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MAS-MAS VILLAGE TOUR GUIDES: PERCEPTION ON THE PROFESSION, ROLES AND LEARNING NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Research on tourism suggests that tourist guides are key representatives in the tourism industry in that they have contributed significantly to the satisfaction of visitors and are believed to determine whether or not the tourist will revisit destinations. The present study sought to investigate the perception of local tour guides Mas Mas village pertaining to their future carrier as tour guides and the roles they played in the profession. It also assessed the perceived learning needs as tour guides. There were five local tour guides and two potential employers taking part in this study. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussion and semi-structured interviews and were analyzed by employing the five-phased cycle of qualitative data analysis. The findings of this study suggested that being a professional tour guide is a promising career and a prestigious career despite encountering negative perception from the local community. It also revealed the tour guides played as key factor to develop village based tourism. However, they believed to be in need of further training

Keywords: Perception; Tour Guides; Learning Needs.

INTRODUCTION

Research on tourism suggests that tourist guides are key representatives in the tourism industry as they contribute significantly to the satisfaction of visitors and are believed to determine whether or not the tourist will revisit destinations. Preparing tourist guides would be of a vital contribution to the sustainability of the hospitality industry, especially for Lombok tourism. Not only does it affect the promotion of tourist attractions, the tour guides also have the potential to create an

overall impression of tour packaged offered and image of tourist destinations. A study on 530 tourists in Istanbul Turkey revealed that there is significant relationship between tour guiding service and tourist satisfaction and their revisiting intention (Cetinkaya and Öter, 2016). For this reason, equipping tourist guides with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance the quality service is worth taking into account. One of the crucial elements of tourist guide training is concerned with language skills development. To ascertain the effectiveness of training for the tourist guides prior assessment on the learning needs is necessary.

Tourist guides play vital roles in the tourism industry. Therefore, equipping local tour guides with the necessary language skills is of vital importance to better inform the tourist about tourist destinations, people culture, history and regulation in the area. If their English communication skills are enhanced, that would allow them to better interact with and give more interesting information to the tourists. Nguyen (2015) asserts that tour guide performance plays an important role on foreign tourists' satisfaction and tourists' destination loyalty in a package tour. Furthermore, one of the recent studies in Sri Lanka revealed tourist guide occupy key frontiers in the hospitality industry and become spokesperson for the nations' cultural heritage (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). Hadi, et al (2021) argued that local tourist guide must be better prepared with necessary skills, knowledge, and other related competences to enable them to better serve the visitors.

World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (2010) defines a tour guide as *“a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority”*. With such challenging tasks, the future of tour guides is still uncertain. Melia and Rice (2012) suggest that tour guides in Dublin still must have other form of incomes to such as pension or a partner with an income to avoid living in difficulty. This indicates that the earning from working as tour guides is not enough to support their lives.

With regards to training for tourist guides in Lombok, the local government of west Lombok has issued modules stating the standardized training that every tourist guide should attended. The training consists of (1) general knowledge on Lombok Tourism, (2) guiding techniques, (3) tourist guides key performance indicators, etc. (West Lombok Tourism Office, 2012). Hadi, etc (2021) also recommended a number of competencies that each tour guide should possess namely: (1) foreign language training, (2) local language training, (3) cross cultural understanding, (4) ICT literacy, (5) local culture values, (6) other training such as cooking, tour itinerary planning, etc. Through this study, we aimed to identify what kind of further training that local tourist guide in Mas Mas village did need.

Our initial observations in Mas-Mas village indicated that the local tour guides were mostly dominated by school leavers, graduating from secondary Islamic schools. All of them did not receive a proper educational background in tourism. They only learned tour guiding related skills by observing how senior tour guides performed. They also learned English language skills through an intensive program organized by the village head through *Pondok Santri*. *Pondok Santri* was

specifically designed to assist students in Mas Mas village (secondary school students) to gain English speaking skills by which they can use to communicate with the visitors. This program was intended to support the village-based tourism promoted in Mas-Mas village. Despite the presence of such a program, a formal investigation on the effectiveness of this program has yet to be assessed.

The current study, however, did not aim to measure the effectiveness of the program. Rather, it was mainly intended to analyze the learning needs of the local tourist guides in Mas-Mas Village. It also sought to investigate their views on the career in tourism and perceived roles as tour guides. Hence, to meet the objectives of this study, the following questions were resorted to carry out the investigation. First, how do the local tour guides see their future in the profession of a tourist guide? Second, how do the local tour guides perceived the roles of a tour guide?. Last, what are the profile of tour guide learning needs as perceived by the local tour guides and potential employers?

METHODOLOGY

To do investigation, a descriptive qualitative research design was employed as it allowed the researcher to gain information about who, where, what, when and how. It further enabled the researcher to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe what exists. There were seven participants of this study consisting of five local guides and two potential employers who were selected by employing purposive sampling technique. The criteria of participant selection were based on their involvement in the tour guiding activities regardless their ages and seniority. Two employers, however, were selected based on their willingness to hire these local guides as their employees in their companies. Prior to data collection, ethical consideration was conducted. Each participant was asked to sign consent letter regarding their participation in this study. All of them were informed about their participation and they could withdraw as participant without any further consequence. They were also informed that the information they gave were treated confidentially and it is only the researcher who could have access to them.

Focus group discussion was employed to five local tour guides to elicit their opinion and to gain further information with potential employers, we employed a semi structured interviews. The collected data in this study were analyzed by employing the five phased cycle of qualitative data analysis namely: 1) compiling, 2) disassembling data, (3) reassembling data, (4) interpreting, and (5) concluding (Yin, 2011). Focus Group Discussion activities aimed to collect information about the tour guides perception of their profession and roles as tour guides as well as their learning needs to improves their capacity as tour guides while interviews sought to ask data regarding quality and further training that a tour guide need to have to work in their companies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Local Guides' Perception of their future as a Tour Guide

One of the participant reported that being a professional tour guide was a promising career and a prestigious career because it allowed him to establish international networks with people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. It also enabled him to gain financial benefits which he could use to pay for his higher education tuition fee. He further believed that working as a tour guide would widen his horizon of cultural diversity as a result of intensive interaction with a wide range of international visitors. He even argued that being a tour guide encouraged him to improve his knowledge of his native culture.

Furthermore, he perceived himself as a researcher when he acted as a tour guide. For him a tour guide should be well informed about West Nusa Tenggara culture and traditions. He also had to be familiar with all the tourist attractions in the province, especially those of Lombok. All this information implies that he had very positive views or attitudes concerning the tour guide profession. It appeared that he was aware of the key requirements of being a tour guide as suggested by the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (2003) which stated that a tour guide is a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area.

With regards to the future of the tour guides, most of them did see the future of being a tour guide. They believed that there would be more local guides needed in Lombok in the future. Despite this, they still could not decide whether or not being a tour guide as their main profession in the future. In line with this finding, Melia (2012) reported that a large majority of both tourist guides and tour operators are optimistic for the future of the tourist guiding industry in Ireland although the future is seasonal and part-time.

An empirical study by Türker and Öztürk (2013) revealed that community in their study viewed tourism played a significant roles to rejuvenate the tourist destination, create jobs and attract people back to the area to work in the tourism industry. By way of contrast, an informant admitted that most of the community, even family members still perceived a tour guide as a negative' profession. She argued that such an impression was due to a number of reasons. First, it is because of the community's lack of understanding of the truth of the tour guide profession. Second, this is the result of the negative behavior of an unlicensed tour guides. Despite this, she also mentioned that, in general, most of the tour guide family members, especially their parents, supported them to work as tour guides. The reasons for this were as follows. First, their parents were proud to see them (the tour guide) having the capability to speak with foreigners. Second they could earn money to support their family. These reasons had been strong motivation to keep them moving on this profession.

Perceived roles of tour guides

One informant highlighted that the main role of a tour guide was to give information and be a source of information regarding to tourist attraction in the village. He further postulated that a tour guide had to explain anything related to tourist destinations. In line with that, another participant reported that the tour guides were responsible to establish a positive impression to attract the tourists' intention to revisit. He also believed that a tour guide acted as an ambassador of local culture which required tour guide's ability to explain about the local culture. Further views were elicited from the participants of this study pertaining to their roles in the profession. One participant claimed that a tour guide also played as a promoting team of tourists' destinations. He argued that the development of tourist destination depended partially on how guide played their roles and be able to entertain the tourists. He believed that a tour guide has to be able to tell jokes to make the trip fun and enjoyable like a story teller. Bryon (2012) and Mathisen (2012) pointed out that an efficient way to engage tourists and the only tool the destination to sell themselves was by storytelling.

From focused group discussion with the female tour guides, this study revealed that all of the female guides opined that being a tour guide was both exciting and encouraging. It was exciting because they could meet with foreigners, give information about their village potential. They could gain new knowledge by exchanging information with the visitors, for instance about cultural differences and people's lifestyle. They also regarded guiding as encouraging as it allowed them to have new experiences to deal with people of different personalities. On one occasion, they would meet friendly visitors while at the other time they would encountered the unfriendly guests which challenged their patience. With these experiences, they eventually could learn how to adapt and made some adjustments. They also learned to understand and see people or visitors from perspectives.

Another important point revealed from the FGD with the tour guides is that being a tour guide forced them to learn further regarding their own cultural. Often, they met tourists who would ask about the histories of their villages and the traditions maintained by the community. As a result, they should allocate their time to meet the local figure to find deeper information about their own culture. Eventually, what really matters to them was about time investment for self development. For them, investing their time as tour guides and learning enables them to explore their village and its potentials. This study confirmed the roles of tour guide as proposed by Kruczek (2013). Kruczek highlighted the key roles of tour guide namely: (1) as a source of knowledge relating to sightseeing, (2) as an educator – tutor, (3) as a representative of a city, region, country, (4) a “tourist information centre”, (5) as a group leader, (6) as a tourist activist, and (7) as a tourist expert.

Further training for Mas Mas Tour Guides

In Mas Mas village, there existed training for tour guide by Indonesian Tour guide Association) but that was in 2013. There were ten of them who were still

actively working as tour guides. However, they have yet to receive any formal training such as diploma in tourism or tour guiding. As reported by an informant of this study that the training was limited and was not sufficient to prepare the local tour guides of Mas Mas to better perform their tasks. The training materials did not cover cross cultural issues, how to be an engaging story teller, leadership and initiative. For this reason he urged that the local tour guides needed further training to enhance their guiding capacity. They also needed experience such as practicum or carry fieldtrip to other places in that the guide in Mas Mas only experienced guiding locally. The existing program in Mas Mas village only focused on learning a language.

One of the female tour guides admitted that they faced a little problem concerning language issues. Issues concerning new vocabularies or expression might occur, however, they would ask for the visitors to explain what they meant. They also expressed that they needed to learn different accents for instance American, British and Australian accents because the visitor might come from different English spoken countries. Besides having proficient language skills, a tour guide should have a range of knowledge about general Tourism information and regulation of tourism, subject of Professional Tourist Guiding, Tourism, Promotion, history and culture, Archeology, Mythology, Art, Religion History and Sociology, Literature, and General Health Information and First Aid (Avcikurt, Alper, and Geyik, 2009).

Interviews with two potential employers of tour guides revealed what a tour guide should have to be able to perform his or task professionally. One of the informants highlighted three major aspects to enhance namely language skills, the understanding of tour routes or package and the knowledge and ability to provide quality or standardized services to the visitors. This finding confirms an empirical study by Çetinkaya and Öter (2016) that quality of tour guiding service contributed to the tourists' satisfaction and their revisiting intention. Another informant pointed out that a tour guide should have a good personality and broad understanding of local culture, people's character, destination, and even the local rules. With regards to language training, Melia and Rice (2012) recommended that any future training on language should respond to shortages of specific language guides, for instance Mandarin or any European or South American language.

CONCLUSION

The finding of this study revealed that the local tourist guide in Mas Mas village viewed being a professional tour guide is a promising career and a prestigious career. Working as tourist guides enables them to gain financial benefits, widen their understanding of cultural diversity, and encourages them to improve his knowledge of his native culture. This study also found that tourist guides profession was still perceived negative profession as a result of community's lack of understanding of the truth of the tour guide profession and impact unlicensed tourist guides. Despite this, they go support from their families. With regards to the tourist guides views on this profession, they perceived themselves as key frontier of tourism development in the village and as a source of information. They also

learned that being tourist guides were both exciting and encouraging who play critical roles to establish a positive impression to attract the tourists' intention to revisit. Eventually, this study has elicited the learning needs of the tourist guides to enhance their capacity, namely language skills, tour routes understanding, knowledge and ability of customer services, and storytelling skill. The findings of this study can be resorted as reference to develop training for tour guides especially those working as local tour guides in village based tourism. This also can be used as the reference for policy making. Despite this, this study was only conducted on small number of participants making it only transferrable to similar contexts. For this reason, future study should conduct survey to gain broader views on local tourists guide in Lombok.

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