

Tourists' Expectations and Satisfaction toward the Use of English and the Content of Information by Thai Tour Guides in Bangkok

Thip-arphorn Sawangpol¹

¹Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, Dhurakij Pundit University

Abstract

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The tourism sector is one of the most important economic sectors in Thailand. A tour guide represents an important role on tourist satisfaction and intention for re-visiting. Understanding tourist expectations and satisfaction would provide strategies for developing better services of the tour guides. The objectives of this study are to investigate the level of tourist expectations and satisfaction of the English use and content of Thai tour guides and to provide recommendations to develop the training courses. Using Bangkok as a case study, a total of 106 questionnaires were collected with the help of tour guides during the tour conduction. Data were analyzed using factor analysis, hypothesis testing, multiple regression analysis, and K-means cluster analysis.

Findings revealed that the delivered message was the most important factor towards tourist satisfaction and followed by the English use of the tour guides. The sampled tourists came to Bangkok with higher expectations and left with higher satisfaction levels for the content of information provided. It is recommended that Thai tour guides must be improved in terms of grammatical correctness, use of vocabularies, technical terms and expressions, delivery of the messages, and understandable stress, accents and pronunciation. Findings from this study provide insights into both tourism industry and academic areas to improve services and skills of the tour guides in terms of content and use of English in hospitality concerns and to revise curriculums as well as the tour guide training courses to meet tourist expectations.

คำสำคัญ : The Role of Tour Guide, Tourists' Expectations, Tourists' Satisfaction, English for Tour Guides

Introduction

Due to the increasing number of tourists travelling to Thailand, the tourism sector becomes a fast growing business and sharply affects Thai economy. The tourism sector also contributes to improve the quality of life and create job market for local residents. The competitiveness of the market place and the increased expectations of customers have made tourism enterprises recognize the importance of customer service quality for future repeat and referral business (Bowie & Chang, 2005). Consequently, tour guides who are regarded as one of the representatives of countries and destinations and one of the most important front-line staff in the tourism industry play a significant role on tourist satisfaction and re-visit intention as the success of the service quality in the tourism industry very much depends on the performance of tour guides (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010; Zhang & Chow, 2004). The tour guides are responsible for monitoring the itinerary and providing immediate support to customers from the beginning until the end of the tour. Effective guiding service can create interesting experiences for customers, and also enhance their satisfaction and retention (Spears & Rosenbaum, 2012).

In order to facilitate and serve travellers well, language plays an important role to conduct communication in general and hospitality service in particular. Communication skill, both oral and written ones, is genuinely an important element of hospitality industry. O'Brien and Ham (2012) also state that good tour guides have to be knowledgeable and resourceful, and they have to know how to communicate efficiently and effectively. However, it is generally accepted that English is regarded as a foreign language in Thailand. Thai people study English only at schools to communicate with speakers of the language or read texts using the target language (Meemark, 2002). According to Prachanant (2012), most Thai people encounter the difficulties when communicating with foreigners who speak English. Similarly, most tourism employees in Thailand face the problems when they are in contact with foreign tourists. Their problems are using inappropriate words and expressions in speaking, being unable to understand foreign accents, having inadequate vocabulary in reading, and lacking grammar knowledge in writing. In addition, tour guide curriculums in Thailand have been taught in private and public institutions to provide learners various kinds of practice, activities, and internship to make sure that they are ready to work in tourism and hospitality industry after graduation. However, there are several challenges faced by the tourism industry. For example, the lack of potential tour guides and the inadequate proficiency in English communication skills, and curriculums are not based on the real needs of the tourism sector as it should be. The questions are "Does the curriculum provide the skill that responds to the need of the tourists?", and "Does the tour guide-training course meet all the expectations of tourists?"

This study was conducted in the context of the foreign tourists who travelled to Thailand with the services from the tour operators, tour managers, along with the Thai tour guides who design a tour program and provide the services by using English as medium to communicate with the tourists and conduct the tour. The first objective of this study is to investigate the level of tourist expectations and satisfaction towards the use of English and the content of information by Thai tour guides. The second objective is to propose the potential ways to develop the Thai tour guide training courses in terms of content and use of English among tour guides and tourism employees.

Literature Review

Apart from planning the tour itinerary, there are various definitions given to describe the role of the tour guide. The European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG), n.d.) defines a tour guide as “a person who guides groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the home country around the monuments, sites, and museums of a city or region; to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of the visitor’s choice, the cultural and natural heritage and environment”. According to Wong and Sandiford (1998) the role of a tour guide is “to guide groups of individual visitors to monuments, sites, and museums of a city or region; to interpret about cultural and natural heritage and environment in an inspiring and entertaining manner by using the language of visitor’s choice”. One of the important elements contributing to the success of a tour program, as well as to the satisfaction of tourists, is the skill of the tour guide (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010; Mak, Wong & Chang, 2010).

In this study, a tour guide refers to a person who has a good understanding of the culture of tourists in order to facilitate and serve what tourists need, to guide them while traveling in an area by using English as a medium of communication, and to conduct the tour. It is generally accepted that tourists have expectations after selecting a destination for a holiday and that their satisfaction levels during and after their holiday periods are functions of their expectations (Huh, Uysal & McCleary, 2006, p. 83; Korzay & Alvarez, 2005, p. 179; Yoon & Uysal, 2005, pp. 55–68). Severt, Wong, Chen & Breiter (2007) define tourist satisfaction as the extent of the tourist’s fulfillment pleasure which occurred from the trip experience about a product or service feature that fulfills the tourist’s desire, expectations and wants in association with the trip. The tourist is satisfied when experiences go beyond the expectations. However if the tourists feel displeasure, dissatisfaction will be the expected outcome (Chen & Chen, 2010; Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Moreover, satisfaction is defined as a psychological concept involving the feeling of well-being or pleasure, which results from a customer obtaining what one hopes or expects from a product or service (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). In the tourism industry context, tourist satisfaction is defined as the outcome of the comparison between expectations and experiences of the tourists (Truong & Foster, 2006). For designing data collection and analysis, the definition of tourist expectation referred to the justification of the tourist that happens before the travel and the satisfaction is related to the experience of the tourists gained on the delivered service after the travel.

Methods and Materials

A questionnaire was used to collect data regarding tourists' expectation and satisfaction towards the English use and content of Thai tour guides. A five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (5) very high to (1) very low was used to measure both expectation and satisfaction levels. For demographic variables, the nominal and ordinal scales were implemented. The research framework consists of three variables, including (1) The English use of Thai tour guide, (2) The content of information provided, and (3) The delivered messages that have influence on tourists' expectation and satisfaction. Also, eleven items (questions) were used to measure the aforementioned predictor variables. Under variable 1, the items are: Q1 (Grammatical correctness); Q2 (Variety use of vocabularies,

technical terms and expressions; Q3 (Fluency and smoothness of message delivery); and Q4 (Understandable stress, accents and pronunciation of the English words). The items in variable 2 are: Q5 (The background of the temples and palaces); Q6 (The functions of decorative elements of the temples and palaces); and Q7 (The intricacy and delicacy of decorations of the temples and palaces). The items for variable 3 are: Q8 (Descriptive messages and detailed information); Q9 (Relaxing atmosphere to be able to draw the tourists' attentions); Q10 (Two-way communication messages; and Q11 (Appropriate use of non-verbal messages). The overall research framework is shown in Figure 1.

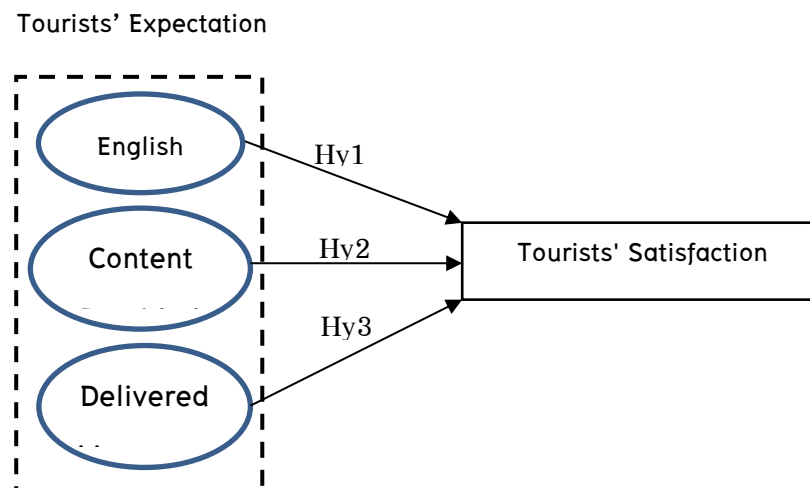


Figure 1 Proposed research framework

Research Hypotheses

In this research, the expectation and satisfaction levels of Thai tour guides were investigated. According to the proposed research framework (see Figure 1), the hypotheses developed for this research are explained as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The expectation level of English use of Thai tour guides has the positive effect on the tourists' satisfaction

Hypothesis 2: The expectation level of content of information provided has the positive effect on the tourists' satisfaction

Hypothesis 3: The expectation level of delivered messages has the positive effect on the tourists' satisfaction

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the data collection, a questionnaire was validated by researchers in the Research Service Center at Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok. Data were carried out in Bangkok with the help of tour guides who are working in the tour companies in Thailand. The questionnaires were distributed to the tourists by the tour guides themselves during the tour conduction. Data were collected from May to October, 2017. Data were evaluated by applying a range of statistical techniques. The descriptive statistic was used to analyze data for demographic variables by frequency counting. The mean score and standard deviation were used to measure and analyze for each item. Factor analysis was carried out to investigate variable relationships for complex concepts that are not easily measured by reducing a large number of variables into a few interpretable underlying factors. Hypothesis

testing was conducted using multiple regressions to identify variables' inter-relationship. Cronbach's Alpha was also conducted to test consistency of the items. Finally, the relationship between tourists' expectation and satisfaction levels was investigated.

Results

Profile of Respondents

In this section, the profile of (Total) 106 respondents is summarized, including the frequency and percentages of age, gender, marital status, nationality, education, and frequency of visiting. The research respondents comprised of tourists from 23 nationalities from Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. Out of the 106 respondents, 41 (38.7%) were American, Australian, and British citizens. The respondents represented various age groups and education levels. 77 respondents (72.6%) were the first time visiting Thailand. Details of the respondents profile are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Profile of research respondents

(n = 106)

Characteristi cs	Descriptio ns	Frequenc y	Percen t	Characteristi cs	Descriptio ns	Frequenc y	Percen t
Age	No answer provided	2	1.9	Nationality	No answer provided	6	5.7
	20 – 25	11	10.4		American	26	24.5
	26 – 30	23	21.7		Argentine	2	1.9
	31 – 35	14	13.2		Australian	6	5.7
	36 – 40	6	5.7		Belgian	4	3.8
	41 – 45	6	5.7		British	9	8.5
	46 – 50	11	10.4		Chinese	4	3.8
	51 – 60	16	15.1		Filipino	7	6.6
	over 60	17	16.0		French	4	3.8
Gender	No answer provided	2	1.9		German	5	4.7
	Male	51	48.1		Indian	1	0.9
	Female	53	50.0	Irish	2	1.9	

Table 1 (continued)

(n = 106)

Characteristics	Description	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristics	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status	No answer provided	3	2.8	Nationality	Italian	6	5.7
	Single	37	34.9		Japanese	1	0.9
	Married	59	55.7		Lebanese	2	1.9
	Divorced	6	5.7		Malaysian	4	3.8
	Widowed	1	0.9		Mexican	2	1.9
Education	No answer provided	8	7.5		Portuguese	4	3.8
	Undergraduate	21	19.8		Scottish	1	0.9
	Bachelor	49	46.2		Singaporean	4	3.8
	Master's degree	20	18.9		Spanish	1	0.9
	Higher than Master's degree	8	7.5		Venezuelan	2	1.9
					American Indian	1	0.9
Frequency of visiting Thailand	No answer provided	2	1.9		African	2	1.9
	First time	77	72.6		American		
	2 to 5 times	25	23.6				
	More than 5 times	2	1.9				

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis for expectation and satisfaction levels was conducted using principal component analysis as the method for factor extraction. The number of factors was determined based on the eigenvalue criterion ($\lambda > 1$) performed by the varimax rotation method. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was implemented to verify the usefulness of factor analysis where the small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level were required. Sampling Adequacy was verified by Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) where the high value (close to 1) generally indicates that the sampling is adequate. If the value is less than 0.50, the sampling is not adequate and that

remedial action should be taken. Results of the factor analysis including factor loadings for all items are shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2 KMO and Bartlett's tests

		Expectation Level	Satisfaction Level
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.893	0.905
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1373.371	1049.514
	Sig.	0.000	0.000

According to Table 2, the KMO values for expectation and satisfaction levels are 0.893 and 0.905 which indicate that the sampling is adequate. The Bartlett's test is statistically significant for both levels (expectation level: 1373.371, p-value = 0.000 and satisfaction level: 1049.514, p-value = 0.000). The results of the Bartlett's test indicate that the investigated variables are related and therefore suitable for structure detection.

Table 3 represents the results of factor analysis on tourist expectation and satisfaction levels. For expectation, it is shown that out of 11 items (Q1–Q11) there are three factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 87.364 percent of the total variance. This value exceeds 60 percent threshold used in social sciences (Aliman, Hashim, Wahid & Harudin, 2016). Factor 1 represents the English use of Thai tour guides, which consists of four items (Q1–Q4). It explains 33.365 percent of variance with eigenvalues of 3.670. Factor 2 represents the content of information provided and comprises of three items (Q5–Q7). It contributes 30.950 percent of the total variance with eigenvalues of 3.404. Factor 3 represents the delivered message and consists of four items (Q8–Q11). It explains 23.049 percent of total variance with eigenvalues of 2.535.

In similar fashion, factor analysis results of satisfaction level reveal that out of 11 items there are also three factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1. This explains 81.700 percent of the total variance. Factor 1 has 29.017 percent of variance with eigenvalues of 3.192. Factor 2 contributes 26.968 percent of the total variance with eigenvalues of 2.966. Factor 3 has 25.715 percent of total variance with eigenvalues of 2.829.

Table 3 Factor analysis results

Factor	Expectation level				Satisfaction level				
	Alph a	Rotation Eigenvalu es	% Variance Explained	Factor Loadin g	Alph a	Rotation Eigenvalu es	% Variance Explained	Factor Loadin g	
Factor 1:									
The English use of Thai Tour Guides	0.94 4	3.670	33.365		0.92 5	3.192	29.017		
Q1				0.876				0.761	
Q2				0.808				0.846	
Q3				0.877				0.770	
Q4				0.856				0.778	
Factor 2:									
The content of informatio n provided	0.94 0	3.404	30.950		0.92 0	2.966	26.968		
Q5				0.833				0.846	
Q6				0.813				0.820	
Q7				0.889				0.803	
Factor 3:									
The delivered messages	0.94 3	2.535	23.049		0.88 6	2.829	25.715		
Q8				0.610				0.707	
Q9				0.650				0.788	
Q10				0.746				0.838	
Q11				0.744				0.707	
Total Variance			87.364 %	Total Variance			81.700%		

Table 3 also presents the reliability and internal consistency of each factor. According to the sample size of 106 ($N = 106$), a cut-off point of 0.60 was used to include items in interpretation of each factor. The underlying reason of using this cut-off point value is based on the fact that the significance of factor loading will depend on sample size. For sample size of 50 a loading of 0.722 can be considered significant and for 100 sample the loading should be greater than 0.512 (Field, 2009). For the internal consistency, the closer the Cronbach's alpha is to 1, the higher its internal consistency reliability (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). For expectation level, the alpha values for the variables are as follows: Factor 1 ($\alpha = 0.944$), Factor 2 ($\alpha = 0.940$), and Factor 3 ($\alpha = 0.943$).

Likewise, for satisfaction level, the alpha values for the variables are as follows: Factor 1 ($\alpha = 0.925$), Factor 2 ($\alpha = 0.920$), and Factor 3 ($\alpha = 0.886$). All factors have alpha scores above 0.80, which indicate that the items used to measure the factors are reliable and consistency.

Hypothesis Testing

Referred to the research framework (Figure 1), the multiple regressions among three predictors of expectation level and the overall satisfaction level were conducted (see Table 4). These predictors included the English use of Thai tour guides (Factor 1), the content of information provided (Factor 2), and the delivered messages (Factor 3). All three predictors were regressed with the criterion variable. Although the R^2 value is low, the F-test is significant at 0.001 and the model is fit. There might be other variables that may influence tourist satisfaction. Table 4 shows that all predictors have positive effects with overall tourist satisfaction level. Based on p-value (Sig.), only two predictors (Factor 1 and Factor 3) are statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis testing can be summarized as hypothesis 1 and 3 are accepted while hypothesis 2 is rejected. The results are also shown that the most important factor toward tourists' satisfaction is the delivered message ($t = 2.758$), while the second important factor is the English use of Thai tour guides ($t = 2.671$). These findings suggest that tourists had high expectation in both the delivered message and English use of Thai tour guides and they were highly satisfied. The more details of the relationship between tourists' expectation and satisfaction levels are explained in the following section.

Table 4 Regression analysis results ($n = 106$)

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	4.238			68.648	0.000
Factor 1: English use of Thai tour guides	0.166	0.062	0.245	2.671	0.009
Factor 2: Content of information provided	0.098	0.062	0.145	1.587	0.116
Factor 3: Delivered message	0.171	0.062	0.253	2.758	0.007
R			0.380		
R^2			0.145		
F-value			5.753		
F-sig.			0.001		

The Relationship between Tourists' Expectation and Satisfaction Levels

To further investigate on the relationship between tourists' expectation and satisfaction level, first the correlation analysis must be tested. Table 5 presents the result of a correlation coefficient of 36.7. This coefficient is statistically significant (p -value = 0.000). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between expectation and satisfaction variables.

Table 5 Relationship between expectation and satisfaction correlation analysis

		Expectation	Satisfaction
Expectation	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	1	0.367
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	106	106
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	0.367	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	106	106

In this research, an expectation–satisfaction matrix was developed as shown in Figure 2. The research explored tourists' expectation level deriving from a five–point Likert–type scale for all items. According to Figure 2, the grand mean of expectation score was 3.826 and can be used to classify sampled tourist as high and low expectancy groups. By using K–means cluster analysis, there were 47 tourists (44.340%) in low expectancy group and 59 tourists (55.660%) were in high expectancy group. Similarly, the grand mean of satisfaction score was 4.238. By implementing K–means cluster analysis, the results showed that 70 tourists (66.038%) were in high satisfaction group and 36 tourists (33.962%) were in low satisfaction group. The expectation–satisfaction matrix (Figure 2) consists of four different quadrants. The quadrant “A” is higher–expectation and higher–satisfaction, the quadrant “B” is lower–expectation and lower–satisfaction, the quadrant “C” indicates lower–expectation and higher–satisfaction, and the quadrant “D” represents higher–expectation and lower–satisfaction. Table 6 presents the distribution of questionnaire items according to the expectation and satisfaction matrix.

According to Figure 2, the quadrant “A” consists of Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, and Q9. It can be argued that the tourists had relatively high expectations and after obtaining the service their satisfaction was fulfilled. For quadrant “C” (Q11) the tourists had low expectation but their post satisfaction was beyond their expectation level. For quadrant “D” (Q10) the tourists had such a high expectation but their satisfaction was not achieved. However, the item in quadrant “D” should be easily improved to fulfill the tourists' satisfaction since its coordinate is near the borderline divided between low and high satisfaction level. The quadrant “B” is the most concern due to the tourists had both low expectation and low satisfaction levels. Also, from the results of regression analysis, these items in quadrant “B” are in the second important factor. Therefore, to improve overall tourists' satisfaction level, these items should be focused and improved in the first priority.

Table 6 The distribution of questionnaire items (Q1–Q11) based on the expectation and satisfaction matrix

Quadrant A: Higher–expectation and higher–satisfaction	Quadrant B: Lower–expectation and lower–satisfaction	Quadrant C: Lower–expectation and higher–satisfaction	Quadrant D: Higher–expectation and lower–satisfaction
Q8: Descriptive messages and detailed information	Q4: Understandable stress, accents and pronunciation of the English words	Q11: Appropriate use of non-verbal messages	Q10: Two-way communication messages
Q9: Relaxing atmosphere to be able to draw the tourists’ attentions	Q1: Grammatical correctness		
Q7: The intricacy and delicacy of decorations of the temples and palaces	Q3: Fluent and smooth delivery of the messages		
Q6: The functions of decorative elements of the temples and palaces	Q2: Variety use of vocabularies, technical terms and expressions		
Q5: The background of the temples and palaces			

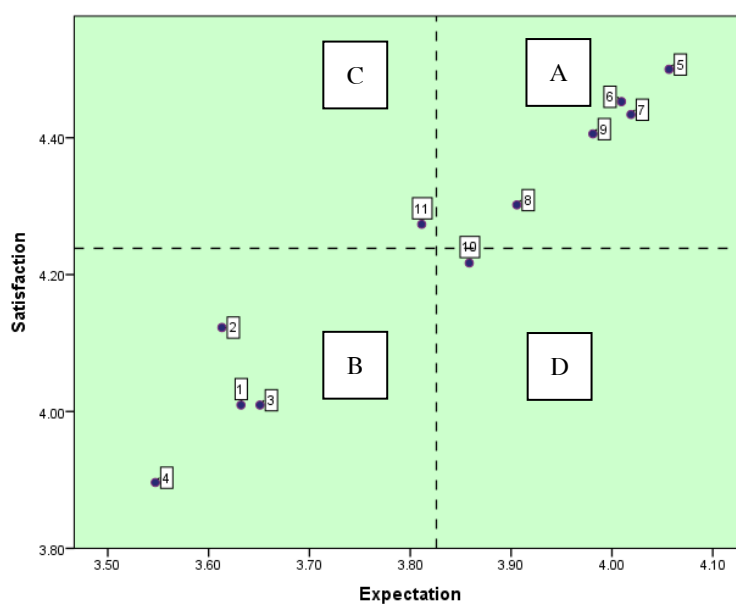


Figure 2 Expectations–Satisfaction matrix

Conclusions and Discussions

The tourism sector is one of the most important economic sectors in Thailand. The tour guide represents an important role on tourist satisfaction and re-visiting, as well as receiving new tourists. Understanding tourist expectation and satisfaction will provide strategies for developing better services of the tour guides. The factor analysis revealed that the sampled tourists used in this research were adequate for the analysis and the investigated variables were related. The research results gave support to two hypotheses developed in this research. The findings indicated that the most important factor towards tourist satisfaction is the delivered messages and the second important factor is the English use of the tour guides. The findings also suggested high expectation in both delivered messages and English use, and the tourists were highly satisfied. From the findings, it can be suggested that Thai tour guides must be improved in terms of the English use and the delivered messages in order to enhance the quality of services.

A cluster analysis was assessed the expectation and satisfaction levels of Thai tour guides from sampled tourists. It was found that the sampled tourists came to Bangkok with higher expectations and left with higher satisfaction. It can be concluded that the tourists had higher expectations and higher satisfaction for the content of information provided, including background of the temples and palaces, functions of decorative elements of the temples and palaces, and intricacy and delicacy of decorations of the temples and palaces, as well as descriptive messages and detailed information, and relaxing atmosphere to draw tourists' attentions. Despite high expectations of two-way communication by tour guides, the satisfaction level was relatively below the grand mean. It is recommended that two-way communication should be improved to increase tourists' satisfaction. Interestingly, Thai tour guides had lower expectations on non-verbal messages but the tourists' satisfaction level was high. This result creates a window of opportunity for improving services of the tour guides by increasing the effectiveness use of non-verbal skills.

Recommendation

Based on the findings using a cluster analysis, it is highly recommended that Thai tour guides must be improved in terms of grammatical correctness, use of vocabularies, technical terms and expressions, delivery of the messages, and understandable stress, accents and pronunciation. Instead of using the story telling technique, the tour guides should create more two-way communication atmosphere to enhance the interaction between the tour guides and the tourists. As a result, the Findings from this research provide useful information for both the tourism industry to improve services along with skills of the tour guides in terms of content and use of English in hospitality concerns and the academic areas to revise the curriculum as well as the tour guide training courses to meet the expectations of tourists.

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