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ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL TOUR GUIDE TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN SRI LANKA: TOWARDS PROMOTING TOURISM EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of Area Tour Guide Training Programs conducted by two Provincial Councils in Sri Lanka. The aim was achieved through a review of extant literature and empirical investigation based on data provided by 81 novice tour guides who completed the training programs conducted by particular organizations. A quantitative approach was applied in the study by administering a questionnaire survey. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures and paired sample t-test. The result shows that content of the selected training program is par with the six dimension model which is widely accepted in the designing tour guide training. Moreover, it was found that the program had been successful in terms of knowledge, skill and attitudes imparted in the trainees. Nevertheless, the study identified some contents in the training curricular require reconsideration to make them more relevant and inclusive.

Keywords: Area Tourist Guide Training Program, Tourism, Tour guides, Training Curricular

1. Introduction

With the decisive conclusion of the war in 2009, Sri Lanka with its peaceful environment is now considered as one of the safest destinations for tourists to travel. Arrival of two millions of tourists in 2016 paved a new ground stone in the tourism industry of Sri Lanka (SLTDA, 2016). The increased tourists' arrivals has created a strong forward linkage demand for the tourism related products and services alike. As a result, a significant number of individuals and organizations involved in supplying tourism related products and services. Tour Guiding is one of such services that tourists have perceived as an essential service to obtain to make their tour a memorable. The Government and travel agencies in Sri Lanka are very much keen in providing an improved quality of tourist guiding service and expecting an increase in tourist inflow during the present years. Thus, it is essential to train, develop and prepare the tour guides to meet the potential demand. Training of tour guides in Sri Lanka is the sole responsibility of the Government and its agencies including Provincial Councils and Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM). The said apex bodies are also responsible for licensing and the control over the trade.

The general impression of the tour guides greatly affects the net return of the tourism business. In product differentiation in travel trade, the service of a tour guide works as a primary factor. Particularly, the services rendered by the tour guides and the goodwill of the service provider are primary factors to earn competitive advantages to a company in the tourism business (Mossberg, 1995). Since the market is both price and quality sensitive, it is an obligatory requirement to provide a high quality tour service to the tourists without any price increase, for which advanced professional service of a tour guide service becomes mandatory. Thus tour guides should have a sound idea about what is expected from them and it is a prerequisite that they attend to a tour guide training program which implants required knowledge, attitude and skills in tour guiding. However, many tour companies, perhaps inadvertently, fail to properly train and inspire their guides in the art of tour guiding. Guides are often handed books to read concerning the information they should learn for delivery or they will simply accompany another guide for one or two tours before becoming solo guides (Carmody, 2013).

According to the reports of Central Provincial Council (CPC), North Central Provincial Council (NCPC), and Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), there were many criticisms about the poor service quality of the tour guides during the guided tours as they are not service minded. Although tour guides are not responsible for all the events, the unlicensed tour guides' incompetency to handle a situation is well-highlighted. Besides, many consider tour guiding as a fun occupation with lots of chances for free traveling and mingling with foreigners. Nevertheless, not all of the provincial tour guides in North Central Province and Central Province are able to offer sufficient knowledge and information about the destinations to fulfill the tourists' expectation. For instance, Mossberg (1995) identified that the tour leaders tend to be less trustworthy, poor in personal grooming and less cooperative than promised, which adversely affect the overall satisfaction of the tourists. In Sri Lanka, all tour guides must pass the qualification examination, and attend to tour guide's training program in order to get the Provincial Tour Guide License (PTGL). In 2016, only CPC and NCPC of Sri Lanka conducted Provincial Guide training programs and issued the licenses to the competent individuals. It is a timely requirement to analyze both courses so as to evaluate whether the provincial level guide programs have achieved its intended objectives and to make enhancements to the programs if required. The aim of these area tour guide training programs is to prepare the new candidates as a qualified tour guide in a group tour (Ministry of Tourism Development and Christian Religious Affairs, 2017).

When tourism taking place in the local settings, it is mandatory that the local people fully understand the assigned duties of tour guiding through proper training. Although the role of the tour guide in the context of tourist experience has been researched by many researchers (de Kadt, 1979; Cohen, 1985; Roggenbuck & Williams, 1991; Weiler et al., 1991), there is a lack of research in the context of tour guide training especially in developing countries. In supporting this view, Rosemary et al. (2001) stated that there has been no systematic reviews of tour guide training programs in less developed countries. A few studies have been carried out in identifying the role of a tour guide (Weiler & Davis, 1993; Weiler & Crabtree, 1998). As a result the performing tour guides in some rural areas may be less qualified for their duties. In order to become effective interpreters training and qualifications of such tour guides is a main concern (Weiler & Ham, 2001). Nevertheless, there is even less published researches on the training of tour guides. Further, research in the area of guiding has been largely confined to examining tourists' views and evaluations of guiding performance rather than guides' training programs (Hughes & Ballantyne, 2001; Ong, Ryan and McIntosh, 2014). However, it is a fact that only a standardized tour guiding program can create a qualified tour guide. The problem related to this study evolves from this scenario. Sri Lankan literature has continue to be silent on tour guides, their nature of duties and especially the training programs which has a significant effect on making a qualified guide. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of area tour guide training programs conducted by the CPC and NCPC of Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

Tour guides as connectors of the hosts and tourists work as the escort for tourists who usually be with the tourists throughout the tour (Metalka, 1990). Weiler and Davis (1993) identified tour guide as a person who is acting on behalf of the tour operator, accountable for supply of entire travel experience. Many scholars have both agreed and argued with the tour guides' multiplicity of roles to play (Cohen, 1985; Weiler et al., 1991; Pond, 1993). Weiler and Richins (1990) said tourist guides contribute for a better travel experience for the tourists. This was affirmed by Chowdhary & Prakash (2009) who said a tour guide's role is significant as it directly affect to the overall tourist satisfaction along with the service encounter in a group tour. Cohen (1985) further described the dual roles of the 'original guide' as being both path finder and mentor. Another given role for a tour guide is to exhibit environmentally and culturally sensitive behaviors, to help out nature conservation, to provide education and interpretation, and finally to act as a cultural mediator between foreign tourists and local communities (Muñoz, 1995). Lindberg et al. (1998) further strengthened the idea of Munoz (1995) by considering tour guides as the heart and soul of the ecotourism industry.

Irrespective of size and the breadth, the tour guides act as the face of any tourism related organization, whether it's a travel agency, tour operator, local destination or a local conservation group and also have a responsibility of looking after both host communities and the environment (Black & Weiler, 2005). Although it is one of the oldest human activities, tourist guiding is still unrecognized, criticized and undervalued profession, which is why Pond (1993) named them as "orphans of the industry".

Tour guides, perhaps, mostly criticized stakeholders in the travel world. They are commonly blamed for any issue related to the travel including bad weather, traffic jams and overcrowding of the destinations (Christie & Mason, 2003). In fact, many tourists have discovered that the tour guides are unfamiliar with city's history. Once questioned, some tour guides have rewritten the city's history for their benefits and to please their guests. There are countless examples to point out that guides not being familiarize with the destination. At times they cook up stories or coming

out with other popular stories to please the tourists (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2009). So it is evident that untrained and uneducated tour guides often hurt the city's reputation and damage overall tourists' experience during their tour which is often irreversible (Arreola, 1998).

The traditional interpretive role of the tour guide as a one-way presenter is insufficient for the modern day tourism (Weiler & Black, 2015). This was reassured by Chowdhary and Prakash (2009). According to them, a lot of guides from the informal sector jeopardize the tourism industry. This results in poor image and weakening of the tourism positioning. According to Arreola (1998), this can cause nearly irreversible damages to the image of the destination. After identifying the problems related to the tour guides, Ross (1997) recommended adequate and ongoing training programs for the guides to ensure enhanced services in travel agency operations. Black and Weiler (2005) recommended that professional organizations including the public and private sectors should develop a mechanism to support guides, and once established, the organization should initiate training, certification, licensing and award programmes for their members.

Pond (1993), suggests the qualities possessed by a tour guide. They include broad knowledge of the respective areas, eagerness, commitment towards the job and learning, understanding, flexibility, sensitivity for the people, pride in servicing others and the 'ability to interpret by painting mental pictures. Pond further believes training as a viable and a successful tool to develop these qualities among the guides. Knudson et al. (1995) also agree with Pond (1993). According to them, tour guides should have a range of qualities that can only be developed through a systematic training. The added few more qualities to the Pond's list. They include friendliness, confidence, delivery and organization. Knudson et al. (1995) further suggest to train the interpreters to develop these qualities. They concludes their study asserting that effective tour guiding is a result of long time experience gained together with cautious study and continuous training. Additionally, the focus on effective speaking is one of the most important skill for tour interpretation that comes with amiability, spontaneity, energy, confidence, delivery, and ability to organize. However, they highlight that education itself cannot develop all these qualities therefore, training is essential.

Tourism industry is a customer centric industry that heavily relies on professionals who can render quality services and who can communicate effectively with excellent interpersonal skills. Whinney (1996) suggest that such skills are mainly achieved through training. After the training it is important to encourage guides for conservation actions with both guests and hosts. In fact, there are some successful examples of guides who personally involved in conservation projects after their training (O'Brien, 1999). However, it is significant to follow up with the tour guides after their training programs to identify their post training behaviors and to take necessary actions thereafter. Attending to a training program will not only enhance guides' knowledge and skills, but also their industry position, payments, career opportunities and conditions at work. Further, at an industry level, training improves both standards and quality of the tourism products that will win a competitive advantage to the destinations (Black & Weiler, 2005).

Howard (1997) proposes that irrespective of the long history of tour guiding profession, it has no particular academic base. After careful review of the significance of the profession it is important to develop benchmarks and best principles and practices. To reach such standards systematic training is essential (Pond, 1993). Cherem (1977) also suggested of best possible trainings for all individuals involved in guiding. He further highlights the significance of the ability of delivery of the knowledge, for which he suggested courses in interpretive methods, as well as field courses, research and theory about tour guiding. Ang (1990) is also in the view that tour guiding should be a more professional activity that can be developed through training. Thus, training of the tour guides can be identified as a high priority (Go, 1995; Whinney, 1996; Terra Firma & Tourism Resource Consultants, 1998).

There hardly were any theoretical base in tour guiding researchers recommended of benchmarking the best practices (Cherem, 1977; Ang, 1990; Pond, 1993; Howard, 1997). However, an important question to address is the appropriate content of the tour guides' training programs. The training programs should begin after identification of the existing level and the expected outcomes. Many researchers have emphasized of the need of understanding the roles of tour guides and the need of articulating better training programs for the tour guides (Weiler & Davis, 1993). When developing a tour guide training following things need to be researched: training needs and aims, curriculum structure and content, selection of trainees and trainers, and assessment and evaluation (Black & King, 2002). There are many methods in delivery of skills (Cherem, 1977). He recommends inputs in interpretive methods, field courses, research and theory.

The tour guide training programs are mostly organized and conducted by the government apex bodies including ministries or its agencies. Also, there are occasions that the trade associations, training institutes, universities of colleges offering such training programs. The fact here to consider is different organizations may develop and conduct courses based on their view as the most important role for tour guides. Such that there could be differences between the content of the training programs. Further to that, the backgrounds of participants, i.e. what kind of

knowledge they have already acquired, what type of learning methods are most suitable for them may also play a significant role in the delivery of the training program (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2009).

Guidelines for tour guide training are developed and published by the World Federation of Tourist Guide Association (WFTGA) in collaboration with many Universities in the world. They have identified four main categories under which knowledge, skills and attitude domain relies. The first category is Practical Guiding (PG) skills. It involves skills including practical elements of guiding; variety of guiding scenarios, terminology, itinerary preparation etc. The second is, Sensitization (SS) which includes building a philosophical premise for tour guiding. This further comprises issues concern for the host community, the society, and the nation. Interpersonal and Behavioral (IN) skills, the third element, are targeted at individual and group behavior, including addressing cross-cultural settings. The Business and Management (BM) skills includes a wide variety of issues that help in developing guiding as a business i.e., both entrepreneurial and managerial inputs. Chowdhary and Prakash (2009) added two extra dimensions to this framework, making it six. Accordingly, Knowledge of Tourism (KN) products was identified as one of the important dimensions. This was especially important in cases where the agencies view a guide's job as that of information disseminator or educator. The last dimension was that of Tourism Context (TC). This dimension intends to render a tourist guide more relevant vis-à-vis the tourism context or supply chain.

3. Methodology

The present study aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of Area Tourist Guide Training Program (ATGTP) conducted by the CPC and NCPC of Sri Lanka to train unlicensed tour guides in the particular regions. Accordingly, the statistical population targeted by the study was all the unlicensed tour guides registered in the said programs. Thus, this is a descriptive and survey research which intends to provide important managerial and policy implications to develop the programs in ensuring sustainable capacity building.

ATGTP is typically a 06 week program divided into two parts. Part one is 05 weeks classroom lectures followed by 1 week field work which includes four excursions. The trainees must spend remaining time for field work wherein they are expected to prepare and submit a training project report and make a presentation which includes transcript of their commentary at one of the selected monuments. Training is organized 4 days a week. On a typical training day, there are 3 sessions of 120 minutes duration of each. Therefore, there are around 60 classroom sessions totaling 120 classroom contact hours. The duration of an excursion is 06 hours, that makes total 24 practical hours. Thus, the total theoretical and practical hours are cumulative up to 144 hours.

This program is also par with the six dimension model proposed by Chowdhary and Prakash (2009). Table 1 shows ATGTP content loading to the model.

Table 1: ATGTP content loading across six dimensions of Chowdhary-Prakash model

#	Dimension	Number of Sessions	Number of Hours	% distribution of sessions
1	Practical guiding skills	9	18	12.50
2	Sensitization	12	24	16.67
3	Interpersonal/ behavioral skills	18	36	25.00
4	Business/ management	9	18	12.50
5	Knowledge of tourism products	12	24	16.67
6	Tourism context	12	24	16.67
Total		72	144	100%

The primary instrument of this study was a questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed among all the participants (110) to the ATGTP 2017, and 81 were received, that indicated a 73% response rate. The questionnaire had three sections in four pages. The questions in the first section gather information to identify the demographic profile of the respondents. Second section contains 25 item inventory on Likert type five scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (essential) to identify the importance perceived by the participants on knowledge, skills and attitude (KSA) that are factored under six main variables including practical guiding skills (PGS), Sensitization

(SS), Interpersonal and behavioral (IN), business and management skills (BM), knowledge of tourism (KN) and tourism context (TC) according to World Federation of Tourist Guide Association (WFTGA). The third repeated same inventory used in the previous section, with a scale ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to great extent) to measure the magnitude that they have gained the knowledge, skills and attitudes from the ATGTP. Further, open-ended questions in the first section of the questionnaire were used to obtain more personal opinion from licensed tour guides toward the existing training program in Sri Lanka.

Construct validity and reliability were applied to determine the convergent validity and internal consistency of the constructs used in the instrument. For the purpose principle component analysis and reliability test based on Cronbach's alpha were used and their results are reproduced in Table 2. According to Table 2, result reveals that sample size was adequate to apply factor analysis to the given constructs. Moreover, communities generated by the analysis were well over 0.5 indicating the construct validity of the measures. Cronbach's alpha coefficients which were ranging from 0.67 to 0.9 confirm the reliability of the constructs used in the instrument.

Table 2: Results of principle component analysis and reliability test

Construct	No of Items	KMO	Bartlett's Test		TVE	Chronbach's Alpha
			Chi Square	Sig		
PGS	03	0.666	46.03	.000	63.76%	0.700
SS	04	0.755	78.31	.000	59.06%	0.764
IN	07	0.830	306.71	.000	61.27%	0.892
BM	03	0.655	37.04	.000	60.81%	0.669
KN	04	0.780	126.87	.000	68.26%	0.841
TC	04	0.771	144.11	.000	68.58%	0.842

Descriptive statistics and paired samples t-test procedures were employed in data analysis to capture the level of importance of each competency area, training needs and unmet competencies of the tour guides by the ATGTP. Content analysis was also utilize to analysis the qualitative responses for the instruments. Exploring the diversity of viewpoints on these issues represents an inductive 'first look' at area tourist guide training in Sri Lanka, with the aim of being able to suggest grounded directions for future inquiries.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Demographic information of the tour guides who participated in the survey are given in Table 3. Among the participants, majority of the respondents was in 35 – 44year category. About 82 percent of them had at least G.E.C Advanced Level qualifications to the date. A vast majority of the participants are having a background of tourism through their work experience, i.e., 60 percent of the tour guides are having minimum 02 years of experience in the tourism and hospitality sector. It was further revealed that 63 percent of the respondents were performing as unlicensed tour guides in both Central Province and North Central Province. Out of that, 67 percent of the tour guides had minimum two years of working experience as an unlicensed tour guide.

Table 3: Demographic information of the participants

Factor	% of the participants
Age	
Below 25	14.8
25-34	28.4
35-44	30.9
45-54	18.5

55 or Above	7.4
Educational qualifications	
Ordinary Level	17.3
Advanced Level	48.1
Certificate /Diploma	19.8
Degree	14.8
Years of Experience in tourism	
Less than 2 years	23.5
2 – 4 years	19.8
5 – 9 years	25.9
10 years or above	14.8
No experience	16.0
Perming as an unlicensed tour guides	
Yes	63.0
No	37.0
Experience as a Tour Guide	
Less than 2 years	19.8
2 – 4 years	16.0
5 – 9 years	17.3
10 years or above	7.4

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics calculated for six main domain; PGS, SS, IN, BM, KN and TC, on two contexts that level perceived and acquired by the participants.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Competency Domain	Level Perceived		Level acquired	
	Mean	Std. DV	Mean	Std. DV
PGS	4.102	0.706	4.020	0.808
SS	4.266	0.679	3.987	0.717
IN	4.176	0.669	3.980	0.743
BM	4.189	0.638	3.905	0.773
KN	4.128	0.715	3.873	0.702
TC	4.342	0.706	3.845	0.732

According to Table 4, the participants for the survey perceived that all the domains focused by the ATGTP are important to their career as tour guides. In fact, they have given greater priority to tourism context (M=4.34) and sensitization (4.26) while giving significance importance to the remaining domain as well. Competency level acquired in the six domains reveals that the program, ATGTP, could be able to meet the program objectives by providing knowledge, skills and attitudes among the participants in the context of tour guiding. However, slight differences between the mean values of level perceived and level acquired signify that the some competencies have not been transferred as expected. To examine whether there are significance differences between levels perceived and acquired, paired samples t-test was performed and its result is reported in Table 5.

Table 5: Result of Paired Samples t- test

Pair	Paired Differences					t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
				Lower	Upper		
P_PGS -->A_PGS	.082	.874	.097	-.111	.275	.847	.400
P_SS --> A_SS	.278	.775	.086	.107	.450	3.235	.002
P_IN --> A_IN	.195	.756	.084	.028	.362	2.330	.022
P_BM--> A_BM	.283	.878	.097	.089	.478	2.908	.005
P_KN --> A_KN	.255	.770	.085	.084	.425	2.979	.004
P_TC --> A_TC	.496	.749	.083	.331	.662	5.967	.000

The result reveals that there is no significance difference between the levels perceived and acquired by the participants with respect to the practical guiding skills ($t=.847$, $p>0.05$). In other words, the participants are absolutely satisfied with the knowledge and skills that they have gained from the program on practical guiding. However, result signifies that difference between the levels perceived and acquired is substantial in the domains of sensitization ($t=3.235$, $p<0.05$), interpersonal and behavioral ($t=2.330$, $p<0.05$), business and management skills ($t=2.908$, $p<0.05$), knowledge of tourism ($t=2.979$, $p<0.05$) and tourism context ($t=5.967$, $p<0.05$). Among these domains, tourism context is found to be a module which requires an increasing attention as it has recorded the highest mean value for level perceived as well as highest mean difference between the levels perceived and level acquired by the participants.

5. Conclusion

The study found that Area Tourist Guide Training Program conducted by the Central Provincial Council and North Central Provincial Council in Sri Lanka has been designed in par with the six dimension model proposed by Chowdhary and Prakash (2009). In fact, the result reveals that the participants of the program understood that six domains focused by the program; practical guiding skills, sensitization, interpersonal and behavioral skills, business and management skills, knowledge of tourism and tourism context, are very much appealed by their profession as a tour guide. The result further indicates that the program had been successful in terms of inculcating knowledge, skill and attitudes of the participants. Need of revisiting the curriculum of the program is also highlighted by the results. More specially, course content of tourism context is appealing some reforms to make it more comprehensive.

In general, tour guides, as one of the main actors in the tourism industry cannot be effective in performing their duties, unless, they have the specific training and necessary skills and competencies to success in their career. The present study was an initial attempt towards the assessing the effectiveness of a tour guide training programs conducted by the two provincial council in Sri Lanka. The study confirmed that such a program would have a significance effect over trainees' knowledge, attitude and skill that are required in the profession. Thus, policy makers design such training programs that are necessary and helpful to creating professional behavior in novice tour guides in the country. Further strengthening exiting programs by introducing comprehensive course contents and focusing wider group of potential tour guides can play an important role towards the sustainable capacity building in the sector.

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