An Investigation of Intercultural Communication Competence of Thai Tour Guides in Bangkok

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Abstract
In the age of a borderless world, many transnational corporations emphasize cultural diversity as a part of the company policy in requiring employees to be interculturally competent (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2009). Individuals that are knowledgeable of social systems or are able to behave appropriately among different cultures become the striking point that employers need (Bremer, 2006; Deardorff & Hunter, 2006; Hulstrand, 2008). Especially in Thailand, tour companies have launched tour programs to meet the tourists’ demands, and therefore, tour guides should be interculturally competent so that they can deliver memorable experiences to tourists. This study aims to investigate the self-awareness regarding intercultural communication competence of Thai tour guides working in Bangkok. The study also makes an attempt to ascertain the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence as well as to explore the differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of their intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The participants of this study were 50 tour guides and 50 foreign tourists that were visiting Bangkok by participating in a city tour program. Data were collected using a self-assessment questionnaire for investigating the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and a questionnaire for studying the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The statistics used in this study were descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-test. The results indicated that the tour guides reported having high competency in intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence were at a high level. In addition, there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence.

Keywords: Intercultural communication competence, Intercultural communication competence assessment, Tour guides

Introduction
The tourism industry in Thailand is expanding rapidly nowadays and the increasing number of international tourists influences the demand for professional tour guides with good language skills and multi-cultural skills. To be a competent tour guide, a person should be fluent in the target language and have good knowledge of the attractions’ routes, interesting sites, and how to make the tourists feel more comfortable while traveling. Since the appreciation and satisfaction of the tourists are crucial for creating the travellers’ loyalty and increasing the number of new visitors, knowing how to build the first impression of the tourists
is very important. If the tour guides can notice the different characteristics of each culture and have sufficient knowledge for preparing for the trip enjoyably, the tour companies will gain more advantages. Therefore, the skills of intercultural communication competence are essential for the profession of tour guides because interculturally competent tour guides will receive a lot of compliments and enhance the number of the regular customers in the future.

A review of the available literature and previous studies reveals that few studies have addressed the intercultural communication competence of people that work in the tourism industry. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the self-awareness regarding the intercultural communication competence of tour guides working in Bangkok and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. In addition, the study also explores the differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence.

Literature Review

Definitions of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

The term “intercultural communication competence” has been defined in numerous studies. Deardoff (2006), for example, defined intercultural communication competence as “the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skill and reflection” (p.194). In other words, it is the capability of people to handle cultural elements that they are not familiar but nevertheless try to understand and act in an appropriate way.

Further, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) stated that intercultural communication competence is not only comprised of the effective and appropriate interaction between people, but is the effective and appropriate interaction between people that own specific environments. Chen and Starosta (2005) agreed with this and defined the term “intercultural communication competence” as “the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment” (p.241).

With the above definitions, scholars in this field indicated that intercultural communication competence is the ability to consider proper behaviors by using attitudes, knowledge, skills, and interpretations in order to achieve cultural interaction with unfamiliar people that have particular identities.

Chen and Starosta’s (2005) Dimensions and Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

In this study, Chen and Starosta’s (2005) dimensions and components of intercultural communication competence were adopted in order to investigate the tour guides’ and tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. According to them, intercultural communication competence is comprised of four dimensions: personality attributes, communication skills, psychological adaptation, and cultural awareness. The details of each dimension are discussed below.

Personality Attributes

Personality attributes include self-disclosure, self-awareness, self-concept, and social relaxation. These four traits contribute to the individual’s personality. When dealing with intercultural situations, competent communicators will willingly reveal their own cultural information or show their cultural practices by way of self-awareness, seeking appropriate behaviors to converse with the interlocutors. In addition, the communicators have to be
optimistic about differences, react with confidence, behave with pleasing gestures, and feel relaxed even when participating in a different culture.

**Communication Skills**

Communication skills can be divided into message skills, social skills, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management. Message skills are related to descriptiveness and supportiveness. Descriptiveness is a quality of describing and supportiveness is how to support or react to others using cues. Secondly, social skills are relevant to empathy and the ability to understand others’ feelings and emotions. With respect to behavioral flexibility, communicators have to adjust themselves automatically when dealing with a new environment in order to establish a good relationship between the interlocutors. The last one is interaction management. This aspect emphasizes how to develop a topic smoothly, for example, letting one person talk by not interrupting or paying attention while others are speaking.

**Psychological Adaptation**

Psychological adaptation is related to an individual’s ability to control his or her feeling of frustration, stress, alienation, and ambiguity. For competent persons, these feelings are temporary, and they will defeat all these feelings with just a little time. They tend to be able to adjust immediately to the situational demand with less nervousness and can maintain varying environments swiftly and sufficiently.

**Cultural Awareness**

Cultural awareness refers to understanding the uniqueness of each culture or knowing why people behave and think in different ways. In order to achieve intercultural interaction, communicators should learn about the host culture to help them adapt their behaviors to match with the host culture.

**Studies relevant to the self-assessment of intercultural communication competence**

Inkaew (2016) examined the intercultural communicative competence of front office personnel working in hotels in Bangkok. The findings showed that hotel front office personnel are well aware of intercultural practices, but the awareness tends to be limited to the surface level. They did however employ their surface cultural knowledge, both appropriately and effectively, when dealing with their daily duties within the hotel lobby. With regard to intercultural communicative competence on a deeper level, front office personnel perceived that they were inadequately equipped, and that they mainly tried to gain more intercultural communicative competence from experience in the workplace.

Hudelson et al. (2011) conducted a study of the self-assessment of intercultural communication skills, using a survey of physicians and medical students in Geneva, Switzerland. The results illustrated that the medical students possessed more competence in basic medical skills than intercultural tasks. In addition, they possessed more competence in general intercultural skills than specific intercultural communication skills. The results also showed that the qualified doctors that took care of the immigrant patients possessed more competence in intercultural communication skills than all clinical tasks.

Nanakorn (2011) investigated the intercultural communication competence among Thai Airways cabin crew. The results of this study indicated that the Thai Airways cabin crew had a high level of intercultural communication competence. They assessed themselves most competent in intercultural awareness, followed by intercultural sensitivity, and the least competent was intercultural adroitness. In terms of strategy plans to improve intercultural
communication skills of the Thai Airways cabin crew, the study suggested that the plans should consider the age of the employees and their experiences in intercultural interacting with foreigners. These two factors will provide great results.

Studies related to the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence

Alshatnawi (2014) investigated the communication skills of Jordanian tour guides and German tourists’ perceptions. The results showed that Jordanian tour guides had different degrees of communication skills in performing their tasks. The reasons are that they have strong personalities in performing their jobs, they are enthusiastic, confident, sensitive, and flexible, and have adequate knowledge of traditions and rituals. This study recommended to further increase the tour guides’ communication skills in further studies.

Hiroe (2010) studied the Japanese licensed tour guides’ needs for intercultural communication competence. Questionnaires were distributed to survey the opinions of foreign tourists. The findings showed that (1) foreign tourists have a wide variety of interests of Japan, (2) although the number of foreign tourists in Japan continually increased, they rarely used tour guide service, (3) tour guides’ knowledge, language skills and good attributes were expected by the tourists, lastly (4) the tour guides were considered as the competent communicators since they did not only lead in the tour groups, but they were also the country representatives that help promote tourism of the country.

Leclerc and Martin (2004) studied perceptions of French, German and American tourists toward tour guides’ communication competence. The findings indicated that within three nationalities, there were significant differences in the tourists’ perceptions. French and German tourists ranked all the dimensions most important while American tourists considered verbal and nonverbal competence the most important dimensions.

Research questions

1. To what extent are the tour guides aware of their intercultural communication competence?
2. What are the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?
3. Are there any differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?

Statement of Hypothesis

The mean scores of the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence is significantly different from the mean scores of the tourist’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence.

Statistical hypothesis

\[ H_0: \bar{X}_{\text{guides' competence tourists}} = \bar{X}_{\text{perception}} \]
\[ H_1: \bar{X}_{\text{guides' competence tourists}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{perception}} \]

Methodology

This part of the present study describes the instruments and procedures. It contains information about the participants, the research instruments, data collection, and data analysis and procedures.
Participants
Two groups participated in this study. The first group included 50 Thai tour guides working in Bangkok that escorted foreign tourists to the Grand Palace and Bangkok landmarks around Rattanakosin Island in Phranakorn district; and the second group was 50 foreign tourists that visited Bangkok by taking the city tour program. The major reason for selecting this area was because the Grand Palace and Bangkok landmarks are well known by foreign tourists and the justification of choosing 100 participants was based on Fraenkel and Wallen’s (2000) suggestion. According to the data gathered from the tour guides’ questionnaires, the participants were 38 female (76%), and 12 male (24%). Their ages ranged from 20-30 years. Most of them had a Bachelor’s degree (72%). Their working experience varied from 1-20 years. As for the tourists, the background information revealed that 26 male (52%) and 24 female (48%) responded the questionnaires. Their ages ranged from 21-60 years or more. They had different educational background, ranging from below Bachelor’s degree to Doctoral degree. Most of the participants were Chinese (N=6), followed by American (N=5) and German (N=4).

Research instruments
The research instruments used in this study consisted of two types of questionnaires: (1) a self-assessment questionnaire for assessing the tour guides’ self-awareness of competence in intercultural communication; and (2) a questionnaire for studying tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ competence in intercultural communication.

Tour guides’ questionnaires
The tour guides’ self-assessment questionnaire regarding their self-awareness of intercultural communication competence was constructed based on four intercultural communication competence domains; namely, personality attributes, communication skills, psychological adaptation, and cultural awareness, formulated by Chen and Starosta (2005). The questionnaire comprised two main parts as follows:

Part 1: Demographic information included gender, age, educational background and working experience. The data of the demographic information were used as an overview of the tour guides’ background information of this study.

Part 2: In this part, the participants were asked to respond to the 16 items five-point Likert-scale questionnaire to measure their self-assessment on intercultural communication competence, which was based on the integrated model of intercultural communication competence of Chen and Starosta (2005). In responding to the questionnaires, the participants indicated the extent to which they assessed their self-awareness of intercultural communication competence by responding either (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree.

Tourists’ questionnaires
The questionnaires for studying the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence were used to ask about their perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. This questionnaire consisted of two parts as follows:

Part 1: Demographic information included gender, age, educational background and nationality. The data of the demographic information were used as an overview of the tourists’ background information of this study.

Part 2: The participants were asked to respond to the 16 items five-point Likert-scale questionnaires to report their perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence, which was based on the integrated model of intercultural communication
competence of Chen and Starosta (2005). Again, in responding to the questionnaires, the participants indicated the extent to which they assessed the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence by responding either (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree.

Data collection

Data collection began in April, 2018. The researcher constructed two types of questionnaires and then asked 3 experts in the field, two university lecturers and one experienced tour guide, to validate all of items in the questionnaires via the Index of Congruence (IOC) form. All of the items in the tour guides’ self-assessment questionnaires on intercultural communication competence were translated into Thai so that the participants could understand the questions. For the tourists, all of items in the questionnaires for studying the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence were written in English. To collect the data, these two types of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, including 50 Thai tour guides and 50 foreign tourists.

Data analysis and procedures

In order to obtain the results of this study, the data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-test. The statistics used in this study were as follows:

The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation in order to answer research question 1, “To what extent are the tour guides aware of their intercultural communication competence?” and research question 2, “What are the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?”.

In order to answer research question 3, “Are there any differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?”, an independent-samples t-test was used to compare the differences between the tour guides’ perceptions of their self-assessment competence in intercultural communication and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence.

Findings

This study aimed to investigate the tour guides’ self-awareness of their intercultural communication competence, to explore the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence, and to find out the differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of their intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The findings of the study are reported according to three research questions.

Research question 1: To what extent are the tour guides aware of their intercultural communication competence?

In order to investigate the tour guides’ self-awareness of their possession of intercultural communication competence, 50 tour guides completed the self-assessment questionnaires on intercultural communication competence. The data from the tour guides’ questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation. In order to interpret the findings from the tour guides’ questionnaires, the following criteria were used to interpret the data:
Table 1
The measurement criteria of the rating scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Range</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.21-5.00</td>
<td>highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.41-4.20</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.61-3.40</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.81-2.60</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-1.80</td>
<td>lowest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the overall mean scores for the tour guides’ self-awareness for each domain of intercultural communication competence.

Table 2
Overall mean scores for each domain of intercultural communication competence perceived by the tour guides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of ICC</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality Attributes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Adaptation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 2, the results showed that the tour guides claimed that they had a “high” level of intercultural communication competence in all domains. The highest mean score rated by the tour guides was the domain of “personality attributes” (x̄ = 3.93, SD = 0.33), followed by “cultural awareness” (x̄ = 3.89, SD = 0.12), and “communication skills” (x̄ = 3.84, SD = 0.12). The lowest mean score rated by the tour guides was “psychological adaptation” (x̄ = 3.75, SD = 0.27). The details of the rank order of the mean scores of the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence in each domain are further displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
The rank order of the mean scores of tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank order</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Personality Attributes</td>
<td>2. I am aware of the way I present myself appropriately to foreign tourists from different cultures.</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4. I feel relaxed while working with tourists from different cultures.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3. I feel confident talking about and explaining the attractions’ details to culturally-distinct tourists.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. I reveal information about myself openly while communicating with foreign tourists.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 2: Communication Skills

1. I adapt my behaviors to match with foreign tourists from different cultures. 4.04 .81
2. I listen sincerely to tourists from other cultures and understand their feeling. 3.94 .82
3. I begin the topic of conversation smoothly and share opportunities for foreign tourists to discuss. 3.78 .95
4. I can deliver exact explanations by interpreting skills and know how to respond to foreign tourists. 3.60 .83

Section 3: Psychological Adaptation

1. I have a feeling of enjoyment toward the differences between the culture of tourists and my own culture. 4.14 .78
2. I am able to adjust immediately to situational demands while communicating with foreign tourists. 3.68 .87
3. I can handle the feeling of nervousness or stress while interacting with foreign tourists from different cultures. 3.66 .87
4. I spend little time defeating disappointed feelings when dealing with a new culture. 3.52 .93

Section 4: Cultural Awareness

1. I am able to control and modify my performance with people from diverse cultures. 4.00 .78
2. I can modify my behaviors to create harmonious communication within the intercultural interactions between foreign tourists. 3.92 .80
3. I am aware of the similarity among various cultural backgrounds that are represented on a tour. 3.90 .79
4. I know the uniqueness of each culture and can guess the tourists’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. 3.72 .83

As shown in Table 3, the tour guides rated item 2, “I am aware of the way I present myself appropriately to foreign tourists from different cultures.” (x̄ =4.32), which is in the domain of “personality attributes,” with the highest mean score. It can be interpreted that the tour guides perceived gaining the highest level of self-awareness or the ability to be conscious when dealing with the cultural environment. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score rated by the tour guides was item 11, “I spend little time defeating disappointed feelings when dealing with a new culture”, which is in the domain of “psychological adaptation” (x̄ = 3.52). It can be interpreted that the tour guides claimed that they had high ability to control their feelings of frustration, stress, alienation, and ambiguity.

Research question 2: What are the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?

In order to investigate the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence, 50 tourists completed the questionnaires for studying
their perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The data from the tourists’ questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation. In order to interpret the findings from the tourists’ questionnaires, the following criteria were used to interpret the data:

Table 4
The measurement criteria of the rating scales

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 reveals the overall mean scores for each domain of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence perceived by the tourists.

Table 5
Overall mean scores for each domain of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence perceived by the tourists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of ICC</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality Attributes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Adaptation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 5, the tourists perceived that the tour guides tended to have a “high” level of intercultural communication competence in all domains. The highest mean score rated by the tourists was the domain of “personality attributes” (x̄ = 3.97, SD = 0.07), followed by “psychological adaptation” (x̄ = 3.90, SD = .13), and “cultural awareness” (x̄ = 3.87, SD = 0.13). The lowest mean score rated by the tour guides was “communication skills” (x̄ = 3.86, SD = 0.10). The details of the rank order of the mean scores of the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence in each domain are further displayed in Table 6.

Table 6
The rank order of the mean scores of tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank order</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean (x̄)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section : Personality Attributes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The tour guide is relaxed while working with me, a person that comes from a different culture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The tour guide is confident while talking and explaining about the attractions 'details to me.</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank order</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Mean( $\bar{x}$)</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1. The tour guide reveals his/her information openly while communicate with me.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The tour guide is aware of the different ways that he/she could represent himself/herself with me, a person that come from a different culture.</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 2: Communication Skills**

6. The tour guide listens sincerely to me, a person whose culture is different and also understands my feelings.
1. 3.96  .97

5. The tour guide can deliver exact explanations and know how to respond to me.
2. 3.88  .80

7. The tour guide adapts his/her behaviors to match with my culture.
3. 3.88  .80

8. The tour guide begins the topic of conversation smoothly and shares opportunities for me to discuss.
4. 3.72  .83

**Section 3: Psychological Adaptation**

12. The tour guide has a feeling of enjoyment toward the differences between my culture and his/her culture.
1. 4.06  .87

9. The tour guide can handle the feeling of nervousness or stress while interacting with me, a person that comes from a different culture.
2. 3.94  .71

11. The tour guide spends little time defeating disappointed feelings when dealing with a new culture.
3. 3.80  .76

10. The tour guide is able to adjust immediately to situational demands while communicating with me.
4. 3.78  .74

**Section 4: Cultural Awareness**

14. The tour guide is aware of the similarity among various cultural backgrounds that are represented in the tour group.
1. 3.96  .81

13. The tour guide is able to control and modify his/her performances among diverse cultures.
2. 3.92  .78

15. The tour guide can modify his or her behaviors to create harmonious communication within the intercultural interactions between foreign tourists.
3. 3.90  .84

16. The tour guide knows the uniqueness of each culture and can guess my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
4. 3.68  .84

As shown in Table 6, the tourists rated items 4 and 12 ($x^-=4.06$), which is in the domains of “personality attributes” and “psychological adaptation,” with the highest mean score. It can be interpreted that the tourists thought that the tour guides had the highest level of these attributes.
of social relaxation and the ability to control their feeling of frustration, stress, alienation, and ambiguity. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score rated by the tour guides was item 16, “The tour guide knows the uniqueness of each culture and can guess my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors,” which is in the domain of “cultural awareness” (item 11, $\bar{x} = 3.68$). It can be interpreted that the tourists thought that the tour guides had the high ability to understand the characteristics of each culture or knew why people behave and think in different ways.

Research question 3: Are there any differences between the tour guides’ self-awareness of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence?

The findings for this question were used to test Hypothesis 1.

**Statement of Hypothesis**

The mean score for the tour guides’ self-assessment of intercultural communication competence was significantly different from the mean scores for the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence.

$$
\begin{align*}
H_0: & \quad \bar{X}_{\text{guides' competence}} = \bar{X}_{\text{tourists' perception}} \\
H_1: & \quad \bar{X}_{\text{guides' competence}} \neq \bar{X}_{\text{tourists' perception}}
\end{align*}
$$

In order to analyze whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the tour guides’ self-assessment of their intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perception of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence, an independent-samples t-test was used to get the answer to the hypothesis, as shown in Tables 7 and 8.

**Table 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour Guide</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57.9000</td>
<td>8.42312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62.3400</td>
<td>9.83665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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29th & 30th June, 2018
After performing an independent-samples t-test, the results showed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the tour guides’ self-assessment of intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence ($t = -2.424$, $p = .017$). As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

In terms of the findings for research question 1, which asked about the extent to which the tour guides were aware of their intercultural communication competence, the results showed that the tour guides had a “high” level of intercultural communication competence in all domains, especially the domain of “personality attributes”. They were aware of the way in which they presented themselves to the tourists, and felt enjoyment and relaxed while working with people from unfamiliar cultures. This is in line with Nanakorn’s study (2011), which indicated that the Thai Airways cabin crew also had a high level of agreement regarding their intercultural communication competence, particularly in terms of intercultural sensitivity (self-concept, open-mindedness, non-judgmental attitudes, and social relaxation), which are similar to personality attributes. Thus it can be explained that the employees in a frontline of hospitality industry possess a high level of personality attributes because they are willing to present Thai culture to foreign tourists, possess positive attitudes to the differences, be aware how to consider a proper behavior, and have a relaxed feeling and confidence when working on their duty.

Regarding the findings for research question 2, in terms of the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence, the results showed that the tourists thought that the tour guides had a “high” level of intercultural communication competence in all domains, especially the domain of “personality attributes.” This is in line with the work of Alshatnawi (2014), who claimed that the tourists thought that tour guides had a strong personality in performing their job, were enthusiastic, confident, sensitive, flexible, and had adequate knowledge of traditions and rituals.

The findings for research question 3 showed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the tour guides’ self-assessment regarding intercultural communication competence and the tourists’ perception of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The mean scores for the tourists’ perceptions were higher than the mean scores for the tour guides’ self-assessment. This may have been caused by the roles of the tour guides and the tourists. It is possible that tourists tend to expect good service from a tour guide, so they thought that the tour guides should have a high level of “personality attributes”, be opened person and be proud to show their own culture with an impressive gesture to the foreign tourists. These findings are in line with the work of Hiroe (2010), since he indicated that tour guides not only work as a tour leader, but also play a role of country representatives that help to spread tourism of the country.

Conclusion

The current study provides some evidence concerning tour guides’ self-awareness and tourists’ perceptions of tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. The findings of this study can contribute some benefits at least to the groups of people that work in the tourism industry or organizations working with multi-cultural customers so that they can understand intercultural communication better and adjust themselves to working in an intercultural environment. In addition, the results of this study can be used as a guideline for training and
assessing the intercultural communication competence of tour guides in order to improve their intercultural communication skills.

However, there were some limitations to this study. First, the sample size of this study was rather small so a larger sample of tour guides and tourists for the questionnaires is recommended for further study. Secondly, due to the time constraints, only 5 tour guides and 5 tourists were asked to participate in the interviews. Therefore, a larger number of interviewees is recommended for future studies. It is also suggested that observations should be added in order to investigate the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence. In this study, only questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data. Lastly, the questionnaires for investigating the tourists’ perceptions of the tour guides’ intercultural communication competence should be translated into other languages since the majority of foreign tourists are not mother-tongue English speakers; as a result, they may not be able to understand the questions clearly.

References


