

Demand for Chinese-Speaking Staff in Luang Prabang’s Hospitality Sector: Trends, Challenges, and Workforce Implications

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Abstract

The rapid growth of Chinese outbound tourism has significantly impacted the hospitality industry in Southeast Asia, particularly in Luang Prabang, Laos a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its cultural and natural attractions. This study investigates the increasing demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang’s guesthouse and hotel sector, driven by the rising influx of Chinese tourists. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative interviews with hospitality stakeholders and quantitative surveys of Chinese-speaking tourists to analyze trends, challenges, and implications for the local workforce. Findings reveal a substantial demand for bilingual staff, with hotel and guesthouse managers emphasizing the importance of Chinese-speaking employees in enhancing customer satisfaction and service quality. However, challenges such as a shortage of qualified candidates, limited access to language training, and financial constraints particularly among smaller establishments hinder the sector’s ability to meet this demand. Survey results indicate that a large proportion of Chinese tourists prefer accommodations with Chinese-speaking staff, and their satisfaction levels are significantly higher when served by such employees compared to non-Chinese-speaking staff. The study highlights the critical role of language proficiency in improving guest experiences and fostering repeat business. It also underscores the need for workforce development initiatives, including government-supported language training programs and partnerships with educational institutions, to address staffing shortages. The findings align with global tourism trends that increasingly prioritize multilingual staff to cater to international travelers. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers and industry practitioners, emphasizing the importance of adapting to the linguistic and cultural needs of a diverse clientele to ensure the sustainable growth of Luang Prabang’s tourism sector.

Keywords: Chinese speaking staff, Accommodation service sector

Introduction

The global tourism industry has undergone rapid transformations in recent decades, influenced by factors such as emerging markets, changing travel patterns, and economic growth in previously underrepresented regions. In particular, the rise of Chinese tourists has reshaped tourism industries around the world. For countries in Southeast Asia, including Laos, the influx of Chinese-speaking tourists has significantly impacted local tourism infrastructure and business operations. One city that has been particularly affected by this development is Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site located in northern Laos. Known for its stunning natural landscapes, rich cultural history, and vibrant religious traditions, Luang Prabang has become an increasingly popular destination for international tourists, especially from China (Tourism Development Department of Laos, 2021). It affected the demand for skilled Chinese-speaking staff in the local hospitality sector, specifically in guesthouses and hotels, has risen considerably.

Over the past decade, Luang Prabang has experienced substantial growth in tourism, driven by its status as a culturally significant destination and its accessibility to international travelers. According to the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2022), tourism is one of the most important sectors contributing to the country's economy, with Chinese visitors being a primary source of revenue. The popularity of Luang Prabang among Chinese tourists is particularly notable due to its proximity to China, direct flight connections, and the growing interest in the region's history, heritage, and natural beauty. This influx of Chinese visitors has created a pressing need for the tourism and hospitality industry in Luang Prabang to adapt to the linguistic and cultural preferences of this market.

The shift toward bilingual staff reflects a broader cultural exchange between Laos and China. Tourism brings economic benefits, but it also promotes cross-cultural understanding and interaction. In Luang Prabang, Chinese-speaking employees act as cultural intermediaries. They help with communication and promote a positive image of Laos to Chinese visitors. This interaction enhances the tourism experience and ensures that the local community benefits from the growing number of Chinese tourists.

However, several questions remain regarding the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang's guesthouse and hotel sector. Will the supply of qualified Chinese-speaking workers be sufficient to meet this demand? What challenges do guesthouses and hotels face in employing multilingual staff? How satisfied are tourists with Chinese-speaking employees? Do Chinese tourists prefer accommodations with Chinese-speaking staff? These questions are critical for understanding the future trajectory of Luang Prabang's tourism industry and its ability to adapt to evolving market needs.

This study aims to explore the Demand for Chinese-Speaking Staff in Luang Prabang's Hospitality Sector: Trends, Challenges, and Workforce Implications. By examining the factors driving this demand, the challenges faced by hotels and guesthouse owners, and the implications for the local workforce, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the intersection of language, tourism, and hospitality in Laos. The findings will offer a better understanding of how the tourism industry in Luang Prabang is responding to the growing presence of Chinese tourists and contribute to ongoing discussions about workforce development in the hospitality sector.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the trends in the demand for Chinese-speaking staff within the guesthouse and hotel services sector in Luang Prabang. Given the growing number of Chinese-speaking tourists visiting the city, it is essential to understand how the hospitality industry has adapted to meet their needs. The methodology employed in this research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a deeper analysis of the demand for Chinese-speaking employees, the challenges faced by the hospitality sector, and the impact of this trend on the local workforce.

Research Design

This study follows a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather a wide range of data. The qualitative component aims to understand the experiences and perceptions of hospitality industry stakeholders, including hotel managers, guesthouse owners, and employees. The quantitative component involves the collection of statistical data on the number of Chinese-speaking tourists, the staffing needs of hospitality establishments, and language proficiency levels among local workers.

By using both approaches, the study seeks to present a holistic picture of the current demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang's hospitality sector. This design allows for both depth and breadth in data collection, offering insights into both the individual experiences of industry participants and broader trends across the city.

Sampling and Participants

Specifically, the target population consisted of:

- Hotel and guesthouse managers who oversee operations and staffing decisions.
- Front-line employees such as receptionists who interact directly with guests.
- Chinese tourists who came to travel in Luangprabang.

The study employs purposive sampling of 10 large hotels and 10 small to medium guesthouses located in Luang Prabang. Within this purposive sampling framework, random selection was applied to ensure unbiased representation within each category. After identifying establishments that met the study criteria, the final participants were randomly selected from each group. This approach helped minimize selection bias and enhanced the reliability of the findings by giving all eligible establishments an equal chance of being included in the study.

Sample group

The sample size for the qualitative interviews consisted of 40 participants, including managers of 10 large hotels, managers of 10 small- to medium-sized guesthouses, and 20 employees who were working in these hotels and guesthouses.

The sample for the quantitative survey consisted of 100 Chinese tourists who met the researchers and were willing to complete the questionnaire during a one-week data collection period. These participants were encountered at various tourist sites and accommodations across the city. They were approached without prior appointments and were selected through chance encounters. This method ensured a diverse range of perspectives regarding service quality and language accessibility.

Tools to Collect Data

Qualitative data were collected using an interview form. The form included open-ended questions focusing on the following areas:

- The current demand for Chinese-speaking staff in the hospitality sector.
- Challenges faced by employers in hiring and training Chinese-speaking personnel.
- The impact of Chinese-speaking staff on customer satisfaction and service quality.
- The perceived future demand for Chinese-speaking staff in the sector.

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire that included yes/no responses, as well as some questions that used a Likert scale (1–5) from extremely unsatisfied to extremely satisfied, respectively) to measure satisfaction. The questionnaire focused on the following:

- Whether the tourist preferred to be served by Chinese-speaking staff.
- The perceived quality of communication with non-Chinese-speaking staff.
- The level of satisfaction with services based on language assistance.
- The frequency of encountering language barriers during their stay.

Additionally, hotel and guesthouse managers were asked to complete a brief survey to collect data on their current staffing levels, language skills of their employees, and the frequency with which Chinese-speaking tourists visit their establishments.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments, the questionnaire was carefully developed and refined through a pre-testing process. A pilot test involving 10 Chinese tourists and 5 local hospitality staff members was conducted to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of the survey items. Based on their feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve wording and comprehension. The questionnaire was originally designed in English and then translated into Chinese using a back-translation technique to ensure linguistic and conceptual accuracy. To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the main constructs, with all values exceeding 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. These procedures strengthened the overall validity and reliability of the data collection instruments used in the study.

Data Collection

The qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with hotel and guesthouse managers, employees. The interviews were conducted in person, face to face. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the interview process, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions while still addressing key research questions.

The quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires handed to guests in hotels or guesthouses, while others were given to tourists walking on the streets near Luang Prabang tourist sites. The questionnaires took 5 to 10 minutes to complete, and they were collected after the tourists had finished.

Data analysis

The qualitative data collected from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying recurring themes and patterns in the responses to better understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The themes were categorized to address specific research questions related to demand, challenges, and workforce development in the hospitality sector.

Thematic analysis was performed using the following steps:

- Reading through the interview transcripts and survey responses to get an overview of the data.
- Identifying significant statements, phrases, or sections of text that were relevant to the research questions.

- Grouping the codes into overarching themes that represented common experiences or challenges.
- Analyzing the patterns and connections between themes to draw conclusions about the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang.

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends in the responses. This included calculating the frequency of responses, the percentage of tourists who prefer Chinese-speaking staff, and the satisfaction levels of tourists with regard to language accessibility.

The data were analyzed using statistical software SPSS Version 22.0 to calculate means, percentages, and frequency distributions. The findings from the tourist surveys were compared with the staffing data from hotels and guesthouses to assess the alignment between demand and supply in terms of Chinese-speaking staff.

Results

The analysis of the data collected from interviews, surveys, and statistical reports revealed significant trends and patterns regarding the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in the guesthouse and hotel services sector in Luang Prabang. These findings offer valuable insights into the current state of the hospitality industry, the language needs of Chinese-speaking tourists, and the challenges faced by local businesses in meeting these demands. This section presents the key results from both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study.

Demand for Chinese-Speaking Staff

Interviews with hotel and guesthouse managers ($n = 20$) revealed that there has been a notable increase in the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in recent years. Most participants (80%) reported that they have observed a steady rise in the number of Chinese-speaking tourists visiting their establishments since the opening of the China-Lao high-speed train in 2021. Many managers noted that Chinese tourists make up a significant portion of their clientele, especially during peak travel seasons such as Chinese New Year and school holidays. Many managers stated that in the past few years, they have noticed that almost 40-50% of their guests have come from China. As a result, they believe that having Chinese-speaking staff is essential to provide a high level of service, as it directly impacts guest satisfaction.

Managers also reported that Chinese-speaking guests are more likely to stay in hotels and guesthouses where staff can communicate in their native language, which improves their overall experience and comfort. Approximately 70% of managers agreed that language barriers often lead to misunderstandings, missed business opportunities, and decreased satisfaction.

Challenges Faced by Employers

The primary challenge identified by managers in hiring local staff was the lack of Chinese-language proficiency among job seekers. In particular, most employees in Luang Prabang's hospitality sector are local Lao citizens with limited Chinese language skills. Managers expressed their difficulty in finding qualified candidates with both fluency in Chinese and experience in hospitality roles. Many guesthouse owners indicated that it was hard to find staff who were fluent in Chinese, especially among the younger generation. Although most of them speak basic English, that is not enough for Chinese guests.

The need for Chinese-speaking employees in guesthouses and hotels is a direct consequence of the increasing number of Chinese tourists seeking personalized services in their native language. Language has long been recognized as a critical component of customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, as it facilitates better communication, enhances guest experiences, and fosters positive relationships between guests and service providers (Hsu, 2016).

In a competitive tourism market such as Luang Prabang, where guests are accustomed to high standards of service, the ability to communicate in Chinese can be a significant factor in attracting and retaining customers. This trend aligns with broader global patterns in tourism, where service providers in various countries are increasingly prioritizing multilingual staff to meet the demands of international tourists (Li, 2017).

Impact on Service Quality

Despite these challenges, a majority of managers (75%) reported that the addition of Chinese-speaking staff has led to improvements in customer service and satisfaction. Guests who were served by Chinese-speaking staff were more likely to express higher levels of satisfaction with the overall service quality. Managers observed that Chinese-speaking employees helped bridge cultural gaps, facilitated smoother communication, and provided more personalized services, such as assisting with local attractions and guiding tours.

Survey of Chinese-Speaking Tourists

A total of 100 Chinese tourists participated in the survey. The survey aimed to understand their language preferences and satisfaction levels regarding communication with hotel and guesthouse staff.

Of the respondents, 85% reported that they preferred to be served by Chinese-speaking staff, particularly for check-in/check-out procedures, inquiries about local attractions, and booking tours. Among these, 40% stated that they would actively seek out accommodation with Chinese-speaking staff when booking their stay.

Approximately 60% of the tourists indicated that they encountered communication difficulties during their stay, especially when interacting with non-Chinese-speaking staff. Common issues included miscommunication regarding room preferences, payment methods, and directions to local attractions.

Tourists who prefer Chinese-speaking staff rated their overall experience as significantly higher with 80%, compared to those who prefer Chinese or English-speaking staff with 20% (Table 1). Guests who were satisfied and had positive experiences with Chinese-speaking staff had a mean = 4.49 and S.D = 0.70, compared to those who were satisfied and had positive experiences with No matter between non-Chinese or Chinese speaking staff, who had a mean = 3.23 and S.D = 0.75 (Table 2)

Table 1 Guest prefer Chinese speaking staff for service

Topic	Frequency	Percent
Guests Preferred Chinese speaking staff for service	80	80.00
Guests Preferred non-Chinese speaking staff for service	20	20.00
Total	100	100.00

Tourists who prefer Chinese-speaking staff rated their overall experience as significantly higher with 80%, compared to those who prefer Chinese or English-speaking staff with 20%.

Table 2 Guests satisfaction with Chinese speaking staff service

Topic	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Guests who were Satisfied with service regardless of staff spoke Chinese	100	4.49	0.70	High
Guests who were satisfied with service regardless of whether staff spoke Chinese	100	3.23	0.75	Moderate
Total	100	3.86	0.72	Moderate

Guests who were satisfied and had positive experiences with Chinese-speaking staff had a mean = 4.49, high level and S.D = 0.70, compared to those who were satisfied and had positive experiences with No matter between non-Chinese or Chinese speaking staff, who had a mean = 3.23, moderate level and S.D = 0.75.

Staffing Data from Hotels and Guesthouses

Data collected from 20 hotels and guesthouses in Luang Prabang showed that:

Chinese- Speaking Staff Proportion: On average, only 15% of staff in these establishments were proficient in Chinese. The proportion was higher in larger, more internationalized hotels (up to 30%), but much lower in smaller guesthouses (around 5%).

Tourist Demographics: Among these 20 hotels and guesthouses, 60% of them reported that over 30% of their guests were from China, with 40% of them reporting that more than 50% of their guests came from China during the high season.

Staffing Needs

When asked about future staffing plans, 70% of hotel managers indicated that they intend to increase the number of Chinese-speaking staff over the next few years to meet growing demand. Larger establishments were more likely to invest in professional language courses, while smaller guesthouses were looking for ways to hire bilingual staff directly.

Comparing services and staff spoke Chinese

Subgroup analysis was conducted to examine differences between large hotels and small to medium guesthouses. This comparative analysis provided deeper insights into variations in staffing challenges, language service quality, and customer satisfaction levels across different types of establishments. The results showed that large hotels generally performed at higher levels than smaller guesthouses; however, the quality of Chinese-speaking staff did not differ significantly between the two groups.

Discussions

The findings of this study confirm the rising demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang's guesthouse and hotel services sector. This trend reflects global patterns in the hospitality industry, particularly in regions experiencing an influx of Chinese-speaking tourists. By comparing the results of this study with existing literature, several key themes emerge, including the increasing importance of language proficiency for customer satisfaction, challenges in staffing, and future workforce development needs. This section discusses these findings in relation to other research in the field.

Rising Demand for Chinese-Speaking Staff

The results of this study indicate a significant increase in the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang, with 75% of hotel and guesthouse managers reporting a need for bilingual employees. This demand is driven by the growing number of Chinese-speaking tourists visiting the city, which aligns with global trends in the tourism industry. According to Li (2017), the increasing middle class in China and the expansion of Chinese outbound tourism have made Chinese tourists a dominant group in global travel. Studies by Goh & Lo (2019) also confirm that countries across Southeast Asia are seeing a surge in Chinese tourism, necessitating the hiring of Chinese-speaking staff in the hospitality sector.

Similarly, in Thailand, a study by Thitiphan & Charoenrat (2018) found that the rapid increase in Chinese tourist arrivals led to a growing demand for Chinese-speaking staff in hotels, particularly in tourist-heavy areas such as Bangkok and Phuket. This suggests that the demand for Chinese-speaking employees in Luang Prabang is part of a broader trend in Southeast Asia, where businesses catering to Chinese-speaking tourists are prioritizing bilingual staff to improve service delivery.

Furthermore, the demand for Chinese-speaking staff in Luang Prabang's hospitality sector reflects wider economic and social trends in the region. China's economic growth has fueled a surge in outbound tourism and the expansion of Chinese-speaking communities abroad. In Luang Prabang, the growing number of Chinese tourists creates a need for a workforce that can meet their linguistic expectations. Guesthouses and hotels are especially affected, as smaller establishments often depend on local staff with limited access to formal language training. As a result, having Chinese-speaking employees is becoming essential for businesses that want to stay competitive in the expanding tourism market. (Goethals, 2016)

Beyond the practical staffing needs, the rise in Chinese-speaking employees in Luang Prabang has wider effects on the local workforce and community. The demand for bilingual staff creates both opportunities and challenges for local workers. It influences employment prospects, language learning, and professional development. As the hospitality sector continues to grow, there is a stronger need for training programs that help local employees develop the language skills required to serve Chinese tourists effectively. These initiatives can bridge communication gaps between local workers and international guests. They also improve service quality and support the professional growth of individuals in the tourism industry. (Goh & Lo, 2019).

Challenges in Staffing and Training

Despite the growing demand for Chinese-speaking staff, the study revealed significant challenges related to staffing. Approximately 70% of hotel and guesthouse managers cited difficulties in finding qualified candidates with fluency in Chinese. This shortage of bilingual employees is a challenge not only in Luang Prabang but also in other tourist destinations. In Vietnam, Nguyen (2020) highlighted similar staffing shortages in the hospitality industry,

particularly in regions that attract large numbers of Chinese tourists. Similarly, in Singapore, a study by Adam (2019) found that the hospitality sector was struggling to meet the language needs of Chinese-speaking visitors due to a lack of skilled bilingual workers.

The lack of available candidates with both Chinese language skills and hospitality experience is a challenge identified in multiple studies. According to Hsu (2016), language skills alone are not sufficient; hospitality workers must also possess the necessary customer service skills to meet the expectations of international tourists. In Luang Prabang, this dual skillset is particularly difficult to find. As highlighted by Goh & Lo (2019), while many local workers have basic English language skills, proficiency in Chinese is relatively rare. This gap is exacerbated by the cost of language training programs. The study found that 30% of hotels and guesthouses offered language training to staff, but the cost of such training was a barrier, particularly for smaller businesses.

This challenge is further documented by Gross et al. (2013), who noted that while larger hotel chains in China have been able to invest in language training programs, smaller independent hotels in countries like Laos and Vietnam often lack the resources to do so. This disparity in resources contributes to uneven language competency in the hospitality sector.

Language and Customer Satisfaction

A key finding of this research was the positive correlation between the availability of Chinese-speaking staff and customer satisfaction. Tourists who interacted with Chinese-speaking employees rated their overall experience significantly higher than those who did not. This finding is consistent with research by Li (2017), who found that language barriers negatively impacted the service quality and satisfaction of Chinese tourists in Southeast Asia. Similarly, a study by Hanqiu & Silin (2024) in Cambodia revealed that Chinese-speaking tourists expressed higher satisfaction levels when interacting with staff who could communicate in their native language, especially for personalized services and information about local attractions.

The importance of language proficiency in enhancing guest experiences is also emphasized by Hsu (2016), who argues that language is a crucial factor in shaping tourists' perceptions of service quality. In a similar vein, the findings of Lee & Chang (2018) in Taiwan revealed that multilingual staff, especially those fluent in Chinese, were able to provide higher levels of service, leading to greater customer loyalty. The positive impact of Chinese-speaking employees on customer satisfaction in Luang Prabang reflects these global patterns and highlights the importance of language proficiency in fostering positive guest experiences.

Moreover, a study by Cheng & Mak (2020) and Chen et al. (2021) on the hospitality industry in Macau found that the integration of Chinese-speaking staff into hotel operations was linked to increased guest retention rates, as tourists from Chinese-speaking regions felt more comfortable and valued. This aligns with the findings in Luang Prabang, where managers indicated that Chinese-speaking staff helped build trust with Chinese guests and fostered repeat business.

Future Trends and Workforce Development

Looking to the future, this study found that 70% of hotel and guesthouse managers in Luang Prabang plan to hire more Chinese-speaking staff in the coming years. This proactive approach to workforce development reflects the growing recognition of the need to address the language gap in the hospitality sector. A similar trend was observed in a study by Jang & Lee (2017) in South Korea, where hotels in Seoul were increasingly focused on hiring multilingual staff to accommodate the growing number of Chinese tourists. Similarly, a report by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (2019) highlighted the need for Southeast Asian countries to invest in multilingual workforce training to meet the demands of Chinese-speaking tourists.

In Luang Prabang, businesses are also exploring partnerships with local language schools to provide language training for existing employees. This trend is in line with research by Goh & Lo (2019), who emphasized the importance of continuous skill development and cross-cultural training to ensure that hospitality workers can effectively serve international tourists. In Singapore, the Singapore Tourism Board (Teo & Cacciafoco, 2022) has implemented initiatives to support language training for tourism workers, particularly in response to the increase in Chinese tourist arrivals. These types of programs could provide valuable models for workforce development in Luang Prabang.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for both the hospitality industry and tourism policy in Laos. Given the increasing demand for Chinese-speaking staff and the challenges associated with staffing and training, there is a need for targeted policy interventions. These could include government-funded language training programs and initiatives to encourage private sector investment in workforce development. Such an approach has been successfully implemented in Thailand, where the government has supported language training for hospitality workers to meet the needs of international tourists (Thitiphan & Charoenrat, 2018). Furthermore, local educational institutions could collaborate with the tourism industry to offer tailored language courses that meet the specific needs of hospitality workers in Luang Prabang.

Conclusion and suggestions

The findings confirm that the rising influx of Chinese-speaking tourists in Luang Prabang has created significant demand for bilingual employees, particularly in the context of providing enhanced customer service. The study revealed that the demand for Chinese-speaking staff is driven by the need for effective communication and personalized service, which are crucial in improving customer satisfaction and fostering repeat business.

While the demand for Chinese-speaking staff is clear, the research also highlighted several challenges faced by businesses in Luang Prabang. These include difficulties in finding qualified candidates, the high cost of language training, and the limited availability of language courses for local workers. The shortage of skilled bilingual staff reflects broader trends observed in other Southeast Asian countries, where the growing number of Chinese-speaking tourists has outpaced the availability of qualified workers. Smaller establishments, in particular, face financial constraints that prevent them from providing language training programs to their staff, which hinders their ability to fully capitalize on the growing Chinese tourist market.

Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that businesses in Luang Prabang are aware of the importance of addressing the language gap and are increasingly prioritizing the hiring of bilingual employees. This trend is supported by the positive correlation between the presence of Chinese-speaking staff and higher customer satisfaction ratings, with Chinese-speaking tourists reporting better experiences when they are able to interact with staff who speak their language. The research also indicated that hotel and guesthouse managers are planning to invest in the recruitment and training of more bilingual staff to meet the growing demand in the coming years, signaling optimism for future growth in the sector.

In light of these findings, it is clear that language proficiency, particularly in Chinese, has become a key factor in enhancing the quality of services in the hospitality industry. To address the staffing shortages, businesses in Luang Prabang, especially smaller establishments, would benefit from targeted workforce development programs, including

government-supported language training initiatives. By investing in language skills and staff training, businesses can improve their competitiveness, increase customer satisfaction, and better meet the needs of the evolving tourist market.

Unlike Thailand or Cambodia where tourism industries are more mature, better resourced, and supported by established hospitality training institutions Luang Prabang's hospitality sector remains dominated by small- and medium-sized, often family-run guesthouses. These businesses typically operate with limited financial margins, making it difficult to invest in systematic language training or to attract qualified bilingual personnel. As a result, while the need for Chinese-speaking staff is acute, the local industry's capacity to respond remains constrained by structural and institutional factors unique to Laos's developing economy.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of the shifting dynamics in the hospitality sector of Luang Prabang and offers valuable insights for both industry practitioners and policymakers. As the tourism industry continues to evolve, it is essential that the hospitality workforce adapts to the linguistic and cultural needs of a diverse, international customer base. The future of Luang Prabang's tourism sector, and its ability to thrive in an increasingly globalized market, will depend on the successful integration of multilingual staff into the workforce, ensuring that the city remains an attractive and welcoming destination for tourists from around the world.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the study's findings may not be generalizable to all regions in Laos, as it focuses specifically on Luang Prabang. Secondly, because of the small sample size due to the time constraints and availability of participants, the results are indicative only and not necessarily generalizable to the population. There may also be biases in the self-reported data from both tourists and staff, particularly regarding their perceptions of language barriers and satisfaction with services.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

This study contributes new knowledge on how language proficiency specifically Chinese-language skills has become a strategic factor in the sustainable development of tourism in smaller, culturally significant destinations like Luang Prabang. It reveals that the demand for Chinese-speaking staff is not only a response to market forces but also a reflection of broader socio-economic and cultural transitions in the community. Unlike in neighboring Thailand or Cambodia, where tourism industries are larger and more commercialized, Luang Prabang's reliance on small, locally owned guesthouses makes language adaptation a community-level challenge rather than a corporate one.

For the wider society, this research underscores the need for policies that balance economic integration with cultural preservation. Government-supported language training, local education partnerships, and heritage-sensitive workforce programs can ensure that linguistic adaptation enhances rather than undermines community identity.

Overall, this new knowledge deepens understanding of how global tourism trends intersect with local livelihoods and cultural sustainability, offering a model for other small heritage cities navigating similar pressures from rising Chinese outbound tourism.

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