

Examining the Impacts of Professional Competences on the Job Stress of Mandarin Tour Guides in Taiwan

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Abstract

Regarding human resource development in the travel service industry, tour guides' professional competencies may affect their tour guiding-related job stress. Accordingly, this study examines the relationships between professional competencies and job stress among Mandarin tour guides in Taiwan. Study data were gathered from Mandarin tour guide license holders through the Tour Guide Association of Taiwan. Further, the study considered a convenience sample of 315 respondents to test some hypotheses. The study's empirical results indicate that a significantly negative correlation exists between professional competencies and job stress. Nevertheless, the 'Communication & Expression', 'Ability to Operation', and 'Control of Risk Handling' dimensions were found to have the most significant negative effects on job stress for Mandarin tour guides in the Taiwanese tourism industry. The study results are expected to have implications for tour guides' competency development and provide practical contributions to assist travel agencies and relevant associations in effectively strengthening the professional competencies of Mandarin tour guides. Eventually, a balance can be established between Mandarin tour guides' professional competencies and job stress so that relevant practitioners and chairs may create and develop appropriate workplaces for relevant employees in the industry.

Keywords: Mandarin tour guide, professional competence, job stress, travels service industry.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Taiwan has been at the forefront of global travel service industry development. The total number of travellers to Taiwan from Mainland China reached 2,047,051 in 2015 and increased to 11.06 million in 2018 (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2019). Further, visitor arrivals to Taiwan from Mainland China have been more than those from Japan. Moreover, the growth rate of Mandarin tour guides approved in Taiwan increased by 30.12% from 2003 to 2011, and the total number of such guides reached 1,382 in 2018 (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2019). To manage the growing numbers of tourists from Mainland China in Taiwan, we should focus on the employment market of Mainland Chinese tourism and recognise free and independent travellers from China as the main and largest tourism target market in Taiwan. Simultaneously, the increase in the numbers of tourists reveals that the Taiwanese travel service industry is moving ahead in terms of both globalization and localization. Consequently, the Taiwanese tourism service industry, which is characterised by high labour intensity, requires Mandarin tour guides with well-developed specialized techniques and appropriate tactics for stress resistance. To ensure human resource development in the Taiwanese travel service industry, one should consider how tour escorts' professional competencies affect their tour guiding-related job stress. In other words, establishing a balance between the professional competences and job stress of Mandarin tour guides should be a main consideration in the development of the Taiwanese tourism industry.

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Therefore, this study aims to (1) analyse the demographic characteristics of Mandarin tour guides, (2) explore the relationship between professional competences and job stress for these tour guides, and (3) examine the effects of professional competencies on job stress among Mandarin tour guides. Finally, the study's results may significantly contribute to human resource development in the travel service industry.

2. Literature Review

Mandarin tour guides play the important role of helping Mainland Chinese travellers connect with locals in Taiwanese tourism services and respond to the travellers' requests and problems during tours. However, to date, only a few studies have focused on the problems and issues faced by tour leading and guiding professionals; further, most of the surveys on tour escort experiences involve studies on tourist experience and behaviours (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013).

Chen, Siu, Lu, Cooper, and Phillips (2009) discussed the direct and moderating effects of informal social support and tour service professionals' efforts to manage work stress and depression. However, research has often overlooked the emotional experiences of tour guides in favour of the experiences of tourists (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013). Moreover, earlier research attempted to intensify studies on stress resilience and emotional management in tourism settings, with particular emphasis on tour guides (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2013). In other words, for Mandarin tour guides to realize an equilibrium between professional competencies and job stress in the workplace, they should have physical stamina, stress resistance, self-efficacy, guiding and interpretation skills, and coping tactics for crisis and risk management (Shoji, K., Cieslak, R., Smoktunowicz, E., Rogala, A., Benight, C.C., & Luszczyńska, A., 2016).

Nevertheless, research reveals that professional competencies affect job stress among tour guides in the travel industry. Further, some studies revealed that the higher the employees' job stress, the lesser their job satisfaction and affinity for their workplace (Robbins & Coulter, 2005). Moreover, such factors may influence the operations of organizations by enhancing employees' intentions to evade responsibility, lessen participation, change performance, engage in labour strikes or absenteeism, increase turnover, and so on (Behr & Newman, 1978; Robbins & Judge, 2015, 2016; Schuler, 1980). Further, Tsai (2009) and Chiu (2010) indicated that demographic variables, such as years of employment, age, gender, and educational level, can significantly influence employees' professional competencies and job stress levels.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Framework

Thinking the above literature review with its research purposes, the study developed and constructed a framework (see Figure 1). Further, it examined the following hypotheses:

H1. The demographic variables of Mandarin tour guides significantly differ according to professional competency and job stress.

H2. Professional competencies are significantly positively correlated with job stress.

H3. The more favourable a Mandarin tour guide's perception of their professional competence, the weaker the job stress they experience.

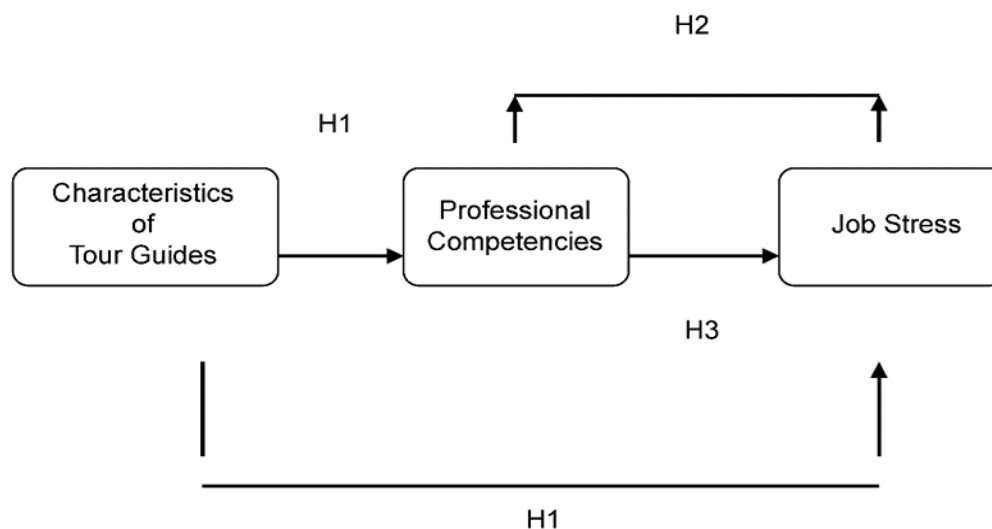


Figure 1 Depiction of the Research Framework

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection procedure involved surveying respondents through face-to-face enquiries and collecting details using fill-in questionnaires, which were distributed through the Tour Guide Association of Taiwan website; the subjects, who were appropriately qualified and possessed the Mandarin Tour Guide certificate/license, responded appropriately.

The main survey was conducted and appropriate data were gathered between September and December 2019. Among 400 filled questionnaires, 315 were selected as the valid sample, with a response rate of 78.75%. Subsequently, the collected data were computed and analysed using demographic analysis, reliability and validity tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), a *t*-test, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

4. Results

As presented in Table 1, the study considered the following characteristics of Mandarin tour guides: gender, age, type of tour guide, educational level, and years of employment. Further, men comprised 63.8% and women 36.2% of the sample. On the other hand, most of the respondents were 41- to 50-year olds (30.2%). In addition, approximately 52.4% of the respondents possessed a college/university degree. However, only 35.6% were employed for 1 to 2 years. In other words, 76.8% of the respondents were freelance tour guides.

Table 1 Characteristics of Respondents

Item	Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	201	63.8
	Female	114	36.2
Age	Under 30	47	14.9
	31–40	80	25.4
	41–50	95	30.2
	Over 51	93	29.5
Type of tour guide	Freelance	242	76.8
	Full-time	73	23.2
Educational level	High School/Vocational School	49	15.6
	Junior College	61	19.3
	University/College	165	52.4
	Graduate School or Higher	40	12.7
Years of employment	Less than 1	77	24.4
	1–2	112	35.6
	3–5	79	25.1
	More than 5	21	14.9

As depicted in Tables 2 and 3, each variable has five underlying dimensions. The five dimensions of professional competences are 'Communication & Expression' [mean (M)=4.11], 'Interpreting Related Knowledge' (M=3.72), 'Capability of Assistance' (M=3.79), 'Ability to Operation' (M=3.92), and 'Control of Risk Handling' (M=3.94). Further, the five dimensions of job stress for Mandarin tour guides in Taiwan are 'Risk of Suddenness' (M=3.31), 'Following Institutional Provisions' (M=3.36), 'Making Visitors Satisfied' (M=4.12), 'Getting Along with Visitors' (M=3.26), and 'Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks' (M=3.67). In this study, all the indicators and dimensions were integrated and developed based on relevant theories and a literature review. Moreover, good instrument content validity was established, and the reliability coefficients of the constructs ranging from 0.7583 to 0.9225 were all well above the 0.70 standard. Hence, the survey instrument's internal consistency was reliable, and the analysed items are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Dimensions of Professional Competencies for Mandarin Tour Guides

Dimension	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
C&E	4.11	0.5661	0.8643
IRK	3.72	0.7528	0.8785
COA	3.79	0.6258	0.8267
ATO	3.92	0.6312	0.7768
CORH	3.94	0.6795	0.7598

Notes: SD, standard deviation; C&E, Communication & Expression; IRK, Interpreting Related Knowledge; COA, Capability of Assistance; ATO, Ability to Operation; CORH, Control of Risk Handling

Table 3 Dimensions of Job Stress for Mandarin Tour Guides

Dimension	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
ROS	3.31	0.5461	0.9225
FIP	3.36	0.7349	0.8798
MVS	4.12	0.6312	0.8456
GAWV	3.26	0.6179	0.7721
BDTCWT	3.67	0.6562	0.7583

Notes: SD, standard deviation; ROS, Risk of Suddenness; FIP, Following Institutional Provisions; MVS, Making Visitors Satisfied; GAWV, Getting along with Visitors; BDTCWT, Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks

Tables 4–7 depict partially significant associations between respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of professional competencies and job stress. According to Table 4, 'Interpreting Related Knowledge' was significantly differentiated towards 'Gender'; further, 'Control of Risk Handling' was significantly differentiated toward 'Type of Tour Guide'. In Table 5, 'Communication & Expression', 'Interpreting Related Knowledge', 'Capability of Assistance', and 'Ability to Operation' were significantly differentiated towards 'Educational Level'; moreover, 'Communication & Expression', 'Interpreting Related Knowledge', 'Capability of Assistance', and 'Ability to Operation' were significantly differentiated towards 'Years of Employment' as well. As shown in Table 6, 'Following Institutional Provisions' and 'Getting Along with Visitors' had significant differences with 'Type of Tour Guide'. Nevertheless, as presented in Table 7, 'Risk of Suddenness', 'Following Institutional Provisions', 'Getting along with Visitors', and 'Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks' were significantly differentiated towards 'Educational Level'. On the other hand, 'Following Institutional Provisions', 'Making Visitors Satisfied', and 'Getting Along with Visitors' had significant differences with 'Age'; further, 'Making Visitors Satisfied' was significantly differentiated towards 'Years of Employment'.

Table 4 Results of *t*-Test on Demographic Characteristics and Professional Competencies

	C&E	IRK	COA	ATO	CORH
Gender	−0.766 (0.433)	2.311* (0.032)	0.829 (0.398)	1.545 (0.136)	1.671 (0.092)
Type of tour guide	1.024 (0.331)	1.259 (0.213)	1.547 (0.132)	-0.190 (0.861)	1.988* (0.051)

Notes: C&E, Communication & Expression; IRK, Interpreting Related Knowledge; COA, Capability of Assistance; ATO, Ability to Operate; CORH, Control of Risk Handling; * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; IRK vs Gender: Male>Female; and CORHF vs Type of Tour Guide: Freelance>Full-time

Table 5 Results of One-Way Analysis of Variance on Demographic Characteristics and Professional Competencies

	C&E	IRK	COA	ATO	CORH
Educational Level	3.924**	7.283**	3.192*	7.912**	2.341
Age	0.531	1.483	1.039	0.316	1.947
Years of Employment	2.814*	6.275**	4.941**	4.649**	1.738

Notes: C&E, Communication & Expression; IRK, Interpreting Related Knowledge; COA, Capability of Assistance; ATO, Ability to Operation; CORH, Control of Risk Handling; * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; **Professional Competencies and Educational Level:** (1) C&E vs Educational Level: Graduate School > Junior College, (2) IRK vs Educational Level: Graduate School/University or College > Junior College, (3) COA vs Educational Level: Graduate School > Junior College, (4) ATO vs Educational Level: Graduate School > University or College > Junior College; Graduate School > Vocational School/High School; **Professional Competencies and Years of Employment:** (1) C&E vs Years of Employment: Significant difference, (2) IRK vs Years of Employment: More than 5 years > Less than 1 year & 1–2 years, (3) COA vs Years of Employment: More than 5 years > 1–2 years, (3) COA vs Years of Employment: More than 5 years > 1–2 years

Table 6 Results of *t*-Test on Demographic Characteristics and Job Stress

	ROS	FIP	MVS	GAWV	BDTCWT
Gender	-0.520 (0.605)	-0.988 (0.316)	0.053 (0.943)	-0.178 (0.849)	1.632 (0.112)
Type of Tour Guide	-1.432 (0.163)	-3.187** (0.005)	-0.217 (0.827)	-2.659** (0.007)	0.338 (0.725)

Notes: ROS, Risk of Suddenness; FIP, Following Institutional Provisions; MVS, Making Visitors Satisfied; GAWV, Getting along with Visitors; BDTCWT, Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; FIP vs Type of Tour Guide: Freelance > Full-time; GAWV vs Type of Tour Guide: Full-time > Freelance

Table 7 Results of One-Way ANOVA on Demographic Characteristics and Job Stress

	ROS	FIP	MVS	GAWV	BDTCWT
Educational Level	13.081**	7.518**	0.809	2.949*	8.029**
Age	0.298	8.557**	6.713**	2.798*	0.342
Years of employment	0.319	1.765	3.634*	0.922	0.379

Notes: ROS, Risk of Suddenness; FIP, Following Institutional Provisions; MVS, Making Visitors Satisfied; GAWV, Getting along with Visitors; BDTCWT, Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks; * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; **Job Stress and Educational Level:** (1) ROS vs Educational Level: Graduate School, University or College, and Junior College > High School/Vocational school, (2) FIP vs Educational Level: Graduate School, University or College, and Junior College > High School/Vocational School, (3) GAWV vs Educational Level: University or College > High School/Vocational School, (4) BDTCWT vs Educational Level: Graduate School & University or College > High School/Vocational School; **Job Stress and Age:** (1) FIP vs Age: Under 30 years > 31–40 years, 41–50 years, and Over 51 years, (2) MVS vs Age: Under 30 years & Over 51 years > 31–40 years, (3) GAWV vs Age: Significant difference; **Job Stress and Years of Employment:** (1) MVS vs Years of Employment: 1 year > More than 5 years.

This study performed Pearson's correlation analysis across professional competencies and job stress levels, and Table 8 depicts the results (Table 8). Further, most of the professional competences of Mandarin tour guides were significantly correlated with job stress. In other words, a significantly negative correlation existed between the tour guides' professional competencies and job stress.

Table 8 Results of Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Professional Competencies and Job Stress

Dimension	C&E	IRK	COA	ATO	CORH
ROS	0.313**	0.151*	0.241**	0.183*	-0.327**
FIP	0.229**	0.147*	0.281**	0.170*	-0.288**
MVS	-0.022	0.182*	0.210**	0.174*	-0.123
GAWV	0.275**	0.163*	0.231**	0.181*	-0.179*
BDTCWT	-0.058	0.011	-0.088	-0.014	-0.173*

Notes: C&E, Communication & Expression; IRK, Interpreting Related Knowledge; COA, Capability of Assistance; ATO, Ability to Operation; CORH, Control of Risk Handling; ROS, Risk of Suddenness; FIP, Following Institutional Provisions; MVS, Making Visitors Satisfied; GAWV, Getting along with Visitors; BDTCWT, Being Dedicated to Coping with Tasks; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

Table 9 presents the results of the ANOVA that tested the regression model's ability to significantly predict the values of the outcome variable. The ANOVA enabled the prediction of outcome variable values, $F(5, 25) = 2.005$, $p = .021$. The ANOVA illustrated significance, and Table 10 depicts the computed coefficients for the regression model.

The finding illustrated that Communication & Expression ($t = 2.999, p = .005$), Ability to Operation ($t = 3.385, p = .001$), and Control of Risk Handling ($t = 3.152, p = .003$) dimensions significantly and negatively predicted job stress using the following formula: adjusted $R^2 = (0.496)^2 + (0.538)^2 + (0.501)^2 = 0.786$. Moreover, its variance inflation factor ($VIF=1, VIF < 10$) is acceptable and there is no multicollinearity. This finding revealed that the three dimensions of professional competence for Mandarin tour guides can significantly and negatively predict job stress within the industry.

Table 9 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Professional Competencies and Job Stress

Source	df	SS	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Model	5	4.247	0.8494	2.005	0.021*
Error	25	10.593	0.42372		
Total	30	14.840			

Notes: df, degree of freedom; SS, Sum of Square; MS, Mean of Square; F, F Value_

* $p < 0.05$

Table 10 Professional Competencies for Mandarin Local Tour Guides That Significantly Predict Job Stress

Factor	Dimension	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
PC 1	C&E	-0.496	2.9	0.00
PC 2	IRK	-0.175	1.1	0.29
PC 3	COA	0.152	0.7	0.43
PC 4	ATO	-0.538	3.3	0.00
PC 5	CORH	-0.501	3.1	0.00

Notes: C&E, Communication & Expression; IRK, Interpreting Related Knowledge; COA, Capability of Assistance; ATO, Ability to Operation; CORH, Control of Risk Handling; PC, Professional Competence.

* $p < 0.05$

5. Conclusions and Suggestion

In this study, analysis revealed that most of the subjects had an employment experience between 1 and 2 years and were in the middle-aged to senior age groups. Further, the majority of respondents were freelance tour guides who were planning to transfer to another career position and realise career development since they had already entered middle age. In addition, we found that Taiwanese Mandarin tour guides had a limited ability to interpret and guide relevant knowledge and diffidence in describing antiques and cultures. Moreover, most were freelance, rather than full-time, tour guides.

Further, our analysis of the professional competencies and characteristics of Mandarin tour guides revealed that male guides who utilised various techniques to interpret and guide relevant knowledge were more advanced than their female counterparts, and the techniques utilised by freelance Mandarin tour guides to manage the risks and crises associated with suddenness were superior to those used by full-time guides. Nevertheless, with respect to job stress, the dimension 'Making Visitors Satisfied' ($M = 4.12$) scored higher than the other five dimensions (the mean score average ranged from 3.26 to 3.67). As depicted by the aforementioned findings and the relevant practical observations in the industry, more insight is required into the perceptions of Mandarin tour guides, whose stress resistance towards their workplace should be superior to that of the proletariat. However, the study also reveals that junior Mandarin tour escorts become more stressed and experience higher pressures than seniors; senior Mandarin tour guides are, in general, more qualified and have higher professional competencies and knowledge. On the other hand, it may be specifically identified that the dimensions of professional competences for Mandarin tour guides are significantly negatively correlated with job stress. Furthermore, the study revealed that the dimensions of professional competencies for Mandarin tour guides can significantly and negatively (but partially) predict job stress. In other words, professional competence and job stress are significantly negatively correlated. The lesser the probability of a Mandarin tour escort in Taiwan using professional competencies as a coping strategy, the greater the negative effect on her or his job stress. Hence, the enhancement of the professional competencies of Mandarin tour guides can help address and reduce job stress in the workplace.

The current study's findings are considerably valuable and may emphasise the reinforcement of work efficiency, stimulate the potential, and raise the competitiveness of Mandarin tour guides in the travel service industry in Taiwan. Further, due to differences in consumer behaviour styles and requests regarding tour planning for Chinese tourists, Mandarin tour guides currently find it very difficult to get along with tourists and satisfy their needs. Moreover, Mandarin tour guides must manage the complaints and emergent incidents and cater to the wishes of tourists and visitors; however, the relevant abilities or capabilities must be performed by the Mandarin tour guides. Moreover, Mandarin tour guides perform a higher number of tasks and have to handle more pressurized accountabilities than other industry employees. Nevertheless, to establish exceptional prestige and image for the industry, it is crucial to enhance the quality and reinforce the professional competencies of Mandarin tour guides. In conclusion, efficiently reducing the job stress of Mandarin tour guides through various trainings and effectively increasing the opportunities for on-the-job training should be the main consideration of the travel service industry.

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