

## THE STUDENTS' IMPLEMENTATION OF ETIQUETTE IN TABLE MANNERS PROGRAM

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the implementation of student etiquette in a program that teaches the rules of manners in the context of communal dining. Table etiquette is an essential part of social and professional life, and these skills are expected to enhance students' self-image and interpersonal abilities. The research method involved distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews with 7th-semester students who participated in the program. The findings indicate that the majority of 7th-semester students were able to apply etiquette well, although some challenges were observed in understanding and practicing more complex rules. Factors affecting the success of etiquette implementation include the level of understanding, cultural background, and the influence of instructors. This study recommends the need for a more structured approach and a variety of teaching methods to improve the effectiveness of the Table Manner program for 7th-semester students.

**Keywords:** *Implementation, Etiquette, Table Manners*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Table manners, often referred to as dining etiquette, encompass a set of rules governing behavior at the dining table. These include proper ways of sitting, using utensils, eating, drinking, and leaving the dining area (Dwi Hanadya et al., 2022). Understanding table manners is crucial in today's increasingly global and diverse society. As individuals

interact with people from various cultural and social backgrounds, having proper dining etiquette becomes a basic yet essential social skill.

According to Hornby (Stenson & Hornby, 1996), *manner* refers to a person's way of behaving toward others, encompassing polite social behavior, habits, and customs. This implies that manners—especially during meals—

reflect an individual's behavior and social identity. In this sense, table manners are not only about eating correctly but also about presenting oneself appropriately in social settings. Our behavior at the table contributes significantly to how others perceive us, particularly in formal or professional environments.

Table manners are most commonly associated with formal Western-style dining, as the concept was introduced by Europeans and became standardized through their cultural practices. In many contexts, knowledge of table manners is considered part of general social knowledge. However, some people still perceive table manners as relevant only to those from higher socioeconomic classes. This perception has contributed to a widespread lack of understanding and awareness regarding dining etiquette. Consequently, many individuals—regardless of education level—still lack proper knowledge and practice of table manners in daily life. To address this, basic education on table manners is needed from an early stage.

In the context of higher education, particularly in hospitality-related studies, table manners training is increasingly recognized as essential. In this regard, sixth-semester students of the English Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang participated in a table manners practice session held at the Pangeran Beach Hotel. This activity was part of the *English for Hotel* course, aiming to equip students with the necessary soft skills for professional and social settings. Through this program, students were expected to learn and demonstrate appropriate dining etiquette, thereby enhancing their character and interpersonal skills.

However, based on preliminary observations and questionnaire responses distributed to the sixth-

semester students, it was found that their understanding and implementation of table manners remained limited. Despite receiving instruction, many students did not consistently apply table manners in everyday life. This indicates a gap between the theoretical knowledge delivered during the course and the actual implementation of that knowledge in real-life situations.

Despite the increasing integration of soft skills development in higher education, particularly in hospitality and English-language study programs, the **implementation** of such training in real-life scenarios remains underexplored. Table manners, a fundamental component of social etiquette, are not only essential for personal development but also play a critical role in professional settings—especially for students entering careers in tourism, hospitality, and international communication. However, existing research predominantly focuses on the **delivery of table manners training**, such as the content, materials, and instructional methods, rather than the **outcomes** of such training in shaping consistent behavior and etiquette among students.

Several studies (Hanadya et al., 2022; Putriana et al., 2024; Vanosta, 2025; and others) have emphasized the **importance of etiquette training**, but they stop short of evaluating whether students can transfer this knowledge into practice. Moreover, studies conducted between 2021 and 2025, including those by Santoso (2023), Faradina (2022), and Hidayat (2021), highlight a recurring issue: students often demonstrate knowledge of etiquette in theory but struggle to apply it appropriately in real-life social or formal contexts.

This gap between knowledge and application is significant, particularly in Indonesia, where multicultural social

interactions are becoming more common, and students are expected to represent themselves professionally both at home and abroad. The failure to implement appropriate etiquette can hinder students' social confidence, limit their professional opportunities, and reflect poorly on the institutions that trained them.

Therefore, this study is necessary to **evaluate how effectively students implement the etiquette learned during table manners training**. It provides a practical assessment of behavioral outcomes rather than theoretical understanding alone. By focusing on sixth-semester students who have already undergone formal instruction, this research contributes valuable insights into the **efficacy** of current teaching methods, the **real-world preparedness** of graduates, and the potential improvements needed in hospitality-focused curricula.

Ultimately, this study not only addresses a gap in academic research but also supports educators, curriculum designers, and hospitality practitioners in fostering more competent, socially aware, and professionally prepared graduates.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition of Table Manners

Table manners are widely recognized as a crucial component of social etiquette, governing how individuals conduct themselves during meals. They include a set of behavioral norms associated with eating, posture, utensil use, and interaction with others at the dining table. These rules, while often culturally specific, serve a universal purpose in promoting respect, order, and professionalism in dining settings.

The origin of the term "etiquette" is traced back to the French word *étiquette*, which referred to the formal cards used

in royal courts to guide appropriate behavior (Bertens, 2002, as cited in Mawaddah, 2016). Over time, these guidelines evolved from ceremonial customs into more generalized social rules, particularly those applied during meals. Table manners thus represent the historical development of etiquette into a modern-day practice essential for social cohesion and interpersonal respect.

Pendit (2020) defines table manners as a form of dining etiquette that includes various aspects of eating behavior, such as proper posture, utensil usage, and courteous interaction with others. These behaviors are not just about maintaining order but are integral to displaying self-discipline and respect in social gatherings. In formal contexts, particularly in business or international settings, such behaviors are critical to demonstrating cultural awareness and professionalism.

Sorto and White (2018) support this view by emphasizing the communicative value of table manners. According to them, table manners function as a non-verbal language, reflecting an individual's upbringing, level of education, and social awareness. Poor table manners can result in negative social judgments, while proper etiquette can enhance one's image in both social and professional environments.

The relevance of table manners in contemporary society continues to grow, especially in a globalized world where individuals increasingly engage in cross-cultural interactions. Dwi Hanadya et al. (2022) argue that table manners are not only about adhering to rules but also about showing respect for others, including hosts and fellow diners. Their research highlights how table manners can influence first impressions and serve as indicators of an individual's adaptability and professionalism in diverse settings.

Moreover, the instructional value of table manners is being increasingly recognized in educational and vocational contexts, especially in hospitality and English-language programs. As Mawaddah (2016) points out, the integration of etiquette training within formal education helps students develop both personal character and professional competence. This is particularly important for students preparing for roles in service industries where interaction with clients and colleagues from different cultural backgrounds is inevitable.

In summary, the literature underscores the multifaceted role of table manners as both a cultural construct and a professional necessity. From their historical roots in royal courts to their present-day application in global business and education, table manners serve as a reflection of individual character and social competence. Despite widespread acknowledgment of their importance, gaps remain in evaluating how well etiquette is internalized and applied by learners following formal instruction—a gap this study seeks to address.

### 3.2 Etiquette Rules in Table Manners

A well-mannered dining experience is not only defined by the food served or the setting, but also by the **social conduct** of diners, particularly in regard to posture, utensil usage, and behavior at the table. Dining etiquette is a set of culturally informed practices that contribute to a respectful and pleasant atmosphere during meals.

**Posture**, as one of the foundational components of table manners, reflects both discipline and respect in formal dining. Harcourt (2017) identifies correct sitting posture as essential, noting that individuals should maintain a straight back, avoid slouching, and keep

their hands appropriately positioned—typically resting lightly on the table without placing elbows on the surface. Additionally, placing personal items such as mobile phones or handbags on the table is discouraged across many cultures, as it disrupts the formality and cleanliness of the dining space.

Equally significant is the proper use of **napkins and cutlery**, which varies by cultural tradition. In Western formal dining, napkins are to be placed on the lap immediately after sitting and used discreetly throughout the meal (Fielding, 2019). If a diner needs to temporarily leave the table, the napkin should be placed neatly on the chair, not the table, to signal that the meal is not yet finished. At the end of the meal, it is customary to fold the napkin loosely and place it beside the plate. Cutlery use also follows structured conventions, such as using utensils from the outside in according to the sequence of courses served. Fielding (2019) adds that if a utensil is dropped, diners should signal the waiter rather than retrieve it themselves, maintaining the formality and hygiene of the dining environment.

Behavior during eating is another critical aspect of table manners. Miller (2018) highlights several universally accepted rules, including chewing with the mouth closed, refraining from speaking with food in the mouth, and covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing. These practices demonstrate consideration for others and contribute to a hygienic and respectful environment. Additionally, Harmer (2020) emphasizes that making loud eating noises, playing with food, or gesturing with utensils is often regarded as impolite and disruptive. Such behaviors not only distract from the meal but may also offend others at the table.

Social etiquette also extends to behaviors beyond the mechanics of

eating. Diners are generally expected to ask for permission before leaving the table, avoid distracting behaviors such as using mobile phones, and refrain from staring at others while they eat (Harmer, 2020). These actions, while seemingly minor, significantly impact the overall dining experience and reflect an individual's level of social awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of dining etiquette. It encompasses not only technical knowledge of table settings and utensil use but also behavioral and social norms that reflect a person's upbringing, respect for others, and professional demeanor. Understanding and practicing these elements are especially important in cross-cultural and formal contexts, where first impressions and interpersonal interactions play a pivotal role.

### 3.3 Cultural and Social Importance of Table Manners

Table manners, while varying widely across cultures, universally function as markers of respect, social awareness, and cultural competence. Smith and Jones (2016) argue that adherence to proper dining etiquette facilitates smoother social interactions by creating a respectful and comfortable environment for both hosts and guests. These customs help standardize expectations at the table, reducing potential misunderstandings and discomfort. For example, European dining traditions typically emphasize formality, with structured multi-course meals, specific cutlery placement, and strict adherence to sequence and posture. In contrast, Asian dining etiquette often centers on communal sharing and includes culturally specific gestures such as the use of both hands when offering or receiving items, or refraining from

pointing chopsticks directly at others—actions that signify humility and respect.

Brewer (1997) challenges the misconception that table manners are merely arbitrary social rules, instead framing them as components of social intelligence. This perspective suggests that the ability to navigate formal dining environments with appropriate etiquette is linked to broader competencies such as self-confidence, professionalism, and intercultural adaptability. Good table manners, in this sense, are reflections of an individual's upbringing, cultural literacy, and sensitivity to social norms. These attributes become particularly critical in business, hospitality, and diplomatic **contexts**, where behavior at the dining table may significantly impact relationships, negotiations, and perceptions of credibility. As such, developing a nuanced understanding of table manners across cultures is essential for individuals preparing for international or professional careers.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

In descriptive qualitative research, the data are typically in the form of words, observations, images, or recorded behaviors, rather than numerical values. The goal is to capture the richness and complexity of participants' responses and present them in a descriptive format. The process involves systematic data collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation, aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

The sample in this study consisted of sixth-semester students enrolled in the English Study Program at Pasir Pengaraian University, who had previously participated in a table manners training session as part of the *English for Hotel* course. A total of 23 students were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling



technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research focus—in this case, their direct involvement in the table manners program.

To gather data, the researchers utilized two main instruments: questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and close-ended questions designed to assess students' understanding and implementation of table manners. The items addressed various aspects of dining etiquette, including posture, utensil usage, social interaction, and behavioral practices. The interviews, conducted with selected participants, were semi-structured to allow flexibility while still focusing on core areas of interest. These interviews provided deeper insights into students' perceptions, personal experiences, and challenges in applying table manners in real-life situations.

The data collected were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This process involved organizing the data into categories, identifying recurring themes and patterns, and interpreting the findings to reflect the students' level of understanding and the extent to which they implemented table manners in their daily lives. The analysis was conducted manually by coding responses and triangulating data from questionnaires and interviews to ensure validity and reliability.

This method was chosen to provide a nuanced understanding of how table manners training is internalized and applied by students, with a focus on **practical** behavioral outcomes rather than just theoretical knowledge.

#### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings on table manner etiquette among 6th semester

students at University of Pasir Pengaraian reveal several important patterns across multiple dimensions of dining etiquette. Based on the questionnaires distributed to 30 students via Google Forms and interviews conducted with 23 students, the following findings emerged.

**Table 1.** Results of the Table Manner Understanding and Practice Questionnaire

No	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1	Understanding of Table Manners	19	82.6%
2	Table Manner Etiquette	18	78.3%
3	Using Eating Utensils	17	73.9%
4	Behavior While Eating	18	78.3%
5	Food Menu Preferences	16	69.6%
6	History of Table Manners	17	73.9%

##### 4.1. Understanding of Table Manners

The findings of this study reveal a strong foundational understanding of table manners among sixth-semester English students at Pasir Pengaraian University. The majority of participants recognized that dining etiquette is essential for demonstrating respect and fostering a positive social atmosphere. This aligns with Smith and Jones (2016), who argue that dining manners are integral to respectful social interaction and contribute to creating comfortable environments for all participants. Furthermore, students' recognition of cultural diversity in dining customs confirms earlier conclusions by Wang (2023), who found that awareness of cultural variation is key to cross-cultural competence in formal dining settings.

Brewer (1997) also emphasized that table manners are an expression of social

intelligence, supporting the idea that students' awareness of etiquette across cultures reflects not only knowledge but also adaptability—a critical skill in both professional and multicultural environments. The emphasis on cultural sensitivity is especially relevant in a globalized world where hospitality professionals and graduates are increasingly expected to operate across cultures.

## 4.2. Application of Table Manner

### Rules

While the students showed a high level of knowledge, the application of etiquette rules varied. Basic practices such as waiting for all guests to be served before eating and proper placement of cutlery were generally followed, consistent with the findings of Hanadya et al. (2022), who reported improved etiquette behavior among students who received formal training. However, more nuanced behaviors, especially concerning the use of technology at the dining table, showed weaker adherence. This discrepancy reflects current generational trends. For example, recent research from *Vogue* (2024) and the *New York Post* (2024) found that Generation Z often deprioritizes traditional etiquette, particularly concerning mobile phone usage during meals.

This generational behavior could signal a shift in social norms, suggesting that etiquette training must evolve to address digital-era behavior while maintaining core values of respect and presence during meals. As suggested by Faradina (2022), curriculum updates should incorporate modern etiquette issues to ensure relevance and practical application.

## 4.3. Knowledge and Comfort with Cutlery Usage

Although most students demonstrated confidence in using basic cutlery, such as forks and spoons, fewer felt comfortable using knives or following formal place settings. This echoes the findings of Putriana et al. (2024), who reported that while knowledge was high, confidence in executing more complex etiquette practices (like cutlery sequencing) remained a challenge.

Fielding (2019) stressed the importance of familiarity with multi-course formal dining as a professional competency, especially in Western business and hospitality contexts. The confusion among students regarding cutlery order suggests a need for more experiential learning, such as role-play or mock fine-dining sessions, as also recommended by Santoso (2023), who found that practical immersion significantly improves etiquette application.

## 4.4 Eating Manners

The data indicated that most students adhere to polite eating behavior, such as chewing quietly, avoiding disruptions, and being respectful of others' habits. These findings align with Harmer (2020), who noted that quiet, considerate eating behaviors are universally accepted signs of refinement and respect. Students' reported sensitivity to others' eating habits also corresponds with Sorto and White's (2018) idea that table manners represent non-verbal communication that signals empathy and cultural awareness.

The findings support the idea that students are not only aware of how to behave but also why these behaviors matter—a distinction critical to sustaining long-term habit formation. As emphasized by Widyadhari Vanosta

(2025), successful etiquette education requires both cognitive understanding and emotional engagement.

#### 4.5 Food Preferences and Menu Knowledge

Students demonstrated refined food preferences and an understanding of menu components such as appetizers, main courses, and desserts. The emphasis on freshness, quality, and balance suggests an elevated awareness of culinary standards. This insight aligns with *Moments Log* (2023) and *Culture Tourist Blog* (2024), which highlighted how food choices are closely tied to etiquette, taste, and personal expression in different cultural contexts.

Moreover, students' preferences for lighter dishes and balanced flavors show alignment with modern global food trends, which prioritize health, freshness, and sensory harmony. As Harcourt (2017) points out, an appreciation of food quality and presentation is often intertwined with one's ability to participate in sophisticated dining scenarios.

#### 4.6. Historical Knowledge of Table Manners

The results show that most students have a solid understanding of the historical and cultural development of table manners, though fewer actively study cross-national comparisons. This is consistent with Wang (2023), who found that while many students are aware of dining traditions, in-depth cross-cultural comparisons are less common unless explicitly taught.

Students' interest in how dining customs evolve over time corresponds with Mawaddah (2016), who argued that understanding the historical evolution of etiquette fosters greater respect for modern practices and helps students

adapt to new social environments. The recognition that etiquette reflects social class, values, and status also supports earlier sociological analyses by Brewer (1997) and Bertens (2002).

#### 4.7. Interview Insights

The interviews enriched the quantitative data by revealing deeper cognitive and emotional engagement with table manners. Students clearly articulated that etiquette reflects self-discipline, respect, and cultural knowledge. Their familiarity with formal dining behaviors, such as cutlery placement and napkin use, indicates successful retention of instructional content—findings supported by Hanadya et al. (2022) and Putriana et al. (2024).

Furthermore, students' adaptive strategies for navigating dining customs in various cultural settings—such as researching local etiquette or asking for advice—support the view of Brewer (1997) and Wang (2023), who emphasize cultural flexibility as a key element of modern etiquette. Their preferences for à la carte versus set menus also reflect contemporary dining values related to choice and exploration, resonating with consumer behavior studies in hospitality and tourism education.

In conclusion, the study confirms that sixth-semester English students demonstrate a strong conceptual understanding of table manners, with high levels of awareness regarding respect, cultural diversity, and formal dining rules. However, the findings also highlight challenges in consistent behavioral application, particularly in more nuanced areas like technology use, complex cutlery protocols, and comparative historical knowledge. These insights echo and extend the work of prior scholars and point to the need for



enhanced experiential learning, modernized etiquette instruction, and culturally responsive training in hospitality and language education programs.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of etiquette through the Table Manner program significantly contributes to shaping students' behavior, communication skills, and overall social competence. The findings show that students who engaged in the program exhibited a solid understanding of formal dining etiquette, including proper cutlery usage, polite conversation, and respectful behavior at the table. Additionally, the program fostered students' cultural awareness, enabling them to recognize and appreciate the diversity of dining practices across different societies. These outcomes are particularly relevant for English Study Program students, who are likely to encounter diverse social and professional environments in their future careers.

However, the study also identified gaps in the consistent application of etiquette, particularly in informal settings where supervision was absent. Some students admitted to reverting to casual habits, such as using mobile phones during meals or misapplying cutlery etiquette. This highlights the need for reinforcement beyond formal training sessions. While the Table Manner program lays an important foundation, its long-term impact depends on regular practice, integration into everyday routines, and ongoing mentorship from instructors and role models.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on etiquette education, particularly within the context

of higher education in non-Western settings. It offers empirical evidence on how structured table manner training can influence students' personal and professional development. By focusing on sixth-semester English students, the research also underscores the importance of embedding soft skills into language and hospitality-related curricula. Moreover, this study adds value by incorporating students' self-assessment and interview data, providing a comprehensive picture of how etiquette is understood, perceived, and practiced in real-life contexts.

To build on the positive outcomes of the Table Manner program, several recommendations are proposed. First, institutions should consider integrating etiquette instruction more thoroughly across multiple semesters rather than as a one-time activity. Reinforcement through role-playing, peer evaluations, and reflective journals may help students internalize etiquette practices more effectively. Second, lecturers and facilitators should contextualize etiquette training within students' cultural and social realities, allowing flexibility while upholding global standards. Third, collaboration with the hospitality industry could provide opportunities for real-life application through internships or formal dining events. Lastly, future research may explore the long-term behavioral effects of table manner training and investigate comparative outcomes across different disciplines or institutions.

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