

AN EXPLORATION OF TOURIST GUIDES' COMPETENCIES TO CREATE MEMORABLE TOURIST EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: Tourist guiding in South Africa is a sector of the tourism industry that is subject to regulation to acquire competence and skills to meet the guiding standards and to provide quality services to tourists. The research aims to explore the skill sets perceived by tourist guides as the most important in their professional practice to create a memorable tourist experience to ensure that skills perceived to be most important are considered during the guiding training course for present and future tourist guides to prepare them for both employment, long-life learning and enhance their performance to attain the highest level of customer satisfaction. This study made use of a descriptive quantitative research approach through an online survey research design to collect data. A non-random sample of 320 tourist guides was selected to participate in the study. Data from the online survey was coded into numerical representations and captured in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics together with a confirmatory factor analysis were used to analyse and interpret the results. The results showed various skill sets perceived as the most important from the tourist guides' perspective, including honesty and reliability, ethical skills, time management, customer care skills, health and safety skills and communication skills.

Key words: tourist guides, skills, employability skills, tourist experience, personal skills, hard skills

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INTRODUCTION

The National Department of Tourism (NDT) in South Africa governs the guiding sector of the tourism industry. In order to operate professionally to work as a qualified and legally registered tourist guide, a guiding qualification is required that is accomplished through a certified learning institution in the country. All licensed learning institutions that offer such qualifications in South Africa are required to register with the Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority [CATHSSETA] (FGASA, 2019). This national authority is responsible for vocational and applied learning programmes within the sector.

The skills required by a tourist guide to be employable include both hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job. Soft skills are interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills, attitudes, habits and personal attributes that one possesses or skills that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with (Vasanthakumari, 2019). According to James and James (2004), hard skills are no longer seen as the single most important skill set and Nealy (2005) supports this by stating that soft skills are often considered more important for productive performance in the modern tour operator sector. While technical skills are a part of many educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis in curricula so that students learn the importance of soft skills early in their academic programs before they embark on a business career (Wellington, 2005). Much research has been done on the importance of soft skills in the workplace (Klaus, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010; Nealy, 2005; Smith, 2007) but is scant in the realm of tourist guiding. This study aimed to determine the level of importance of the various skills of tourist guides from the perception of these professionals in South Africa because tourist guides' competencies play an important role in what feelings and knowledge visitors will develop at the end of guided tours which may lead to customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist guides are one of the most important components of a tourist's experience at a destination. Uys (2009) states that a tourist guide is a multi-skilled individual that contributes by creating an experience for tourists through interpretation.

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Tourist guides are frontline staff who provide the ‘moment of truth’ for tourists and may make or break the trip (Zhang and Chow, 2004; Melia, 2012; Salazar, 2006; Hoang, 2015; Hurombo, 2016). The services of tourist guides may influence the quality of a traveller’s experience, length of stay, and the resulting financial benefits for a local community (Chilembwe and Mweiwa, 2014). Therefore, tourist guides who provide high quality services to tourists essentially ensure that they are satisfied and as a result, they may be willing to pay more and stay longer at a destination (Chilembwe and Mweiwa, 2014). In addition, the higher the service quality perceived by a tourist, the more opportunities the local individuals may have to improve their financial return due to increased spending and more time spend by tourists at a destination.

The tourist guide is defined as unofficial ambassadors of their countries, tourism companies, tourist destinations and employers who are required to possess moral, intellectual and professional qualities to be able to deliver memorable tourist experiences to the tourists in an interesting way (Kassawnh et al., 2019). Moral qualities include being authenticity, showing a sense of humour, self-respect and trustworthiness, Intellectual qualities include being knowledgeable with full information, for example, more information related to cultural matters, improved logical skills, life – long learner, commitment to continuous learning, and personal enrichment and professionalism qualities: the ability to plan, organise, coordinate, communicate and direct with ease (Sandaruwani and Gnanapala, 2016; Thompson, 2012; Kassawnh et al., 2019).

Tourist guides may be self-employed or find employment through travel agencies and tour operators. Thus, they require employability skills to be hired to be able to provide the best services to the tourists. The term skill refers to “the ability of somebody to do something well which is usually only gained through training and experience” (Uys, 2009, p.18). According to Robles (2012), business executives in the modern workplace perceive soft skills with increasing importance. Soft skills include interpersonal qualities, attitudes, habits and personality of individual, which one can acquire through educational, work and life experiences and personal attributes that one possesses, whereas hard skills are the technical abilities and knowledge that one possesses (Robles, 2012; Binsaeed et al., 2017). Soft skills consist of a variety of skills including communication, interpersonal ability, stress management, problem solving, self-management, time management, customer service skills, decision-making skills, leadership skills, cognitive skills and teamwork skills (Singh and Jaykumar, 2019). Furthermore, Robles (2012) states that employers consider new employees who have both strong soft skills and hard skills as more employable. The major soft skills perceived as the most important by business executives, also applicable to those in the tourism industry, include integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic (Robles, 2012). Robles (2012), Grančay (2020) and Čuić Tanković et al. (2021) indicates the required important personal attributes and skills of employees, including tourist guides, which are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Ten soft skills and attributes of employees Source: Robles (2012); Grančay (2020); Čuić Tanković et al. (2021)

Skills and attributes	Example	Type
Communication	Oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening and ability to deliver information clearly, negotiate and resolve conflict.	Skill
Courtesy	Manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful.	Character
Flexibility	Adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable.	Character
Integrity	Honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what is right and gives important, accurate and true information.	Character
Interpersonal skills	A sense of humour, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, disciplined, patient, social skills and tolerant of people.	Character
Positive attitude	Optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident.	Character
Professionalism	Professional, well dressed, neat appearance, poised.	Character
Responsibility	Accountable, reliable, accomplished, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense.	Character
Teamwork	Cooperative, congenial, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative.	Skill
Work ethic	Hard-working, loyal, self-motivated, punctual, good attendance.	Character

Table 2. Soft skills Source: Cleary et al., (2006); Čuić Tanković et al., (2021)

Soft skills	Example
Basic/fundamental skills	Technical, knowledge of the task, hands-on ability
Conceptual/thinking skills	Planning, collecting and organising information, problem-solving
Business skills	Innovation and enterprise
Community skills	Civic and citizenship knowledge
People-related skills	Interpersonal qualities, such as communication and teamwork
Personal skills	Attributes such as being responsible, resourceful, and self-confident

Robles (2012) states that even though all of the personal attributes and interpersonal qualities appear to be very important, not all are perceived to be equally important; some skills are more important when comparing them with other personal skills. The skills that travel and tourism employers including travel agents and tour operators want from their employees to foster and enhance their performance to attain the highest level of customer satisfaction include soft skills which are transferrable in many jobs (Cleary et al., 2006; Čuić Tanković et al., 2021). Furthermore, Čuić Tanković et al., (2021) state that in the travel and tourism industry, soft skills are considered important compared to other skills. Table 2 provides an overview of general employability skills. People skills are a core component of soft skills (Klaus, 2010). People skills are the interpersonal attributes that characterise a person’s relationships with other people to enable someone to engage and get along with the people around them both on a personal and emotional level. They give someone the power to express their feelings effectively and, equally, they allow people to understand and connect with others (Thompson, 2021).

Some researchers note that interpersonal skills are the most important skills at all levels of the job (Sheikh, 2009; Smith, 2007) and may be very relevant to a career that involves significant elements of interpretation. While authors equate interpersonal skills with soft skills (James and James, 2004; Perreault, 2004), interpersonal skills are only one facet of soft skills. In addition to interpersonal skills, soft skills include personal qualities and career attributes (James and James, 2004; Nieragden, 2000; Perreault, 2004). Personal attributes might include one's personality, character traits, aptitude, values, and attitudes, for example, likeability, time management prowess, and organisational skills (Parsons, 2008; Malimas, 2017). Career attributes can include communication, teamwork, leadership, and customer service (James and James, 2004).

People skills are the foundation of good customer service, and customer service skills are critical to professional success in almost any job. Tourism businesses want resourceful employees with soft skills and employability skills at all levels, regardless of their position and industry. Employability skills are a set of skills, which employers expect from their employees, regardless of their position and industry. These skills are related to communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, the ability to negotiate, professionalism and ethics (John, 2009; Timm, 2005; Kiryakova-Dineva et al., 2019; Nikitina and Lapiņa, 2019; Donina and Lapiņa, 2020), in addition, employers seek employees with interpersonal qualities who can collaborate, motivate, and empathise with their colleagues (Rodas, 2007; Klaus, 2010). Mitchell et al. (2010) found ethics and general communication skills as extremely important, with time management and organisational skills as extremely important. Uys (2009) states that skills required for tourist guides may depend on the type of guiding that is being conducted. Table 3 indicates six (6) important skills identified, specifically for tourist guides, from literature.

Table 3. Skills required by tourist guides (Source: Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Salazar, 2006; Uys, 2009; John, 2009; Suryana, 2022)

Skills	Description
Research skills	Being able to find information to share with tourists and display a willingness to know things
Organisational skills	Being able to be on time, follow a programme and manage the smooth running of a tour
Communication skills	Ability to deliver information, listen, negotiate and resolve conflict
Map reading	The ability to find and keep direction and using a map or a Global Positioning System (GPS).
Leadership	Ability to lead a group
Cultural sensitivity and awareness	Awareness of cultural diversity and the various backgrounds of tourists.

A tourist guide is required to undertake formal and informal research to update his or her guiding skills as well as knowledge related to the industry. Formal research relates to reading relevant textbooks, undertaking formal courses of study such as nature conservation, reading industry reports, attending industry-based events, while informal research relates to reading general media articles, speaking with tourists or visitors and visiting destinations, sites and attractions (ASEAN, 2015). One can thus comfortably argue that the ability to conduct research, as similarly propounded by Salazar (2006) is also a very important competence needed by tourist guides to excel in their field.

One of the soft skills considered more important in the tourism workplace is communication skills (Wesley et al., 2017; Jiang and Alexakis, 2017). Communication and culture are inseparable, tourist guides need to possess effective communication skills to be able to communicate with tourists from different cultural backgrounds. Because of their daily face-to-face interactions with tourists whose ethnic, social, religious and cultural backgrounds are different from their own, their communication competency needs constant improvement. Good communication skills need to be learnt and maintained through daily practice. Effective communication skills can lead to higher levels of tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty and more positive word-of-mouth advertising (Leclerc and Martin, 2004).

Moreover, authors such as Baum et al. (2007), suggest that tourist guides contribute to the destination image, as well as marketing and branding through an effective interpretation of a destination. An important associated principle of effective communication is effective listening. Listening to what others say is one of the most important aspects of good communication and helps to understand what people say, especially in terms of receiving feedback. Listening to customers enables the guide to understand what exactly they want and consequently to respond in a manner to satisfy their needs. Truly listening to what others say is a skill in itself and needs to be learnt.

Therefore, a guide needs to practise and develop good listening skills to enrich tourists' experience. Listening, show your interest and awareness using non-verbal communication with tourists (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Uys, 2009). Hurombo (2016) indicates that tourist guides need to demonstrate a passion for their work to show enthusiasm which can be expressed through effective communication with a good knowledge of the destination and products when dealing with tourists. A good tourist guide also needs to listen carefully to what the tourist says and try to remember details. Listening implies caring for their needs (VUSSC, 2006).

Being on time means being able to arrive at a meeting point, complete tasks and meet obligations at or by a designated time (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). To be punctual shows that a person is reliable, organised, dependable and can be trusted. In addition to that, being punctual as a guide shows a sense of respect for the tourists, the workplace and the industry. Furthermore, it demonstrates that a guide values other people's time and respects important social rules and conventions, increasing the credibility of the guide. Being late for an appointment of any nature is taken to be a sign of disrespect by many international cultures. As a guide, it is important to be the first one to arrive at the meeting point and to stay on time with the itinerary. Punctuality is not universal and varies from culture to culture.

For example, USAID (2012) states that German and French tourists arrive early for every excursion that being late is taken to be a sign of disrespect. It is also considered very rude to be late by 10 minutes for an appointment with North American tourists. Spanish, South American and African tourists do not pay attention to set times or deadlines. It is important for all tourist guides working in a new area to have the ability to read a map and use GPS to find directions.

The ability to interpret a map is important in terms of orientation, directing, developing an itinerary for a tour group about where they go, what they do, how long they spend in an area or on activity and having to make changes to the intended route. It is important to make use of a map to orientate yourself in a new area of operation as a tourist guide (Uys, 2009). Being able to use GPS can prevent tourists and a tourist guide from getting lost in an unfamiliar destination and can help to show the quickest route to take to get to the destination, therefore, understanding GPS functioning and other technological advances are equally/more important to tourist guides.

The vital role of a tourist guide is to lead and escort a group of tourists, take charge of the tour and take responsibility for the group. In addition, a guide should also ensure the comfort of the group and guarantee their safety and security so that when an emergency arises or when there is a need to take decisive action to address and solve unexpected circumstances and respond to their individual needs, preferences and wishes as a leader of a guided tour. It is important to know how to lead and manage the tour group to ensure no one gets lost and all participants get maximum value from the tour (ASEAN, 2014; Demirović Bajrami et al., 2020; Suryana, 2022).

Donohoe (2011, p. 37) states that “Cultural Sensitivity is the extent to which those who implement, support, and participate in ecotourism: minimize impacts to the natural and cultural environments, foster intercultural awareness and respect, contribute to the protection of built and living cultural heritage, foster the informed participation and empowerment of local and indigenous peoples, and respect the socio-cultural value systems of the host community”. Tourism companies packaging guided tours, tourist guides and host destinations or countries are encouraged to be aware of the cultural backgrounds of their tourists to ensure that there is no cultural break between the host community and visitors (Lashley, 2017). Therefore, considered to be essential for a tourist guide to have a good Intercultural communication to be able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds without offending them.

Melia (2012), Hoang (2015) and Hurombo (2016) assessed the roles of tourist guides, the impacts of tourist guides' performance on foreign tourist satisfaction and the skills required to co-create memorable tourism experiences. This study is similar to the study that has been conducted in the past in different countries, for example, Čuić Tanković, et al. (2021) conducted a study based on tour guide's competencies as predictors of tourists' sustainable behaviour – evidence from the national park. In addition, this study is also similar to the study conducted by Grančay (2020) which aimed to assess the competitiveness of Slovak tourist guides using Slovakian licenced tourist guides as a case study.

Lastly, similar to the study conducted by Demirović Bajrami et al. (2020) based on tour guides' competencies as predictors of tourists' sustainable behaviour – evidence from national parks. Therefore, the methodology, questionnaires and literature review were adopted from previous studies (Melia (2012); Hoang, 2015; Hurombo, 2016). Very limited research has examined how tourism frontline staff should be nurtured to become co-creators of memorable tourist experiences, particularly tourist guides. Studies conducted previously by authors such as El-Sharkawy (2007), Vasanthakumari (2019), Hine (2020), Demirović Bajrami et al. (2020) and Čuić Tanković, et al., (2021) identified a set of skills perceived to be more important than others at workplace and by tourist guides, including organisational skills, problem-solving skills, leadership, time management, customer care skills, health and safety skills, communication skills, knowledge of the destination and tourism products, right attitude concerning service, honesty and trustworthiness.

METHODOLOGY

This study made use of an exploratory quantitative research approach. The target population included all registered tourist guides of South Africa. A non-probability sampling procedure, more specifically convenience sampling, was applied. Authors developed the survey, based on previous studies conducted by Melia (2012), Hoang (2015) and Hurombo (2016). A questionnaire was distributed among licensed tourist guides in South Africa by means of a survey link (electronic survey) which was e-mailed to guides listed on provincial databases, and 320 completed questionnaires were returned. The empirical data was gathered from 15 August until 28 September 2018.

Online surveys have the advantage that respondents in dispersed geographical areas may be included in the target population, it may be completed at the respondent's own time and anonymity of the respondents are ensured, lastly it allows respondents to navigate through questions based on answers. Inbuilt data validation rules ensure that people get the right questions based on the previous answers (Glover and Bush, 2005; Siva Durga Prasad Nayak and Narayan, 2019). This was useful due to the geographic dispersion of tourist guides in the country. In addition, online surveys give the capability to transfer study responses directly into a database and translation mistakes are reduced (Andrews et al., 2003).

Information from the online survey was coded into numerical representations and captured in Microsoft Excel. The collected information was factually dissected by utilising the Program (STATA) Version 15 program. Descriptive insights were utilised in this study as well Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests were conducted to look at the adequacy of the test and the reasonableness of information for factor analysis. The survey was particularly planned for this study and the reliability of the questions within the survey posted to the test and was tested by utilising the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results provide an insight into the various skills considered important as perceived by tourist guide respondents. The reviewed literature demonstrated that many researchers emphasise the important skills required for any employee including tourist guides such as organisational skills, ethical skills, customer care skills, time management skills and communication skills for building a good relationship with visitors and the image of the site they show to visitors.

The respondents were required to rate the importance of each personal skill, trait and knowledge in contributing to the quality of a guided tour experience.

The importance of personal skills for the tourist guide

Respondents were required to rate the importance of each skill from Table 4 on the scale provided where 1 equates to not important at all and 5 to extremely important.

Table 4. Perceived personal skills, traits and knowledge

Importance personal skills, traits and knowledge for a guide	Not important at all	Less important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Knowledge of the destination's culture	0%	0.65%	18.30%	33.01%	48.04%
Knowledge of a destination's history	0%	3.27%	19.93%	34.97%	41.83%
Sense of humour	0%	1.31%	24.26%	37.70%	36.72%
Knowledge of local people's lifestyle	0%	1.31%	19.28%	38.89%	40.52%
Briefing tourists in advance about the local culture and norms	0%	3.92%	18.95%	37.91%	39.22%
Ability to anticipate tourist needs	0%	0.33%	12.79%	35.08%	51.80%
Strong sense of ethics	0%	0.99%	8.25%	32.34%	58.42%
Willingness to help clients	0%	0%	5.56%	25.16%	69.28%
Ability to remember the names, faces of clients	0%	4.93%	28.62%	32.24%	34.21%
Learning other people's language	2.94%	26.14%	35.62%	22.88%	12.42%
Ability to conduct the tour in the language of the tour group	3.27%	26.80%	23.86%	21.57%	24.51%
Ability to handle customers' complaints	0.33%	0.33%	13.11%	37.05%	49.18%
Ability to solve any conflicts during the tour	0%	1.64%	8.85%	31.48%	58.03%
Time management	0%	0.66%	8.22%	25.00%	66.12%
Educating clients about environmental protection issues	0%	2.31%	15.84%	29.37%	52.48%
Appearing neat and tidy	0%	0.65%	12.09%	29.41%	57.84%
Ability to answer all the questions from the tour group	0.66%	5.25%	28.52%	34.43%	31.15%
Ability to pay attention to detail	0%	0.65%	20.92%	33.99%	44.44%
Enthusiasm	0%	0%	7.84%	28.76%	63.40%
Ability to coordinate a group	0%	0.33%	11.48%	35.08%	53.11%
Taking good care of customers' needs	0%	0.33%	9.18%	30.82%	59.67%
Ability to entertain	0.33%	4.26%	32.79%	30.82%	31.80%
Knowledge of the destination and tourism products	0%	0.33%	13.07%	35.62%	50.98%
Tolerance	0%	1.31%	15.08%	30.82%	52.79%
Honesty and reliability	0%	0%	3.28%	19.34%	77.38%
Ability to understand and manage others' emotions	0.66%	2.30%	19.02%	37.05%	40.98%
Listening skills	0%	0.33%	9.80%	27.45%	62.42%

Table 4 shows different skills, traits and knowledge of tourist guides' competitiveness that were pre-selected based on literature (Zhang and Chow, 2004; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Salazar, 2006; John, 2009; Melia, 2012; Robles, 2012; Hoang, 2015; Hurombo, 2016; Ćuić Tanković et al., 2021; Suryana, 2022). It can be seen that tourist guides themselves consider moral skills to be the most important part of their competence. Respondents rated the following top six personal skills, traits and knowledge as 'very important' to 'extremely important' (Table 4) and the rate at which each skill was rated by the respondents was indicated in percentages.

- Honesty and reliability 97%
- Willingness to help clients 94%
- Enthusiasm 92%
- Strong sense of ethics 91%
- Time management 91%
- Taking good care of customers' needs 91%

The findings of this study in relation to the personal skills and knowledge required for the tourist guides correspond with much of the literature. The results support previous findings on the importance of soft skills (Robles, 2012; Binsaeed et al., 2017; Hurombo, 2016; Singh and Jaykumar, 2019). The literature highlight the following knowledge, traits and skills as very important to extremely important for the professional tourist guides to do their work effectively:

Being ethical, honest and reliable includes providing accurate and true information during any guided experience and being honest create better relationships with tourists was also noted as a vital guiding skill by Uys (2009) and Mitchell et al. (2010). Willingness to help clients was found to be one of the most important skills required by tourist guides in their profession. The study conducted by ASEAN (2014) agrees with the findings of this study and shows a willingness to help clients considered an important skill for professional tourist guides, furthermore states that tourist guides, who show a willingness to assist, demonstrate care for tourists. Taking good care of customers' needs was also considered an important skill needed by tourist guides. Customer care includes listening to customer needs and anticipating their needs (VUSSC, 2006; Uys, 2009).

Enthusiasm had initially been theorised to be part of personality traits and character for tourist guides. This skill also emerged as one of the most important skills needed by the respondents to demonstrate a passion for their work and to do their work successfully. This research confirms findings by Hurombo (2016) who indicates that tourist guides need to demonstrate a passion for their work to show enthusiasm which can be expressed through effective communication with a good knowledge of the destination and products when dealing with tourists. In addition, Demirović Bajrami et al. (2020) state that being enthusiastic and energetic during the tour can encourage visitors to take some actions or behave the

same way when the tour is over. Time management also emerged as one of the most important skills needed by the respondents. Several authors support these findings and organisations including Zhang and Chow (2004), Uys (2009), Mitchell et al. (2010), USAID (2012) who all indicate that time management is an important skill for tourist guides. Being punctual means being on time or being able to arrive at a meeting point, complete tasks and meet obligations at the designated time. Being on time demonstrates that a tourist guide values other people's time.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

A CFA was employed to affirm the components that were loaded into three factors including emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and personality traits that were extracted from the study conducted by Hurombo (2016). The factor analysis was conducted using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Burton and Mazerolle (2011) state that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests is conducted to look at the adequacy of the test and the appropriateness of the information for factor analysis, therefore the stated test was conducted for this study to confirm the adequacy of the test. Cooper and Schindler (2014) expressed that the suitability of the correlational network for factor analysis is benchmarked at 0.5 for the KMO test whereas less than 0.05 is measurably critical for Bartlett's test of Sphericity (<.05) and is satisfactory. The KMO test for factor analysis had a critical KMO measurement of 0.93, which was over the minimum required score of 0.5, The Bartlett test measurement was $p= 0.000$. These two conditions, hence, qualified the suitability of factor analysis for this study (Hurombo, 2016). Field (2009) states that factor analysis may be a procedure utilised to distinguish whether the relationship between a set of observed factors stems from their relationship to one or more idle factors within the data. Field (2009) further proposes that factor analysis is valuable for examining build legitimacy, and it is known as a demonstration for measuring idle factors, which cannot be specifically measured with a single variable.

In agreement, Rummel (2012) adds that factor analysis tries to distinguish fundamental factors that clarify the pattern of relationships inside a set of observed factors. For the expressed reasons, the factor analysis was performed to distinguish the fundamental clusters or sets of tourist guide qualities that can be utilised to clarify much of the change under perception for this study. The STATA Software was used to apply a principal component factor analysis using an orthogonal rotation.

The pattern matrix of the principal components factor analysis identified three factors that were labelled according to similar characteristics. Table 5 outlines the results of the factor analysis. A PCA of the remaining items using Orthogonal Varimax revolution was conducted, resulting in a total variance of 52%. All variables had high-reliability coefficients extending from 0.8 the least to 0.9 most elevated. As prescribed by Field (2009), only factor loadings above 0.40 and the suggested Cronbach's Alpha measurement of 0.7 were extricated and displayed in Table 5. The results of an orthogonal revolution of the arrangement appear in Table 5. When loadings less than 0.40 were avoided, the analysis yielded a three-factor arrangement straightforward structure (calculate loadings =>.40).

Table 5. Factor analysis results (Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA).)

Perceived most important personal skills, traits and knowledge	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Rank-Sum	Rank-Mean
Factor 1: Moral qualities		0.9003	182343.00	595.89
Ability to anticipate tourist needs	0.5498	0.8907		
Strong sense of ethics	0.5966	0.8967		
Willingness to help clients	0.6730	0.8885		
Ability to handle customers' complaints	0.6059	0.8906		
Ability to solve any conflicts during the tour	0.6082	0.8904		
Time management	0.5840	0.8950		
Enthusiasm	0.6734	0.8901		
Taking good care of customers' needs	0.5834	0.8896		
Tolerance	0.7038	0.8920		
Honesty and reliability	0.8072	0.8909		
Listening skills	0.5675	0.8912		
Factor 2: Professional qualities		0.8541	131715.00	430.44
Sense of humour	0.4941	0.8455		
Ability to remember the names, faces of clients	0.4683	0.8502		
Educating clients about environmental protection issues	0.4810	0.8425		
Appearing neat and tidy	0.4628	0.8390		
Ability to answer all the questions from the tour group	0.6775	0.8346		
Ability to pay attention to detail	0.6806	0.8294		
Ability to coordinate a group	0.4814	0.8383		
Ability to entertain	0.7091	0.8345		
Ability to understand and manage others' emotions	0.5139	0.8345		
Factor 3: Intellectual qualities		0.8189	107763.00	352.17
Knowledge of the destination's culture	0.8295	0.7806		
Knowledge of a destination's history	0.8465	0.7763		
Knowledge of local people's lifestyle	0.7182	0.7821		
Briefing tourists in advance about the local culture and norms	0.6895	0.7817		
Learning other people's language	0.5684	0.7959		
Ability to conduct the tour in the language of the tour group	0.4783	0.8381		
Knowledge of the destination and tourism products	0.4808	0.8089		

The factor analysis (Pattern Matrix) identified three factors, which retained 52% of the variation data and based on Table 5, they are intellectual skills, moral skills and professional skills. For each of the factors, Cronbach's Alpha was determined (Table 5). Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016), Thompson (2012) and Kassawnh et al. (2019) state that tourist guides must possess moral, intellectual and professional skills, which include the following:

Factor 1: Moral skills

Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) state that moral skills are multifaceted. It is composed of many distinct traits such as trustworthiness, humility, pride, validity, a sense of amusingness, respect and reliability. Other traits include kindness, justness, courage, and self-control. Therefore, it was found that the variables loaded onto Factor 1 are closely associated with moral traits. This factor was labelled as moral skills.

Eleven items were loaded onto factor 1. The majority of these eleven variables were to do with the visitor guide's capacity to get the tourists' needs. The factors that loaded in this factor included resilience, conflict determination skills, foreseeing traveler needs, trustworthiness, honesty and reliability, taking good care of customers' needs, time management, ability to handle customers' complaints, listening skills, enthusiasm, willingness to help clients, and a strong sense of ethics. The ethical qualities factor had the most elevated Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.90 which affirmed the reliability and inner consistency of the factor under study. All items loaded onto factor 1 are linked to communication skills, positive attitude, integrity and Interpersonal skills from the top ten skills identified in the literature review.

Factor 2: Professional skills

The variables that emphatically connected in this factor included a sense of humour, ability to remember the names and faces of clients, educating clients about environmental protection issues, showing up flawless and clean, the ability to answer all the questions from the tour group, the capacity to pay consideration to detail, the ability to coordinate a group, the capacity to engage, and the capacity to understand and oversee others' feelings. This factor was labelled as professional qualities and included the tourist guide's ability to plan the tour, coordinate with the tourists, communicate and direct with ease. The factor's Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85 implied the reliability and inside consistency of the factor scale. Professionalism is one of the top ten skills identified in the literature review by Robles (2012), who indicated how professional should appear and all items loaded onto this factor are related to professionalism skills.

Factor 3: Intellectual skills

Intellectual skills relate to interest in information and cultural matters, commitment to continuous learning and personal enrichment (Sandaruwani and Gnanapala, 2016). Therefore, in this factor, seven variables were loaded including information of the destination's culture, information of a destination's history, information of nearby people's way of life, and briefing sightseers in progress almost the nearby culture and standards. Other variables included in this factor are learning other people's language (vocabulary, grammar), the ability to conduct the tour in the language of the tour group, and information of the destination and tourism products. Factor 3 had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.82 implying inner textures and reliability of the factor. Intellectual skills are based on the knowledge of a tourist guide when providing a guided tours. The results from Table 5 show that moral skills were perceived as the most important factor or key factor for the respondents to be able to provide better-guided experiences.

The rank mean is 595.89 when compared with the other two factors namely, professional skills and intellectual skills. Therefore, moral skills were considered the most important factor for the tourist guides to perform their job professionally, most of the qualities, attributes, and skills classified under moral skills are rated to be the most important when compared to other skills. The intellectual qualities factor, be that as it may, had the least rank mean value of 430.44 which appears that it was valued by the respondents to be of the slightest significance.

Implications of the research

Tourist guide performance is one of the keys concern to the success of a guided package tour. The results of this study suggest several implications for tourist guides, tour managers and tour operators. The study provides some guidance on strategies from the tourist guide performance perspective. The current research has also indicated that good tourist guides are based on six components: time management skills, ethical skills, enthusiasm skills, customer care skills, health, safety skill, and communication skill. Moreover, tourist guide performance is significantly and positively related to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Firstly, in terms of organisational skills, tourist guides should concentrate on improving their ability in time management and activities organisation by understanding deeply about the package tour they are guiding. Secondly, it contributes to career awareness to help guiding students and curriculum designers, to be aware of the expected personality, character traits, aptitude, values, and attitudes of tourist guide from a tourist guide perspective. Lastly, the study also shows an implication for the people who are leaders in the tourism industry in South Africa. In a company with the endeavour of tourist guides and the support from tour managers and tour operators, there should be a new and innovative system/certificate to evaluate a qualified tourist guide for the inbound market. That system/certificate has to stress the significant knowledge and skills of a tourist guide, including the knowledge of the culture and history of destinations, the knowledge of the understanding culture of foreign tourists, the skill of solving problems and conflicts, the skill of time management and activities organisation, and the skill of introduction traditional food and entertainment places. This not only fulfils the tourist guide attributes but also enhances the level of tourists' satisfaction with a package tour and increases their level of destination loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relating to the importance of tourist guiding in the tourism industry researchers suggest that tourist guides need to be carefully selected, trained, motivated, monitored and regularly evaluated. The findings of this study suggest that both tourists, tourism employers and future tourism professionals are aware of the importance of soft skills in the tourism industry as a people-based industry, which requires multiple skills to deliver the best service. The study proposed a multidimensional construct consisting of six competencies of tourist guide performance which include time management skills, ethical skills, enthusiasm skills, customer care skills, health and safety skill and communication skill. This competence can be found as the most effective factor for building tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The positive image of tourist guide performance is not only positively and significantly related to the satisfaction of tourists but also is one of the factors that determine the destination loyalty of customers. Tour operators, travel agents and other tourism employers may consider interpersonal skills as a very important attribute in job applicants. They can employ honest and reliable employees who can communicate well, get along with others, and work hard.

The study, moreover, has proposed several suggestions for both tourist guides, tour managers and tour operators to identify the advantages and disadvantages of tourist guide attributes in a tourism company, and then to foster and enhance the performance of employees to reach a higher level of customers' satisfaction as well as their destination loyalty. The suggestions, in addition, also help the policymakers in South Africa to set up an innovative standard system of qualifications for inbound tourist guide staff that appropriated worldwide standards from a global perspective. Tourist guide performance is not only the factor that affects the success of a package tour but also plays an important role to build the image of the tourism industry in South Africa. Based on the results, the researcher recommends that it is a necessity to prepare tourist guides in South Africa very well to enable them to deal with tourists skilfully and professionally.

Organisations need to train current employees to enhance their soft skills. Soft skills and hard skills should be integrated to create a well-rounded business graduate. Further research is needed to study interpersonal skills and determine if other soft skills are deemed as important as the attributes found in this study. Firstly, this study focused only on tourist guide competencies. Therefore, future studies should explore the competencies of the different frontline employees in the tourism industry for example, in the hospitality sector to compare and validate the results from the present study.

Limitations of the research

The main obstacle encountered during the study was the lack of a database to be able to contact the respondents regarding the study. It was found that some of the respondents' contact details from the National Department of Tourism (NDT) database were incorrect. Due to a restricted time frame, it was merely possible to conduct the study from the 15th of August until the 28th of September 2018 to be able to complete the study within the time frame. This study focused on the importance of professional tourism employees' skills from the perspective of tourist guides. The weakness of this research is that the study was conducted with tourist guides only. A study for visitors would have given the details about a tourist's point of view of the interaction between visitors and tourist guides to confirm whether tourist guides apply the skills they consider to be more important in their profession of guiding. This considers centres on the tourist guide as the key figure. Hence, a study of the visitors was not conducted. The needs and expectations for employee skills change over time, so longitudinal research should be employed to monitor the changes in skills perceived to be more important.

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