

EXPLORING TOUR LEADERS' CULTURAL COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

Tour leaders' cultural competence (CC) significantly influences the job performance and deserves more attention in the field of tourism research. However, few studies on the content and influence factors of tour leaders' CC from the perspectives of tour leaders are currently available. Therefore, this study aims to explore the tour leaders' CC for escorting tour groups. In-depth interviews with 16 tour leaders were conducted in order to explore the cultural competence in tour guiding. Through qualitative approach and content analysis, resulting in four categories of tour leaders' CC: cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural communication and interaction, cross-cultural adaption and mediation. This research contributes to the current knowledge by expanding the understanding of cultural competence and tour group dynamics. Implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: tour leader, cultural competence, cultural differences, group package tour

INRODUCTION

Group package tours (GPTs) are products that provide pre-arranged transportation, accommodation, destinations, and services (Wang, Hsieh, Chou & Lin, 2007; Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000). GPTs typically include a tour leader, who is responsible for escorting the group and providing services (Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002). Tour leaders are the primary mediators between the tour group and local hosts, their job performance influences not only tourists' regard for the travel agency but also their loyalty and overall travel experience (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Zhang & Chow, 2004). Therefore, tour leaders play an integral role in group tours.

Previous studies asserted that individuals need to develop CC to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998). CC refers to an individual's ability to apply his/her cultural knowledge to effectively interact with people of a different cultural background (Selmeski, 2007). Scherle and Nonnenmann (2008) indicated that CC is a continuous process in which an individual learns from, observes, and

reflects on specific events and behaves according to different cultural situations. Therefore, people who possess CC are more likely to accept and learn other cultures and are more willing to abide by the customs of other societies. They are not only able to effectively interact with people of different cultural backgrounds (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013), they are also more aware of the cultural differences and use their cultural knowledge to adjust their own behaviors (Triandis, 2006). Some studies validated that repetitive engagements with diverse groups help individuals learn about and reflect on local cultures, consequently improving their job performance (Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazer, Taylor-Ritzler, Portillo, Rodakowsk, Garcia-Ramirez, & Willis, 2011).

Tour leaders assume instrumental, social, communicative, and interactional roles when escorting tour groups (Cohen, 1985). The instrumental role entails maintaining pre-arranged schedules and researching local travel information and road use habits. The social role entails interacting with tour members from different cultural backgrounds and maintaining a harmonious mood within the group. The communicative role entails assuming the role as a tour guide responsible for introducing the local environment (Tsaaur & Lin, 2014), drawing on local knowledge and communication skills to create a memorable tourism experiences for the tour members. The interactional role entails mediating role concerning the tour group, destination, tour suppliers, and local communities (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008), tour leaders help tour members to understand and accept local cultural customs, and they can guide tour members how to display appropriate behaviors in a manner that respect local norms. (Yu, Weiler, & Ham, 2002). All of the aforementioned roles are associated with CC. To meet the requirements of each role, tour leaders must have the ability to quickly adapt to various cultural situations and handle/resolve problems that may arise while escorting their tour group.

CC is one of many competencies that individuals must possess in order to be a successful tour leader. Although CC has been validated as an essential competency, few studies have discussed CC broadly or comprehensively. The purpose of this study is to examine the CC that tour leaders should possess for escorting tour groups and contribute the findings to academia to close existing comprehension gaps. In this study, tour leaders were invited to participate in an in-depth interview. A content analysis approach was adopted to examine the collected data and elucidate the content of tour leaders' CC. The present study fills the gap in the literature in three ways. First, this study proposes a foundation for theoretical development by identifying CC performed by tour leaders. Second, this article contributes to current knowledge by expanding understanding of tour leaders' CC. Finally, the findings of this study not only help tour leaders understand the CC required for escorting tour groups but also may serve as a reference to help travel agencies or tour leader associations plan CC-related training courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Cultural competence

Culture affects and shapes people's beliefs, values, opinions, attitudes, emotions, behaviors, and lifestyles (Cheung, Shah, & Muncer, 2002). CC refers to an individual's ability to rapidly learn different cultures and convert this knowledge into action and to draw on his/her cultural knowledge to effectively interact with people of different cultural background (Selmeski, 2007). CC is associated with an individual's knowledge, comprehension, and skill pertaining to different cultural groups (Almutair & McCarthy, 2014).

CC and cultural intelligence are essentially different concepts. Previous scholars asserted that intelligence is a stable ability and less amenable to development. In other words, intelligence is a stable ability while competence is circumstantial. Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualized cultural intelligence by proposing a framework comprising multiple intelligence constructs (e.g., general intelligence, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence). Cultural intelligence is only one construct of CC (Ang et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2006) and different from the content of CC (e.g., cultural knowledge and cultural skills). Gertsen (1990) categorized the CC of employees of multinational corporations into emotion (personal traits and attitudes), cognition (how individuals acquire and categorize cultural knowledge), and communication and behavior (becoming an effective communicator). The three constructs each contain knowledge, skill, and ability, and individuals must demonstrate the effective application of knowledge, skill, and ability (Johnson et al., 2006). Therefore, CC is a display of tangible actions.

CC is a continuous process in which an individual learns from, observes, and reflects on specific events and behaves according to different cultural situations (Scherle, & Nonnenmann, 2008). People who possess CC are able to notice cultural authenticity and distinguish the cultural differences between themselves and others (Scherle & Coles, 2008). CC serves a key function in cross-cultural contexts. Previous studies have examined the CC of different subjects, such as health professionals (Sue, 2001; Kumas-Tan et al., 2007), nurses (Almutairi & McCarthy, 2014; Perng & Watson, 2012) and expatriates (Johnson et al., 2006). They focus on the CC required to handle different situations in different cultural contexts. Therefore, CC is an integral attribute in the workplace.

2.2. Cultural competence of a tour leader

A review of previous studies on tour leaders showed that in cross-cultural situations, a cultural gap is typically exhibited between tourists and local hosts. Tour leaders serve as a mediator between tour members and local hosts, they must possess CC that are relevant to different culture (Ap & Wong, 2001; Yu et al., 2012). Although tour leaders often exercise

their CC, few studies detail events in which tour leaders exercise their CC. In this study, tour leaders' CC is defined as tour leaders' ability to understand different cultural backgrounds and effectively convert this knowledge into action while escorting their tour group. Therefore, this study searched out the situations of cultural competences that have been mentioned in previous literatures.

Jacobson and Robles (1992) indicated that understanding of the host culture, history and environment is an important topic on the tour leader training programs. Tour leaders who demonstrate an adequate understanding of local cultures are able to introduce destinations to tourists in detail, leading them to form a better understanding of "real" local cultures (Yu et al., 2002). By comparison, leaders that lack cultural knowledge is unable to accurately portray local cultures, customs, and history to tourists, which could hinder tourist satisfaction (Bowie & Chang, 2005). For example, a tour leader escorting a tour group in Thailand should be fully aware of the country's history, customs, and taboos. Therefore, tour leaders should be well versed in cultural knowledge (Dahles, 2002), in order to guide their tour groups in understanding local cultures, thereby enhancing tourist satisfaction.

Tour leaders often operate in and between different cultural contexts and interact with people of different cultural backgrounds (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008). They should be aware of cultural differences and local ways of communication and use suitable words and communication styles (Huang, 2011). If tour leaders are fluent in the local dialect and possess excellent communication skills, they would be able to merge with the local culture, establish favorable interactive relationships, and collect accurate local information for their tour groups (Yu et al., 2002). Professional tour leaders are able to effectively draw on their communication and other skills to fulfill their escorting duties (Al Jahwari et al., 2016). Hence, this study considered cross-cultural communication and interaction are key components of tour leaders' CC.

Tour leaders are of crucial importance in cultural tourism. Unlike previous research on CC, they are tasked with selecting and introducing destinations and translating unfamiliar, exotic cultures into familiar cultural narratives for tourists (Dahles, 2002). Tour leaders also provide information and anecdotal stories about the destination to their tour group and serve as the go-between for tourists and local hosts, helping tour members better understand and adapt to local cultural environments (Leclerc & Martin, 2004). The tour leader is also able to provide visitors with deeper insight into and understanding of local culture and customs, and offers tips on how to behave appropriately in the local cultural milieu (Yu et al., 2002). Therefore, tour leaders draw on their cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity to adjust their own values and behaviors and help tour members understand and adapt to local cultures. In this situation, tour leaders' CC is an indispensable guiding competence but few studies used a theoretical sample for tour leaders; hence, they do not completely address the CC of tour leaders.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participant characteristics

Cultural competence may differ characteristics from the tour leaders. For a more detailed understanding of tour leaders' cultural competence, we categorized the interview subjects by age, job permanence, and number of years in the profession. Subjects were divided into four age groups: 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and 51 or older. They were further categorized as permanent or freelance tour leaders. they were sorted into three groups based on the years they have spent leading tours: less than five years, 6-14 years, and more than 15 years. Finally, GPT types: long haul and short haul.

We interviewed sixteen tour leaders in Taiwan. Subjects were approached based on personal recommendations and information offered by tour leader associations. Patton (2002, p. 244) asserts that qualitative research has no minimum sample size requirement. Data in qualitative research relies on data saturation. From the analysis, no new culture competences were found from interviews with focus group, indicating that data saturation had been reached. The number of interviewees in this study was similar to those in past qualitative research on tour leaders or tour guides, which was between 10 and 20 (Tsaur & Lin, 2014; Wong & Lee, 2012). The profile of the 16 interviewees are shown in Table 1. Among the interviewees, 13 were serving as tour leaders at the time of the interview, and three were former foreign tour guides responsible for escorting overseas tour groups in Taiwan. The pool of interview subjects consisted of ten males and six females, aged between 28 and 55 years old (average age: 46), with 2 to 30 years of work experience as tour leaders.

Table 1. Profiles of tour leaders

No.	Name	Sex	Years of guiding tour	Areas of tour	Age
T1	Allen	M	27	America, Europe, Asia, Australia	53
T2	Wei	F	8	Europe, America, Africa	47
T3	Wu	M	30	Asia, China, Europe	55
T4	Rita	F	20	America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand	48
T5	Jessie	F	4	Mongolia , India	32
T6	Wang	M	13	Europe, North America	43
T7	Chao	M	9	Asia, China, Europe	37
T8	Ruth	F	20	Asia, China, America	45
T9	Cheng	F	11	Asia, Oceania	36
T10	Moscow	M	2	Japan, Thailand	28
T11	Frank	M	21	Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia	50
T12	Leo	M	4	Japan, Europe	39
T13	Hsiao	M	3	Asia	35
T14	Eric	M	12	Europe, Asia, Australia, Oceania	46
T15	Ling	F	18	Japan, Korea, Thailand	42
T16	Hong	M	16	China, Korea	46

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. To ensure that the survey and interview proceeded smoothly, an interview handbook was composed based on previous literature (Almutairi & McCarthy, 2014). The handbook first provided a definition of tour leaders' CC (the tour leaders' CC refers to tour leaders understand different cultural backgrounds and effectively convert this knowledge into action when engaging guiding and escorting their tour group) and several examples of CC (e.g., understanding local history, accept local culture). The interviewees were asked to respond to the following open-ended question: *“Do you think what cultural competence is important to tour leader? Why?”* *“As a tour leader, what are the dimensions of cultural competence, and please provide some examples of relevant situations?”* *“In your previous experience during a package tour, how do you function effectively within a new cultural context and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds? Please describe these situations in detail.”* and *“In the situation when you do not understand the people from different culture, what do you do? How do you handle that?”* During the interviews, extensive notes and relevant speech marks were written down literally.

A two-stage sampling approach was adopted to select the interviewees. First, convenient sampling was adopted to selected interviewees recommended by acquaintances of the researcher. Then, snowball sampling was adopted, in which the interviewees recommended other experienced parties to participate in this study. We conducted extensive, semi-structured interviews to collect data between January and March, 2017. Average

interview length was one hour. Interviews were recorded, and interviewers took comprehensive notes and recorded speech marks. All interviews were asked to leave an email address used to follow-up with a validity check. We were obtained 136 pages of transcribed data.

3.3 Content analysis of cultural competence of tour leader

Content analysis is a research method that attempts to identify and codify recurrent themes and patterns to foster the subjective interpretation of textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We used the three-step procedure (Patton, 2002) along with a method adapted from prior research in the field (Tsaur & Lin, 2014) to analyze the interview data. First, two judges were invited to filter the interview items and determine the basic unit of analysis for CC. They then discussed the filtered items and conceded in 349 units. Both Judge A, a certified TL, and Judge B have research experience within the tourism industry.

Second, we analyzed the data using an inductive content analysis approach. First, we grouped the units into meaningful, interpretable categories. Judges A and B compared all the units to determine similarities and differences and perform necessary merging or separation. As a result, the 349 units were grouped into 45 CC-related categories. These categories were then further organized into 10 high-order categories. The inter-rater reliability of the two classification processes was 0.89 (312/349) and 0.91 (41/45) respectively. This surpassed the 0.8 standard (Kassarjian, 1977), indicating strong reliability in the classification results.

Third, an inductive content analysis approach was adopted to analyze the categories. The two judges agreed that the CC units in the high-order categories demonstrated similar qualities or characteristics. Subsequently, the 10 categories were classified into four themes derived from the literature review: cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication and interaction, and cross-cultural adaption and mediation. After completing these procedures, the judges named the categories to accurately reflected tour leaders' CC.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Cultural knowledge

This subject focus on the cultural knowledge for tour leaders when they guide tours, including local cultures, destination environments, living environments, and tour members' cultural backgrounds.

4.1.1 Local culture

Tour leaders that possess such knowledge are able to introduce destinations to tourists in detail, leading them to form a better understanding of “real” and “authentic” about local cultures (Yu et al., 2002). Tour leaders must display a high-level of professional skill and intimate knowledge of local cultures (Dahles, 2002). During tours, they should demonstrate a

keen understanding of local customs, religions, cultural values, and cultural differences. The interviewees expressed that religion is the most influential element in cultural evolution and that tour leaders must be fully aware of the religious etiquette and taboos when visiting temples and churches, minimizing discourtesy caused by ignorance or misunderstanding.

Tour leaders should pay special attention to local regions and religious beliefs. They should not only understand and follow religious codes themselves but also remind tour members not to violate local religious regulations. (T4)

4.1.2 Local travel environment

When obstacles arise during the tour or when tour members violate local laws and regulations, tour leaders may experience increased burden or the itinerary may be severely delayed. Tour leaders can reduce the negative effects of adverse events by they have an understanding of local laws and regulations, because the tourists' overall satisfaction are easily affected by sudden occurrences during the tour (Lee, Shafer, & Kang, 2003). Therefore, tour leaders must be aware of local political stability, possible criminal attacks, and attitude of the inhabitants to minimize travel risk and maximize the safety of tour members. In addition, tour leaders must have a detailed understanding of local laws and regulations and impart this knowledge to tour members on arrival, repeatedly reminding members not to engage in illegal behaviors (e.g., using drugs, soliciting prostitution, smuggling contraband, and smoking in non-smoking zones).

Singapore has a strict penal system, where chewing gum and littering are illegal. (T14)

4.1.3 Local life habit

Tour members are generally unaware of local lifestyles and environments. It is the tour leader's duty to inform them about local habits and preferences, including dietary habits (e.g., meals, cooking method, and utensil use style), clothing habits (e.g., hot springs culture in Japan), and consuming habits (e.g., tips and tax return). Moreover, different destinations have different consuming habits and regulations. For example, haggling in the floating markets in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar is permitted. Tour leaders must explain cultural differences with tour members during the tour to prevent disputes or misunderstandings stemming from tourists' unfamiliarity with local customs and lifestyles.

We must understand local culinary features and dietary habits. For example, European food is saltier, and Turkish food generally contains olive oil. These foods may not meet members' dietary preferences. (T1)

4.2 Cultural sensitivity

The degree of cultural sensitivity is a factor that influences awareness of and respect for cultural differences during intercultural interactions. (Yu et al., 2002). This theme including cultural empathy, cultural awareness and cultural affinity ◦

4.2.1 Cultural empathy

Empathy and flexibility are key traits that facilitate tour leaders in fulfilling their duties. Therefore, it is important to consider such traits in measuring the cross-cultural competence of tour leaders. Yu et al. (2002) note that tour leaders must possess the characteristic of empathy and be non-judgmental of others and sensitive to others' needs to be culturally competent. Therefore, tour leaders must demonstrate the capacity to accept and respect different cultures and cultural values.

I will not let my own stereotypical impressions affect my tour group. I fully accept the local culture once I arrive in that country. (T10)

4.2.2 Cultural awareness

Cultural awareness refers to tour leaders' awareness of local cultures, their knowledge of local societies, and their ability to detect the cultural difference between their own culture and others' (Yu et al., 2002). When fulfilling an itinerary, tour leaders must draw on their cultural knowledge and awareness of cultural regulations to adjust their existing concepts and behaviors and help tour members understand and adapt to local cultures. Tour leaders must survey local conditions and inform their tour members on appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. They should not explain these behaviors by mocking local cultures to avoid violating international etiquette.

Tour leaders must be culturally sensitive. They must consider all potential cultural conflicts that may arise in the trip and repeatedly remind tour members to abide by local regulations. (T11)

4.3 Cross-cultural communication and interaction

This theme focuses on CCs associated with ability to communicate and interact effectively with people from different culture, including communication skills, interpersonal interactional skills and language abilities ◦

4.3.1 Communication skills

Tour leaders use body language, cultural intimacy, and speech as the forms of communication during escorting. Most tour leaders develop their own GPT itineraries. Travel agencies tend to, but do not always, take tour leaders' individual attributes and areas of expertise into consideration when arranging tours. In some countries (e.g., Europe), locals demonstrate strong cultural identity and are less willing to speak English. In these cases, communication between tour leaders and coach drivers may become problematic (Tsaur &

Lin, 2014). Professional leaders draw on their experiences to decide which communications skills to apply in order to communicate and interact with people of different cultural backgrounds effectively (Al Jahwari et al., 2016). In this study, interviewees expressed that they often use body language to achieve effective communication.

In some countries, English is not an effective form of communication. I'd use body language to communicate with others. Generally, using body language combined with simple words is the fastest way. (T2)

4.3.2 Interpersonal interactional skills

Tour leaders' interpersonal skills include the ability foster in-group bonds, facilitate interactions between tour members and locals, resolve issues that may arise, handle unexpected incidents, and demonstrate intercultural respect and understanding (Yu et al., 2002). Findings show that during escorting, tour leaders are tasked with communicating with local service suppliers. As the cultural ambassador of the group, tour leaders must pay special attention to cultural etiquette and display confidence. A keen understanding of local cultural etiquette and customs is extremely important. Tour leaders must interpret the situation and act accordingly, as well as avoiding making inappropriate hand gestures or saying inappropriate words. They should constantly remind their tour members to respect local culture and behave accordingly.

In Central and South America, it is customary for coach drivers and guides to give you a hug and press their cheek against yours when you meet. This is common practice there. I will explain extent international courtesy during these cross-cultural situations. (T5)

4.3.3 Language abilities

Language is an essential component of culture (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2009). Findings indicated that the language competencies that tour leaders should possess the ability to understand of local dialects and intonations, adjust speaking styles, apply different explanation techniques, use suitable words, and understand the spoken tour members' language. Tour leaders are responsible for guiding tour members in understanding the local society, cultural value, and lifestyles but also providing language explanation and bi-directional communication services (Yu et al., 2002). Leclerc and Martin (2004) found that tour members were generally more satisfied with the performance of tour leaders who were proficient in language.

Australians have a dense accent. They typically pronounce words ending with 'de' as 'dai.' It takes some getting used to. Therefore, we should spend some time understanding their accent, word use, and intonations. (T8)

4.4 Cross-cultural adaption and mediation

This theme focuses on cultural competences associated with ability to adapt local environment effectively and tour guides play a direct role in mediating cultural exchange, including cultural adaptability and mediation ◦

4.4.1 Cultural adaptability

Cultural adaptability needs to address not only the work environments but also weather conditions, local foods, linguistic diversity, cultural differences, and communication with the host society. Individuals that are culturally adaptive show increased psychological health, job satisfaction, and positive relations with the host society (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, & Luk, 2005). Tour leaders may not always follow familiar itineraries. When they are assigned to unfamiliar itineraries, they are faced with the stress and challenges of a new culture. Findings in this study indicated that tour leaders must be adaptable to the pressure of new cultures, capable of immersing themselves in local lifestyles and accepting of different cultural environments and lifestyles in order to facilitate their groups in adapting to local cultures.

I enjoy challenging myself, so I look forward to escorting new travel itineraries. I am able to alleviate the pressure of adapting to a new culture. It's not stressful. (T15)

4.4.2 Cultural mediation

Cultural mediation refers to the ability to mediate communication, understanding, and action between different languages or cultures. Tour members depend on their tour leaders to overcome their cultural and language barriers and to strike a balance between cultural buffering and exploration. Yu et al. (2002) have found that the reason why tourists opt to join tour groups is that they hope to acquire new and rewarding intercultural experiences. However, the direct roles played by tour leaders in mediating cultural exchange between visitors and host cultures. They draw on their cultural values, language, communication styles, and knowledge of customs and artefacts to introduce the features of their destinations in detail to their groups, show them the authenticity of their destinations, and help them adapt to their environments and behave accordingly.

When tour members are unfamiliar with local cultures, it is the duty of the tour leader to help them understand and avoid cultural taboos. (T6)

DISCUSSION

CC has been discussed extensively in other domains. However, this study is one of the first studies to explore the CC of tour leaders. A qualitative interview approach was adopted in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of tour leaders' CC. The data were analyzed using a stringent content analysis method to produce 10 CC items across three dimensions.

Research findings revealed that tour leaders' CC comprises cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, cultural communication and interaction, and cultural adaptability and mediation.

First, cultural knowledge is arguably the most important component of CC. Ye et al. (2002) asserted tour leaders who demonstrate an adequate understanding of local cultures are able to introduce destinations to tourists in detail, leading them to form a better understanding of "real" local cultures. Findings validated cultural knowledge to be the most important component of CC and showed that cultural knowledge consisted of local religion, customs, history, cultural value, language, travel information, vendor regulations, lifestyles, and habits. Tour leaders that demonstrate adequate cultural knowledge are able to provide tour members with an unforgettable travel experience without violating local regulations.

Second, few studies have discussed the cultural sensitivity of tour leaders. Tour leaders with cultural sensitivity are better at detecting cultural differences and accepting/respecting different cultures. Tour leaders escort tour groups all over the world. They must lead tour members in respecting local cultures and adjusting their subjective views with affinity and without passing subjective judgments. Therefore, vendors should focus on enhancing tour leaders' cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity to minimize international indecency and cultural conflict.

Third, several studies on tour leaders have indicated that they should demonstrate favorable cultural communication skills when escorting tour groups (Al Jahwari et al., 2016; Leclerc & Martin, 2004). These studies largely measured tour leaders' communication skills using verbal and non-verbal measuring scales. In this study, a stringent qualitative interview method was adopted to elucidate the CC of tour leaders. Compared with communication skills, tour leaders' CC encompasses a wider scope. Tour leaders' cross-cultural communication and interactional skills facilitate the effective exchange between tour members and local vendors.

Finally, the findings on intercultural communication and mediation competence of tour leaders obtained in this study were different to those proposed by Yu et al. (2002), who only provided a framework pertaining to the effects of tour leaders' CC on tourist experiences and explained that tour leaders' CC comprised cognition, affinity, and behavior. The study failed to categorize the constituting factors and content of tour leaders' CC using stringent theories and methods. The findings of this study indicated that tour leaders might not always follow familiar itineraries. When they are assigned to unfamiliar itineraries, they are required to adapt to the local environment and customs and mediate communication between tour members and local hosts.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Theoretic implication

The CC requirements for tour leaders have never been mentioned in previous studies. This study is the first study of its kind to apply the importance of CC in addressing issues

concerning tour leaders in the context of tourism. This study combines rigorous qualitative interviews and data analysis to elucidate the constructs and content of tour leaders' CC. Although the study of CC has gained considerable progress in the fields of medicine, education, and organization, research on the CC of tour leaders remain lackluster in the field of tourism and recreation. The findings obtained in this study are anticipated to expand the scope of CC research and enrich relevant theories.

Previous research mostly focused on tour leaders' roles (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014), service quality (Heung, 2008; Mak et al., 2011), emotional labor (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013; Wong & Wang, 2009), tour guiding styles (Wong & Lee, 2012; Tsaur, & Teng, 2017). CC is an essential skill for escorting tour groups. Although a number of previous studies have discussed tour leaders' cross-cultural communication ability, it is only one of the many constituting factors of CC. Currently, no academic study or publication has intensively and extensively discussed the concepts and content of tour leaders' CC. This study is the first of its kind to discuss CC in the context of tourism. Our finding identified four main categories: cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural communication and interaction, cross-cultural adaption and mediation, and identified 10 subcategories of tour leaders' CC while tour guiding are supported by the rich data. We found that the categories of cross-cultural adaption and mediation and some subcategories are unique in the context of tour leaders because package tours provide frequent social interaction and sometimes face unexpected contingencies. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for the future development of a CC scale specifically for tour leaders. From a theoretical perspective, the contribution of this study is the establishment of a theoretical basis on which to form the CC concepts specific to tour leaders and the expansion of existing concepts.

6.2 Managerial implications

Examining the practices of tour leaders to examine their CC revealed a considerable amount of useful information. Tour leaders' CC is very important that their job performance directly affects the reputation of the travel agency. Tour leaders can acquire local information online or attend training courses organized by tour leader associations to enhance their CC. Therefore, understanding tour leaders' CC facilitates vendors and tour leader associations design suitable courses for tour leaders. In addition, offering effective training courses reinforces tour leaders' cultural knowledge and enhances their performance in guiding tour groups.

The findings of this study clearly show that CC is an essential skill for escorting tour groups. Tour leaders can foster and reinforce their CC through continued education and professional training. To enhance the CC of underperforming tour leaders, vendors can organize exchange activities, wherein outstanding tour leaders can share their guiding tour experiences and skills. Moreover, tour leaders that lack cross-cultural communication,

interactional skills, and cultural adaptability should not be assigned to large or long-distance tour groups.

Many newly employed tour leaders enter the industry thinking that they can travel the world while earning a large salary in the form of tips. However, their enthusiasm is extinguished by the many problems they encounter over time. Therefore, newly employed tour leaders should endeavor to improve their CC early in their career and interact with experienced tour leaders.

6.3 Limitations and directions for future research

While the results have helped us to gain greater insight into the cultural competence of tour leaders, it is also important to recognize certain limitations to this study. Due to time and resource constraints, only Taiwanese tour leaders were interviewed in this study. Therefore, the generalization of the findings is limited. Furthermore, a small sample size was examined in this study. The correlation between tour leaders' traits and CC could not be determined. In future, researchers can consider conducting a comparative analysis using a large sample size to elucidate the differences between the CC of short- and long-haul tour leaders. Finally, further analysis can be conducted on the four CC categories proposed in this study to determine the consequences and effects of tour leaders' CC.

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