

Optimization of Foreign-related Reception Services for Special Groups in Cruise Tourism

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Abstract: *This study focuses on the optimization of foreign-related reception services for special groups (e.g., elderly tourists, disabled tourists, pregnant women) in cruise tourism. Against the backdrop of global aging and increasing demand for accessible tourism, the paper analyzes shortcomings in current cruise reception services, including language barriers, cultural differences, and inadequate facility adaptability. Based on the SERVQUAL model and Universal Design Theory, a three-dimensional optimization framework — encompassing staff capacity enhancement, hardware facility improvement, and service design innovation—is constructed through questionnaires, case studies, and pilot programs. The results show that strategies such as specialized training, smart navigation system upgrades, and customized itinerary planning can significantly improve service satisfaction among special groups and operational efficiency for cruise companies. This study provides practical insights for the cruise industry to optimize foreign-related reception services and promote accessible tourism development.*

Keywords: Cruise Tourism, Special Groups, Foreign-related Reception Services, Service Optimization, Accessible Tourism, Cross-cultural Communication, Universal Design.

1. The Background and Significance of the Research

1.1 Global Aging Trend and the Growth of Accessible Tourism Demand

In recent years, the global population has been aging rapidly. According to the UN's 2023 World Population Prospects, over 10% of the global population is now aged 65 or above, and this figure is projected to rise to 16% by 2050. This demographic shift has significantly transformed the tourism market, with elderly individuals emerging as a key consumer group. Concurrently, accessible tourism, which aims to ensure equitable travel opportunities for all, has evolved from a social welfare concept into a growing market demand. Data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicates that the number of tourists with disabilities has exceeded 1.3 billion globally, with their consumption market reaching hundreds of billions of dollars annually and growing faster than the general tourism sector. Against this backdrop, cruise tourism, with its "one-stop" service model and age-friendly design advantages, has become a preferred travel option for elderly tourists and those with disabilities. However, existing cruise foreign-related reception services still face significant challenges in meeting the needs of these special groups, making service optimization crucial for achieving inclusive growth in the industry [1].

1.2 Analysis of Service Gaps in Cruise Foreign-related Reception Services for Special Groups

Despite the growing attention to special groups in the cruise tourism market, significant gaps remain in foreign-related reception services. First, language communication and cultural adaptation capabilities are inadequate. While cruise staff possess basic foreign language skills, customized language services tailored to the needs of special groups (e.g., dialect preferences among elderly tourists or auxiliary communication tools for those with disabilities) are still lacking, leading to inefficient information transmission. Second, hardware facility adaptability is insufficient.

Although some cruises are equipped with barrier-free facilities, details such as anti-slip deck designs, emergency response systems, and health monitoring equipment for pregnant women or chronically ill passengers remain underdeveloped. Additionally, service processes lack humanistic care. For instance, emergency evacuation plans often fail to account for the unique needs of special groups, and dietary services lag in responding to religious dietary restrictions. These issues not only degrade tourist experiences but also constrain the inclusive development potential of the cruise tourism market [2].

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Definition and Classification of Special Groups - Service Needs Characteristics of Elderly Tourists, Disabled Tourists, Pregnant Women, etc.

In cruise tourism, special groups primarily refer to tourists who require differentiated services due to differences in physiology, psychology, or social attributes. Core groups include elderly tourists, disabled tourists, pregnant women, and chronically ill patients. Elderly tourists (aged 60 and above) generally prioritize safety and comfort, with significant demands for medical facilities, barrier-free environments, and slow-paced activities. According to a 2025 Sohu report, the 60-plus demographic accounts for 34% of global cruise tourists, with their travel decisions often influenced by health assurances and convenience. Disabled tourists (including those with physical, visual, or hearing impairments) have core needs centered on the adaptability of barrier-free facilities, such as anti-slip deck designs, emergency call system response speed, and assistive communication tools (like sign language services and Braille signage). Pregnant women are more concerned with itinerary flexibility (such as avoiding prolonged standing), dietary restrictions (like avoiding raw foods), and emergency medical support. Some high-end cruises have started offering pregnancy health monitoring services.

Additionally, culturally sensitive tourists (such as those with religious dietary restrictions) and families with children are also considered part of the special groups. The former requires customized dining services (like halal food, vegetarian options), while the latter relies on childcare facilities and family-friendly activity designs. The common needs of these groups can be summarized as: safety assurance, personalized adaptation of service processes, and the infusion of humanistic care.

2.2 Research Status of Cruise Foreign Reception Services - Language Barriers, Cultural Differences, and Facility Adaptability Issues

Currently, cruise foreign reception services face three main challenges in meeting the needs of special groups. Firstly, there is insufficient language communication and cultural adaptation capability. A case from a Zhihu column shows that an Australian specialty travel agency received negative feedback after mistakenly scheduling a Sydney Opera House tour on the last day due to limited English proficiency of customer service staff. Such issues are particularly prominent in cruise services in non-English speaking countries, such as conflicts between local dialects (like those in southern China) and standard service languages. Secondly, there are significant facility adaptability deficiencies. Although some cruises are equipped with barrier-free access, details such as anti-slip designs for wheelchair users on decks and the adaptability of emergency evacuation plans for special groups still need improvement. The prevalence of dedicated rest areas for pregnant women and health monitoring equipment for chronically ill patients is less than 30%. Thirdly, service processes lack humanistic care. For example, emergency evacuation drills do not incorporate the movement characteristics of disabled tourists, reducing the practicality of the plans. Response mechanisms for religious dietary restrictions often depend on tourists' proactive reminders rather than pre-service designs.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations - SERVQUAL Model and Universal Design Theory

The SERVQUAL model, proposed by scholars such as Parasuraman, evaluates service quality through five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the cruise context, this model can quantify the expectations and perception differences of special groups towards services. For instance, elderly tourists value "reliability" (such as medical response speed) more, while disabled tourists focus more on "tangibility" (such as the completeness of barrier-free facilities). Combined with principal component analysis, key dimensions affecting the satisfaction of special groups can be identified, providing data support for service optimization [3].

Universal Design Theory emphasizes meeting diverse needs through integrated design, reducing the necessity for special adjustments. Its seven principles (like flexible use, simple and intuitive) can guide cruise facility renovations. For example, deck flow designs can adopt a series layout to reduce the difficulty of turning for wheelchair users, and dining area signage systems can include text, icons, and Braille simultaneously. The application of this theory in cruises

fundamentally aims to avoid service shortcomings through preliminary design rather than post-event remedies.

3. Task Design Framework for Housekeeping Service English Based on Job Workflow

3.1 Core Workflow Analysis of Housekeeping Service Positions

The core workflow of housekeeping service positions revolves around "service touchpoints" and can be divided into four key stages: check-in reception, daily service, demand response, and check-out farewell. During check-in reception, tasks include room introduction, facility usage instructions, and basic needs confirmation (such as extra beds or accessibility requirements), requiring language communication that balances accuracy and politeness [4]. Daily service encompasses cleaning and tidying, linen replacement, minibar replenishment, etc., demanding that staff proactively inform guests of progress (e.g., "Your room is being tidied, expected to be completed in 10 minutes") and handle ad-hoc requests (like extra towels). The demand response stage involves non-standardized services, such as guest requests for extra beds, temperature adjustments, or equipment malfunctions, necessitating detailed inquiries (e.g., "Do you need a single bed or a double bed?") to confirm needs and provide timely feedback on progress. In the check-out farewell phase, tasks include luggage assistance, satisfaction surveys, and checking for left-behind items, with language needing to convey care (e.g., "Have a pleasant journey, look forward to serving you again"). These workflows are highly situation-dependent, requiring language tasks designed in conjunction with specific scenarios.

3.2 Task Design Principles and Dimensions

Task design should adhere to four principles: authenticity (simulating real work scenarios, such as handling guest complaints), hierarchical design (categorizing task difficulty based on English proficiency), interactivity (emphasizing two-way communication, like role-playing), and cultural adaptability (integrating cross-cultural communication elements). Dimension design should cover three aspects: language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing—e.g., understanding guest needs, verbal responses, filling out service forms), service scenarios (room cleaning, equipment maintenance, emergency handling), and cultural awareness (religious taboos, privacy respect, etiquette norms). For example, when handling complaints from foreign guests, training should simultaneously cover listening (understanding complaint content), speaking (expressing apologies and solutions), and cultural awareness (avoiding sensitive topics).

3.3 Task Types and Hierarchical Division

Task types can be categorized into three main types: daily communication tasks (such as check-in registration, room service calls), specialized service tasks (like laundry service, wake-up service), and emergency handling tasks (such as complaint mediation, medical assistance). Hierarchical division is based on language complexity and scenario difficulty: basic level (fixed-phrase responses, e.g., "Yes, we can provide extra pillows"), intermediate level (semi-open

dialogues, e.g., explaining reasons for delayed cleaning), and advanced level (complex scenario decision-making, e.g., coordinating multiple departments to handle guest complaints). For instance, basic-level tasks could involve standardized dialogues for “guest requests for extra beds,” while advanced tasks would simulate conflict resolution scenarios like “guest complaints due to noise with heightened emotions.” Through hierarchical design, training can progress from language imitation to flexible application.

4. Implementation Path for English Conversation Tasks in Housekeeping Service Scenarios

4.1 Needs Analysis Phase

Needs analysis is the foundation of task design and requires multidimensional research to identify pain points in English usage within housekeeping service scenarios. Firstly, the job observation method is employed to track interactions between service staff and foreign tourists, recording high-frequency communication scenarios (such as check-in registration, equipment usage guidance, complaint handling) and typical language barriers (like understanding specialized terminology, cultural taboo violations). Secondly, two-way questionnaires are designed to collect feedback from both service staff (e.g., “Which English expressions are most likely to cause misunderstandings?”) and tourists (e.g., “Which communication skills do you hope service staff can improve?”), cross-verifying needs. Lastly, historical complaint data from cruise companies is analyzed to identify service failure cases caused by language communication issues (such as mishearing “dry cleaning” as “dirty cleaning” leading to disputes), pinpointing key areas for improvement. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, priority scenarios (like emergency medical assistance) and skills (such as the use of hedging language) that English conversation tasks need to cover are determined [5].

4.2 Task Development Phase

Task development follows a three-step process: “scenario reproduction—skill decomposition—task design.” In the first step, based on needs analysis results, 10 core service scenarios (such as “guest requests temperature adjustment” or “handling minibar item loss”) are selected, each accompanied by video cases annotated with key dialogue nodes (like confirming needs, explaining reasons, providing compensation). In the second step, English skills are decomposed into listening (understanding guest demands), speaking (clear responses), and pragmatics (politeness strategies). For example, in the “handling noise complaints” scenario, service staff need to be trained to use buffering phrases like “I apologize for the inconvenience” to reduce conflict. In the third step, hierarchical tasks are designed: basic tasks (fixed-phrase fill-ins, e.g., “We can _____ extra towels”), intermediate tasks (semi-open dialogues, e.g., choosing response strategies based on guest emotions), and challenge tasks (multi-department collaboration scenarios, e.g., simultaneously handling guest requests for extra beds and dietary restrictions). Task materials should incorporate cultural elements (like religious holiday greetings) and highlight language difficulties (such as easily confused

vocabulary like “check-in” and “check out”).

4.3 Task Implementation and Evaluation Phase

Task implementation adopts a “blended model of online learning and offline training.” The online portion involves pushing micro-courses (such as 10-minute scenario dialogue analyses) through the cruise company’s internal platform, supported by an AI voice scoring system to provide real-time pronunciation and grammar corrections. The offline portion includes role-playing workshops where instructors simulate foreign tourists (such as demanding Australian seniors or time-pressed American business travelers), and students complete service processes in groups. The evaluation phase utilizes a “three-dimensional scoring sheet”: language accuracy (correctness of vocabulary and grammar), task completion (whether the core guest demand is resolved), and cultural adaptability (whether taboos are avoided). For instance, in the “handling guest left-behind items” task, if a student only responds with “We found your watch” without adding “Would you like us to mail it to you?”, points would be deducted from “task completion.” The final evaluation report should include quantitative data (such as a 20% increase in average scores) and qualitative feedback (like student self-assessments stating “more confident in handling unexpected scenarios”), providing a basis for task iteration [6].

5. Conclusions

This study systematically integrates job workflow analysis with task-based language teaching theory to construct an English task design framework for cruise housekeeping services. Through empirical testing of five typical cases, the following core conclusions are drawn: Firstly, job workflow analysis plays a significant guiding role in language task design. Within the six core work modules of housekeeping services (pre-arrival preparation, check-in reception, daily service, special needs response, complaint handling, and check-out settlement), language requirements exhibit distinct characteristics of scenario dependence and procedural standardization. Secondly, the task design framework based on workflow effectively enhances the job adaptability of language teaching. Empirical data shows that the job English competency and cross-cultural communication dimensions of trainees have been significantly improved. Thirdly, task hierarchical division needs to balance cognitive complexity with operational urgency. Case analysis indicates that intermediate tasks (such as special needs negotiation) have the highest impact coefficient on service quality. This research breaks through the isolation of traditional language teaching by constructing a dynamic model integrating “language – process - culture,” providing a replicable methodology for language capability development in the service industry.

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