



A Study of Customer Service Competencies and Service Quality of Tour Guide

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Abstract

Many types of research in the competency areas focus on healthcare leadership competencies, human resource development competencies, and leadership competencies but not on customer service competencies, specifically tour guide. This study was carried out to examine the relationships between knowledge competencies and service quality of tour guides. The data was gathered from 30 respondents using a simple random sampling technique, and the reliability procedure was also validated. Descriptive and regression analyses were completed using the SPSS Version 23. The constructs of customer service competencies are based on Durand's Model, which includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while the constructs of service quality are based on RATER's Model, which comprises reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. The study examines a meaningful relationship between KSA competencies and the service quality of tour guides. This study will serve as a guideline for developing strategies for excellent customer service employees.

Keywords: - Customer service competencies, service quality, Durand's model, RATER's model, tour guide

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1. Introduction

The tourist industry has increasingly recognised the vital role that tour guides play across the tourism system in recent years. Tour guides' performances can influence tourists' opinions of the commercial image of travel enterprises. They are critical to the success of travel companies' group package tours. Their professional abilities have the potential to make or ruin a traveller's guided tour experience and memory of a destination (Mak et al., 2011). The tourism industry began investigating techniques for enhancing tour guides' professional competences, which are commonly regarded as critical factors in determining tour guide performance (Mak et al., 2010; Mossberg et al., 2014).

Tour guides' professional competences can be considered travel products since they may influence tourists' perceptions of the service quality of tour guiding, hence enhancing tourist satisfaction. Tour guides are

critical human capital for travel enterprises competing in today's highly competitive tourist industry. To compete in a niche market, modern tourism enterprises must invest not only in high-quality travel products and innovative services, but also in the professional development of their tour guides, hence enhancing tourists' satisfaction on group package tours. Tour guides should not only maintain the quality of trip, but also safeguard tourists' rights. They act as a conduit between destinations and their guests. Furthermore, tour guides should give immediate, pertinent, intangible, and inseparable services.

Professional tour guides considerably enhance the overall quality of a travel package, resulting in increased levels of travel satisfaction (Mak, Wong, & Chang 2011). Significantly, such contentment with a trip influences future behavioral intentions, including word of mouth and intent to revisit (Bowie & Chang 2005; Moon & Han 2018). Despite the important role of tour guides' professional characteristics in senior group tours, little

research has been conducted on them. Stigma leveled towards tour guides because of unfavourable stereotyping by their consumers, the tourists, may cause guides to retreat socially, lowering the overall attractiveness of tour guiding as a career (Li et al., 2020). For example, the occupational image of a tour guide will influence visitors' negative opinions of tourist attractions and their contentment with tourism services (Heung, 2008).

Additionally, when the public denigrates tourism careers, the tourist industry may lose its appeal to qualified workers (Li et al., 2020). As a result, highly educated people are declining employment opportunities in the tourism industry. Nowadays, more than 80% of qualified tour guides in China hold a degree below the bachelor's level. Additionally, tour guide occupational stigma contributes to a high likelihood of turnover due to a lack of corporate acknowledgment (Wildes, 2007). This occupational stigma has gotten worse over time because of the new media's widespread negative portrayal of tour guides (Li et al., 2020). Tour guides play a critical role in the relationship between the host and his or her visitors (Ong, Ryan, & McIntosh, 2014). According to Mackenzie & Raymond (2020), tour guides are critical and dominant actors in tourism services, acting as a link and connector between travel companies, tourists, and other tourism service units. The negative impacts of stigma on tour guides are damaging to the development and progress of the tourism industry. To date, insufficient attention has been paid to the tourism industry's de-stigmatization mechanism, particularly for tour guides (He et al., 2021).

Existing research on tour guide de-stigmatization is primarily concerned with stigma avoidance and reduction (Li et al., 2020), and rarely examines or explores practical issues such as how to re-establish the public's objective judgement of tour guides, de-stigmatize the profession in the public's mind, or even eradicate stigma (Hampel & Tracey, 2017). Given that tour guides provide a service to guests, tourists' perceptions of tour guides are crucial in de-stigmatizing the tour guide profession. To address the research mentioned above, this study will analyse methods for instilling a favourable perception of the tour guide stigma in tourists' thoughts utilising the tour guide occupation as the research object.

Numerous studies have indicated that consumers' favourable opinions and evaluations of service providers are reinforced when they receive high-quality service (Wang, 2010). As a result, tourists' impressions of tour guides and their professionalism may influence the service quality provided by their guides. According to the "Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes Map" (BIAS Map) Model, individual views of a particular group based on their warmth and competence will stimulate analogous emotional responses and behavioral inclinations (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007).

Delivering the finest customer service and experience possible, while simultaneously expanding your customer base and remaining profitable, is a highly challenging process. Corporate organizations, particularly those in the service business, rely largely on staff to carry out their

critical tasks. Employees continue to be a business's most significant asset. As a result, the major purpose of the business should be to establish a highly trained and productive customer service team and to retain them with extensive knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to the BIAS Map, when tourists receive superior service, they will reciprocate by evaluating the tour guide as either exceptionally warm or extremely incompetent, and will produce positive attitudes toward them, such as praise, prompting them to defend or cooperate with the tour guide. Tourists are more likely to note that the stereotype of tour operators as "frauds" with a "bad attitude" does not apply in this scenario (Jenkins & Skowronski, 2016). On the other hand, when tourists receive subpar service, they perceive the tour guide to be lacking in warmth or competence, triggering negative emotions such as contempt and driving them to devalue and shun tour guide groups. Thus, they will endorse stereotypical public conceptions of guides and believe that the occupational stigma aimed against them is legitimate.

2. Problem Statement

Most prior research on employee competencies has focused on healthcare leadership competencies (Calhoun et al., 2008), human resource development competencies (Chen, Bian, & Hom, 2005), and leadership competencies (Yoon, Song, Donahue, & Woodley, 2010), but not specifically on customer service competencies. Historically, research has been focused on certain target groups, such as technical managers in research and development (Kenneth, Michal, & Clara, 1999) and financial experts (Scott, 1998), rather than on customer service personnel. Reid and Dold (2017) noted that developing or generating several competency sets may be seen as complex tasks in the context of competency implementation. These tasks include developing operational definitions of competencies (which include the associated knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes), specifying the standards against which an individual's or organization's competence will be measured, and determining the most reliable method for applying those standards.

The previous authors noticed that most of the previous research frequently used vague competency terms and failed to solve their measurement difficulties (Reid & Dold, 2017). Durand (2000; 1998) emphasised the critical nature of three important components of human capital: knowledge, skills, and attitude, all of which influence the level of competency of targeted parties. According to the researcher's analysis of the literature, previous studies have focused exclusively on one model. This effort attempts to bridge the gap between two significant models, Durand's, and RATER.

The study will analyse the customer service competencies of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as defined by Durand (1998). In comparison, the criteria affecting the customer service rate will include reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, as

determined by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990). Durand (1998) categorises knowledge competencies as formal training, existing knowledge, and learning by doing; skills competencies (know-how) include instructional companionship, existing skills, and learning by doing; and attitudes competencies include social companionship, self-identity, and learning by sharing. Given the preceding, we hypothesise that service quality is a crucial factor impacting tourists' attitudes and perceptions of tour guide stigma. This study will examine the effect of service quality on tourists' stigma judgments of tour guides and recommend weakening or even eliminating the occupational stigma associated with tour guides.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Customer Service Quality

The research on customer service quality is concentrated on the RATER's Model criteria, which were generated from Parasuraman et al (1988). The customer service rating is based on the exceptional level of service provided by the staff. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the history of the Model from SERVQUAL to RATER to fully grasp the term "customer service rate" in this study. The SERVQUAL Model originally had eleven service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, communication, credibility, security, competence, civility, customer understanding, and access. However, due to overlap, these dimensions were reduced to five (communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, customer understanding, and access). They focused exclusively on tangibles (physical facilities, equipment, and staff appearance), reliability (ability to execute the promised service reliably and precisely), and responsiveness (willingness to assist clients and give (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality.

a) Customer Service Competencies

Thomas Durand developed the Durand Methodology, a paradigm for competency development that may be applied at both the organisational and individual levels (Durand, 1998; Durand, 2000). Durand (1998) asserted that both organisational and individual competence can be characterised in terms of three critical dimensions: knowledge (what people know), know-how (the skills individuals use to perform their tasks), and attitudes (our mental orientation to our job). Durand's methodology fosters the growth of each dimension through a series of different learning experiences, or "components" of competency development. Durand's Model, like Lucia & Lepsinger (1999) KSA Concept, is composed of two elements: knowledge and skills. Between the KSA Concept and Durand's Model, the only distinction is between Abilities and Attitudes. While the concept is

broad (applicable to organisational and individual competency development), Durand's emphasis is on organisational competency development (Durand, 1998).

While organisational competency is an enthralling and wide issue, these research interests centre on how customer service professionals develop their individual competency and the relationship between customer service competency variables and customer service quality. The researcher believes it would be fascinating to evaluate whether the Durand Model's competency-building characteristics are acceptable and relevant for developing competency among tourism industry customer service professionals. Formal education, the current knowledge foundation, and self-education all fall under the knowledge dimension. In the skills dimension, these factors include instructional companionship, pre-existing skills, and active learning.

Finally, Durand's attitudinal dimensions include social companionship, self-identity, and mutual learning. Despite the simplicity of Durand's Model, there is beauty in these three components. The Model's real contents offer a wealth of information. It becomes much more fascinating considering Durand (1998, pp.318) argument that the dimensions do not have a predetermined order or priority. As can be seen, each factor is critical in determining an individual's ability. Durand (1998) defines knowledge as "*structured sets of assimilated information which make it possible to understand the world, obviously with partial and somewhat contradictory interpretations. Knowledge thus encompasses the access to data, and the ability to enact them into adequate information and integrate them into pre-existing schemes, which evolve along the way*". Durand (1998, pp.318) defines the skills or know-how as "*relates to the ability to act concretely according to predefined objectives or processes. Know-how does not exclude knowledge but does not necessitate a full understanding of why the skills and capabilities, when put to operations, actually work. Know-How thus relates in part to empiricism and tacitness*".

Furthermore, the researcher views this dimension as being more action-oriented than knowledge in a more passive context. Durand defines talents as the ability to apply learned knowledge to certain roles or duties. However, talent is more than simply the application of pure information in a person; it also entails the acquisition of competent application through such activities, either through observation of others performing the job or through personal experience performing the job for an extended period. As a result of the Model's nature, individuals are required to engage in physical and mental activities (Durand, 2000). Additionally, this method stressed the importance of tacit knowledge transfer within the skills component. According to Polanyi (1983), tacit knowledge can be defined in a variety of ways, but in Durand's Model, it is defined as the process of developing abilities through observation of other individuals performing the work at hand.

Attitudes are Durand's final dimension. This dimension may be difficult to grasp as a coherent conceptual framework (Miller, 2002), as attitudes are influenced by a variety of factors, including social, cultural, and self-image factors, all of which influence an individual's ability to develop competency. While the core definition of attitude is extremely broad, Durand (2000, pp. 79) defined it as an individual's reflection of "behaviours, commitment, and culture". Durand (2000) also noted that these attitude components are typically overlooked in studies of competence because most competency categories, such as organisational competence, are more involved and concerned with economic issues (Durand, 2000). Durand has undoubtedly invested much time and effort in developing a broad model that may be used to characterise organisational and individual capabilities. Durand (1998, pp. 318-319) defined attitudes by stating that "*We believe that behaviour but even more so identity and will (determination) are essential parts of the capability of an individual or an organization to achieve anything. We argue that a dedicated organization, eager to succeed, is more competent than a demoralized, passive one with the same knowledge and know-how*". Given that this conceptual study seeks to apply Durand's Model, the researcher assumes that a customer service employee must understand their job as customer service, their skills in interacting with consumers, and their proper attitudes toward customers and co-workers.

b) Tour Guide

The term "guide" refers to someone who leads, directs, or shows the way, most often a foreign tourist who is compensated to give a tour of a city, structure, mountain, or forest and to point out areas of interest (Cohen, 1985). In the United States and Europe, a tour guide or tourist guide assists and informs clients about cultural, historical, and modern heritage at educational institutions, religious and historical sites such as museums, and various tourist attraction resorts. Tourist guiding began in Malaysia in the early 1960s. A tourist guide is defined in subsection 24 (1) of the tourism industry act, 1992, as "any individual who serves tourists or other individuals by directing them for money while they travel." According to the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, existing tourist guides can further their education by learning new languages and broadening their guiding languages to lead foreign tourists. Tourist guides that are multilingual are in high demand now. Tourist guides interested in training and teaching can become trainers and examiners for the tourist guide course at tourism training institutions with adequate experience. Tourist guides with the proper knowledge and cash may also find employment in tourism-related businesses such as tour agencies, hotels, and resorts. The profession as a tourist guide is divided into two, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between city tourist guide and local nature tourist guide

City Tourist Guide	Local Nature Tourist Guide
Tourist guides in cities throughout Malaysia can assist tourists.	Local nature guides are limited to guiding tourists within the natural regions they picked while applying for their licence.
To earn a city tourist guide license, you must attend and complete the Basic Tourist Guide Course. The course lasts 500 hours (4-6 months) and is taught by tourist training institutions that are registered with the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism and Culture.	To earn a license as a local nature tourist guide, you must attend and pass the Local Nature Tourist Guide Course. The 17-day training is taught by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.
The license is blue in colour.	The license is green in colour.

4. Research Framework

The Customer Service Competencies Model provided in this study is based on the theories of Durand (1988) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) RATER's Model. Information acquisition is one of Durand's Model's three fundamental pillars. Knowledge is vital because it lays the groundwork for competent performance. Without knowledge, individuals are incapable of making conceptual distinctions or organising their behaviours, and they lack the crucial information to perform better (Miller, 2002). At the individual level of knowledge, there appears to be a high association between knowledge and competence. For instance, Argyris & Schon (1992) associate the utility value of knowledge with an individual's competence to comprehend and resolve problems based on acquired information. The knowledge dimension encompasses three components that contribute to competency development: formal education, pre-existing knowledge, and experiential learning. Businesses should develop a training programme and hire workers with superior service knowledge, which will increase the reliability of customer care professionals (Wu, Lee, & Liao, 2018). Reliability of customer service representatives is crucial to achieving client contentment (Meesala & Paul, 2018). Employees must be confident in their abilities to reassure customers (Ryan & Cliff, 1997). Employees who share their knowledge with clients instil a sense of confidence and security (Albayrak, Karasakal, Kocabulut, & Dursun, 2020). Employees with 'customer need knowledge' provide superior customer service (Homburg, Wieseke, & Bornemann, 2009). Thus, a lack of prior knowledge of physical appearance impacts employees' appearance when providing services to customers and contributes to a poor impression of the business among customers, resulting in a drop in the organization's growth (Dossinger, Wanberg, Choi, & Leslie, 2019). An organisation should recognise a highly motivated employee who displays empathy and tries to remedy service issues, as they contribute to the customer's favourable opinion of the organisation (Yani-de-Soriano, et al., 2019). However, formal customer service training had no discernible effect on employees' ability to

empathise (Homburg, Wieseke, & Bornemann, 2009). In other words, because of training that provides programmed information on how to fix the customer's problem, workers are unable to empathise with consumers. This is why the consumer senses an injustice, as the employee is incapable of understanding and empathising with them. The organization's training programme demonstrates a lack of empathy for and resolution of consumer complaints or issues (Yani-de-Soriano, et al., 2019). Acquiring knowledge enables employees to be more responsive inside the organisation (Qureshi, 2019). Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

- H1: Knowledge will have a positive effect on reliability.
- H2: Knowledge will have a positive effect on assurance.
- H3: Knowledge will have a positive effect on tangibles.
- H4: Knowledge will have a positive effect on empathy.
- H5: Knowledge will have a positive effect on responsiveness.

Skills (Know-how) represent Durand as the second dimension. According to Durand, know-how "*is action (taking place in the form of the various learning mechanisms) which transforms the potential competence, not yet demonstrated, into reality*" (Durand, 1998, p. 325). Thus, knowledge is action-oriented, necessitating the development of skills and procedures through repetition and practise (Durand, 2000). The know-how dimension is concerned with the acquisition of a skill - or the capacity to behave or perform a task in a particular way. According to Argyris & Schon (1992), our capability permits us to perform effectively. Evers, Rush, and Berdow (1998) demonstrate the importance of skill in the competence equation, even going so far as to define "competency" as an individual's capacity to execute with skill. The purpose of this study is to analyse how individuals develop their talents via the lens of the Model. Instructional companionship, pre-existing abilities, and experience learning are the three elements of know-how.

Employees' lack of competence decreases their customers' trust in them and their contribution to the organization's competencies (Aldubayan, Aljuraiban, & Aldisi, 2019). When employees are unable to keep their pledge to provide services on time, they continue to lack service abilities, which has a bad effect on the customer's perception of their reliability (Sharifabad et al., 2019). Thus, it is vital to enhance employees' abilities to build trust between the consumer and the employee (Garrubba & Yap, 2019). The organization's current physical appearance and physical facilities should be upgraded on a regular basis (Pakurár, Haddad, Nagy, Popp, & Oláh, 2019). The ability of employees to pay attention to client attitudes and thoughts indicates a strong correlation between employee competency and empathy (Sharifabad et al., 2019). Employees develop specialised talents that enable them to execute and respond swiftly to consumer requests (Harcourt & Ateke, 2018). Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

- H6: Skills will have a positive effect on reliability.

H7: Skills will have a positive effect on assurance.

H8: Skills will have a positive effect on tangibles.

H9: Skills will have a positive effect on empathy.

H10: Skills will have a positive effect on responsiveness.

Durand (2000) contends that most of the research on competency has overlooked the effect of attitudes that favour other characteristics. Additionally, the author believes that contemporary competence theory may have placed too much emphasis on cognitive abilities and not enough on the cultural components of the organisational milieu. The author said, "Culture has a critical role in promoting or eroding competence" (Durand, 1998). In a broad sense, Durand (1998, pp. 324) states that attitudes "*are shaped through interaction when individuals conform to the group or organizational behaviour, adopt the same cultural values, and share the same basic commitments.*" The body of knowledge regarding the impact of attitudes (including the components of companionship, self-identity, and learning by sharing) on the field of competency development is substantial and suggests a compelling case for this dimension of Durand's Model. The impact of culture (whether at the organisational level or within the immediate workgroup) cannot be underestimated as a dynamic and influential force influencing the individual.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) coined the term "social architecture" to refer to the web of social ties and meaning-making scenarios through which individuals comprehend an organisation. This is consistent with Durand's view of the critical function of social interaction in shaping behaviour. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), culture exerts such a strong and pervasive influence on individuals that it frequently overcomes the ability of individuals to change their behaviour. Hamel (1998) emphasised the importance of cultural factors inside an organisation, stating that they affect both individual knowledge transmission and interpersonal communication. Hamel (1998) also investigated the role of organisational culture in members' comprehension of shared knowledge. Individuals will perform better, according to Fletcher (1995), if the corporate culture encourages them. Schein (2010) showed that as individuals' mental models, thinking processes, and learning styles become more aligned with their workgroup, they get ingrained in the corporate culture. Tobin (1998) emphasised the need of building a learning culture that promotes constant personal knowledge and ability improvement. The three components of attitude are social companionship, self-identity, and learning through sharing. As a result, an attitude problem may jeopardise the reliability of a high-quality service (Rainnie & Dean, 2009). Employee confidence and the company's favourable reputation among its consumers are affected by employees' trust in giving correct information (Ahmad, Ong, Liew, & Norhashim, 2019). Employees must be instructed to maintain a nice demeanour when dealing with consumers, as they are representing the organisation when providing services to them (Pakurár, Haddad, Nagy, Popp, & Oláh, 2019). Attitudes can be improved as an

employee develops empathy, which benefits the organisation because the person's behaviour improves because of the organisation (Tian & Robertson, 2019). When an employee is dealing with a customer's demand, their cheerful attitude helps them empathise more effectively (Balamurugan & Nivetha, 2018). Employees must be instructed to maintain a nice demeanour when dealing with consumers, as they are representing the organisation when providing services to them (Pakurár, Haddad, Nagy, Popp, & Oláh, 2019). Attitudes can be improved as an employee develops empathy, which benefits the organisation because the person's behaviour improves because of the organisation (Tian & Robertson, 2019). When an employee is dealing with a customer's demand, their cheerful attitude helps them empathise more effectively (Balamurugan & Nivetha, 2018). Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

- H11: Attitude will have a positive effect on reliability.
- H12: Attitude will have a positive effect on assurance.
- H13: Attitude will have a positive effect on tangibles.
- H14: Attitude will have a positive effect on empathy.
- H15: Attitude will have a positive effect on responsiveness.

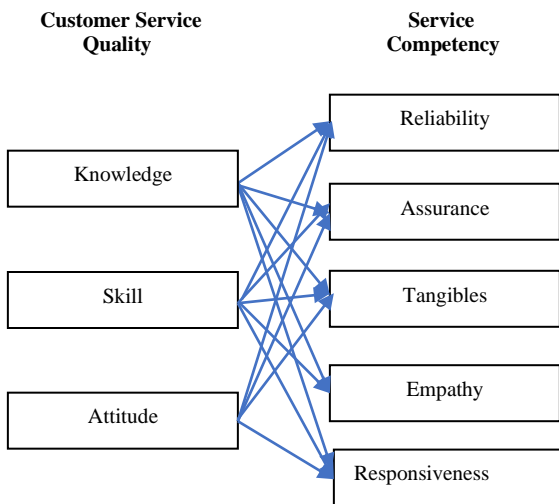


Fig.1. Conceptual framework

5. Methodology

The data for this study were gathered from tour guides in Peninsular Malaysia's central and southern regions. This research employed a quantitative approach, in which a questionnaire was used to elicit data for the study. The data collected were subjected to descriptive and regression analysis.

5.1 Research Instrument

To elicit information from respondents, a questionnaire-based survey was used. Section A, Section B, and Section C compose the questionnaire. Section A elicited demographic information on respondents, including their age, gender, marital status, religion, level of education, level of income, state of residence, number of years of job experience, and badge category. Part B included a question about the competency variable, which includes knowledge, competence, and attitude. Part C focused on service quality and included questions about accountability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. The questionnaire used the Five Point Likert Scale to assess the respondent's degree of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Strongly Agree).

The instruments for competencies were derived from Durand (1998) and consist of nine (9) sub-components, with the researcher developing the items through a four-stage process. KSA was initially identified and operationalized through a survey of the scientific literature on the construct. The instrument consisted of five-point Likert-type items derived from an existing instrument or invented by the researcher. The instruments were validated by peer evaluation during pilot research, and their reliability was determined using the internal consistency approach. Additionally, item analysis was used to eliminate weak items. The third stage entails attempting to ascertain a representative sample of current respondent competencies in this study. The instruments of competencies are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Competencies construct & sub constructs

Knowledge	Formal training
	Existing knowledge base
	Learning by learning
Know-How (Skill)	Instructional companionship
	Existing skill
	Learning by doing
Attitude	Social companionship
	Self-identity
	Learning by sharing

The instruments used to assess service quality were adapted from Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., and Berry, L. L. (1988). They consist of five (5) constructs, each of which contains 4-5 items. Some of the items used to determine reliability include the following: 'I will provide quality services as promised,' 'I know how to respond to customers' inquiries,' 'I am always dressed appropriately,' 'I understand customers' specific needs,' and 'I will provide prompt services to customers,' and so on. The data collection was coded and entered SPSS version 23.

5.2 Sample Size

According to Gorsuch (2014), the total sample size in the pilot study should not be less than 100 persons. According to Dermoot and Sarrela (1996) the total sample size in the pilot test should not be less than 20 people. Rather than that, MacCallum et al. (1999) proposed that the appropriate number of participants in the pilot study should exceed 100. According to Forza (2002), fifteen people. Hair et al. (2003) limited the sample size to 5-30 persons. As a result, the sample size of 30 is sufficient for this investigation. This data was gathered using simple random sampling.

6. Results and Findings

According to Konting (1993) and Darusalam & Hussin (2016), the allowable coefficients are more than a \Rightarrow . Whereas Nunally (1978) suggests that the 'Cronbach Alpha' score should be greater than a \Rightarrow . 70 to be considered acceptable. The interpretation of Cronbach alpha (a) correlation coefficients is as follows:

0.00 to + 1.00 = basically (Lyman, 1986)

.60 to .70 = Satisfied (satisfied coefficients)

.70 to .80 = Stability (stability coefficients)

.80 to .90 = Customary coefficients

.90 to .95 = Adequate coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996)

.80 to .90 = Acceptable reliability

.90 to + 1.00 = Very good reliability (Vierra & Pollock, 1992)

.95 to + 1.00 = Uniformity of internal consistency accepted (acceptable standardized test for internal consistency (Kubiszyn & Borich, 1993)

A pilot study or pilot test was conducted by taking a sample of $n = 30$, as shown in Table 3. the findings of the pilot test study show from the aspect; 'Formal training' alpha value is $\alpha = .671$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 67.1 percent (.671 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .671$ means satisfied coefficients according to Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996). Similarly, the aspect of 'Existing Knowledge Base' alpha value is $\alpha = .939$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 93.9 percent (.939 x 100) based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .937$ means outstanding reliability according to Vierra & Pollock (1992). Learning by learning alpha value is $\alpha = .636$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 63.6 percent (.636 x 100) based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .671$ brings meaning satisfied coefficients according to Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996).

Instructional companionship alpha value is $\alpha = .927$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 92.7 percent (.927 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients

above. The alpha value $\alpha = .927$ brings excellent meaning reliability, according to Vierra & Pollock (1992). The existing skills alpha value is $\alpha = .682$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 68.2 percent (.682 x 100) based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .671$ means satisfied coefficients according to Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996). Learning by doing alpha value is $\alpha = .754$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 75.4 percent (.754 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .754$ carries the meaning of stability coefficients according to Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996).

Table 3. Cronbach Alpha item value

Section	Statement	Item	Correlation coefficient Cronbach α
Knowledge	Formal training	1 - 6	.671
	Existing Knowledge Base	7 - 12	.939
	Learning by learning	13 - 17	.636
Know How (skills)	Instructional companionship	18 - 23	.927
	Existing skills	24 - 28	.682
	Learning by doing	29 - 33	.754
Attitude	Sosial companionship	34 - 39	.895
	Self - identity	40 - 44	.951
	Learning by sharing	45 - 49	.813
Service quality	Reliability	1 - 5	.926
	Assurance	6 - 9	.837
	Tangibles	10 - 13	.637
	Empathy	14 - 17	.837
	Responsiveness	18 - 21	.861

Social companionship alpha value is $\alpha = .895$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 89.5 percent (.895 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .895$ brings meaning; customary coefficients or sufficient coefficients according to Gall, Borg, & Gall (1996). The self-identity alpha value is $\alpha = .951$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 95.1 percent (.951 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above. The alpha value $\alpha = .951$ carries the meaning of outstanding reliability, according to Vierra & Pollock (1992). Learning by sharing the alpha value is $\alpha = .813$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample on the items is 81.3 percent (.813 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .813$ means; customary coefficients or sufficient coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

The reliability of the alpha value is $\alpha = .926$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the

items is 92.6 percent (.926 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .926$ means outstanding reliability (Vierra & Pollock, 1992). Assurance of alpha value is $\alpha = .837$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 83.7 percent (.837 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then alpha value $\alpha = .837$ means; customary coefficients or sufficient coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Tangibles alpha value is $\alpha = .637$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 63.7 percent (.637 x 100) based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .671$ means satisfied coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Empathy alpha value is $\alpha = .837$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 83.7 percent (.837 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .837$ means; customary coefficients or sufficient coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Responsiveness alpha value is $\alpha = .861$, which indicates the degree of reliability of the sample to the items is 86.1 percent (.861 x 100), based on the Cronbach alpha index value (a) correlation coefficients above, then the alpha value $\alpha = .861$ means; customary coefficients or sufficient coefficients (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

7. Conclusion and Future Research

The previous study has emphasised the critical nature of customer service competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitude, in terms of service quality, measured in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. This study attempts to shed light on its variables. As a result, it is anticipated that many these variables will be significant. Additionally, this article might be expanded to include different sorts of respondents, such as travel agents, managers, and business owners in the tourism industry, as there is a dearth of research on travel agencies. This research is expected to add to the body of knowledge by expanding the body of literature on customer service competency in the tourism industry context. The research is significant in that it aims to improve and contribute to educational institutions where students need to learn about customer service tasks relevant to their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. The anticipated contribution of this study to the literature on competency, specifically customer service competency from a tourism perspective, will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between travel agencies and the tourism industry, which is currently lacking, particularly in the Malaysian context. Additionally, this discovery will contribute to future studies on a bigger scale. Thus, the customer service competency model produced in this research can serve as a reference for future research in which other researchers can adapt the Conceptual Model developed in this

research to the Malaysian context in general and more advanced to Asian or even Western contexts.

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