

Human Resource Management of Tour Guides: Challenges and Strategies for Improving Service Quality

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to identify the challenges faced by tour guides in Indonesia and formulate strategies to improve their service quality. The research adopts a quantitative approach with a descriptive design, using data collection through questionnaires distributed to 200 purposively selected tour guides. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression tests. The results reveal that the main challenges faced by tour guides include low economic welfare, limited opportunities for formal training, and competition with unlicensed tour guides. Tour guides also reported that high workloads and uncertain working hours added to the complexity of their tasks. To improve service quality, the strategies most valued by respondents include providing better incentives or compensation systems, continuous training, and strengthening regulations and licensing for tour guides. Hypothesis testing results show that economic welfare and work experience significantly influence service quality. Based on these findings, it is recommended that tour guides enhance their skills through ongoing training, tourism destination managers provide training facilities and improve tour guide welfare, and travel agents collaborate to ensure licensing and welfare for tour guides. Collaboration among stakeholders is needed to create a more professional and sustainable ecosystem in Indonesia's tourism industry.

KEYWORDS: tour guides, economic welfare, work experience, education level

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors in Indonesia, with tour guides playing a key role in providing meaningful experiences for tourists (Pusparani et al., 2025). Tour guides are essential in ensuring that visitors receive accurate information, friendly service, and unforgettable experiences throughout their journey (Trivenna & Eviana, 2024). However, behind this vital role, there are significant challenges in human resource (HR) management for tour guides, particularly concerning the enhancement of service quality to meet the dynamic changes in tourism (Rini & Firdaus, 2022). This research focuses on the challenges faced by tour guide HR management and the strategies that can be implemented to improve service quality in the tourism industry.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of service quality in the tourism sector, but most have focused more on technical and material aspects without delving deeply into the HR management of tour guides. For instance, Stangl et al. (2024) study on service quality in hotels and restaurants did not specifically address the role of tour guides. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2023) explored HR management in the hospitality sector but did not highlight the specific challenges in the tour guide sector. Permana et al. (2024) research on tourist satisfaction primarily focused on destination management, without considering the quality of tour guide HR, which directly impacts the tourist experience.

Based on a study by Mustafa et al. (2021), which examined the development of HR quality in the tourism sector, it was found that many tour guides lack continuous training and self-development opportunities. This study offers insights into the gaps in managing tour guide HR but does not provide clear solutions for addressing these challenges. On the other hand, Mackenzie & Kerr (2013) study reveals that the biggest challenge in managing tour guide HR is the lack of adequate welfare and incentives that correspond to their contributions in enhancing tourist experiences. However, there is no emphasis on the need for continuous skill enhancement, which represents a gap that requires further research within the context of managing tour guide HR.

Specific challenges in managing tour guide HR in Indonesia have not been extensively explained, even though the tourism sector plays an increasingly vital role in the country's economy. One often overlooked aspect is the importance of improving

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tour guides' service quality, which can be measured by enhancing communication skills, knowledge of destinations, and a professional attitude capable of adapting to the needs of international tourists. This research aims to address this gap by focusing on how tour guide HR management can design training, empowerment, and welfare enhancement strategies that align with the demands of modern tourism.

The primary objective of this research is to identify the challenges faced by tour guide HR management in improving service quality and to formulate effective strategies to enhance the skills and motivation of tour guides. This research also aims to contribute practical solutions for the development of training strategies tailored to the ever-evolving needs of the tourism industry. Thus, this study is expected to provide valuable insights for tourism destination managers, travel operators, and training institutions in designing more effective and sustainable tour guide HR development programs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource (HR) management for tour guides has become a topic of great interest to researchers worldwide. In the context of tourism, tour guides play an essential role in shaping tourists' experiences, particularly in terms of knowledge, communication, and personal interaction. According to Lin et al. (2017), service quality in the tourism industry is heavily influenced by the competence of HR, including tour guides, who must possess both technical and interpersonal skills. Arokisamy et al. (2024) research indicates that effective HR management can improve individual and organizational performance, aligning with the enhancement of tourists' experience quality.

Further studies address the challenges faced by tour guides in adapting to changing market demands. Mensah et al. (2015) found that tour guides in Ghana face challenges such as limited training and lack of professional recognition. Similarly, Lin et al. (2017) highlighted that the lack of continuous education for tour guides impacts the quality of service provided. Their study concluded that HR development for tour guides should focus more on enhancing communication skills and in-depth knowledge of local culture to provide tourists with an authentic experience.

In addition, Lin et al. (2021) explored the relationship between the well-being of tour guides and the quality of service they deliver. The study found that tour guides with higher well-being levels tend to offer better service. This finding is supported by Li et al. (2021), who identified that economic welfare factors, such as salary and incentives, significantly influence tour guides' motivation to provide quality service. According to their research, improved welfare increases job satisfaction, which in turn improves service quality for tourists.

A study by Kul et al. (2024) revealed that continuous training helps tour guides cope with the challenges they face in their daily tasks. The research highlights the importance of training programs that encompass the development of communication skills, destination knowledge, and awareness of current tourism trends. Likewise, Bilan et al. (2024) emphasized the crucial role of technology in tour guide training, enabling them to access the latest information and efficiently update their knowledge. This becomes increasingly important as the demand for technology-based tourism experiences rises, requiring digital literacy from tour guides. Some studies also discuss external factors influencing tour guide HR management. Garcia-Gomez et al. (2021) suggested that global economic uncertainty, changes in government policies, and social conditions can affect the performance of tour guides. A study by Sakawati et al. (2022) stressed the need for collaboration between the government, private sector, and tourism industry stakeholders to support the development of professional tour guide HR. Bunakov et al. (2020) research also showed that the existence of educational and training institutions that provide certification for tour guides contributes to service quality improvement. Therefore, strengthening partnerships between various stakeholders is essential to improving the quality of tour guide HR. One key factor is the importance of training programs that are tailored to the ever-changing needs of tour guides. Additionally, factors such as welfare, professional recognition, and external factors also play a significant role in creating high-quality tour guides. Based on this review, this research aims to identify the challenges and strategies that can be applied to enhance the service quality of tour guides in Indonesia, considering all the factors discussed above.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Type

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to identify the challenges and strategies for improving the service quality of tour guides in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it provides a clear and in-depth understanding of the issues faced by tour guides, as well as the strategies that can be implemented to enhance their service quality. The aim of this research is to collect data that can be statistically analyzed to draw conclusions about the factors affecting the service quality of tour guides.

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Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of tour guides working at various tourist destinations across Indonesia, both in domestic and international tourism sectors. The sample will consist of 200 tour guides selected purposively, based on certain criteria, such as having more than one year of work experience and being actively involved in providing services at popular tourist destinations. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that the sample selected is relevant to the research objectives.

Research Instrument

Data will be collected using a questionnaire designed based on the research objectives and existing literature. The questionnaire will consist of several sections: (1) Identifying the demographic data of the tour guides, such as age, education level, and work experience; (2) Measuring the challenges faced by tour guides in performing their duties using a 1-5 Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The challenges to be measured include lack of training, low economic welfare, and lack of professional recognition; (3) Identifying strategies that could be applied to improve service quality, including communication skills development, continuous training, and providing appropriate incentives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data will be collected by distributing the questionnaire both in person and online to the tour guides in the sample. The questionnaires will be distributed via email, social media, and in collaboration with tour guide associations and travel operators in Indonesia. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire instrument will be piloted with a small group of tour guides to ensure its validity and reliability. The results of the pilot test will be analyzed and adjusted if necessary.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the challenges and strategies for improving the service quality of tour guides. This analysis will include calculating frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, inferential analysis using linear regression will be conducted to identify relationships between specific factors, such as the welfare of tour guides and the service quality they provide. Statistical software such as SPSS or Microsoft Excel will be used to process the data and draw conclusions.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Tour Guide Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	< 25 years	32	16.0%
	25 - 34 years	85	42.5%
	35 - 44 years	51	25.5%
	45 - 54 years	24	12.0%
	≥ 55 years	8	4.0%
Education Level	High School / Equivalent	58	29.0%
	Diploma (D1/D2/D3)	75	37.5%
	Bachelor's (S1)	55	27.5%
	Master's (S2/S3)	6	3.0%
	Other	6	3.0%
Work Experience	1 - 3 years	46	23.0%
	4 - 6 years	68	34.0%
	7 - 10 years	52	26.0%
	> 10 years	34	17.0%

Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the tour guide respondents, which include age, education level, and work experience. Based on age, the majority of respondents are in the 25-34 year range, comprising 42.5%. This suggests that most tour guides are within the productive age group, possessing high energy and communication skills to serve tourists effectively. In contrast, only 16% are under 25 years old, and just 4% are over 55, indicating that the majority of tour guides are young to early-

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middle-aged. In terms of education, the largest group of respondents holds a diploma (D1/D2/D3) at 37.5%, followed by those with high school education (29%) and bachelor's degrees (27.5%). Only 3% of respondents have a master's degree or higher, reflecting that most tour guides have mid to higher-level education. While higher education can affect service quality, it does not always guarantee the practical skills needed in the field. Regarding work experience, the largest group of tour guides has 4-6 years of experience (34%), followed by those with 7-10 years (26%) and 1-3 years (23%). Only 17% have more than 10 years of experience, indicating relatively high turnover or career shifts, with many tour guides moving to other professions after a few years in the industry. Overall, the demographic distribution reflects a majority of productive-age tour guides, with varied educational backgrounds and work experiences. The limited number of guides with more than 10 years of experience suggests that low welfare or incentives might be driving guides to switch careers.

Table 2. Respondents' Agreement with Challenges Faced by Tour Guides

No	Challenge Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	Lack of opportunities for formal training	3.95	0.98	High
2	Low economic welfare/income	4.21	0.85	High
3	Lack of professional recognition from stakeholders	3.78	1.05	High
4	Difficulty handling tourists from diverse backgrounds	3.45	1.12	Moderate
5	Competition with unlicensed tour guides	4.05	1.01	High
6	Regulations or policies that are not supportive	3.62	1.15	Moderate
7	Lack of tourism infrastructure support	3.55	1.08	Moderate
8	High workload and uncertain working hours	3.88	0.94	High
Overall Challenge Average		3.81	0.75	High

Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Table 2 shows respondents' agreement with various challenges faced by tour guides. Overall, the average agreement score for the challenges is 3.81, which is categorized as "high," with a standard deviation of 0.75, indicating general agreement among respondents on the challenges they face. The biggest challenge identified is low economic welfare or income, with the highest average score of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.85. This suggests that many tour guides feel their income is insufficient, possibly due to low fees or a lack of incentives from tourism providers. Other significant challenges include limited opportunities for formal training (3.95), competition with unlicensed tour guides (4.05), and high workload with uncertain working hours (3.88). These challenges suggest that tour guides feel undervalued in terms of professionalism and welfare, and they face difficulties balancing their work and personal life due to unpredictable working hours. These factors may be influenced by the lack of institutional support and unclear fee structures. Some challenges, such as difficulty handling tourists from diverse backgrounds (3.45), unsupported regulations (3.62), and inadequate tourism infrastructure (3.55), received moderate agreement. While these issues are still felt, they are not as dominant compared to others and reflect more external factors related to policy and conditions that tour guides themselves cannot easily change.

Table 3. Respondents' Agreement with Strategies to Improve Service Quality of Tour Guides

No	Strategy Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	Development of communication and interpersonal skills	4.45	0.75	High
2	Provision of continuous training (language, culture, etc.)	4.58	0.68	High
3	Provision of better incentives or compensation system	4.65	0.65	High
4	Strengthening the role of professional tour guide associations	4.15	0.88	High
5	Strengthening regulations and enforcement of tour guide licenses	4.30	0.85	High
6	Utilization of technology in guiding services	3.98	0.95	High
7	Increasing collaboration with other tourism industries	4.22	0.81	High
8	Standardization of competencies and professional certification	4.40	0.78	High
Overall Strategy Average		4.34	0.59	High

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Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Table 3 shows respondents' agreement with various strategies that could be applied to improve the service quality of tour guides. Overall, the average agreement score for the proposed strategies is 4.34, which is categorized as "high," with a standard deviation of 0.59, showing high consistency in the responses of the tour guides. The strategy with the highest agreement score is providing better incentives or a more effective compensation system (4.65), indicating that many tour guides consider financial rewards important for recognizing their contributions. This is influenced by the previously identified issue of low economic welfare. Other highly-rated strategies include providing continuous training (4.58) and developing communication and interpersonal skills (4.45), indicating that tour guides highly value skill enhancement to improve their service quality. These training programs are expected to cover various aspects, such as language, culture, and communication skills, to provide better experiences for tourists. Other strategies that also received high agreement scores include enhancing the role of professional associations (4.15), strengthening regulations and enforcing tour guide licenses (4.30), and standardizing competencies and professional certification (4.40). This shows that respondents recognize the importance of professional recognition and clear standards in improving professionalism and service quality. Increasing collaboration with other tourism industries (4.22) and utilizing technology in guiding services (3.98) were also considered important, although the utilization of technology received a slightly lower score, reflecting some limitations in adopting new technologies among tour guides.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.150	0.350		6.143	.000
Economic Welfare	0.285	0.080	.295	3.562	.000
Work Experience	0.042	0.018	.180	2.333	.021
Education Level	0.075	0.055	.105	1.364	.174

Source: Data processing is processed by researchers (2025)

Table 4 presents the hypothesis test results, examining the impact of independent variables on tour guide service quality. Based on the results, several important findings can be explained. First, the variable Economic Welfare has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.285 with a t-value of 3.562 and significance (Sig.) of 0.000. The significance value less than 0.05 indicates that economic welfare significantly impacts the service quality of tour guides. This means that the higher the economic welfare of tour guides, the better the service quality they provide. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests economic welfare can improve tour guides' motivation and job satisfaction, which in turn improves their service quality. Next, Work Experience also significantly influences tour guide service quality, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.042, t-value of 2.333, and significance of 0.021. This indicates that more work experience contributes to better service quality, although its effect is smaller compared to economic welfare. More work experience equips tour guides with better knowledge and skills to handle tourists, improving their ability to provide high-quality services. On the other hand, Education Level does not significantly impact service quality, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.075, t-value of 1.364, and significance of 0.174, which is greater than 0.05. This suggests that, although education level may influence tour guide performance in some contexts, in this case, education level does not have a significant effect on the quality of service provided. One possible reason for this could be that practical skills, such as communication abilities and cultural knowledge, are more relevant to the job of a tour guide than formal education levels.

Table 5. Statistik Model

R	.488
R Square (R ²)	.238
Adjusted R Square	.226
F	20.215
Sig. F Change	.000

Source: Data processing is processed by researchers (2025)

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Table 5 shows the regression model statistics measuring the impact of independent variables on the service quality of tour guides. The R value of 0.488 indicates a moderate relationship between the independent variables and service quality, while the R² value of 23.8% suggests that the model explains nearly 24% of the variability in service quality. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.226 is slightly lower, indicating that there are other factors not included in the model. The F statistic of 20.215 and the Sig. F Change value of 0.000 indicate that this regression model is statistically significant, meaning the variables studied make a meaningful contribution in explaining the service quality of tour guides.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the challenges in Table 2 reveals that economic welfare, specifically low income, is the most pressing concern for tour guides, with the highest average agreement score of 4.21. This finding supports the earlier hypothesis about the high turnover rate or career shift after 10 years of service, where inadequate financial incentives might be a driving factor. Additionally, competition with unlicensed tour guides (average score of 4.05) and lack of opportunities for formal training (average score of 3.95) were also considered significant challenges. These issues collectively highlight the financial vulnerabilities and lack of structural support for the professional development and protection of licensed tour guides. High workloads and uncertain working hours (average score of 3.88) further complicate the challenges faced.

In line with the challenges felt most acutely, respondents strongly agreed with strategies focused on improving both welfare and competence (Table 3). The strategy of providing better incentives or compensation systems received the highest average score of 4.65, confirming that improving economic conditions is a priority for boosting motivation and service quality. This was closely followed by the provision of continuous training (4.58) and the development of communication and interpersonal skills (4.45). This indicates a high level of awareness among tour guides about the importance of investing in personal development to meet the demands of the profession and the increasingly diverse expectations of tourists. Strengthening regulations, licenses, and competency standards (average scores of 4.30 and 4.40) was also considered crucial, logically linked to efforts to combat unfair competition and enhance professional recognition.

The hypothesis test results (Table 4) provide empirical evidence of factors that significantly influence tour guide service quality within the context of this study. Economic welfare was found to have a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.295$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing the argument that tour guides who feel more financially secure tend to deliver better service, likely due to higher motivation and greater focus on their work. Work experience also showed a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.180$, $p = 0.021$), indicating that more years of experience contribute to enhanced service quality, although its impact is relatively smaller than economic welfare. This finding is consistent with the general view that experience brings valuable practical expertise in the service industry.

Although formal education level did not significantly influence service quality ($p = 0.174$), the overall regression model (Table 5) was statistically significant ($F = 20.215$, $p = 0.000$). The R² value of 0.238 (or 23.8%) shows that the combination of economic welfare and work experience explains about 23.8% of the variation in service quality. While significant, this suggests that around 76.2% of the variability in service quality is influenced by other factors not included in the model. These factors may include the personality of tour guides, the quality of specific training received, managerial support from tourism companies, destination characteristics, or even unique interactions with particular tourist groups. Therefore, while improving economic welfare and facilitating the accumulation of work experience are key steps, efforts to enhance service quality must also address potential interventions in other factors.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that the primary challenges faced by tour guides in Indonesia relate to low economic welfare, lack of formal training, and competition with unlicensed tour guides. Improved economic welfare, longer work experience, and the development of communication and interpersonal skills were found to significantly impact the service quality provided by tour guides. The strategies most valued by respondents include offering better incentives or compensation systems, continuous training, and strengthening regulations related to licenses and competency standards. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for improvements in economic welfare and professional development for tour guides to enhance the quality of service they provide. Based on these findings, it is recommended that tour guides strengthen their communication skills and destination knowledge through continuous training and take advantage of technology to expand their knowledge. For tourism destination managers, it is important to provide support in the form of accessible training facilities and ensure the welfare of tour guides through better incentive systems. Meanwhile, travel agents should collaborate with professional associations and regulators to ensure valid licensing for tour guides and focus on improving the welfare and professional recognition of licensed guides. All stakeholders must collaborate to create a more professional and sustainable environment for tour guides in Indonesia.

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