented in online reviews and tourist surveys include inconsistent service standards across different operators, communication difficulties due to limited English proficiency among service providers, insufficient knowledge about local culture and attractions among tour guides, poor hygiene and food safety practices in some food establishments, and inadequate complaint handling and problem resolution mechanisms (Lombok Tourism Board, 2021). These service gaps create negative word-of-mouth effects that damage destination reputation and deter repeat visitation and positive recommendations. According to Morrison (2013), in the digital age where tourists extensively research destinations through online reviews and social media, service quality failures are rapidly amplified and can significantly impact destination image and competitiveness. Moreover, as Reisinger and Turner (2003) emphasize, cross-cultural service encounters in tourism are particularly vulnerable to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction when service providers lack awareness of diverse tourist expectations, communication styles, and cultural norms, making cultural competence an essential component of service quality in international tourism contexts (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024b).

Addressing service quality challenges in community-based tourism destinations requires approaches that go beyond conventional training programs to embrace sustained mentoring, peer learning, and community capacity building. Traditional tourism training in Indonesia has typically followed a cascade model where selected individuals attend centralized courses and then supposedly disseminate knowledge to colleagues, but this approach has proven ineffective due to weak knowledge transfer mechanisms, lack of follow-up support, and insufficient contextualization to local conditions (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Mentoring offers a more promising alternative, providing sustained, personalized support that builds competencies through modeling, guided practice, reflective feedback, and gradual responsibility transfer in authentic work contexts. According to Hudson (2016), effective mentoring in hospitality and tourism sectors requires mentors who combine technical expertise with strong interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity, capable of building trust and motivating learning while respecting existing knowledge and practices. In community-based tourism contexts, mentoring must also navigate power dynamics, cultural differences, and potentially conflicting views

about service quality, hospitality, and appropriate tourist-community relationships, requiring careful attention to participatory approaches that position community members as active learners and knowledge contributors rather than passive recipients of external expertise.

Existing literature on tourism development in Lombok and similar Indonesian destinations reveals significant gaps in understanding how to effectively enhance service quality in community-based settings. Most research has focused on tourism impacts—environmental, economic, and sociocultural—with less attention to the processes and interventions that can improve service delivery and tourist experiences (Cole, 2008). Studies examining tourism training and capacity building in Indonesia have tended to focus on formal education institutions and government programs rather than on community-based initiatives, and have rarely evaluated long-term effectiveness or sustainability of interventions (Tolkach & King, 2015). Furthermore, existing service quality research in Indonesian tourism has predominantly employed quantitative survey methodologies measuring tourist satisfaction levels without deeply exploring the underlying factors, challenges, and change processes from service providers' perspectives. There is particular need for research examining how tourism service providers in traditional communities navigate between maintaining cultural authenticity and meeting international service standards, how they learn and develop service competencies, and what support mechanisms are most effective in fostering sustainable quality improvement that respects local values and capabilities while enhancing competitiveness (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024b).

This study addresses these gaps by documenting and analyzing a comprehensive mentoring program implemented across multiple tourism service categories and locations in Lombok. The research investigates three primary questions: First, how does structured mentoring influence tourism service providers' competencies, confidence, and service delivery practices in community-based tourism settings? Second, what strategies emerge for integrating local cultural values and practices with international service quality standards to create distinctive, high-quality tourist experiences? Third, what factors and mechanisms support the sustainability and diffusion of service quality improvements beyond direct program participants? Through participatory action research involving tourism service providers as active participants in identifying needs, designing interventions, and evaluating outcomes, this study aims to generate actionable knowledge about effective approaches to service quality enhancement in community-based tourism destinations. The findings contribute not only to practical understanding of tourism capacity building in Lombok specifically but also to broader theoretical discussions about service quality in cross-cultural contexts, community-based tourism development, and the role of mentoring in professional skill development within informal economy sectors that characterize much of developing world tourism (Muhsyanur, 2023).

## **METHOD**

This study employed a participatory action research methodology conducted over ten months (March-December 2024) across four major tourism areas in Lombok: Senggigi (beach resort area), Kuta (emerging surf destination), Gili Islands (diving and backpacker hub), and Sembalun (eco-tourism and trekking base). Research sites were selected to represent diverse tourism contexts, tourist demographics, and service provider characteristics, enabling examination of how mentoring approaches might require adaptation across different settings. Participants included 68 tourism service providers representing four categories: 18 accommodation operators (homestays, guesthouses, and small hotels), 20 tour guides (Mount Rinjani trekking guides, cultural tour guides, and water sports guides), 15 restaurant and food stall operators, and 15 local artisans and souvenir vendors. Participant selection employed purposive sampling in collaboration with local tourism associations and village leaders, prioritizing individuals demonstrating commitment to quality improvement, willingness to share learning with peers, and representation across gender, age, experience levels, and business scales. Ethical approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent after being fully informed about study purposes, methods, time commitments, potential benefits and risks, and their rights to withdraw participation at any time without consequences (Muhsyanur, 2020).

The mentoring intervention integrated three complementary components: intensive skills workshops, individualized on-site coaching, and peer learning networks. Four two-day workshops were conducted at central locations in each research area during months 1, 3, 6, and 9, addressing respectively: foundations of service excellence and cross-cultural communication; specific technical skills relevant to each service category (e.g., food safety for restaurant operators, guiding techniques for tour guides); complaint handling, problem-solving, and service recovery; and business development and quality management. Workshops employed experiential learning methodologies including role-plays, case studies, group problem-solving exercises, and sharing of best practices among participants. Between workshops, each participant received monthly visits from assigned mentors—experienced tourism professionals and educators trained in coaching methodologies—who observed service delivery, provided constructive feedback, co-created action plans for improvement, and supported implementation through modeling and guided practice. Peer learning networks were established within each service category and location, meeting monthly to share experiences, troubleshoot challenges, and provide mutual support and accountability. Data collection employed multiple mixed methods: pre- and post-intervention surveys measuring service competencies, confidence levels, and business performance indicators; structured observations of service delivery using standardized quality assessment protocols; mystery guest evaluations where trained assessors posed as regular tourists and systematically evaluated service experiences; tourist satisfaction surveys

administered to visitors who interacted with program participants; in-depth semi-structured interviews with service providers, mentors, and tourism stakeholders exploring perceptions, experiences, and outcomes; and document analysis of business records, tourist feedback, and online reviews. Data analysis followed a convergent mixed-methods design where quantitative survey and assessment data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to measure change over time, while qualitative interview and observation data were analyzed through thematic coding to identify patterns, mechanisms, and contextual factors, with integration of quantitative and qualitative findings during interpretation to develop comprehensive understanding of program impacts and processes.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Professionalization of Service Delivery and Communication Competencies**

Analysis of baseline data revealed significant gaps in fundamental service competencies that directly impacted tourist experiences and satisfaction. Communication challenges were particularly pronounced, with 73% of participants self-reporting limited English proficiency that constrained their ability to understand tourist requests, provide information, and handle complex interactions. Observations documented frequent miscommunications resulting in service failures such as incorrect orders, missed tour details, and unmet tourist expectations. Beyond language proficiency, participants demonstrated limited awareness of diverse communication styles, cultural norms, and expectations that international tourists brought to service encounters. For instance, many service providers interpreted direct tourist requests or complaints as rudeness rather than normal communication patterns in Western cultures, leading to defensive responses or withdrawal rather than constructive problem-solving (M Muhsyanur, SY Sudikan, 2025). Additionally, baseline assessments revealed inconsistent understanding and application of fundamental service principles such as punctuality, hygiene standards, accurate information provision, and proactive service recovery when problems occurred. These gaps align with Reisinger and Turner's (2003) observations about cultural differences in service expectations and the critical importance of cross-cultural competence in international tourism contexts.

The mentoring program produced measurable improvements in service delivery competencies and professional behaviors across all participant categories. Post-intervention assessments showed 64% of participants achieving intermediate or advanced English proficiency levels compared to 27% at baseline, with particularly strong gains in functional vocabulary and phrases directly relevant to their service roles. Mystery guest evaluations documented significant improvements in greeting behaviors, information provision, responsiveness to requests, and problem-solving effectiveness, with average service quality scores increasing from 2.8 to 4.1 on a 5-point scale. Participants reported increased confidence in interacting with international tourists, with one tour guide stating, "Before, I felt nervous and afraid when tourists asked questions I didn't understand. Now I have strategies to clarify,

I'm not embarrassed to ask them to repeat, and I can still give good service even when my English is not perfect." The mentoring approach's effectiveness derived from its contextualized, practice-based methodology where learning occurred through authentic interactions rather than decontextualized classroom instruction. Mentors modeled effective communication, observed participants in real service situations, provided immediate feedback, and helped participants develop personalized strategies aligned with their roles, personalities, and English proficiency levels rather than expecting uniform approaches.

Beyond technical skills, the program fostered attitudinal and behavioral shifts reflecting professionalization of service orientation. Participants increasingly conceptualized their work not merely as transactions but as creating positive experiences and lasting impressions that would influence tourists' overall destination perceptions and likelihood of recommending Lombok to others. This professional identity development manifested in greater attention to details such as cleanliness, presentation, and anticipating tourist needs; increased willingness to go beyond minimum requirements to exceed expectations; and proactive efforts to learn about tourists' interests, preferences, and feedback. Several participants spontaneously implemented quality improvement initiatives beyond program requirements, such as creating multilingual signage, developing specialized tour packages, improving facility aesthetics, and establishing systematic feedback collection mechanisms (Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023). However, professionalization also created tensions and challenges. Some participants struggled to balance service excellence expectations with economic constraints, noting that recommended improvements (e.g., enhanced facilities, higher quality materials, additional staff) required investments that small-scale operators found difficult to afford. Others expressed concern that excessive formalization might diminish the relaxed, personal hospitality that many tourists specifically sought in community-based tourism settings. These tensions reflect broader debates in tourism studies about standardization versus authenticity and the potential homogenization of tourism experiences as developing destinations adopt international service models (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), highlighting the need for quality enhancement approaches that respect local contexts and resources while meeting essential service standards.

### **Cultural Integration and Authentic Service Differentiation**

A central challenge in enhancing tourism service quality in traditional communities involves navigating the relationship between international service standards and local cultural practices, values, and identities. Initial program discussions revealed diverse perspectives among participants regarding this relationship, with some viewing traditional hospitality practices as obstacles to quality improvement requiring replacement with modern approaches, while others resisted external standards as threats to cultural authenticity and community values. These tensions reflect what Salazar (2012) identifies as the "cosmopolitanization" of

tourism, where global service models and expectations increasingly influence local practices, sometimes creating conflicts between economic imperatives to meet international standards and cultural commitments to maintain distinctive traditions and identities. The mentoring program needed to move beyond simplistic binary framings of tradition versus modernity to help participants develop integrated approaches that honored Sasak cultural values while incorporating service elements that would enhance tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness. This required careful attention to which aspects of service quality were universal requirements (e.g., cleanliness, safety, honesty) versus which allowed for cultural variation and could become sources of distinctive destination identity.

Through workshop discussions, peer exchanges, and mentor coaching, participants developed increasingly sophisticated understanding of how to integrate cultural authenticity with service professionalism to create unique value propositions. Tour guides learned to incorporate Sasak cultural protocols, storytelling traditions, and spiritual beliefs into their guiding while ensuring tourist safety, clear communication, and appropriate pacing. One guide explained, "I used to think being professional meant acting like guides in Bali or Jakarta, very formal and scripted. Now I understand that my Sasak identity and knowledge is actually my advantage. I can be professional by being authentically Sasak, explaining our way of thinking and living, not by imitating others." Accommodation operators discovered ways to maintain traditional architectural styles, furnishings, and social customs while incorporating comfort features and hygiene standards that international tourists expected. Restaurant operators created menu descriptions and dining experiences that educated tourists about Sasak culinary traditions while accommodating dietary restrictions and taste preferences. These examples illustrate what MacCannell (1973) terms "staged authenticity"—not in the negative sense of deceptive fabrication but as thoughtful presentation that makes cultural practices accessible and meaningful to outsiders while maintaining their essential integrity and significance to local communities.

Tourist feedback data provided evidence that culturally grounded, authentic service differentiation enhanced rather than diminished satisfaction. Tourists consistently rated cultural authenticity and local knowledge among the most valued aspects of their Lombok experiences, with many specifically noting appreciation for interactions with service providers who shared cultural insights, demonstrated pride in Sasak heritage, and facilitated meaningful cultural exchanges. Comments like "Our guide didn't just show us sites, he helped us understand Sasak worldview and invited us into his culture" or "The homestay felt like staying with family, they shared their daily life and traditions with us" reflected tourist preferences for authentic cultural engagement over standardized, impersonal service. However, achieving this integration required sophisticated cultural competence and reflexivity from service providers—the ability to read tourist interests and comfort levels, explain cultural practices in accessible ways, navigate potential misunderstandings or discomfort, and adjust cultural content and interaction styles to diverse tourist

backgrounds and preferences. Some participants struggled with this complexity, either overwhelming tourists with cultural information they had difficulty processing or becoming overly cautious and minimizing cultural content to avoid potential offense. These challenges underscore the importance of ongoing support and peer learning opportunities where service providers can share experiences, learn from successes and failures, and continuously refine their approaches to cultural integration. The development of this cultural brokering capability represents a sophisticated form of service competence that deserves greater recognition in tourism training and professional development initiatives (Dahles & Bras, 1999).

### **Collaborative Networks and Collective Quality Improvement**

Pre-intervention research revealed that Lombok's tourism service providers typically operated in relative isolation with limited collaboration, knowledge sharing, or collective action despite common interests in destination reputation and success. Competition for tourist business created hesitancy to share innovations or best practices that might advantage competitors. Geographic dispersion and lack of formal organizational structures limited opportunities for interaction and collective learning. Several participants described experiences where they had attempted service innovations or quality improvements but felt discouraged when these efforts were not matched by other operators, creating inconsistent destination experiences that confused tourists and limited individual operators' ability to build reputations. This fragmented landscape contrasts sharply with the collaborative networks and destination-level quality management systems that characterize successful tourism destinations (Nordin & Svensson, 2007). The mentoring program hypothesized that creating structured opportunities for interaction, demonstrating benefits of knowledge sharing, and facilitating initial successes in collective action might catalyze more sustained collaborative relationships and collective quality improvement efforts beyond the formal program period.

The peer learning networks established through the program evolved from initially awkward, facilitator-dependent gatherings into dynamic communities of practice characterized by reciprocal knowledge exchange, mutual support, and emerging collective initiatives. Monthly meetings provided forums where participants shared service innovations, discussed common challenges, analyzed tourist feedback, and collaboratively developed solutions to shared problems. Over time, networks developed distinctive cultures and priorities reflecting their specific contexts and member interests. The Gili Islands tour guide network focused heavily on environmental sustainability and marine conservation, developing shared protocols for minimizing tourism impacts on coral reefs. The Senggigi accommodation network prioritized marketing collaboration, creating a collective booking platform and coordinated promotion of the area as a cohesive destination. The Sembalun trekking guide network emphasized safety standards and emergency response procedures given the risks associated with Mount Rinjani trekking. Participants reported that network interactions provided not only practical

knowledge and skills but also emotional support, professional identity, and sense of collective purpose that countered the isolation many had previously experienced. As one participant described, "Before, I felt I was struggling alone. Now I have colleagues who understand my challenges, celebrate my successes, and help me when I face problems. We are building something together."

Evidence of sustainability and diffusion emerged in multiple forms, suggesting that collaborative relationships and quality improvement momentum might persist beyond external facilitation. Follow-up data collected three months after formal program conclusion showed that seven of eight peer networks maintained regular meetings with average attendance rates of 76%, with several networks establishing formal organizational structures, elected leadership, and membership dues to support ongoing activities. Networks initiated various collective actions including joint marketing efforts, cross-referrals among operators, collaborative training for new entrants, engagement with local government on tourism policy issues, and development of informal quality assurance mechanisms where network members monitored and provided feedback on each other's services. Several network participants reported actively mentoring non-participants, diffusing knowledge and practices beyond direct program involvement and creating ripple effects of quality improvement across broader service provider communities. However, network sustainability remained vulnerable to various challenges including leadership transitions, member conflicts, competing time demands, and absence of institutionalized support from government or tourism associations. Networks in areas with stronger existing social capital and organizational traditions demonstrated greater resilience than those in more fragmented communities. These patterns underscore the importance of social and institutional contexts in determining whether capacity-building interventions generate lasting change, and highlight the need for complementary institutional development and policy support to reinforce and sustain community-level quality improvement initiatives (Saxena, 2005). Future research should examine longer-term network evolution, factors distinguishing sustained from declining networks, and how networks might be effectively integrated into destination governance and quality management systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that comprehensive, culturally responsive mentoring programs can significantly enhance tourist service quality in community-based tourism destinations, addressing competency gaps while respecting local values and building sustainable improvement capacity. The research reveals three critical dimensions of effective service quality enhancement: professionalization of service delivery through improved communication skills, technical competencies, and service orientation; integration of cultural authenticity with international standards to create distinctive, high-quality tourist experiences; and development of collaborative networks that facilitate knowledge sharing, mutual support, and collective quality improvement. However, findings also illuminate persistent

challenges requiring attention beyond individual capacity building, including resource constraints limiting small operators' ability to implement recommended improvements, tensions between standardization and authenticity in service delivery, and institutional gaps in destination-level quality management and support systems. Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for tourism stakeholders: First, tourism capacity-building initiatives should employ sustained mentoring and coaching methodologies rather than conventional one-time training workshops, providing ongoing support through authentic service contexts. Second, mentoring programs should explicitly address cultural integration and help service providers develop sophisticated cultural brokering capabilities that honor local traditions while meeting tourist expectations. Third, facilitating peer learning networks and communities of practice should be a central program component, recognizing that collaborative relationships and collective action are essential for sustainable quality improvement. Fourth, service quality enhancement efforts require complementary institutional development including destination marketing organizations, quality assurance systems, and policy frameworks that support rather than hinder local operator success. Fifth, future tourism planning in Lombok and similar destinations should balance growth targets with service quality readiness, ensuring that capacity building receives equal priority with infrastructure development and promotional activities. Sixth, further research should examine long-term sustainability of service quality improvements, investigate effective models for scaling mentoring approaches across larger geographic areas and service provider populations, explore tourist perspectives on authenticity and cultural integration in service encounters, and analyze institutional and policy factors that support or constrain community-based tourism quality enhancement. Finally, successful tourism development in community-based destinations requires moving beyond narrow technical skill building to embrace holistic capacity development that strengthens individual competencies, collaborative relationships, cultural confidence, and institutional support systems simultaneously.

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