

GUEST COMPLAINT HANDLING USING THE LEAPS METHOD AT SELERA RESTAURANT NONGSA POINT MARINA & RESORT BATAM

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the importance of effective guest complaint handling in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry, particularly in Food & Beverage services. The research aims to describe guest complaint handling procedures using the LEAPS method (Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Provide Solution, Satisfy) at Selera Restaurant Nongsa Point Marina & Resort Batam. This research employs a qualitative phenomenological descriptive approach with data collection through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation study. Informants consisted of F&B Assistant Manager, F&B Supervisor, three waiters/waitresses, and three guests who had filed complaints. Data analysis utilized thematic analysis framework with hybrid deductive-inductive coding approach. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Research findings indicate that LEAPS method implementation is conducted systematically through five sequential stages: Listen (active listening), Empathize (empathetic communication), Apologize (sincere apology), Provide Solution (providing alternative solutions), and Satisfy (satisfaction confirmation). The LEAPS method implementation proves effective in enhancing guest satisfaction and restoring trust in hotel services, with complaint resolution rate reaching 92% and guest satisfaction level at 88%.

Keywords: *Complaint Handling, LEAPS Method, Guest Satisfaction, Food & Beverage Service.*

INTRODUCTION

The global hospitality industry has experienced significant growth, driven by increasing tourist mobility and demand for high-quality hospitality services. The World Travel & Tourism Council (2023) reported that the tourism and hospitality industry contributes approximately 10.4% to global GDP with projections for continued growth until 2030. In Indonesia, the hotel sector shows consistent growth trends with the number of star-rated hotels reaching 3,638 units in 2023, an increase of 13.68% from 2019 (BPS, 2023). Batam City has experienced rapid development with 72 star-rated hotels in 2023. Along with industry growth, challenges in maintaining service quality have become increasingly complex. One crucial aspect that often becomes a source of guest dissatisfaction is Food & Beverage (F&B) service, particularly in complaint handling. Hien et al. (2022) revealed that F&B service-related complaints account for 42% of total hotel complaints with high dissatisfaction levels when not handled with appropriate approaches. Safitri et al. (2023) found that 35% of guest complaints relate to inconsistent F&B service quality in the post-pandemic era. The complexity of complaint handling in F&B service increases as it involves multiple touchpoints between guests and staff. Mantjari et al. (2024) found that poorly handled F&B complaints can reduce guest satisfaction by up to 60% and negatively impact return intentions. However, effective complaint handling can increase satisfaction by up to 40% compared to pre-problem conditions, demonstrating the importance of proper service recovery. The LEAPS method (Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Provide Solution, Satisfy) is a systematic approach for complaint handling in the hospitality industry. Unlike conventional approaches that are often reactive and unstructured, the LEAPS method offers a comprehensive framework. Sangpikul (2021) found that 70% of guests feel more satisfied when staff actively listen to complaints. Rosena & Lewa (2023) demonstrated that empathetic approaches can increase service quality perception by up to 45%. Although each stage has proven effective, there is no comprehensive study analyzing the holistic implementation of the LEAPS method in hotel restaurant F&B service

contexts. This research aims to describe guest complaint handling procedures using the LEAPS method at Selera Restaurant Nongsa Point Marina & Resort Batam, covering the stages of Listen, Empathize, Apologize, Provide Solution, and Satisfy. The urgency of this research is reinforced by the fact that the post-pandemic hospitality industry faces increasingly high guest expectations regarding service quality and complaint handling.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with phenomenological descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to understand and deeply describe the implementation of the LEAPS method in guest complaint handling. Creswell & Poth (2018) affirm that qualitative research is appropriate for understanding the meaning individuals give to social or human problems. The research was conducted at Selera Restaurant, Nongsa Point Marina & Resort Batam during July-August 2025. Informants were selected purposively with criteria of having direct experience in LEAPS method implementation. Informants consisted of F&B Assistant Manager (1 person), F&B Supervisor (1 person), Waiters/Waitresses (3 persons), and guests who had filed complaints (3 persons). Data collection used method triangulation including participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation study. Observation was conducted with guidelines covering each stage of the LEAPS method. In-depth interviews used interview guides with open-ended questions. Documentation included complaint handling SOPs, training materials, and guest complaint reports. Data analysis used the Braun & Clarke (2019) thematic analysis framework with hybrid deductive-inductive coding approach. The analysis process included: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing report. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Listen Stage

The Listen stage is an important foundation in the LEAPS method. Observation results show that F&B staff give full attention to guests filing complaints by stopping other activities, making eye contact, and showing open body language. The F&B Supervisor stated, "When guests complain, the first thing we do is listen carefully without interrupting. We let guests express their complaints until they are finished." This approach aligns with Sangpikul's (2021) findings that 70% of guests feel more satisfied when staff show willingness to actively listen to complaints. Staff use active listening techniques by providing verbal responses such as "I understand" and "Yes, Sir/Madam" as well as non-verbal responses in the form of head nodding. One guest who had filed a complaint said, "I felt valued when staff truly listened to my complaint without appearing rushed or defensive." This finding confirms the importance of cognitive and emotional dimensions in the listening stage as proposed by Loo et al. (2021) in the Cognitive-Emotive-Behavioral model.

Implementation of Empathize Stage

The Empathize stage is performed by showing understanding of guest feelings and situations. Staff use empathetic phrases such as "I understand your disappointment" and "I sympathize with the inconvenience you experienced." The F&B Assistant Manager explained, "We train staff to put themselves in guests' positions and feel what they feel. Empathy is not just words, but must also be visible from facial expressions and tone of voice." Interview results with guests reveal that empathetic approaches increase positive perceptions of problem-solving efforts. One guest stated, "Although my food was late, the staff's empathetic attitude made me less angry and more understanding of the situation." This finding is consistent with Rosena & Lewa's (2023) research which found empathetic approaches can increase service quality perception by up to 45%. El-Sherbeeney et al. (2024) also found staff empathy to be the most critical factor in improving service recovery quality by up to 50%.

Implementation of Apologize Stage

The Apologize stage is performed by delivering sincere and specific apologies for problems experienced by guests. Observations show staff use phrases such as "We apologize for the delay in your order" or "We apologize that the food did not match your order." One waiter explained, "Apologies must be sincere and specific to the problem that occurred, not just a general sorry." Guests appreciate apologies delivered sincerely without seeking excuses or blaming other parties. One guest said, "Staff immediately apologized without making excuses. This shows professionalism and awareness that they are responsible for my experience." This finding aligns with Damayanti et al.'s (2024) research showing that sincere and specific apologies can reduce negative word-of-mouth levels by up to

50%. Tjiptono & Chandra (2016) emphasize that apologies are a crucial element not only as acknowledgment of mistakes but also as efforts to restore emotional relationships with guests.

Implementation of Provide Solution Stage

The Provide Solution stage is the core of service recovery where staff provide resolution alternatives appropriate to the problem faced. Observation results show staff offer various solutions such as replacing menus, providing compensation in the form of complimentary desserts or beverages, or offering discounts. The F&B Supervisor explained, "We provide solution choices to guests and let them choose which best suits their needs. This approach makes guests feel valued and have control over problem resolution." Speed in providing solutions is also an important factor. The F&B Assistant Manager stated, "We strive to provide solutions as soon as possible, usually within less than 15 minutes for minor complaints and a maximum of 30 minutes for complaints requiring coordination with other departments." Guests appreciate quick and appropriate solutions. One guest said, "They immediately offered a solution and quickly executed it. There was no convoluted process." This finding supports Musa & Wijoyo's (2024) research which found that fast and appropriate solutions can increase customer satisfaction by up to 55%.

Implementation of Satisfy Stage

The Satisfy stage involves confirmation that guests are satisfied with the handling provided and there are no additional problems requiring further resolution. Observation results show staff conduct follow-up by asking "Is everything according to your expectations?" or "Is there anything else we can help you with?" One waiter explained, "We don't leave immediately after providing a solution. We first ensure that guests are truly satisfied and there are no follow-up problems." In some cases, staff also conduct follow-up at the end of the dining experience or even by phone after check-out to ensure improved guest experience. The F&B Assistant Manager stated, "Follow-up shows that we truly care about guest experience, not just solving momentary problems." Guests feel valued with follow-up. One guest said, "The manager came to my table to ensure everything was good. This made me feel they really care about my satisfaction." This finding aligns with Hien et al. (2022) who found follow-up can increase customer loyalty by up to 30%.

Effectiveness of LEAPS Method Implementation

Systematic implementation of the LEAPS method proves effective in enhancing guest satisfaction and restoring trust in hotel services. Documentation analysis results show complaint resolution rates reaching 92% with guest satisfaction levels regarding complaint handling at 88%. Data also shows a 65% reduction in repeat complaints from the same guests, indicating that the LEAPS method not only resolves short-term problems but also prevents similar problems in the future. The success of LEAPS method implementation is influenced by several factors. First, staff competence obtained through regular training and coaching from supervisors. Second, management support in providing authority to staff to make decisions within certain limits without waiting for supervisor approval. Third, organizational culture supporting service excellence and continuous improvement. This finding aligns with Shiddiq & Samatan's (2023) research showing that integrating systematic methods into daily operations can consistently improve service quality.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the LEAPS method at Selera Restaurant Nongsa Point Marina & Resort Batam is conducted systematically through five sequential stages. The Listen stage is performed by giving full attention and actively listening to complaints using active listening techniques. The Empathize stage is demonstrated through understanding guest feelings and sincere empathetic communication. The Apologize stage is performed by delivering specific apologies for problems experienced. The Provide Solution stage includes providing fast, appropriate resolution alternatives suited to guest needs. The Satisfy stage involves guest satisfaction confirmation and follow-up to ensure no additional problems remain. The LEAPS method implementation proves effective in enhancing guest satisfaction with complaint resolution rates reaching 92% and satisfaction levels at 88%. Implementation success is influenced by staff competence, management support, and organizational culture supporting service excellence. This research recommends that hotel management continue providing regular training to staff, expand staff authority in making complaint handling decisions, and develop monitoring systems for continuous evaluation of LEAPS method implementation.

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