

Benefiting from intercultural competence: A phenomenological research on tourist guides*

Kültürlerarası yeterlilikten faydalanmak: Turist rehberleri üzerine fenomenolojik bir araştırma

Gönderim Tarihi / Received: 20.05.2023

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 08.12.2023

Doi: [10.31795/baunsobed.1299958](https://doi.org/10.31795/baunsobed.1299958)

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the concept, dimensions, and causes of intercultural competencies from the perspective of tourist guides. A phenomenological research approach was used to explore how tourist guides' intercultural competences emerge in intercultural experiences. Using purposive sampling, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourist guides with international experiences until saturation occurred. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings suggest three dimensions, namely, cultural awareness & cognitive flexibility, cultural sensitivity and emotional flexibility, and cultural resourcefulness & behavioral flexibility are predominant in tourist guides' intercultural experiences. This study of exploring tourist guides' experiences is expected to provide a useful framework and contribute to a broader understanding of intercultural competence in tourist guiding.

Keywords: Intercultural interaction, Intercultural competence, Phenomenological research, Tourist guides

ÖZ: Bu makale, kültürlerarası yeterliliklerin kavramını, boyutlarını ve nedenlerini turist rehberlerinin bakış açısından araştırmaktadır. Turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterliliklerinin kültürlerarası deneyimlerde nasıl ortaya çıktığını keşfetmek için fenomenolojik bir araştırma yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Amaçlı örnekleme kullanılarak, doygunluk oluşana kadar uluslararası deneyime sahip kıdemli turist rehberleri ile dokuz yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yapılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tematik içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, kültürel farkındalık ve bilişsel esneklik, kültürel duyarlılık ve duygusal esneklik ve kültürel beceriklilik ve davranışsal esneklik olmak üzere üç boyutun turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası deneyimlerinde baskın olduğunu göstermektedir. Turist rehberlerinin deneyimlerini keşfetmeye yönelik bu çalışmanın yararlı bir çerçeve sunması ve turist rehberliğinde kültürlerarası yeterliliğin daha geniş bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürlerarası etkileşim, Kültürlerarası yeterlilik, Fenomenolojik araştırma, Turist rehberleri

* Bu çalışma Anadolu Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araştırma Projeleri Birimi tarafından 1808E308 proje numarasıyla desteklenmiştir.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Literatür taraması

Kültürlerarası iletişim, turist rehberlerinin profesyonel yaşamlarının her dakikasına nüfuz etmektedir. Turist rehberi, iletişim sürecinde baskın bir aktör olarak durmaktadır. Turist rehberleri profesyonel rollerini icra ederken tüm iletişim süreçlerinde kültürlerarası yeterliliklerden yararlanmaktadırlar. Bu yeterlilikler profesyonel yaşamlarının bileşenleridir (Lin vd., 2017).

Taylor (1994), kültürlerarası yeterliliği, bir kişinin farklı kültürleri veya farklı kültürlerin üyelerini anlamak ve bunlarla uygun şekilde etkileşimde bulunmak için sahip olduğu kültürel bilgi ve davranışsal beceriler olarak tanımlamaktadır. Zakaria (2000) bunu, başkalarının kültürünü öğrenme ve anlama, o kültürle ilgili unsurlara ilişkin bir anlayış geliştirme ve olaylara başkalarının bakış açısından bakma ve değerlendirme becerisi kazanma olarak açıklamaktadır. Daha genel bir tanım, kültürlerarası etkileşimi takiben düşünme ve hareket etme yeteneğidir (Hammer vd., 2003: 422).

Kültürlerarası bir ortamda, kültürler arası sorunları yönetmede uygun ve etkili yeterlilikler esastır. Herhangi bir organizasyonda kolaylaştırıcı rolü üstlenen kişiler, bu çalışmadaki turist rehberlerine benzer şekilde, kendilerinden istenen görevleri yerine getirmekle yükümlüdür. Ancak Bennett'e (2012) göre, uygun ve etkili bir kolaylaştırıcıyı neyin oluşturduğunu açıklamak zordur, çünkü kriterler kültürel bağlama göre değişir. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmada incelenen kültürlerarası yeterlilik kavramı turist rehberleri için önemli bir çalışma konusu olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Dinamik ortamlarda turist rehberliğine ilişkin kültürlerarası yeterliliklerin incelendiği çalışmalar oldukça azdır. Ayrıca, ilgili literatürde sözü geçen modellerden yararlanılarak Türkiye'deki turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterliliklerini derinlemesine araştıran bir çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır. Konuyu net bir şekilde anlayabilmek için bu çalışma, turist rehberlerinin deneyimlerini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Buradan hareketle, bu çalışmada Türkiye'deki turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterlilikleri literatürdeki modellerden yararlanarak femomenolojik bir yaklaşımla derinlemesine incelenmek istenmiştir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, turist rehberlerinin turistler ve turizm endüstrisindeki diğer paydaşlarla etkileşimleri sırasında kültürlerarası yeterliliklerini araştırmak için fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım kullanmaktadır. Fenomenolojik araştırmalarda, bir olgunun her katılımcıya göre nasıl değiştiğini keşfetmek ve farklı bakış açılarını bir araya getirmek için kullanılan maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme türü de dahil olmak üzere katılımcıları seçmek için amaçlı örnekleme kullanılır (Ersoy, 2017: 108-110). Araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda, katılımcıların seçiminde temel kriter turist rehberlerinin yabancı turistlerle çalışmış olmalarıdır. Çalışma katılımcıları, turist rehberlerinin mesleklerini icra etmeleri için bir meslek odasına kayıtlı olmalarını zorunlu kılan Türkiye'deki rehberlik mevzuatına göre seçilmiştir.

Katılımcıların kültürlerarası deneyimlerini ve yeterliliklerini nasıl algıladıklarını keşfetmek için yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu geliştirilmiştir. 20.02.2019 - 15.05.2019 tarihleri arasında Antalya'da dokuz katılımcı ile yüz yüze görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler ortalama 30 dakika sürmüş ve veri doygunluğuna ulaşıldığında sonlandırılmıştır, yani yeni veriler araştırma konusuna ek iç görüş sağlamamıştır.

Araştırmacılar tarafından, kodlama sürecinde tutarlılığı ve doğruluğu sağlamak için her toplantıdan sonra çevrimiçi tartışmalar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerin ses kayıtlarının transkripsiyonları araştırmacılar tarafından kontrol edilmiştir. Kodlama iki ayrı ekip tarafından yapılmış ve kodlar ortaklaştırıldıktan sonra her araştırmacı tarafından ayrı ayrı değerlendirilmiştir. Temaların belirlenmesinde tümevarımsal yaklaşımdan yararlanılmıştır. Nihai kodlar ve temalar toplu tartışma ile belirlenmiştir.

Bulgular

Turist rehberlerinin görüşleri üç ana temanın ortaya çıkmasına katkıda bulunmuştur: Kültürel Farkındalık ve Bilişsel Esneklik, Kültürel Hassasiyet ve Duygusal Esneklik ve Kültürel Beceriklilik ve Davranışsal Esneklik. Araştırmada belirlenen kod sayısı ise 33'tür.

Turist rehberlerinin görüşlerine göre kültürlerarası yeterliliğe sahip rehberler, farklı kültürleri etkileyebilen, farklılıkların farkında olan ve farklı değerleri bünyesinde barındırabilen rehberlerdir. Ancak rehberlerin kültürlerarası yeterliliğe sahip olabilmesi için farklı kültürlerin ihtiyaçlarını anladığının farkında olması, farklı kültürleri sürekli öğrenmeye istekli olması ve farklı kültürlerle önyargısız yaklaşabilmesi gerekmektedir.

Katılımcılar, kültürlerarası yeterliliğe sahip rehberlerin, farklı kültürlerle etkileşim öncesi ve sonrasında pozitif duygudaşlık kuran, farklılıklara saygılı, kültürel açıdan hoşgörülü ve empatik rehberler olması gerektiği yönünde görüş bildirmişlerdir. Katılımcılar ayrıca farklı kültürlerle karşı tarafsız bir yaklaşım sergileyebilen ve onlarla iyi ilişkiler geliştirebilen rehberlerin kültürlerarası yeterlilikleri olan rehberler olarak ele alınabileceğini belirtmişlerdir.

Rehberlere göre kültürlerarası yeterliliğe sahip rehberler, kültürlerarası durumlara uygun davranışlar geliştirebilmeli ve grup içinde ortak bir dil oluşturabilmelidir. Ayrıca rehberlerin sözlü ve sözsüz iletişim yeteneğine (beden dili) sahip olması, etkili ve uygun iletişim becerileri geliştirmesi gerekir. Yeterliliğe sahip rehberler mesleki açıdan deneyimli, sempatik ve arkadaş canlısı davranışlar sergileyen, farklı kültürlerle uyum sağlayabilen ve kendi kültürlerini ifade edebilen kişiler olmalıdır. Bazı rehberler, yeterliliğe sahip bir rehberin kültürel duyarlılık geliştirmesi, sinerjik becerilere sahip olması, duyguları yönetmesi, başkalarını etkilemesi ve empati geliştirmesi gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Turist rehberlerinin açıklık-şeffaflık ilkesini benimsemeleri, aktif dinlemeleri, esnek ve kontrollü olmaları gerektiğini ifade etmişlerdir. Bazı rehberler farklı kültürlerin taleplerine cevap vermenin gerekliliği, özgüven ve öz farkındalık, bilgiyi farklı açılardan yorumlayabilme becerisi gibi konularda görüşler sunmuştur.

Sonuç ve tartışma

Turist rehberliği ile ilgili dinamik ortamlarda kültürlerarası yeterlilik çalışmaları nadirdir. Ayrıca bu çalışma, daha net bir anlayışa sahip olmak için turist rehberlerinin deneyimlerini ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Kültürel farklılıklar bir genelleme olsa da kültürel öz farkındalık bağlamında rehberlerin karşılaşacağı en yaygın kültürlerin farklı değer ve beklentilerini anlamak önemlidir. Bu, bir turist rehberinin hedef kitlesini anlamının önemli bir parçasıdır (O'Brien ve Ham, 2012: 11). Farklı kültürlerde eş zamanlı ve ardışık kültürel yorumlamalar yapan turist rehberleri, turistlerin farkındalığını arttırmayı, öğrenmelerini ve beğenmelerini teşvik etmeyi amaçlar. Ayrıca, turistlerin kültür, miras, koruma ve manzara için empati geliştirmelerine ve ziyaret edilen yerleri anlamalarına yardımcı olmayı ilke edinir (Stewart vd., 1998).

Turist rehberleri ayrıca turistlerin grup ilgilerine odaklanmalı ve iletişimsel rolleri bağlamında doğru bilgileri iletmelidir. İlginç seyahat hikayelerinin paylaşılması, samimi ve eğlenceli bir atmosfer yaratarak turistler için olumlu bir deneyime yol açabilir. Turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterlilik kazanabilmeleri için farklı kültürlerle ilişkin bilgi, beceri ve deneyim kazanmaları gerekmektedir.

Araştırma yoluyla turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterlilikleri için ölçekler geliştirmek, etkili kültürlerarası iletişim için gerekli olan bilgi, beceri ve tutumların belirlenmesine yardımcı olabilir. Karma araştırma modellerinin kullanılması, kültürlerarası yeterlilikleri etkileyen çeşitli faktörlerin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını sağlayabilir. Ayrıca, turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterliliklerine ilişkin turistlerin beklentilerini ve bu yeterliliklerin nasıl algılanıp elde edildiğini incelemek önemlidir. Kültürlerarası yeterliliğin turist rehberlerinin performansı, turist memnuniyeti ve destinasyon imajı üzerindeki etkisini test etmek için ampirik araştırmalar da yapılabilir. Turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yeterliliklerini geliştirmek için yurt dışında eğitim programları düzenlenerek deneyimsel yeterlilik kazandırılabilir, farklı kültürlerle etkileşim sürecinde uygun davranış, tutum ve becerileri sergilemeleri sağlanabilir. Ayrıca turist rehberlerinin kültürlerarası yetkinliklerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmak için farklılıkları yönetme bağlamında yaratıcı drama temelli eğitimler verilebilir.

Introduction

Tourist guides have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022), expectations, service quality (Kuo et al., 2018), and the reputation of the enterprise (Bahang et al., 2018). Tourist guides play a mediating role (Huang, 2011), among transportation, accommodation, and tourism attractions, and as such, they require professional competencies that are an integral part of travel products (Tsaur & Teng, 2017). Therefore to achieve a complete performance, tourist guides need to possess multiple competencies simultaneously. Additionally, the tourist guide interacts with tourists from various cultural backgrounds, making intercultural communication and interaction an essential aspect of their profession.

As professionals who interact with intercultural differences, the interaction between the tourist and the guide becomes significant in achieving the tourism experience (Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008). Intercultural competencies cover all professional strategies and roles of tourist guides. It is crucial to understand how tourist guides experience their intercultural competencies and the places and conditions affecting such experience, as they are in continuous interaction with all tourist groups, particularly with foreign tourists. However, there are limited empirical studies examining the intercultural competencies of tourist guides (Tsaur & Tu, 2019), and to the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first studies addressing the individual experiences of the guides from their point of view. Besides, it presents a theoretical model to comprehend the dimensions of intercultural tourist guides and the dynamic relationships among these dimensions.

There is a large body of literature investigating the dimensions and qualities of intercultural competence, and various models have been developed to measure it (Paige, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009; Holt & Seki, 2012). These models suggest that intercultural competence is a complex concept that requires the development of specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills to achieve desired internal and external outcomes. Although these models do not directly examine tourist guides' cultural competence, they provide a useful framework for this study to explore tourist guides' experiences and contribute to a broader understanding of intercultural competence.

There are very few studies examining intercultural competencies regarding tourist guiding in dynamic environments. Additionally, no study has been found that thoroughly investigates the intercultural competencies of tourist guides in Antalya (Turkey) using the models mentioned in the relevant literature. To understand the subject clearly, this study highlights the experiences of tourist guides. Based on this, this study aimed to examine the intercultural competencies of tourist guides in Antalya (Turkey) in depth with a phenomenological approach, using models in the literature.

Literature review

Intercultural competencies

Competence is defined as a set of skills or behaviors. However, this definition is context-specific, and what constitutes a valuable competency in one context may not be valuable in another. Competencies also change over time. Therefore, setting competencies that are applicable in any condition without prior criteria is challenging. Spitzberg (1997: 380) suggests two criteria, appropriateness and effectiveness, for determining the validity of competencies. Appropriateness refers to the norms, expectations, and rules that are appropriate for all parties to a relationship, provided they do not cause conflicts. Effectiveness means achieving valued aims and awards based on cost and alternatives.

Precedent studies suggest that national and ethnic values play a significant role in shaping human behavior and these values cannot be universally applied in every culture (Pizam, 1998). Triandis (1979) and Brislin et al. (1983) have emphasized the importance of understanding how cultural differences impact interactions. In addition, they argue that individuals who communicate with people from different cultures must adapt effectively to the cultural settings, and comprehend the socio-cultural environment they live in (including language and symbols used, perception-interpretation, behavioral patterns, value judgments, beliefs, etc.). Culture shapes the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of groups and individuals within them. Values form the core of a culture when its layers are analyzed (Hofstede, 1991: 5-10; Hofstede, 2001). At the core of culture is communication.

Intercultural communication permeates every single minute of tourist guides' professional lives. The tourist guide stands as a dominant actor in the communication process. Tourist guides benefit from intercultural competencies in all communication processes when playing their professional roles. These competencies are the constituents of their professional lives (Lin et al., 2017).

Researchers have defined intercultural competence in various ways, including cultural competence, international competence, cross-cultural competence, multicultural competence, intercultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, global competence, intercultural effectiveness, intercultural literacy, global citizenship, and intercultural harmony (Deardorff, 2004: 32; Sinicrope et al., 2007: 2). Taylor (1994) describes intercultural competence as a person's cultural knowledge and behavioral skills to understand and interact appropriately with different cultures or members of different cultures. Zakaria (2000) explains it as learning and understanding the culture of others, developing an understanding of elements related to that culture, and gaining the ability to look at and evaluate events from others' perspectives. A more general definition is the ability to think and act following intercultural interaction (Hammer et al., 2003: 422). Similarly, Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) and Bennett (2012) describe intercultural competence as appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who represent different affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations in cultural contexts. Cultural differences often present obstacles to cultural competence, as these differences are often ignored or rejected.

From a global perspective, cultural differences among communities lead to differences in thinking, lifestyle, and communication styles. As it is not possible to eliminate these differences, understanding and internalizing different values is the key to effective cross-cultural communication (Erdem, 1996). In this context, intercultural competencies are the main factor that individuals and communities encounter when interacting with different cultures. For tourist guides, encountering diverse cultures is a fundamental requirement of their profession.

In an intercultural setting, appropriate and effective competencies are essential in managing cross-cultural issues. Individuals who play a facilitator role in any organization, similar to tourist guides in this study, are obliged to provide the duties required of them. However, according to Bennett (2012), describing what constitutes an effective and appropriate facilitator is difficult because the criteria vary depending on the cultural context. Therefore, the concept of intercultural competence investigated in this study emerges as an important subject of study for tourist guides.

There is a body of literature exploring the dimensions and qualifications of intercultural competence, and various models have been developed to measure it (Paige, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009; Holt & Seki, 2012). Ruben (1976) and Ruben and Kealey (1979) propose seven dimensions of intercultural competence, including respect, interaction attitude, information orientation, empathy, flexibility, interaction management, and tolerance for uncertainty. Byram and Risager (1999) and Risager (2007) suggest intercultural competence models based on their European experiences, with Byram proposing a five-factor model and Risager defining 10 dimensions with a focus on linguistic competence.

Other studies, such as the Intercultural Competencies Assessment (INCA) project and the International Profiler project by WorldWork, identify six and ten competency dimensions, respectively. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) study identified four dimensions, and the process model of intercultural competence by Deardorff (2011) covers attitudes, knowledge, and skills. All of these models suggest that intercultural competence is a complex concept, requiring the development of specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills to achieve desired internal and external results. While these models do not directly examine the cultural competencies of tourist guides, they provide a useful framework for this study to explore tourist guides' experiences and contribute to the broader understanding of intercultural competence.

Methodology

Research model

This study employs a phenomenological approach to investigate the intercultural competencies of tourist guides during their interactions with tourists and other stakeholders in the tourism industry. The aim is to explore how these competencies are manifested in these intercultural experiences. The phenomenological approach is used to examine how individuals perceive events and interactions in specific situations, creating a conceptual understanding of their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007: 25-26). This approach allows for a focus on the participant's own experiences, as opposed to external observations (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, phenomenological research typically seeks to understand the perspectives of a community or subgroup, rather than individuals (Lu & Chen, 2011: 276). Central to this approach is the exploration of individuals' perceptions, emotions, memories, and interpretations of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002: 104). The reason for using the phenomenological approach in the study is that this approach is an approach that allows individuals to express their perspective on a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience a phenomenon.

Participants

In phenomenological research employs purposeful sampling to select participants, including the maximum variation sampling type which is used to explore how a phenomenon changes depending on each participant and to gather diverse perspectives (Ersoy, 2017: 108-110). For this reason, purposeful and criterion sampling was used in the research. In line with the purpose of the research, the main criterion in the selection of the participants is that the tourist guides have worked with foreign tourists. Working with foreign tourists is also a key criterion for participant selection, as they must have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009).

Selection of the participants

The study participants were selected by the guidance legislation in Turkey, which mandates that tourist guides be registered with a professional chamber to practice their profession. In Turkey, there are 13 vocational chambers of tourist guides operating under the Tourist Guides Association (Turist Rehberleri Birliği, 2020). For this study, participants were selected from those registered with the Chamber of Antalya Tourist Guides (Antalya Turist Rehberleri Odası, 2020), with the permission of the board of directors of the ARO. The reason why the participants are limited to Antalya is that two of the researchers work in Antalya. Additional participants were recruited based on suggestions from the tourist guides themselves. The majority of participants had voluntarily conducted seminars at Akdeniz University Faculty of Tourism every spring semester as part of the course “Specialization in Guidance-208” at the bachelor’s degree level. Informal interviews were conducted with the participants before and after the seminar, and they were invited to participate in the research. The scope and framework of the research were explained to the participants, and verbal consent was obtained after specifying the legal and ethical frameworks related to the research.

Characteristics of participants

The participants’ real names are not mentioned in the study. The participants are coded as K1, K2, and K9. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1: Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Educational status	Professional experience	Guidance language	Nations the guide works with
K1	Male	49	Master’s Degree	20 Year	English	Any English-speaking nation
K2	Male	56	Bachelor’s Degree	33 Year	German	German, Austrian, Swiss
K3	Male	57	Master’s Degree	32 years	English	Any English-speaking nation
K4	Female	73	Bachelor’s Degree	43 years	English, French, Spanish, Italian	All nations

K5	Male	52	Master's Degree	22 years	Russian, Bulgarian	Russian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani, Turkic Republics
K6	Male	68	Master's Degree	20 years	English	British, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealander, North countries
K7	Female	53	Bachelor's Degree	30 years	English, Italian	Turkish, Italian, English-speaking nations
K8	Male	33	Bachelor's Degree	10 years	English	American, Australian, New Zealander, Canadian
K9	Male	34	Master's Degree	7 years	English	Turkish-speaking and English-speaking nations

Upon analyzing the characteristics of the participants, it was found that they have attained educational degrees at the bachelor's and master's levels. In comparison to other professional groups in Turkey, tourist guides represent an educated segment of society. The participants in this study are primarily experienced tourist guides who have been working in the profession. This aspect of their background makes them well-suited to provide valuable insights into intercultural competencies when working with international tourists in Turkey. All but one of the participants permanently reside in Antalya, while four of them also work as faculty members. The participants possess diverse areas of expertise; K1 specializes in overseas tours and archeology, K2 in faith tourism, K3 in anthropology, K4 in linguistics, K5 in trekking and nature tourism, K6 in the Canakkale-Troia Region, K7 in Europe tours as an outgoing guide, K8 in cultural assets of Istanbul, and K9 in the Antalya Region.

Data collection process and data analysis

A semi-structured interview form was developed to explore how the participants perceive their intercultural experiences and competencies (see ANNEX-1). The form was created by the researchers and revised based on the existing literature on intercultural competencies. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine participants in Antalya between 20.02.2019 and 15.05.2019. The interviews lasted for an average of 30 minutes and were terminated once data saturation was reached, meaning that new data did not provide additional insights into the research topic.

Throughout the data collection process, the researchers also followed the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of the participants towards their profession during the seminars they conducted as part of the "Specialization in Guidance-208" course. Non-systematic observations were made during these seminars. Additionally, the researchers examined articles, books, and the websites of professional chambers related to the guidance profession in Turkey.

Research meetings were also held as part of the study, including online interviews, face-to-face interviews, and electronic correspondence. Audio recordings of these meetings were transcribed, and the congruence between the transcripts and voice recordings was verified. The data collected from these meetings are stored digitally.

Trustworthiness

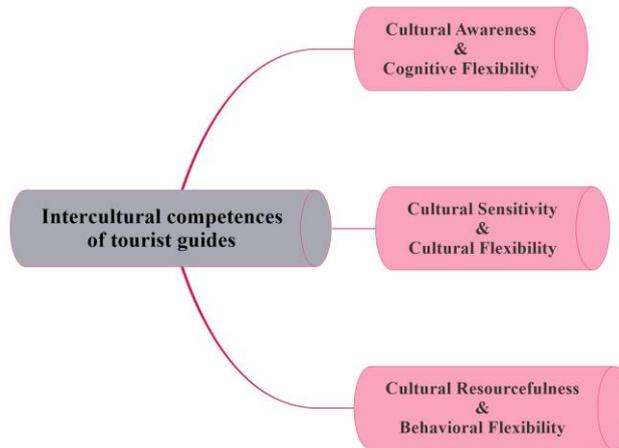
Creswell's (2009: 190-191) recommendations were followed in this study to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. A trustworthiness committee consisting of four experienced researchers in qualitative research was established to review every step of the research through electronic correspondence. Two of the researchers were also tourist guides, and three had publications on cultural differences and intercultural competencies in indexed journals. After the interview questions were prepared, they were structured in consultation with six different experts working in the tourism guidance department, three of whom were also tourist guides. The researchers held online discussions after each meeting to ensure consistency and accuracy in the coding process. The transcriptions of the voice recordings of the interviews were checked by the researchers. The coding was done by two separate teams, and after commonizing the codes, they were evaluated separately by each researcher. Inductive approach was used to determine the themes. The final codes and themes were determined by collective discussion. Inductive approach was used to determine the themes.

This study is among the studies that do not require ethics committee approval due to the use of research data before 2020.

Findings

The tourist guides' opinions contributed to the emergence of three main themes: Cultural Awareness & Cognitive Flexibility, Cultural Sensitivity & Emotional Flexibility, and Cultural Resourcefulness & Behavioral Flexibility (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Intercultural competences of tourist guides



After conducting a content analysis of the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, three themes and 33 codes were identified. Table 2 presents these themes and codes.

Table 2: Themes and codes

Theme	Code √	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9
Cultural Awareness & Cognitive Flexibility	Understanding the ability to affect different cultures		√	√					√	
	Awareness of differences (informational cultural awareness)	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
	Incorporation of different values			√	√				√	
	Awareness on understanding the needs of different cultures (mindfulness)			√				√		
	The eagerness to learn different cultures continuously (interest-discovery)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
	Tolerance to uncertainty									
	Unprejudicedness				√	√		√		√
Cultural Sensitivity & Cultural Flexibility	Positive Affection Towards Different Cultures Before Interaction		√	√		√	√		√	√
	Positive Affection After Interaction			√						
	Respect for differences	√	√			√				√
	Cultural empathy	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
	Cultural tolerance			√	√			√	√	
	Impartiality (Geocentrism)			√		√		√		√
	Ability to develop good relationships with different cultures		√	√					√	
Cultural Resourcefulness & Behavioral Flexibility	Developing behaviors suitable for intercultural situation		√		√	√	√	√		√
	Affection	√								
	Ability to create a common language	√		√			√		√	
	Effective listening ability								√	
	Verbal Communication competence			√					√	

Non-Verbal Communication competence (body language)	√		√	√				√	
Developing effective and appropriate communication skills			√				√	√	√
Professional experience (knowledge-background)		√	√				√		
Sympathetic and friendly behavior			√						
Ability to express one's own culture			√			√	√	√	
Developing cultural sensitivity	√		√					√	√
Synergistic skill (Developing teamwork skills with different cultures)				√					√
Emotion management (emotional strength)			√	√					√
Openness-transparency	√								
Adaptability		√	√	√	√		√		√
Developing the ability to empathize		√			√				√
Flexible behavior		√							
Potential to respond to requests of different cultures		√	√						
Ability to remain calm-controlled		√			√		√		
Self confidence-self awareness	√	√						√	√
Ability to interpret information from different perspectives		√			√		√	√	

Cultural awareness & cognitive flexibility

Based on the opinions of the tourist guides, the guides with intercultural competence are the guides who can influence different cultures, aware of the differences, and incorporate different values. However, for the guides to have intercultural competence, they should be aware of understanding the needs of different cultures, be eager to learn different cultures continuously, and be able to approach without prejudices towards different cultures (Table 3).

Table 3: Participants' opinions

<i>Awareness of differences (informational cultural awareness)</i>	K1: 'I consider them my guests and I believe that I should make preparations as if a guest will come to my home. Because every guest has their specific behavior patterns based on their national characteristics. They have their style of thinking.' K3: 'The guide will not only be equipped with Turkish culture, Ottoman culture, Republic culture, Anatolian Culture, but will also incorporate the target audience or guest, their culture, foods, proverbs and social life in their country.'
<i>Unprejudicedness</i>	K4: 'I do not accept prejudices in any way. Because, they came to my country.' K7: 'The tourist guide should not be prejudiced.'
<i>Understanding the ability to affect different cultures</i>	K3: 'If, for instance, the visiting group is from Israel and that day is Shabbath. If you say shabbat shalom, you will please them greatly on a Saturday. You will talk to their hearts.' K2: 'After all, education is the top of everything. The tourist guide should know the region where the group came from, and is able to do some analysis or preliminary studies related to that region. For example, if you, as a guide, make a prior study on well-known painters, artists, sculptors, actors who live in or were born in that region or some geological facts, then you give the feeling that you have information at least about the region your clients have come from, and that you are closely related to their cultural values.'
<i>Awareness on understanding the needs of different cultures (mindfulness)</i>	K3: 'The tourist guide should know the needs of the group and respond them accordingly.' K7: 'We need to consider everything from lunch to reservations before visiting any place. They have needs. Their needs for eating can even change. Such a thing is actually a challenge for the tourist guide, the world conjuncture develops depending on the geographies and this is likely to lead to problems between groups. The second is eating habits. Because, even eating times differ. Spanish people go to lunch at 3.00 PM.'
<i>Incorporation of different values</i>	K3: 'If, for instance, the visiting group is from Israel and that day is Shabbath. If you say shabbat shalom, you will please them greatly on a Saturday. You will talk to their hearts.' K4: 'The tourist guide should also know the cultures in the group. ... I ask my group if there is any child. If there is a child, I ask his/her age. Accordingly, I bring a coloring book from my culture for painting Hittites. ... Such applications are beneficial for reciprocal interaction. They may have a festival falling within the date range of that tour. I also note down the festivals of the countries. ... Doing something in their festival.'
<i>The eagerness to learn different cultures continuously (interest-discovery)</i>	K4: 'We need to renew ourselves continuously. Because any person from another county will have questions to ask. There may be some developments in that country. There may be some other developments in the world. We need a level of culture sufficient to synthesize, rapidly respond to, and get adapted to all those.' K7: 'Tourist guides should either go to those countries to experience there or work for a very long time to incorporate the culture carried by people coming from those countries, including their cuisine.'

Cultural sensitivity & emotional strength

Participants presented opinions that the guides with intercultural competence should be the guides who have positive affection before and after interaction with different cultures and are respectful to differences and culturally tolerant and empathetic. The participants further stated that the guides who can show an impartial approach towards different cultures and have the ability to develop good relations with them can be addressed as the guides with intercultural competencies (Table 4).

Table 4: Participants' opinions

<i>Positive affection towards different cultures before interaction</i>	K1: 'Tourist guide is a cultural learner. Because, the tourist guide cannot learn the state of his/her clients unless he/she values such times. The guide cannot learn how they behave in which conditions. This takes place in the free times that belong to the group but not to you. What are these free times? A break. A break, because it is everybody's break. It is the driver's, the group's break, but not yours.'
<i>Positive affection after interaction</i>	K3: 'The tourist guide should teach a culture courteously keeping its modestness in a sustainable way to create good memories for his/her guests, rather than epic feelings. One of the most important duties of a tourist guide is creating unforgettable memories for his/her guests.'
<i>Respect for differences</i>	K9: 'It is also different in terms of respect. The tourist guide may, for example, approach from the point of respect, but a tourist from far-east is likely to perceive it differently. It is very important for a tourist guide to understand such differences.'
<i>Cultural empathy</i>	K6: 'The tourist guide needs to know the person to whom he/she talks. While talking about general knowledge with an Arabic person, ... the tourist guide should also be able to talk about Arabic culture. Anything can be discussed with an American without ever being fully extended. Because they are comfortable in their opinions. On the other hand, however, while talking to an Arabic person, the tourist guide does not have to be conservative, but should at least consider his/her conservative point of view. It also depends. Indeed, it is possible to be fully comfortable when talking to a Japanese person, except for some jokes. In terms of Chinese people, for instance, reds and sevens may be an example of this. I mention those as an example. The guide should discuss the issues regarding their cultures in a way not to discomfort them a lot.'
<i>Cultural tolerance</i>	K8: 'People from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in countries such as the United States can still create diversity. When this is the case, what we bring to the forefront culturally is tolerance. Ultimately everyone has different values. They perceive the world through this and all group members have reached a point where a different culture prevails. Therefore, the concepts of understanding, interpretation, and tolerance emerge at that point.'
<i>Impartiality</i>	K5: 'Tourist guide should be impartial. He/she should make himself/herself impartial. This is the way to perceive it. If a guide catches impartiality, he/she will obtain the competence, of course over time.'
<i>Ability to develop good relationships with different cultures</i>	K3: 'A tourist guide should browse through like a radar on the bus and make eye-contact. Who is sleeping? Who can sabotage the group? There are also individuals who sabotage the group. The tourist guide should find and pick them and ensure that he/she is also happy at the end of the day. Everybody is not happy. Some have psychological problems. The tourist guide should identify the tourist with problems and make him/her feel that he/she came to a beautiful holiday.'

Cultural resourcefulness & behavioral flexibility

According to the guides, the guides with intercultural competence should be able to develop behaviors suitable for intercultural situations and create a common language within the group. However, guides should have verbal communication competence and non-verbal communication ability (body language), and develop effective and appropriate communication skills. The guides with competence should be experienced in professional aspects, show sympathetic and friendly behavior, be able to adapt to different cultures and express their own culture. The guides stated that a guide with competencies should develop cultural sensitivity, have synergistic skills, manage emotions, influence others, and develop empathy. They further stated that the tourist guides should adopt the openness-transparency principle, listen actively, be flexible, and be calm-controlled. Some guides presented opinions on the necessity of responding to the demands of different cultures, self-confidence and self-awareness, and the ability to interpret information from different perspectives (Table 5).

Table 5: Participants' opinions

<i>Affection</i>	K2: 'Civilizations are international. Cultures are specific to the communities. Nobody expects anyone to know the proverb and important days in their culture. Everybody knows the Easter and dates pertaining thereto. But nobody expects a guide to be interested in and have knowledge about all details of the Easter. However, if the tourist came on the easter day, the guide should at least say <i>Happy Easter, how delicious your eggs are ...</i> '
<i>Potential to respond to requests of different cultures</i>	K2: 'The main point is to provide individuals with the most appropriate service based on their nationalities, and to satisfy them.'
<i>Professional experience (knowledge-background)</i>	K3: 'The tourist guide maybe is not but should try to be a walking encyclopedia.' K7: 'The tourist guide may develop himself/herself by visiting the relevant countries depending on his/her availability within the time he/she provides guidance. Development does not take place all of a sudden.'
<i>Effective listening ability</i>	K8: 'Knowing the group is like how I do in general, on a long tour, namely for one, two, three-week tours, on the first day a meeting dinner may be organized. In this dinner, the tourist guide and the group members know each other. Here, we ask some questions to the group members.'
<i>Sympathetic and friendly behavior</i>	K3: 'If you say a few things regarding the cultures of your guests regardless of where they come from, they will definitely ignore some mistakes you will make during the tour.'
<i>Developing cultural sensitivity</i>	K8: 'It may be important to know what should be avoided here, the red lines. In each culture, certain common gestures may express different meanings. The tourist guide should be familiar with such things, refrain from them, or do the most suitable one. For example, certain types of looks can be understood differently in our culture than in their cultures. Such as certain gestures, certain voice tones. There are a number of elements that each culture coded differently. The tourist guide should be aware of them.'
<i>Verbal Communication competence</i>	K8: 'If we consider language not only as a means of communication but as a carrier of culture, yes. However, if we use it as a means of communication alone, it is not then. However, the idioms that exist in the language, even the special sayings, the sense and perception of humor belonging to the country where the tourists come from or even the smaller location are important.'
<i>Non-verbal communication competence (body language)</i>	K8: 'If we include culture non-verbal communication elements such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and gaze into the language, the tourist guide should also have such language skill.'
<i>Ability to create a common language</i>	K8: 'Apart from that, when we consider culture as a more inclusive connecting element, we try to find something special for the group, like trend issues or common values. We do this through the points where the group members are closest to each other. Again, humor can be used as an integrative element for the group. Using the group consciousness (we call it icebreaker in English) we must break the ices in the group and turn them into people who gather around common values. For example, a joke made up during the tour that nobody other than group members laugh and understand, but the group members. We try to create a temporary mini-culture specific to that group.'
<i>Emotion management</i>	K3: 'We must manage our anger perfectly with our hearts and emotions. One red face in the group can disrupt our business and psychology. This can also disrupt the group's psychology. We have to approach that person with such a smiling face and manage him/her until the evening. We must perform the anger-management perfectly.'
<i>Developing behaviors suitable for the intercultural situation</i>	K6: 'The guide should discuss the issues regarding their cultures in a way not to discomfort them a lot.'
<i>Developing effective and appropriate communication skills</i>	K7: 'In other words, any word you use may be normal for you, but not for them. It is same for the codes, the codes are very important in the countries. The codes may be right for you, but not for them. The person who recognizes the cultures and develops the intercultural dialogs is the guide.'
<i>Ability to express one's own culture</i>	K7: 'First, the aim of coming on a holiday is to know a different culture. When you tell a cultural difference, then everybody listens with interest. This can be, for example, fortune-telling after drinking Turkish coffee, asking for the girl in marriage, the night of henna. This will make them busy while making them happy. What makes them feel the purpose of their visit is the local culture already. Even giving recipes attract attention. For example, you know a meal that this specific to our country, if you tell about it and explain from which region that meal comes, this will make them listen to you.'
<i>Developing the ability to empathize</i>	K5: 'First, the tourist guide must have lived with that person. So just being in Turkey and managing a tour for a few days or one week in Turkey does not mean that the guide learned the people's lifestyle, cultures, feelings, and thoughts. Theoretical information does not allow tourist guides to understand such elements. In other words, going there and spending time with them for a certain period of time is more useful in understanding why they think and behave so and why their interactions are so.'
<i>Openness-transparency</i>	K1: 'Being open to speaking. Not considering topics as unspeakable.'
<i>Adaptability</i>	K8: 'When it comes to intercultural competence, I understand the skills such as understanding different cultures in an environment, communicating with them, interpreting and accepting them.'
<i>Self confidence-self awareness</i>	K9: 'I think that self-confidence is one of the prerequisites for the guidance profession. The guide, who knows a culture and how to treat that culture, can make it more advantageous in terms of guidance profession, and the guide's performance in this regard can increase even more.'

<i>Flexible behavior</i>	K2: 'These are practices of good agencies. The agency should write down, for example, who has what kinds of allergies? Who has what sicknesses? Which medicines should be taken? Does anybody have acrophobia? If they did not write, I ask my guests. Sometimes they don't say it in the group, but when I am alone, they come to tell me privately. So I can adjust myself a little bit more for such people. The tourist guide has to be flexible. The tourist guide should be able to create solutions, minimize the solution as much as possible, and manage many things without calling the travel agency.'
<i>Ability to interpret information from different perspectives</i>	K2: 'The tourist guide should be thoughtful as much as possible. For example, I always tell my group to walk behind me. Because, I always walk on the flat or non-stony side of the road where the client is less likely to sprain or break his feet or legs. Because all of us and all clients are not at the same age. Some of them already have hip implants. The tourist guide should pay attention if any organ of the client is broken, and if any steel or platinum implant is placed there etc. The client's psychology is of the utmost importance.'
<i>Synergistic skill</i>	K9: 'The group climate is very important. Here, the guide needs to be very careful in order to prevent those cultural differences and also the conflicts between the tourists. Maybe the tourist guide can manage the bad atmosphere in a better and enjoyable manner.'

Results and discussion

This study aims to describe how tourist guides perceive their experiences regarding their intercultural competence as well as the environments and conditions that affect such experiences. As a result of the study, three dimensions, namely Cultural Awareness & Cognitive Flexibility, Cultural Sensitivity & Emotional Flexibility, and Cultural Resourcefulness & Behavioral Flexibility, were obtained from the opinions of tourist guides.

Primarily, each theme consists of two constituents. The first constituent is comprised of cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cultural resourcefulness. Thus, the study brings the ability to recognize different cultural values at a glance at the competence constituents, to develop sensitivity afterward or simultaneously, and finally to analyze the situations affecting cultural differences in different situations. Cultural definition and understanding (cognitively/emotionally and behaviorally) of why people from other cultures think, feel, and behave in such a way are important. Only in this way, a successful and effective communication environment can be developed (Adler & Gundersen, 2007).

The second aspect of the constituent is the perception of flexibility accompanying the guide's knowledge. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral flexibility of tourist guides with a high level of intercultural competence, when compared with different cultures, seems to be important in fulfilling their professional roles. Interculturally competent people are careful and empathetic people who are motivated to interact with people from other cultures, open to new schemes, adaptable, flexible, and able to cope with complexity and uncertainty (Arasaratnam, 2012). When the literature on intercultural differences is reviewed, the flexibility dimension seems to be related to the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance examined in the studies of Hofstede (2001) and House et al. (2002). While the height in uncertainty avoidance brings an understanding of "different is dangerous", serves behaviors such as tolerance of uncertainty, innovation, and congruence.

In the tourist guiding profession, three dimensions emerged from the tourist guides' own experiences. The first dimension is cultural awareness and cognitive flexibility includes such as, awareness of differences, incorporation of different values, understanding the needs of different cultures, and approaching different cultures without prejudices. A key distinguishing feature of tourist guides is their eagerness to continuously learn about different cultures, which is essential in helping tour members understand and adapt to local cultures. Effective tourist guides must have comprehensive knowledge of the destination, which includes critical thinking skills for acquiring and evaluating knowledge. Communication styles, traditions, cultural values, language, and artifacts constitute the content of tourist guides' cultural information. Knowledge and comprehension involve cultural knowledge, cultural self-awareness, and socio-linguistic awareness. Understanding cultural differences is important in understanding a tourist guide's audience, as some differences between expectations and group interests stem from cultural differences.

Some differences between group interests and expectations stem from cultural differences. Even though cultural differences are a generalization, it is important to understand the expectations and different values of the most common cultures that guides will encounter in the context of cultural self-awareness.

This is an important part of understanding a tourist guide's audience (O'Brien & Ham, 2012: 11). The tourist guides, who make simultaneous and consecutive cultural interpretations between different cultures, aim to increase the awareness of tourists, encourage their learning and appreciation. It also aims to help tourists develop empathy for culture, heritage, conservation, and scenery and understand the places visited (Stewart et al., 1998).

As noted by Yu et al (2002), tourist guides who demonstrate that they understand different cultures sufficiently can direct tourists to better understand local cultures. Effective tourist guides who manage tours must first have a comprehensive knowledge of a particular destination (Chang, 2014). Critical thinking skills are one of the important factors in evaluating and acquiring knowledge (Deardorff, 2011). According to Yu et al (2002), cultural values, traditions, communication styles, language, and artifacts constitute the contents of the tourist guides' cultural information. The knowledge and comprehension dimension involves "cultural knowledge, cultural self-awareness, and socio-linguistic awareness".

The study's Cultural Sensitivity & Emotional Flexibility dimension suggests that tourist guides should be respectful of differences and culturally tolerant. Intercultural competencies involve developing good relations with different cultures and approaching them impartially, which is also supported by the study's results. Valuing differences means respecting a wide range of cultural, demographic, and individual differences. Having intercultural competence is crucial in communicating with people from different cultures effectively. Intercultural competence consists of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery dimensions, which influence intercultural competence. Tourist guides must respect tourists, cultural diversity, other cultures, traditions, and views and be open-minded to host tourists of different nationalities. Respecting involves not making jokes or comments about a person's personal appearance, religion, sexual orientation, or speech, while openness involves different cultures without making judgments and being open to learning.

A tourist guide should also leading to discovery, be curious, and willing to take risks and tolerate uncertainty. Assessing global perspectives and understanding other world views as cultural knowledge entails a holistic and contextual understanding of culture that includes historical, political, and social contexts. Valuing differences means that an individual can go beyond adopting equal treatment for people from different racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, it means respecting a wide range of cultural, demographic, and individual differences (DuBrin, 2012). At this point, one of the most important factors to communicate with people from different cultures accurately and effectively is to have intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is an endless process and evolves.

A tourist guide is described as a person who can communicate effectively and translate cultural knowledge and skills (Wyatt, 1978). As a culture broker, the tourist guide comprehends different cultural structures and can make connections within the context of sociolinguistics awareness. Cultural and ethnic values translated by the guides are the main issues of intercultural situations within deep cultural knowledge. According to Huang (2011: 147), "the common factor in the strategies of tourist guides is their awareness of the need to create the perception that there are similarities between people from different cultures to cross-cultural boundaries and engage tourists in communication". Commanding the differences and similarities between cultures is important to allow tourists to have an understandable image of the culture visited. For example, to help tourists understand Buddhism, "a guide can compare Christianity and other religions with Buddhism teachings and practices. In addition, some tourist guides use anecdotes and legendary stories in their cultural interpretations to facilitate understanding tourists" (Huang, 2011: 148).

The content of intercultural attitudes consists of discovery and curiosity, openness, and respect dimensions. Discovery and curiosity mean tolerating uncertainty; openness means withholding judgment; and respect means valuing other cultures. These three factors influence intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011). Openness means, in attitude, to different cultures without making any judgments and being open to learning. Moreover, a tourist guide should be a curious person leading to the discovery. This means that utilizing curiosity, a tourist guide will be eager to take risks and tolerate uncertainty when the working conditions require this. The ability to understand other world views as

cultural knowledge and the assessment of global perspectives entails a more contextual and holistic understanding of a culture that includes social, political, and historical contexts. Therefore, any assessment of culture-specific information needs to go beyond conventional knowledge of greetings, traditions, foods, and the like (Deardorff, 2011: 68). The tourist guides who are in contact with many different people, businesses, institutions, and organizations are the tourism workers who are in contact with the tourists for the longest time. Therefore, a tourist guide must first respect tourists, cultural diversity, other cultures, traditions, and views and be open-minded to host tourists of different nationalities. According to Manning and Ramirez (2014), respecting involves not making jokes or comments about a person's sexual orientation, personal appearance, religion, or speech.

The study's Cultural Resourcefulness & Behavioral Flexibility dimension suggests that tourist guides with intercultural competence should be resourceful in utilizing local resources to create an enriching experience for tourists. Behavioral flexibility involves adapting to the needs and expectations of tourists from different cultures, being able to adjust to unexpected situations, and communicating effectively with people from different cultures. In terms of the Cultural Sensitivity & Emotional Flexibility dimension, the fact that tourist guides should be respectful of differences (INCA, 2004) and culturally tolerant (WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009) coincides with the relevant literature. On the other hand, individuals who can develop good relations with different cultures (INCA, 2004; WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009). As Tsaur and Tu (2019) suggested, tourist guides must exhibit appropriate intercultural communication and interaction skills while accompanying tour groups. Yu et al. (2002) suggested that tourist guides with effective intercultural communication skills should be able to better solve or avoid misunderstandings between cultures.

The conclusion on the fact that the guides should be professionally experienced (INCA, 2004; WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009), exhibit sympathetic and friendly behaviors (HEFCE, 2009), and be able to express their own culture (WorldWork, 2008) coincides with the relevant studies. Yu et al. (2002) also suggested that tourist guides should be compassionate toward others. The results obtained are in parallel with the study results suggesting that individuals with intercultural competence should have synergistic skills (WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009), manage emotions (HEFCE, 2009), and develop empathy (INCA, 2004). As stated by Yu et al. (2002) and Tsaur and Tu (2019), tourist guides should be able to empathize with tourists from different cultures. The results related to the fact that tourist guides should adopt the principle of openness and transparency (WorldWork, 2008) and exhibit flexible behaviors (INCA, 2004; WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009) are also seen in the literature. As Tsaur et al. (2019) argued, flexibility is one feature that makes it easier for tourist guides to fulfill their duties. It is also mentioned in the related literature that individuals should have the potential to respond to the demands of different cultures (HEFCE, 2009) and have self-confidence and self-awareness (HEFCE, 2009). It was further concluded that tourist guides with intercultural competence should develop cultural sensitivity (WorldWork, 2008; HEFCE, 2009). Tsaur et al. (2019) also stated that tourist guides can detect and accept cultural differences and are better at showing respect. Listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and associating constitute the content of the skills, and this content is necessary for "obtaining, retaining and reproducing" the pre-dimension of cultural competence named "knowledge". This skill dimension is associated with the behavioral aspect of intercultural competence (Navaitiene et al., 2013: 27).

Theoretical and practical implications

To effectively interact with tourists from different cultural backgrounds, tourist guides need to develop intercultural competence and use their skills as interpreters to adapt to the needs and attributes of each group. Effective communication is crucial in building positive relationships between tourist guides and tourists, and guides should be able to establish good communication, provide pleasant comments on tourist attractions, and handle questions and complaints. Developing social and interpersonal communication skills for cultural mediation is also important, as well as having a command of the foreign language to overcome potential communication problems and conflicts. Providing humor, analogies, metaphors, and opportunities for questions can help visitors build links with their daily experiences.

Tourist guides should also focus on the group interests of tourists and convey correct information in the context of their communicative role. Sharing interesting travel stories can create a friendly and recreational atmosphere, leading to a positive experience for tourists. Tourist guides should gain knowledge, skills, and experience regarding different cultures to acquire intercultural competence. This may involve living in countries where their guidance language is spoken and experiencing the culture in its natural environment. By doing so, theoretical information can be converted into practical behavior. To improve the intercultural competencies of tourist guides, education programs abroad can be organized to provide them with experiential competence, allowing them to exhibit appropriate behaviors, attitudes, and skills in the process of interacting with different cultures. Moreover, creative drama-based training can be given within the context of managing differences to help tourist guides enhance their intercultural competencies.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The contribution of this study is that it is the first research to thoroughly investigate the intercultural competence of tourist guides in Turkey with a phenomenological approach. The limitation of the research is that intercultural competence was evaluated specifically for nine tourist guides in Antalya. In future studies, research can be conducted to understand the intercultural competence of guides with different cultural perspectives in different countries. Developing scales for the intercultural competencies of tourist guides through research can help in identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are essential for effective intercultural communication. Using mixed research patterns can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that affect intercultural competencies. Additionally, it is important to study tourists' expectations regarding tourist guides' intercultural competencies and how these competencies are perceived and achieved. Empirical research can also be conducted to test the impact of intercultural competence on the performance of tourist guides, tourist satisfaction, and destination image.

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Ethical approval

This study is among the studies that do not require ethics committee approval due to the use of research data before 2020.

Contribution rate of researchers

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Conflict of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

Support information / Thanks

This study was supported by Anadolu University Scientific Research Projects Unit with project number 1808E308.