

Evaluating tour guiding communication using the Importance-Performance Analysis Model

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Abstract

This study intended to evaluate tour guiding communication using importance-performance analysis model at the rock hewn churches of Lalibela. Specifically, the study assessed the performance of local tour guides of Lalibela on some service attributes in relation to the foreign tourists' perceived importance of those service attributes. Twenty pertinent service attributes were used in a questionnaire to measure both the importance of those service attributes and the performance of local tour guides on those services as perceived by tourists. For this purpose, importance-performance analysis model which has four quadrants has been used. The first quadrant which is labeled as 'concentrate here' shows the service attributes that are rated as high importance, and low performance. The second quadrant of the model is 'keep up the good work' where both the importance and performance of services are ranked high. Quadrant three is called 'low priority' hence both performance and importance are perceived as low. The fourth quadrant is possible overkill which indicates service attributes that are perceived as low importance, and high performance. Among the 20 service attributes, six attributes that were rated above average for importance and below average on performance were plotted in the 'concentrate here' quadrant. This indicates that improvement efforts and special attention should be directed to those attributes in order to improve and enhance the quality of tour guiding services at the destination.

Keywords: *Tour guiding communication, importance-performance analysis, service attributes*

Introduction

Service providers of tourism sector play significant role in presenting and communicating the image of a country in general and a destination in particular. Because service providers engage in the task of providing accommodation, transportation, and making the destination relevant for tourists, the performance of service providers on communication is very likely to have consequential effects on creating tourists' satisfaction and experience about the destination (Zhang and Chow, 2004).

Among service providers, tour guides who are defined as persons who guide visitors in the language of their choice and interpret the cultural and natural heritage of an area (World Federation of Guides Associations, 2003) have crucial roles in the tourism sector. In fact tour guides are extremely useful to the success of tourism sector in many ways. Firstly, because tour guides are forefront employees whom tourists meet when first arriving at the airport, they are useful in creating the image and reputation of the destination in the mind of the tourists. Secondly, as tourists spend much of their time with tour guides at the destination, tour guides are important in playing the role of public relations and ambassadors to reshape tourists' previous thoughts about the destination. Finally, since tour guides are expected to share language with tourists and hosts, tour guides are useful in acting as interpreter and mediator between tourists and the hosts (World Federation of Guides Associations, 2003).

From this, it follows that effective tour guiding communication is of paramount importance for the success of the tourism sector (Shegaw, 2015). This is because it is through communication that tour guides attempt to construct, represent and communicate the social, cultural and symbolic significance of the destination. Thus, being a form of social action and/or interaction, communication appears to be

an important facet of tour guiding practice, for the way tour guides present and communicate the facts of the destination is presumed to have a bearing on the guiding practice (Rabotic, 2009). In fact, it is because through communication that the social and cultural relevance of the destination is conveyed, the way tour guides communicate would influence and affect tourists' experience at (and/or about) the destination and thereby determine the delight and satisfaction visitors find from the services of tour guides and from their visits. In other words, tour guides' level of communication could have a bearing on the success of the tourism sector (Shegaw, 2015).

Nevertheless, although the role of tour guides—i.e.e, their involvement in the activities of tourism—is considered to be an indispensable part of the development of a country's tourism business, a review of the available literature on this specific subject indicates that tour guiding is a neglected profession. For instance, Rabotic (2009) reports that the form of tour guide training that is offered in many countries is mostly based on a revision of secondary school knowledge on geography, history, and cultural heritage of certain regions, but the communication aspect of this economic sector (also referred to as “a smokeless industry”) is neglected. Rabotic (2009) further comments that a tour guide needs to be good at commentary, storytelling, voice projection, articulation, nonverbal presentation and the like in order to effectively present and communicate the significant facts and symbolic meanings of the destination.

Though tourism sector requires professionals possessing a working knowledge and skill of communication, and considerable cultural orientations and values of the tourists, I know from my personal experience that qualified professionals tend to leave aside the tour guiding business. That is to say, professionals who have other options have not usually joined the tour guiding activity of the sector; rather, in most cases, it is school or university dropouts and the unemployed ones who have joined the tour guiding business at the tourist destinations of Amhara regional state (Shegaw, 2015). This practice has created a number of complaints on the tour guiding practice.

Considering the problem of the tour guiding practice, the Amhara Regional Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Parks Development set up a local tour guide accreditation system in 2003. Under this scheme, all local tour guides of the tourist destinations in the region are required to have a valid tour guiding license issued by the Regional bureau. A license is issued to tour guides once they have passed the qualifying examination. For this purpose, grade ten national examination certificates have been set as a minimum requirement for taking part in the qualifying examination that focuses on the historical and cultural aspects or facts of the destination (Shegaw, 2015). However, the knowledge and skills of language or communication have been neglected in testing the qualification of tour guides. Surprisingly, while English is being used as a lingua franca in the sector, the medium for the qualifying examination was Amharic. In other words, the qualifying examination was provided in the local language (i.e., Amharic), while tour guides are expected to communicate in English in their actual tour guiding communication (Shegaw, 2015).

Statement of the problem

As discussed, there are two contradictory views related to tour guiding profession. On the one hand, tour guides appear to be considered as the soul of the tourism sector by playing an essential role in presenting and communicating the facts of (and the symbolic and/or historical meanings associated with) the destination to the visitors. In fact, working in the forefront of the tourism sector, tour guides are the leading players in enhancing the image and reputation of the destination. In representing their locality, tour guides act on behalf of their country, and hence, it is no surprise that they are commonly referred to as “ambassadors” (Holloway, 1981).

On the other hand, in terms of qualification, research work conducted elsewhere and the existing local reality indicate that tour guiding profession gets little attention. Rabotic (2009), for example, states that despite being attractive at first, the job of a guide is not particularly serious and even not so creative, and most guides are not in a condition to (or do not) attempt to adapt their standard tours to clients' characteristics. It is also reported by Gurung et.al (1996) that, though the importance of the role of tour guides as mediators between tourists and the destination has been described, scant research has been conducted on tour guides' performance.

Having been inspired and motivated by such reasons, the researcher thought that conducting a research in the context of tour guiding communication would, in turn, have both practical and theoretical implications, as explained herein. In terms of its practical implications, the study tries to evaluate and

show potential problems with regard to tour guiding communication, as a result of which the concerned bodies would be able to provide solutions to those services which required further improvement. With regard to the potential theoretical implication(s) of this study, the researcher would like to suppose that it could partially fill in the knowledge gap in the field that contributes to our understanding of the tour guiding communication because little research has been conducted in this area at both local and global levels.

Therefore, tour guides, being forefront employees in terms of role and underrated in terms of profession coupled with the absence of research on tour guiding communication within Ethiopian tourism sector in general and in the research site in particular suggest that it could be important to design research in order to evaluate and understand the existing reality of tour guiding communication.

Research questions of the study

The aim of the research was to evaluate the tour guiding communication by applying the importance-performance analysis model. To achieve this, the following specific research questions were designed:

1. How do foreign tourists perceive the importance of attributes of tour guiding communication?
2. How do foreign tourists rate local tour guides' actual performance on those attributes of tour guiding communication?
3. How do local tour guides of Lalibela perform on the attributes of tour guiding communication in relation to the perceived importance of those attributes?

Theoretical model: Importance-Performance Analysis Model (IPA)

Martilla and James (1977) were the first authors who introduced importance-performance model. They used attributes of service importance and service performance to investigate service quality of automobile service providers. They, first, identified fourteen attributes from literature and interviews with service and sales employees. Following the identification of attributes, they conducted a questionnaire survey to assess the attributes' importance and the performance of each attribute. This has become the recognized procedure for the successive importance-performance studies (Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). The use of importance-performance model lies on its advantage to simultaneously analyze the customers' evaluation of the importance of attributes and their perceptions of the service providers' performance in achieving the demands of each attributes (Slack, 1994). The importance-performance model makes the interpretation of data easier by presenting a matrix that classifies importance and performance on a scale of low or high. The actual values of the ratings or the scale means for importance and performance are used as reference points in constructing the two-dimensional grid that divides the matrix into four quadrants.

Importance	Quadrant I Concentrate here: High importance Low performance	Quadrant II Keep up the good work: High importance High performance
	Quadrant III Low priority: Low importance Low performance	Quadrant IV Possible overkill: Low importance High performance
	Performance	

Source: (Zhang and Chow, 2004)

Figure 1: Importance-Performance Analysis grid

The vertical axis represents the mean scores of importance whereas the horizontal axis shows the mean scores of performance. The cut/mid-point between the low and high importance is marked by the grand mean of the importance attributes, and the cut point of the performance axis is indicated by

the grand mean of performance on the attributes. Considering the grand means as a cut point, researchers have labeled the four areas quadrant (I-IV).

Quadrant (I): high importance and low performance (concentrate here)

This quadrant is the most critical labeling because it provides a classification of attributes in which the destination fails to satisfy the customers' perceived level of performance in areas they evaluate as relevant (Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). Low level of performance on these attributes requires immediate consideration and the maximum prioritization in terms of resources and endeavor (Zhang and Chow, 2004; Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). The attributes identified under this quadrant signify major problems and threats to the success of the destination. Therefore, government policy changes and strategies should focus on directing extra resources and efforts to these attributes.

Quadrant (II): high importance and high performance (keep up the good work)

According to the importance-performance model, service quality attributes whose mean scores fall within this quadrant are indicative of a destination's achievement in meeting customers' standards of performance in areas that tourists believe significant (Zhang and Chow, 2004). Attributes in this category represent the main strengths of the service provider that should continue. It is assumed that scarce resources are being effectively allocated where they are needed most and that the current action strategies should be kept in maintaining the service of those attributes (Azzopardi & Nash, 2012).

Quadrant (III): low importance and low performance (low priority)

Attributes falling in this category are not considered as major problems rather they are viewed as minor weaknesses and decision-makers are expected to give low priority in allocating scarce resources (Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). Because no gains can be achieved from improved performance, extra effort in this area is unnecessary.

Quadrant (IV): low importance and high performance (possible overkill)

This part of the model captures those attributes are indicative of over performance. This implies limited resources are being directed at attributes that have least impact on the destinations competitiveness (Zhang and Chow, 2004; Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). These attributes signify wasteful use of resources and cutting strategies are appropriate to reallocate resources where they are needed (Azzopardi & Nash, 2012). Thus, this model has been used in this study to evaluate the performance of local tour guides of Lalibela against the importance of tour guiding communication attributes as perceived by tourists.

Methods

Because the field of communication concerns mainly with the cultural and linguistic aspects of human beings, it is usually categorized in the domain of social sciences. Researchers in social science attempt to describe and explain the nature of human action, interaction and structure in line with relevant theories (Bulmer, 1984; Ferman and Leven, 1975). In addressing such issues, social science researchers have used research methodologies which are traditionally conceived as antagonists between two schools of philosophy: the positivist and the constructivist (Gummesson, 1991).

The positivists believe that the social world exists externally and its properties should be measured through objective methods, and causality and fundamental laws are used to explain regularities in human behavior using large samples from a segment of a population (Cresswell, 2003). In the constructivist paradigm, the researcher is considered to be part of what is researched or observed and develops ideas through interpreting information. Scholars in this perspective claim that human meaning and actions could only be understood holistically within situational contexts, and research in constructivism is concerned with eliciting the viewpoint of the individuals being studied and elucidating details of context (Cresswell, 2007).

This study has been approached from the positivist perspective in order to objectively measure the level of importance of tour guiding communication attributes and the level of performance of tour guides on those attributes. For this purpose, the researcher of this study has employed quantitative approach in order to answer the research questions posed above.

Research setting

This study has been conducted at the rock hewn churches of Lalibela which is one of the tourist destinations of Ethiopia. As Mengistu (2004) has stated, respondents (tourists) who were asked to rank their favorite place to visit in Ethiopia put Lalibela their first preference among fifteen potential tourist destinations. However, as the researcher of this study observed while working as a tour guide, the guiding profession has been given little attention. So, there is a need to evaluate the current status of tour guiding communication in this area.

Sources of data and sampling techniques

The sources of data for this study are foreign tourists. Foreign tourists have rated the importance of selected attributes of tour guiding communication before they visit the destination, and they have again rated the level of tour guides' performance on those attributes of tour guiding communication after they were provided with the tour guiding services.

According to Creswell (2003), a research problem relates to a specific population and the population encompasses the total collection of all units of analysis about which the researcher wishes to make explicit conclusions. Since it is not practical and it is too expensive to involve all the members of the population in a research assignment, sampling procedures are of paramount importance and become critical factors for the success of the study (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the appropriate sampling technique should be employed to determine the participants of a study.

In this study, convenience sampling has been used. As the name implies, convenience sampling technique takes a sample on the basis of finding convenient or available individuals. In other words, a convenience sampling is one that is selected without using random procedures. Subjects who are used as source of data are those who are close at hand. Therefore, this could involve the use of participants who are easily available in the research setting. In this study, since tourists are temporary residents of the tourist destination, convenience sampling technique has been employed to gain the required data from the available tourists. This is to say that, tourists who were available during the time of data collection were considered as source of data.

Procedures and methods of data collection

Data collection involves the use of instruments to gain the required data from sample selected for the investigation. Applying instruments such as, observations, interviews and questionnaires, responses of people, actions and events are collected to see the truthful representations of the social world. With regard to this, Mouton (2002) states that if properly constructed and validated over time, such instruments assist in collecting data that are more likely to be reliable. In this study, questionnaire has been used to collect data relevant to the research questions posed before.

A closed-ended questionnaire that was used by Chow and Zhang (2004) was adapted and administered to assess the perceptions of the importance of tour guiding communication attributes and the tour guides' performance on those attributes. Chow and Zhang have developed and used this questionnaire to investigate the perceptions of tourists towards the importance of predetermined service quality attributes and the performance of Hong Kong tour guides. They have first identified 40 relevant service quality attributes related to tour guides based on literature review and advices from academic staff, trainers and travelers. Then they have conducted a pretest among scholars, hotel staff and travel agencies' managers to rate the importance of the 40 attributes. Finally, they used the 20 pertinent service quality attributes to assess the perceptions of tourists towards both the importance of the attributes and the performance of tour guides on those attributes. Because this research is very much related to Chow's and Zhang's (2004) work, and they have gone through various steps in developing the questionnaire to assure the reliability of the items, the researcher of this study used these questionnaire items with some modification to fit for the context.

The questionnaire has three parts. The first part contains the demographic information of tourists. In this part of the questionnaire, tourists were asked to write their nationality, language, age, gender, etc. In the second section of the questionnaire, they were asked to rate the importance of the tour guiding communication attributes which are adapted from Chow and Zhang (2004). In this part, tourists were asked to rate the level of importance among 5-point likert scale (1=extremely unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5=extremely important). The third part of the questionnaire is about the performance of tour guides on the same 20 attributes of tour guiding communication. In this section, tourists were given to rate the performance of local tour guides after tourists have received the

service of tour guiding. A 5-point likert scales have also been used in this section (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

The questionnaire has been given to receptionists of the big hotels at the destination (Lalibela). The receptionists gave the questionnaire containing items of importance of tour guiding communication attributes to tourists before they got the tour guiding service. This could help the researcher to see the tourists' expectation from the tour guiding services. The questionnaire that contains items of performance has been given to tourists after the tour, so that tourists can rate the level of tour guides performance on those service attributes. Tourists filled in the performance questionnaire when they go to their bedroom because tourists would have time to fill the questionnaire properly, and they could rate the performance of tour guides genuinely in the absence of their tour guides.

Methods of data analysis

Data analysis is the process of explaining and trying to make sense of the data received and reducing it to meaningful accounts. In this study, 'importance-performance analysis' model in line with simple statistical tests has been employed to analyse the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and mean has been computed. Frequency was used to examine foreign tourists' demographic profiles. Mean scores rating perceived importance of tour guiding communication attributes and performance of local tour guides at the destination on those attributes were computed.

For the first research question which is about the perceived importance of tour guiding service attributes, the mean scores of the 20 service attributes have be computed and the most and least important attributes are identified. Similarly, to address the second research question, the mean scores of the service attributes were calculated to identify the level of tour guides' performance on those attributes. Regarding the third research question, the mean scores of the 20 items were plotted on the importance-performance analysis grid according to the importance and performance levels as perceived by foreign tourists.

Results

The results of the study are presented in this section. To check the reliability of the questionnaire items of the importance of tour guide's service quality attributes and the performance of Lalibela local tour guides as perceived by foreign tourists, Cranbach's alpha was calculated which was found significant (0.86) as a factor greater than 0.70 is considered significant (Gray, 2004).

Profile of respondents

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to respondents and 248 were collected, representing a response rate of 83%. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: *Demographic Profiles of Respondents*

Nationality of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
American	47	19.0
Australian	30	12.0
British	36	14.5
French	37	15.0
German	33	13.3
Italian	31	12.5
Spanish	34	13.7
Native Language of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Native speakers of English	113	45.6
Non Native speakers of English	135	54.4
Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
16-25	22	8.9
26-35	90	36.3
36-45	15	6.0
46-55	60	24.2
56-65	38	15.3

Sex of Respondents		
	Frequency	Percentage
66 or above	23	9.3
Male	145	58.5
Female	103	41.5
Educational Level of Respondents		
	Frequency	Percentage
High school complete	15	6.0
Diploma	23	9.3
First degree	89	35.9
Masters	83	33.5
PhD	38	15.3
Experience to Ethiopia		
	Frequency	Percentage
For the first time	87	75.4
For the second time	45	18.2
For the third time	11	4.4
For the fourth time or above	5	2.0

As the above table shows, 145 (58.5%) of the respondents were males and 103 (41.5%) females. The majority of the respondents were between 26-35 age group representing 36.4% of the respondents. The next two groups were 45-55 (24.2%) and 56-65 (15.2%). The remaining age groups only accounted for a minority of respondents, with 9.1% in the 66 or above age group, another 9.1% in the 16-25 age group and 6.1% in the 36-45 age groups. The majority of respondents had first degree, accounting for 36.4% of the respondents. Those with postgraduate degree represented 33.3% masters and 15.2% PhD of the respondents while 9.1% and 6.1% respectively had diploma and high school education. Regarding the experience to Ethiopia, more than three fourth (75.8%) of the respondents were first time visitors to Ethiopia, and 18.2% of the respondents had been to Ethiopia for the second time. A minority (6.1%) of the respondents had experience in Ethiopia more than two times. The respondents of this study were from different nationality backgrounds (American, Australian, British, French, German, Italian and Spanish), however; more than half (51.5%) of the respondents were Americans followed by tourists of British nationality (18.2%). 12.1% of the respondents were from Spanish, and French and German tourists were the next group of tourists each constituting 6.1% of the respondents of this study. As the respondents were also classified based on their language background, the majority (75.8%) of the respondents belonged to native speakers of English. Only one fourth (24.2%) of the respondents were nonnative speakers of English.

Perceived importance of tour guides' service quality attributes

The means and standard deviations of the perceived importance of tour guides' service quality attributes by foreign tourists were calculated and the results were presented according to the ranking of the mean scores in table 2 below.

Table 2: Mean ranking for importance of tour guides' service quality attributes (N=248)

Tour guiding service quality attributes	Mean	Standard deviation
Well trained	4.67	.479
Knowledge of destination	4.64	.549
Informing visitors about destination customs	4.42	.614
Speaking clear language	4.33	.692
understanding the speech of tourists	4.30	.770
Punctual	4.27	.674
Knowledge of lexical items for the context	4.27	.761
Good presentation skills	4.24	.502
Honest and trustworthiness	4.15	.566
Informing safety regulation	4.15	.795
Communicating well in English	4.15	.972
Awareness about cultural differences of tourists	4.09	.723
Good code of ethics	4.06	.556
Helping tourists in addressing needs/questions	4.00	.750
Polite	4.00	.500

Respecting customers	3.85	.566
Paying attention to details	3.85	.939
Being friendly	3.73	.801
Sense of hummer	3.42	.830
Introducing reliable shops	3.15	.795

Note: The importance rankings were based on the mean scores measured on a likert scale from 1 to 5 (1=extremely unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5=extremely important).

All the 20 service quality attributes had a mean score higher than 3, ranking from 3.15 to 4.67, indicating that the respondents (foreign tourists) rated the importance of all these attributes between “neutral” and “extremely important”. Three of the 20 attributes, “well trained (mean=4.67)”, “knowledge of destination (mean=4.64)” and “inform tourists about destination customs (mean=4.42)”, were ranked the most important attributes. Foreign tourists perceived “well trained” and “knowledge of destination” as the most important attributes for tour guides as these were critical requirements of tour guiding service.

The attribute “well trained” is rated as the most important. This may be because it directly or indirectly encompasses all the other service attributes, tourists ranked it first hoping that a tour guide who is well trained can provide well the rest of the guiding service attributes. Besides, because foreign tourists intend to experience a destination, they expect their tour guides to be experts on all aspects of the destination, and to be able to inform them and interpret the details of a destination.

Regarding the attribute, “inform tourists about destination customs”, as foreign tourists are strangers for the destination, they expected their tour guides to inform them not only the destination being visited but also detailed information about the overall customs of the society in the destination such as the do’s and undo’s of the cultural and social norms of the destination. And hence, foreign tourists expected local tour guides of Lalibela to play a crucial role in interpreting and breaking the culture as the tour guide is the first and closest contact person between tourists and destinations.

In contrast, comparing the means of the 20 attributes, “introduce reliable shops (mean=3.15)” and “sense of hummer (mean=3.42)” were perceived by foreign tourists as the least important attributes. The findings of this study indicate that tourists do not perceive the attribute “introduce reliable shops” as important service quality attribute. Chow and Zhang (2004) have reported a similar finding, and they explained that tourists would not believe that tour guides introduce them to reliable shops. This is because some visitors thought that tour guides would usually take them to shops for commission which is a frequent practice in tourism industry across the globe (Chow and Zhang, 2004).

The other attribute that was rated as unimportant in this study was “sense of humour” which was ranked as the second least important of all the 20 service quality attributes. This may be due to the fact that the respondents (foreign tourists) are from different cultural backgrounds, and the importance of sense of humour is valued differently in different cultures.

The standard deviation of the importance of the 20 service quality attributes ranged from 0.502 to 0.972, and as the result is below 1, the variation of respondent’s opinions was small.

Performance of local tour guides in Lalibela

The mean scores of performance statements about local tour guides of Lalibela on the 20 attributes were also calculated. The results are reported according to the ranking of the mean scores in the following table.

Table 3: Mean ranking for performance of local tour guides in Lalibela (N=248)

Performance attributes of tour guides’ service quality	Mean	Standard deviation
Punctual	4.09	.579
respecting customers	4.09	.579
having good code of ethics	4.03	.585
Polite	4.00	.612
honest and trustworthiness	3.88	.485
being friendly	3.79	.600
helping me addressing needs/questions	3.79	.545
on Informing safety regulation	3.73	.517

communicating well in English	3.67	.645
Knowledge of destination	3.61	1.144
good presentation skills	3.55	.794
understanding my speech	3.45	.833
speaking comprehensible language	3.42	.751
Paying attention to details	3.42	.902
sense of humor	3.39	.704
well trained	3.36	1.113
Introducing reliable shops	3.18	.769
knowledge of lexical items for the context	3.12	.992
Being aware of cultural differences	2.94	.966
Informing visitors about destination customs	2.82	1.131

Note: Performance rankings were based on the mean scores measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

As it is shown in the above table, the mean scores for all 20 statements ranged from the highest of 4.09 to the lowest of 2.82. Among the 20 statements, foreign tourists gave the top rating to “my tour guide in Lalibela was punctual (mean=4.09)”, “my tour guide in Lalibela respected me (mean=4.09)”, “my tour guide in Lalibela had good code of ethics (mean=4.03)” and “my tour guide in Lalibela was polite (mean=4.00)”. These results indicate that tour guide service in Lalibela was perceived as reasonable in the aspects of punctuality, respecting tourists, code of ethics and politeness, and tourists were satisfied in these aspects of tour guiding service. Because all these service attributes are necessary and are basic requirements for a competent tour guide, local tour guides of Lalibela need to maintain and keep up the good service standards in these attributes.

In contrast, the three worst ratings by the foreign tourists were given to “my tour guide in Lalibela informed me about customs of destination (mean=2.82)”, “my tour guide in Lalibela was aware about cultural differences of tourists (mean=2.94)” and “my tour guide in Lalibela had knowledge of specific language for the context (mean=3.12)”. In fact, foreign tourists were strangers to the cultural values of Ethiopia in general and the destination (Lalibela) in particular which is different from the customs of tourists. Such differences may cause some embarrassing situations for both the tourists and the host. Since foreign tourists might behave in the same way as they do in their hometowns when visiting Lalibela (churches), it was the responsibility of the local tour guides of Lalibela to inform tourists about the customs of the destination, especially, the appropriate norms of doing things in and around the churches. Otherwise, when tourists act in the same way in and around the churches as they do at home, there will be communication or relation problems with tour guides and with communities at large which intern could affect the success of the tourism sector.

Moreover, local tour guides were the ones who were responsible to be aware about the cultural differences of tourists as they come from various sociocultural origins in order to provide the service according to the needs of tourists. However, the performance of local tour guides of Lalibela in this respect was much lower than what was expected by foreign tourists. The results imply that local tour guides of Lalibela were not aware of cultural differences of tourists, and they provide similar services for all tourists regardless of their sociocultural differences that affect their service needs or expectation.

Regarding knowledge of specific language for the context (biblical/theological terms), this aspect was found the third least rated performance of local tour guides in Lalibela as perceived by foreign tourists. This indicates that though tour guides are able to communicate in English, they fail to use appropriate or specific lexical items for the given communicative purpose. As the destination (the church) is mainly characterized by biblical or theological language, foreign tourists expected their tour guide to provide the description of the churches in appropriate language. However, since local tour guides are not well-trained as indicated above, tour guides provide the service without knowledge of biblical language. This result is in line with Shegaw’s (2015) findings of the interview data. In that study, it was found that most of the local tour guides of Lalibela have problem of using biblical and theological terms which are specific for this destination (the rock hewn churches of Lalibela). Therefore, the low rating on the performance of these service quality attributes suggests an urgent need to regulate and take action to improve the overall tour guiding practice in the destination.

Importance of tour guides' service quality attributes and performance of tour guides in Lalibela

Importance-Performance-Analysis (IPA) was applied to compare the importance of tour guides' service quality attributes and the performance of local tour guides in Lalibela as perceived by foreign tourists, and to indicate proper allocation of resources to areas requiring future improvement. The mean of means (grand mean) of the 20 service quality attributes was calculated to determine the cut point (i.e. high and low) for both the importance and performance axes. The mean scores of both the perceived importance and performance of the services, and their grand means are presented in the following table.

Table 4: *The mean scores of perceived importance and performance of tour guide's service quality attributes, and their grand mean (N=248).*

Tour guiding service attributes	Mean of Importance	Mean of Performance
Punctual	4.27	4.09
respecting customers	3.85	4.09
having good code of ethics	4.06	4.03
Polite	4.00	4.00
honest and trustworthiness	4.15	3.88
being friendly	3.73	3.79
helping me addressing needs/questions	4.00	3.79
Informing safety regulation	4.15	3.73
communicating well in English	4.15	3.67
Knowledge of destination	4.64	3.61
good presentation skills	4.24	3.55
understanding my speech	4.30	3.45
speaking comprehensible language	4.33	3.42
Paying attention to details	3.85	3.42
sense of humor	3.42	3.39
well trained	4.67	3.36
Introducing reliable shops	3.15	3.18
knowledge of lexical items for the context	4.27	3.12
being aware of cultural differences	4.09	2.94
Informing visitors about destination customs	4.42	2.82
Grand Mean	4.08	3.56

Note: Mean of importance scale: 1=extremely unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5=extremely important. Mean of performance scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Based on the above table, first, the axis for importance was labeled from 3.00 to 5.00 because the mean scores of the 20 service attributes for importance were between 3 and 5. However, the axis for performance was labeled from 2.00 to 5.00 because the mean scores of the 20 service attributes for performance were between 2 and 5. Second, the grand means (mean=4.08~4.00) for importance and (mean=3.56~3.50) for performance were used for the placement of the cut point for high and low on the grid (Chow and Zhang, 2004). Then, the mean scores of each service attribute were plotted in the IPA grid corresponding to both importance and performance axes. Accordingly, as shown in figure 2, six attributes were identified in the 'concentrate here' quadrant, nine in the 'keep up' the 'good work' quadrant, three in the 'low priority' quadrant and two in the 'possible overkill' quadrant.

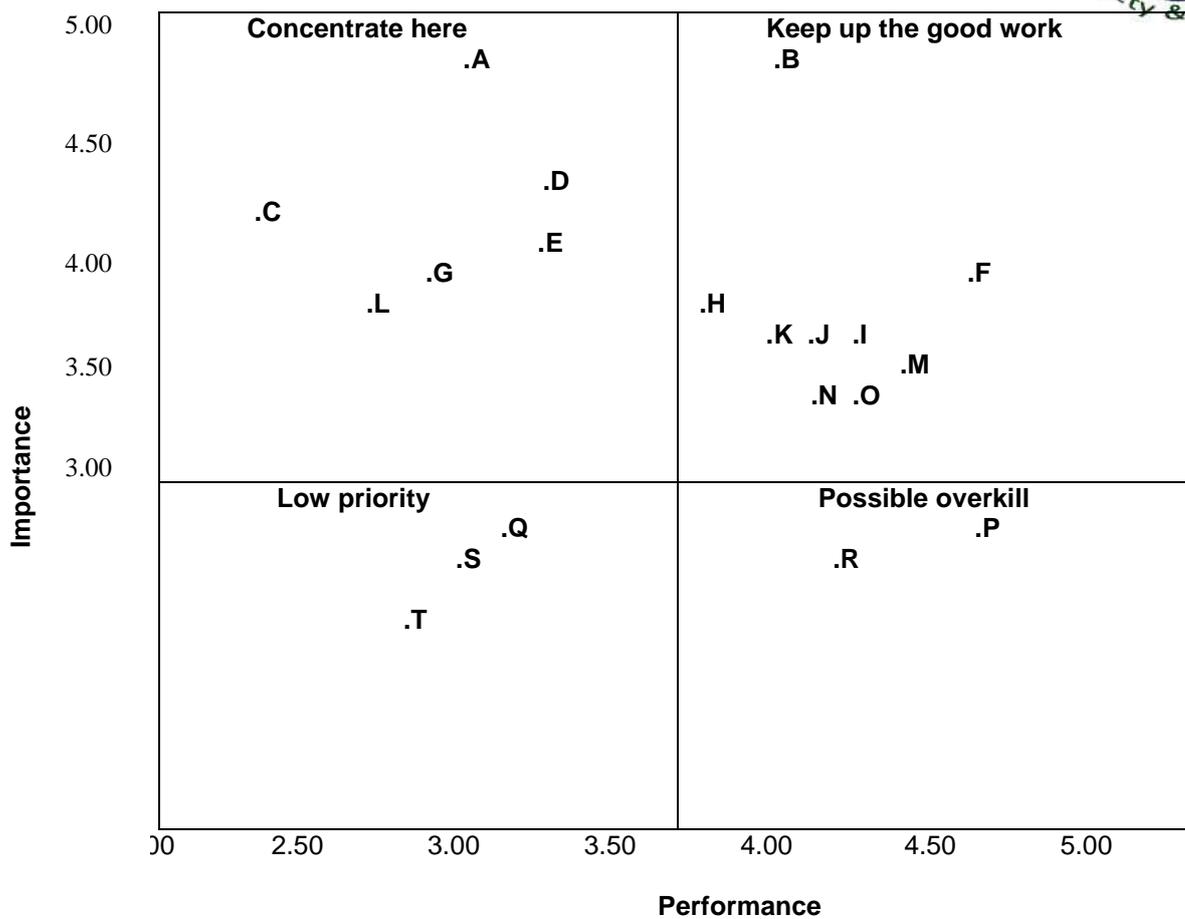


Fig. 2. IPA for local tour guides in Lalibela

Note:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| A. Well trained | K. Communicating well in English |
| B. Knowledge of destination | L. Aware about cultural differences of tourists |
| C. Inform destination customs | M. Good code of ethics |
| D. Speak clear language | N. Helping tourists |
| E. Understand tourists' speech | O. Polite |
| F. Punctual | P. Respect tourists |
| G. Knowledge of specific language | Q. Pay attention to details |
| H. Good presentation skill | R. Friendly |
| I. Honest and trustworthiness | S. Sense of humor |
| J. Inform safety regulation | T. Reliable shops |

Concentrate here quadrant

The 'concentrate here' quadrant is a label given to the area of the IPA grid that shows attributes whose mean scores are identified as high importance and low performance. In this study, six attributes, "well-trained", "speaking clear language", "inform destination customs", "awareness about cultural differences of tourists", "knowledge of specific language" and "understanding tourists' speech", were plotted in the concentrated here quadrant. These attributes were rated above average for importance but below average on performance.

The attribute "well-trained" was perceived as the first most important service quality attribute for tour guides (mean=4.67), but the performance levels of local tour guides of Lalibela in this respect were rated as the fifth lowest (mean=3.36). Another attribute that was identified as high importance (mean=4.33) and low performance (mean=3.42) was "speaking clear language" which is an indication that tourists expected their tour guides to speak the language (medium of communication) clearly, but they found the actual speech of tour guides incomprehensible. The attribute "inform destination customs" was also rated as high importance (mean=4.42) and low performance (mean=2.82). As tourists

are strangers for the destination, and they expected their tour guides to inform them about the socio-cultural norms of the destination, they rated this attribute above average for importance. However, the actual guiding service regarding to the attribute “inform destination customs” was rated ‘below average’ which is an indication that local tour guides of Lalibela do not provide adequate information related to destination customs that was highly expected by foreign tourists.

“Awareness about cultural differences of tourists” was the other attribute identified in the concentrate here quadrant as it was rated high importance (mean=4.09) and low performance (mean=2.94). Respondents (foreign tourists) expected their tour guides to be aware about the cultural differences of customers because it is obvious that tourists are from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, tourists found the actual performance of local tour guides in Lalibela on the tour guide service quality attribute, “awareness about cultural differences of tourists” far below they expected. The other tour guide service quality that was plotted in the ‘concentrate here’ quadrant was “knowledge of specific language” that was rated high for importance (mean=4.27) and low for performance (mean=3.12). The above average rate of importance implies that tourists expected their tour guides to be knowledgeable on the language appropriate for the destination being described (the church in this case). “Understanding tourists’ speech” was the sixth guiding service quality attribute that was plotted in the concentrate here as identified high importance (mean=4.30) and low performance (mean=3.45). Obviously tourists expected their tour guides to understand their speech so that tourists can gain the service they need from their tour guides. However, the finding regarding to this attribute showed that tourists were not satisfied on the tour guides’ command of understanding tourists’ speech.

Keep up the good work quadrant

From the 20 tour guides’ service quality attributes, 9 were identified in the ‘keep up’ the good work quadrant. These were “knowledge of destination”, “punctual”, “good presentation skills”, “communicating well in English”, “inform safety regulation”, “honest and trustworthiness”, “good code of ethics”, “helping tourists” and “polite”. These tour guide service quality attributes were rated above average for both importance and performance. These findings send the message to the sector that in general, tour guides in Lalibela have performed well in the above 9 attributes; however, as all the mean score ratings of performance were lower than those of the importance ratings, special attention should be given to these attributes to maintain and improve guiding services in these areas. For instance, the attribute “knowledge of destination” was rated by respondents between agree and strongly agree (mean=4.64) for importance which indicates tourists’ high expectation of this service from their tour guides, but the actual guiding practice regarding this attribute was rated between neutral and agree (mean=3.61) that implies tourists found the actual service in this respect below they expected. In other words, though the attribute “knowledge of destination” was identified as high for both importance and performance, the respondents (tourists) did not totally agree that their local tour guides in Lalibela were knowledgeable on the destination (the church) because the mean value of the performance of local tour guides in Lalibela in this area was just 3.61 which indicated that respondents tended to agree but did not yet fully agree that their tour guides were knowledgeable in the destination. Therefore, on job training should be provided to local tour guides of Lalibela in order to improve their knowledge of the destination and maintain the required standard in this service attribute. Effort also needs to maintain and improve the other attributes which are plotted in the ‘keep up’ the good work quadrant because the performance means value of each of these attributes were lower than their importance means values as indicated in the IPA grid.

Low priority quadrant

The guiding service attributes “pay attention to details”, “sense of humour” and “introduce reliable shops” were plotted in the low priority quadrant. These tour guide service attributes were rated as below average for both importance and performance which implies that further resources should not be allocated on these attributes. However, this does not mean that the tourism sector should reduce its efforts to improve services on these aspects because though these attributes were rated below average for importance, poor performance on these attributes may cause tourists to be dissatisfied and develop bad experience on the destination.

Possible overkill quadrant

There were only two attributes, “respect tourists” and “friendly” located to the possible overkill quadrant as they were rated below average for importance and above average for performance. This indicates that local tour guides of Lalibela tend to respect and establish good relationship with their guests more than tourists expected them to do in these areas. In fact, foreign tourists might consider these attributes as less important compared with other attributes, but local tour guides of Lalibela performed these attributes more than the other attributes. This may be due to the cultural influence as it matches with the Ethiopian popular saying “Ethiopians are hospitable people”. Above all the attributes, “friendly” and “respect tourists”, do not require special professional training, rather people can develop skills on such attributes based on their social and cultural backgrounds. Overall, as the findings indicated, local tour guides of Lalibela performed well in these areas, and efforts should be towards maintaining high standards over utilizing resources in these attributes.

Discussion

As the result shows, though tourists expected their tour guides to be well trained in the guiding profession, local tour guides of Lalibela were rated as poorly trained. This result is congruent with results of other studies which explain that tour guiding profession is generally given less attention and usually the sector is filled by non-qualified service providers. For example, Dioko (2005) states that tour guides represent a largely underrated, undervalued and underutilized human resource despite the highly expected roles they assume in the guiding service. Particularly, Michel and Coles (2009) describe the condition of tour guides in Ethiopia that highly trained and skilled Ethiopians tend not to want to work outside Addis Ababa, and hence, most of the tourism positions in the destinations of rural areas are filled easily with non-qualified local applicants. This result also supports Shegaw' (2015) finding which states that most of local tour guides of Lalibela are high school complete, and even guides with diploma or degree are trained in unrelated fields. However, the result of this study is different from the result of Zhang and Chow (2004) which was conducted using the same model on the tour guides of Hong Kong. While destination knowledge, in this study, is plotted in the concentrate here quadrant, in Zhang and Chow (2004), it is put in the keep up quadrant.

Speaking clear language is another attribute that was found below tourists' expectation. This result is corroborated with the findings of Shegaw's (2015) qualitative study which indicated that incomprehensible language of tour guides was one area of “communication problems” in tour guiding communication. Thus, the rating of the attribute “speaking clear language” as low performance and high importance confirms the previous findings and such confirmation indicates that this phenomenon is critical for the sector and special attention has to be given for the improvement of the service related to this attribute.

The attribute “inform destination customs” was also rated as high importance (mean=4.42) and low performance (mean=2.82). In the findings of Shegaw's (2015) qualitative study, it was found that foreign tourists violate the cultural norms of the destination (the church), and caused communication or relation problem. This could be the result of local tour guides' low performance in the attribute “inform destination customs” which is considered by tourists as important guiding service quality. This implies that there is a need to improve this area of tour guiding service in order to inform tourists about the cultural norms of the destination.

“Awareness about cultural differences of tourists” was the other attribute identified in the concentrate here quadrant as it was rated high importance (mean=4.09) and low performance (mean=2.94). The previous finding in this regard indicates that local tour guides of Lalibela approach and provide the guiding service in a similar way for all types of tourists regardless of their cultural diversity. For example, Shegaw (2015) states that even some local tour guides interviewed reported that not considering cultural backgrounds of tourists could be considered as discrimination among tourists. This is an indication that the tourism sector has to reallocate the limited resources in order to raise tour guides' awareness about cultural differences of tourists through on-job intercultural training.

The other tour guide service quality that was rated as high importance (mean=4.27) and low performance (mean=3.12) is “knowledge of specific language”. This finding goes with the literature that states language or communication always occurs in context, and the context provides people with a prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or appropriate (Samovar and Porter, 1995). Though the requirement of specific language or communication behavior is as such essential,

the performance of local tour guides in Lalibela was rated below average which indicates that tour guides of Lalibela are not to the required standard in this respect. This is also consistent with the findings of a qualitative study which states that some of the interviewees strongly commented on the deficiency of local tour guides' knowledge of theological or biblical terms which are peculiar features of language in describing the various religious symbolic function of the churches (Shegaw, 2015). The results of this study also indicate that the attribute "Understanding tourists' speech" is plotted in the high importance (mean=4.30) and low performance (mean=3.45) quadrant. Tour guides may find the fast speech of English native speakers difficult to understand as 45.6% of the respondents were native speakers of English which is the medium of communication in the tourism sector.

Overall, the results of this study related to the attributes, "well-trained", "speaking clear language", "inform destination customs", "awareness about cultural differences of tourists", "knowledge of specific language" and "understanding tourists' speech" send an important message to the tourism sector that resources should be directed to improve local tour guides' ability on those attributes. This is to say that, concern should be raised and concentrated on tour guides ability to handle and provide these services attributes properly.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggested that improvement efforts and special attention should be directed to the attributes, "well-trained", "speaking clear language", "inform destination customs", "awareness about cultural differences of tourists", "knowledge of specific language" and "understanding tourists' speech", as all these were indicated as high importance and low performance. Such findings indicate that the tourism sector should direct resources to improve local tour guides' ability on those attributes.

Effort also needs to maintain and improve the other attributes which are plotted in the keep up the good work quadrant because the performance means value of each of these attributes were lower than their importance means values as indicated in the IPA grid.

Some tour guiding attributes such as "pay attention to details", "sense of humor" and "introduce reliable shops" were plotted in the low priority quadrant. However, this does not mean that the tourism sector should reduce its efforts to improve services on these aspects because though these attributes were rated below average for importance, poor performance on these attributes may cause tourists to be dissatisfied and develop bad experience on the destination. The attributes "friendly" and "respect tourists" were located in the 'possible over kill' quadrant. This indicates that local tour guides of Lalibela performed well in these areas, and efforts should be towards maintaining high standards overutilising resources in these attributes.

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