AN ADAPTIVE SKILL FRAMEWORK FOR VIETNAMESE OUTBOUND TOUR LEADERS: EVALUATION AND PROPOSAL

by

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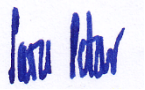

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Dedication

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “AN ADAPTIVE SKILL FRAMEWORK FOR VIETNAMESE OUTBOUND TOUR LEADERS: EVALUATION AND PROPOSAL" submitted " to SSBM, Geneva for the award of degree of Doctor of Business Administration, is my original research work. This thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted partially or fully for the fulfilment of any degree of discipline in any other University/Institution.

Tran Huynh Nguyen

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ABSTRACT

AN ADAPTIVE SKILL FRAMEWORK FOR VIETNAMESE OUTBOUND TOUR LEADERS: EVALUATION AND PROPOSAL

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This study addresses the critical need for an updated competency framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders, bridging the gap between existing vocational standards basing on VTOS (2013) and evolving market demands. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates in-depth 10 interviews with 10 industry experts and a quantitative survey with 20 active tour leaders. The primary research instrument, a scenario-based skills assessment, was developed to measure proficiency across 14 key skills, which were then compared with 400 archival customer feedback forms. The adjusted regression analysis demonstrates that these dimensions, particularly Core Professional Competence (β=0.555) and Operational Management and Planning (β=0.299), are the most influential predictors of a tour leader's overall proficiency. However, the analysis also reveals a disconnect between these skills and customer satisfaction, suggesting that while the skills collectively explain variance in feedback, no single factor's contribution is statistically significant. The study concludes by proposing an evidence-based skill framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders. This framework, grounded in empirical data, provides actionable insights for tour operators and training institutions to enhance recruitment, professional development, and performance evaluation. It highlights the importance of an integrated approach to skill development, moving beyond years of experience and simple feedback metrics to foster a more robust and adaptable workforce.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Term
AVFB	Average Feedback Score
AVSK	Average Skill Score
BARS	Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale
BEI	Behavioral Event Interviews
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRM	Human Resource Management
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes
PDP	Personalized Development Plan
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
RQ	Research Question
SBL	Scenario-Based Learning
SJT	Situational Judgment Test
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound

SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TL	Tour Leader
UGC	User-Generated Content
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
VNAT	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
VTOS	Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 **The Tourism Industry in Vietnam**

In the burgeoning global economy, the tourism industry has emerged as one of the world's largest and most dynamic sectors. Recent data reveal that in 2022, the industry contributed approximately 10.4% to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equivalent to over $10 trillion, and supported 330 million jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). Over the next decade, the tourism industry is projected to grow by an average of 4% annually, reaching 10% of global GDP and accounting for 328 million jobs, or 1 in every 10 jobs globally by 2032 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). This remarkable growth trajectory presents both opportunities and challenges for the development of the tourism sector, particularly in emerging economies like Vietnam. Vietnam’s tourism industry has undergone a transformative journey since the nation’s economic liberalization under the “Đổi Mới” or “DOI MOI” (Renovation) reforms in 1986. Prior to this period, tourism was negligible, as the country grappled with post-war reconstruction and geopolitical isolation (Cooper, 2000). However, the shift to a market-oriented economy catalyzed the government’s recognition of tourism as a strategic sector for economic growth.

1.2 The Booming of Outbound Tourism in Vietnam

Vietnam's rapid economic development has been a cornerstone of its potential as an outbound travel market. According to the World Bank (2024), Vietnam's GDP growth rate averaged 6.5% annually over the past decade, resulting in increased disposable income among its citizens. This economic prosperity has enabled a larger portion of the population to allocate resources for international travel, thereby expanding the outbound travel market (World Bank, 2024). The demographic profile of Vietnam is another critical factor in Mastercard's evaluation

(Mastercard, 2023). Vietnam boasts a youthful population, with approximately 50% of its citizens under the age of 35 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2023). This young demographic is more inclined towards exploring international destinations, contributing to the burgeoning outbound travel market. Furthermore, the growing middle class, projected to encompass 26% of the population by 2025, plays a significant role in driving travel demand (McKinsey & Company, 2022). High rates of digital adoption and mobile payment usage in Vietnam have facilitated easier travel bookings and transactions. Mastercard's research indicates that 72% of Vietnamese consumers use smartphones for travel-related activities, including booking flights and accommodations (Mastercard, 2023). This digital affinity not only enhances the convenience of travel planning but also supports the growth of the outbound travel market. The Vietnamese government has implemented various initiatives to support the tourism sector, both inbound and outbound. Policies such as visa exemptions for short-term travel to certain countries and the promotion of international tourism fairs have positively impacted the outbound travel market (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2024). These measures, coupled with infrastructural developments like the expansion of major airports, have made international travel more accessible for Vietnamese citizens. Vietnam's rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes continue to attract tourists from around the world. However, the country's unique cultural identity also sparks a desire among its citizens to explore different cultures globally. Mastercard's analysis highlights that Vietnamese travelers often seek destinations with cultural and historical significance, as well as those offering novel experiences (Mastercard, 2023). In conclusion, the evaluation of the Vietnam outbound travel market underscores the significance of economic growth, a young and dynamic population, digital adoption, supportive government policies, and

cultural appeal. These factors collectively contribute to the optimistic outlook for Vietnam's outbound travel market, positioning it as a significant player in the Asia-Pacific region.

Year	Outbound Trips (Millions)	Annual Growth Rate
2023	7.5	-
2024	8.0	6.70%
2025	8.5	6.30%
2026	9.0	5.90%
2027	9.5	5.60%
2028	10.0	5.30%
2029	10.5	5.00%
2030	11.0	4.80%

Table 1: The annual growth rate and the number of outbound trips from Vietnam
Source: Mastercard (2023).

1.3 The Role of International Tour Guides in Vietnam Tourism Industry

According to Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2024), by the end of 2023, Vietnam had 4,069 international travel businesses, an increase of 1,175 from the previous year. Of these, 1,276 were joint-stock companies, 38 were foreign-invested, 2,749 were limited liability companies, and 6 were private enterprises. The provincial and municipal Departments of Culture, Sports, and Tourism issued 6,069 tour guide licenses, including 2,211 new licenses, 3,821 renewals, and 37 reissued licenses. Nationwide, there were 37,397 licensed tour guides, reflecting an increase of 3,709 from 2022. This total included 21,642 international guides, 13,881 domestic guides, and 1,874 point-of-service guides.

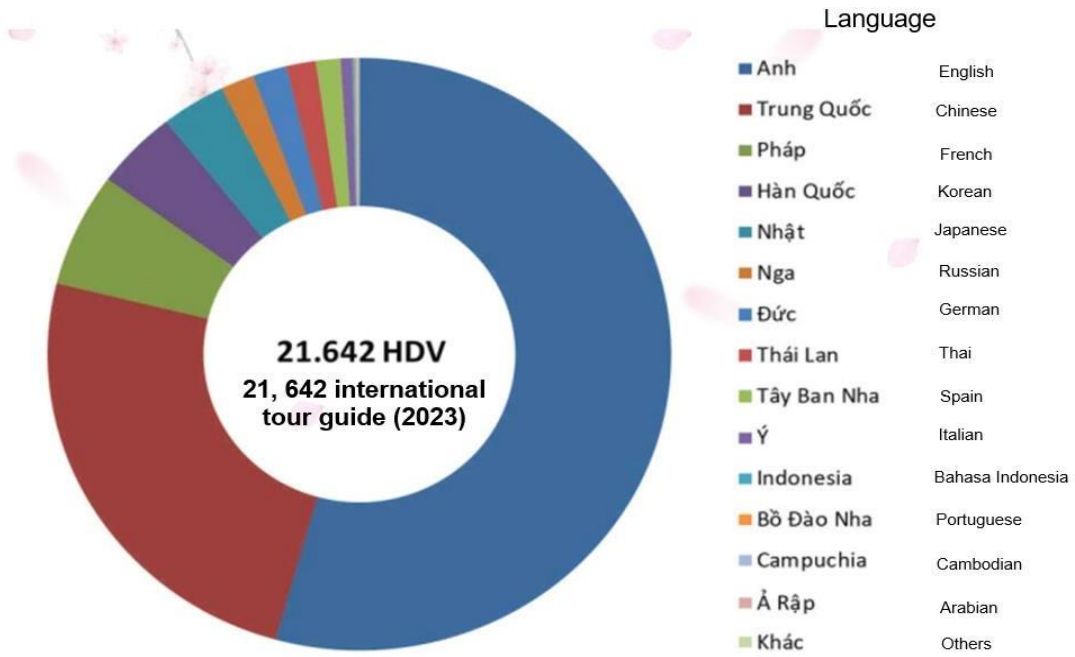

Figure 1 Distribution of international tour guides in Vietnam by language (2023)
Source: Created by the author based on data from VNAT (2024).

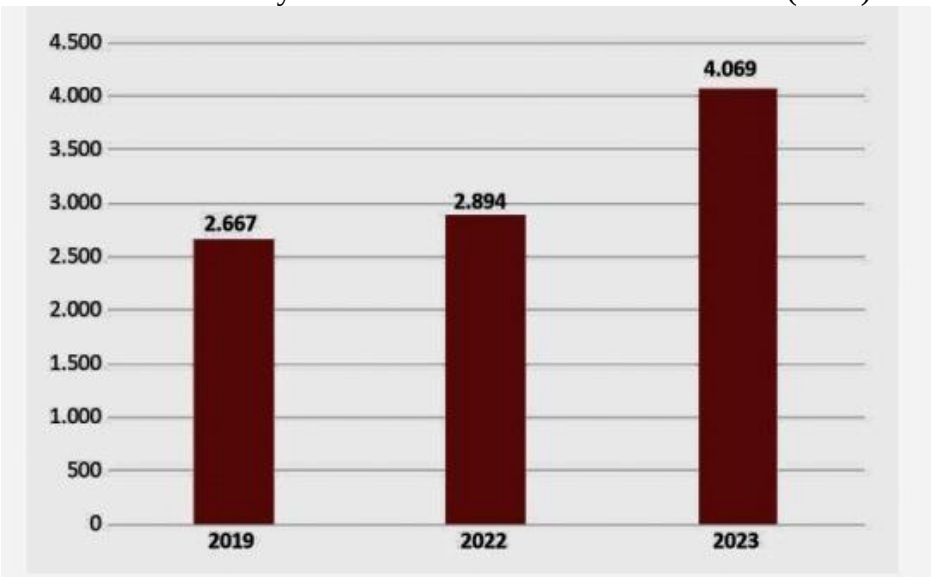

Figure 2 : International Tour Operators of Viet Nam (2019 – 2023)
Source: VNAT (2024)

The effectiveness of tour guides is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of both the operational performance of travel firms and the overall growth of the tourism industry across diverse national contexts (Wong, 2001; Yu et al., 2002; Wong and Kwong, 2004). Yet, despite this

recognition, complaints from tourists, particularly international visitors, about the quality of guiding services remain a recurrent challenge. In the Vietnamese context, this issue is compounded by persistent weaknesses in human resource management, especially among small- and medium-sized enterprises. Common shortcomings include limited investment in structured training programs and the absence of transparent performance appraisal mechanisms. Prior research highlights that systematic staff training enhances service quality while containing recruitment costs associated with highly experienced personnel (Kotter, 2001). Similarly, fair and objective evaluation frameworks are fundamental to building an efficient and equitable workplace (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Tourism literature consistently emphasizes the strong correlation between a tour leader's competence and tourist satisfaction, the ultimate measure of a program's success (Huang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2010). This dependency exposes travel companies to operational risks, as disparities in guide proficiency can lead to inconsistent service outcomes. One notable concern is the outflow of highly skilled tour leaders who leave established firms to set up independent operations, often transferring loyal clients and valuable expertise with them (Huang et al., 2010). Such talent migration is particularly disruptive in the outbound segment, where knowledge of international logistics and cross-cultural mediation is difficult to replace, resulting in service instability and reduced tourist satisfaction (Zhang and Chow, 2004). Consequently, strengthening workforce capacity, particularly among tour guides, is essential to enhance the competitive advantage of tourism organizations (Huang et al., 2010). Despite these observations, there is still a lack of comprehensive academic inquiry and nationally representative data regarding the performance of international tour leaders and their impact on customer satisfaction. This absence of evidence makes it difficult to systematically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnam's tour guiding workforce. While earlier studies have examined the performance of

inbound tour guides in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2015), this thesis extends the discourse by focusing on outbound tour leaders who escort Vietnamese travelers abroad. By doing so, the research generates new managerial implications for outbound operators and contributes novel empirical insights to the DBA body of knowledge.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in an era of profound societal shifts, where technological and social advancements are reshaping lifestyles and increasing opportunities for leisure and travel (Smith & Jones, 2021). Beyond fulfilling basic physiological needs, tourism serves higher-order social and spiritual requirements, offering individuals avenues for recreation and personal enrichment that contribute significantly to their overall quality of life (Doe, 2022). This dynamic sets the tourist as a central force in the industry's expansion. Central to a positive tourism experience is the concept of customer satisfaction, which is often explained by the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory. This theory posits that tourists form pre-travel expectations about a destination or service; satisfaction is then determined by how the actual experience compares to these initial expectations (Oliver, 2010). A positive disconfirmation, where the experience exceeds expectations, leads to high satisfaction, whereas a negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction. Therefore, as individuals increasingly seek fulfilling travel experiences, the tourism industry's success hinges not just on providing services, but on managing and surpassing the complex expectations of the modern tourist.

2.2 The Evolution of Tourism Research and Its Focus on Customer Satisfaction

Early research on tourism established it as a distinctly recognized industry of national importance (Department of Tourism, 2020). This sector encompasses a wide array of businesses that provide services such as transportation, accommodation, leisure activities, dining, and other related services for both domestic and international travelers. The motivations for travel include various purposes, such as leisure and business (Travel Association, 2021). Subsequently, Leiper

(1990) further articulated that the tourism sector includes all enterprises, institutions, and infrastructure designed to meet the specific needs and desires of tourists, which is evident in the marketing and design strategies employed by different entities within the industry. Today, the tourism sector is one of the most critical industries globally, making substantial contributions to the world's GDP and employment. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2023), tourism accounted for approximately 10.4% of global GDP and supported 330 million jobs in 2022. The tourism industry has the potential to assist developing nations in tackling unemployment and poverty by transforming their resources, such as natural attractions and cultural heritage, into economic benefits. Furthermore, this industry promotes environmental sustainability, actively seeking to protect and preserve natural resources for future generations (Johnson, 2022). The expansion of the global tourism industry has spurred a corresponding growth in academic research, which has become increasingly complex and interdisciplinary to reflect the sector's evolving social and technological landscape (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2020). Scholars have explored a wide range of topics, from ecotourism and sustainable development to consumer behavior and cultural tourism (Lee, 2015; Buckley, 2019; Hung et al., 2015; Cuccia and Rizzo, 2014). A significant portion of this research, particularly in developing nations, has focused on key themes like operational management, tourist behavior, and regional development (Tsang and Hsu, 2018). A central element of tourism research is customer satisfaction, a concept frequently analyzed through theoretical lenses such as the SERVQUAL model. This model identifies five key dimensions of service quality—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—that shape a tourist's perception of their experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). High-quality service across these dimensions is a critical antecedent to customer satisfaction, which in turn influences behavioral intentions like loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Chen

and Tsai, 2007). Methodologically, the field has shown a preference for quantitative approaches, with approximately 60% of studies employing this method, often supplemented by statistical analysis (Ballantyne et al., 2010). Research has also become more global, with a notable increase in contributions from institutions in Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, challenging the previous dominance of North American and UK-based studies (Ballantyne et al., 2010). Ultimately, much of this research underscores that tourism is a profoundly human-centric industry (Kwortnik et al., 2021). As a result, effective human resource management has emerged as a critical area of study, as the quality and performance of the workforce, particularly frontline employees like tour guides, are directly linked to service quality and the overall success of the tourism sector (Huang et al., 2022). This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of literature and theoretical aspects pertaining to research in tourism. Drawing from a diverse array of sources, the literature is categorized into three main topics:

i) The significance of human resource management in the travel and tourism sector.

ii) The impact of tour guides, service performance, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty in the travel and tourism business.

iii) The skill framework and career path for Outbound Tour guides in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the chapter proceeds to present the research model, research questions, and hypotheses of the study, which are derived from the literature review and prior academic investigations.

2.3 The Evolved Role of The Outbound Tour Leader

2.3.1 The role of tour guide and tour leader

Tour guide

Tour guides play a multifaceted role in the tourism industry, significantly influencing various aspects of the visitor experience (Falk & Dierking, 2019; Cohen & Cohen, 2018). They serve not only as information providers but also as cultural interpreters, experience facilitators, and ambassadors for their destinations (Buchanan & Hargreaves, 2020). Research indicates that the presence of a knowledgeable and engaging tour guide can greatly enhance visitor satisfaction, resulting in positive word-of-mouth recommendations and encouraging repeat visits (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009; Ballantyne et al., 2018). Furthermore, tour guides contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in Vietnam (Hall, 2021). By advocating for responsible tourism practices—such as respecting local cultures and environments—tour guides can help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and ensure that its benefits are equitably distributed among all stakeholders (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Tour leader

Mancini (2021) emphasizes that the tour leader plays a crucial role in overseeing the group's journey during multi-day excursions, maintaining close interaction with participants. This individual may be an employee of the tour operator, a professional tour guide contracted by the operator, or a representative from the organization facilitating the trip. In Europe, the term 'tour leader' is often synonymous with tour manager, tour conductor, or tour director. Some tour companies prefer to refer to their tour leaders as 'tour guides' to highlight their expertise in providing insightful commentary during sightseeing activities. However, it is important to distinguish between the roles of tour guide and tour leader. A tour guide is defined as someone who conducts tours and possesses extensive knowledge of a specific area, with the primary duty of informing (Pond, 1993). To avoid confusion, this thesis will use the term 'tour leader' to refer to the individual who escorts Vietnamese tour participants throughout their travels abroad. The role

of a tour leader requires a diverse set of skills and presents numerous challenges. Tour leaders must possess a wide range of professional qualifications, including psychology, diplomacy, customer service, public speaking, and specialized knowledge in various fields. Achieving success in this role can be demanding. Webster (1993) noted that ensuring participant satisfaction and fulfilling all contracted services are the primary responsibilities of the tour leader. She proposed a list of ten essential dos and don'ts for conducting a successful tour. Stevens (1990) cautioned that tour leaders must maintain professionalism and avoid personal involvement with tour members, as this could undermine their authority and control over the group. The tour leader faces significant pressure during service encounters, requiring patience and careful attention. Mancini (2021) suggested strategies for effectively managing a tour group, emphasizing that tour leaders should demonstrate fairness, recognize positive group behavior, exceed client expectations, assert authority in disruptive situations, encourage client maturity, exhibit leadership qualities, and maintain flexibility. Numerous empirical studies indicate that the tour leader significantly influences customer satisfaction (Lopez, 1980). Grönroos (2016) asserted that it is the tour leader who facilitates the sale of subsequent tours. Mossberg (1995) examined charter tours and argued that the performance of a tour leader is a critical factor that distinguishes one tour operator from another. The effectiveness of the tour leader during service encounters impacts on the company's image, customer loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication, serving as a competitive advantage. However, customer satisfaction with the tour leader's performance does not necessarily correlate with satisfaction regarding the tour operator. Mossberg proposed that a deeper understanding of the dynamics during service encounters between the tour leader and customers is essential for enhancing overall satisfaction.

2.3.2 Tour guide performance and tourist satisfaction

Tour guides play a pivotal role in shaping tourists' experiences and perceptions of service quality. They act as intermediaries between the destination and the tourists, significantly influencing their understanding and appreciation of the cultural and historical context. A study by Kauffmann et al. (2021) found that the effectiveness of tour guides is closely linked to tourists' satisfaction levels. Customer satisfaction is defined as the degree to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of tourism, satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including service quality, personal experiences, and contextual elements. Understanding customer satisfaction is essential for tourism providers, as satisfied customers are more likely to return and recommend the service to others (Anderson & Mittal, 2000). Tour guide's performance is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction in tourism. Guides who exhibit professionalism, knowledge, and interpersonal skills can significantly enhance tourists' experiences. Research by Chen et al. (2020) found that effective tour guide performance directly correlates with higher levels of tourist satisfaction. Tour guide competence encompasses knowledge, communication skills, and the ability to engage and entertain tourists. A study by Fuchs and Weiermair (2004) highlighted that competent tour guides significantly enhance tourists' satisfaction levels by providing valuable insights and creating memorable experiences. In the Vietnamese context, research on the tourism industry is few, and none has investigated the role of the tour leader or the correlation between tour leader performance and tourist satisfaction. In the absence of substantial study findings on tour leader performance and service quality, tourist organizations exhibit diminished confidence in regulating tour leader practices and assuring optimal performance to provide superior service to their clients. This thesis seeks to evaluate a skill framework for tour leaders in Vietnam by examining their performance which are affected to customers' satisfaction led to their loyalty.

2.3.3 The evolving role of the outbound tour leader

The role of the outbound tour leader has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, shaped by globalization, the rapid expansion of international travel, and evolving tourist expectations. Traditionally, tour leaders were primarily responsible for logistical tasks such as coordinating itineraries, managing group transportation, and ensuring compliance with travel documentation. However, their function has expanded beyond operational oversight to encompass cultural mediation, customer experience management, and crisis resolution in increasingly complex international contexts (Cohen, 1985; Weiler and Black, 2015). In today's competitive tourism landscape, outbound tour leaders are expected not only to provide accurate information and ensure safety but also to act as brand ambassadors, delivering personalized service that enhances the reputation and competitiveness of travel companies. This shift underscores the strategic importance of outbound tour leaders in strengthening customer loyalty, managing cross-cultural encounters, and safeguarding service quality in dynamic global markets.

Early Conceptualizations (1980s–1990s)

The academic study of tour leaders first emerged within broader discussions of tourism intermediaries in the 1980s. Cohen (1985) described the tour leader primarily as a "pathfinder" and "mediator," responsible for logistics, group control, and ensuring that tours progressed smoothly. In this period, the role was largely operational, centered on technical efficiency and managing the practicalities of group travel. Similarly, Holloway (1981) highlighted the importance of reliability, punctuality, and problem-solving as core attributes. The conceptualization at this stage was narrow: tour leaders were framed mainly as facilitators of mobility rather than as value creators within the tourism experience.

Shift Towards Cultural Mediation (1990s–2000s)

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, tourism scholars began emphasizing the cultural and interpretive dimensions of the tour leader's role. Black and Weiler (2005) argued that tour leaders act as cultural brokers, interpreting local contexts and helping tourists make sense of unfamiliar environments. This interpretation role was seen as vital for enhancing the tourist experience beyond logistics, particularly in international settings where language barriers and cultural differences are significant. Mak et al. (2010) further suggested that tour leaders contribute directly to service quality and tourist satisfaction by balancing operational tasks with interpersonal engagement.

The Professionalization of Tour Leadership (2010s)

During the 2010s, literature increasingly viewed tour leaders as professionals whose work involved both technical competence and emotional labor. Weiler and Black (2015) conceptualized the tour leader as a "performer" who manages group dynamics, delivers interpretive narratives, and ensures safety, while also embodying the values of the tour company. Tour leaders were expected to be brand representatives and front-line service providers capable of shaping customer loyalty. This professionalization narrative aligned with the broader shift in tourism research towards service quality, customer experience, and human resource development.

Contemporary Perspectives (2020s and beyond)

In the most recent scholarship, the role of the outbound tour leader is seen as dynamic and multi-layered, influenced by globalization, technological change, and rising customer expectations. Contemporary studies stress the need for cross-cultural competence, crisis management skills, and adaptability to digital tools that support travel coordination (Wang et al., 2020). Outbound tour leaders are now understood as strategic actors who safeguard service quality in competitive markets, manage complex international logistics, and enhance the overall

travel experience. Their role extends beyond group facilitation to brand ambassadorship, reputation building, and sustaining competitive advantage for outbound operators.

2.3.4 Application of proficiency level theory to tour leader reactions in the tourism industry

In the dynamic context of global tourism, the competence and mastery of tour guides are fundamental determinants of service quality and customer satisfaction. Mastery, understood as a high level of skill proficiency, is not merely the outcome of training but also the product of experiential learning, reflective practice, and adaptive expertise (Ericsson, 2006). The theoretical framework of proficiency levels: "Novice, Developing, Proficient, Master" can be effectively applied to evaluate the reactions and performance of tour leaders within the dynamic and often unpredictable tourism industry. Tour leaders are pivotal in shaping the tourist experience, requiring a diverse set of competencies from logistical management to interpersonal communication. (Cohen, 1985; Wong & Lee, 2012) Beyond merely providing information, tour guides act as cultural mediators, facilitators of memorable experiences, and ambassadors for their respective destinations. The presence of an informed and engaging tour guide can significantly enhance visitor satisfaction, leading to positive reviews and encouraging repeat visits. Furthermore, tour guides play a pivotal role in fostering cultural understanding by helping visitors appreciate the historical and cultural significance of sites, grasp local customs, and form meaningful connections with the people and places they encounter. This section elaborates on how a tour leader's reaction to common scenarios can be categorized across these four proficiency levels, reflecting their underlying skill set and professional development:

Scenario: An unexpected road closure significantly delays the tour itinerary and causes passenger frustration.

a. **Level 1: Novice Tour Leader Reaction**: At the Novice level, the tour leader's reaction would likely be characterized by disorganization and an inability to effectively manage unforeseen circumstances. They might exhibit visible panic or distress, struggle to provide clear and timely information to the group and lack alternative solutions. Communication with passengers may be fragmented, leading to increased anxiety and dissatisfaction. The primary focus would be on the immediate problem, without consideration for broader implications on the tour experience or passenger morale. This reflects a limited understanding of crisis management and a heavy reliance on the pre-planned itinerary (Smith, 2023).

Example Reaction: The tour leader, upon learning of the road closure, visibly stiffens, frequently checks their phones for updates without conveying information, and offers only vague apologies. Passengers are left to speculate about the delay, leading to escalating complaints amongst themselves.

b. **Level 2: Developing Tour Leader's Reaction:** A Developing tour leader would demonstrate some foundational understanding of the need to address the situation but might lack the consistency or sophistication of a more experienced leader. They would attempt to communicate the issue, albeit perhaps with some hesitation or incompleteness. They might consider one or two basic alternative solutions but struggle with their implementation or adaptation to the specific group's needs. While acknowledging passenger frustration, their ability to actively de-escalate tension or rebuild group morale would be limited, indicating an ongoing need for structured guidance and practical experience in unforeseen situations (Smith, 2023).

Example Reaction: The tour leader announces the road closure, explaining it is unexpected. They propose a single, straightforward detour that might still be inefficient, and while

apologizing, they struggle to answer detailed questions about revised timings or activities, causing some continued unease within the group.

c. Level 3: Proficient Tour Leader's Reaction: Individuals classified as Proficient consistently demonstrate a solid and reliable command of the subject or skill. A proficient tour leader would react to the road closure with composure and efficiency. They would promptly assess the situation, communicate clearly and empathetically with the passengers about the delay and its cause, and immediately propose viable alternative solutions or adjustments to the itinerary. Their communication would be reassuring, demonstrating an understanding of passenger concerns and a proactive approach to mitigating negative impacts. They would manage group expectations effectively, potentially offering immediate distractions or compensatory measures to maintain group morale, showcasing strong problem-solving and interpersonal skills (Smith, 2023; Zaui, 2025).

Example Reaction: The tour leader calmly announces the road closure, explains the reason succinctly, and immediately outlines two alternative routes or activity adjustments, along with updated timings. They engage with passengers, address questions confidently, and perhaps suggest a brief, unscheduled photo stopping to lift spirits and turn a setback into an unexpected opportunity.

d. Level 4: Master Tour Leader's Reaction: At the Master level, the tour leader's reaction would exemplify exceptional foresight, adaptability, and an in-depth understanding of group dynamics and logistical complexities. Beyond simply resolving the immediate issue, they would anticipate secondary impacts and proactively implement solutions that enhance the overall tour experience despite the disruption. Their communication would be highly persuasive and calming, potentially framing the challenge as an adventure or an exclusive opportunity. They

might leverage their extensive network or deep knowledge of the destination to discover unique, spontaneous alternatives that surpass the original itinerary, showcasing true innovation and leadership (Smith, 2023; Checkfront, 2024).

Example Reaction: Upon receiving news of the road closure, the master tour leader has already consulted real-time traffic data and identified a less-known, scenic alternative route. They present this unexpected change as an "exclusive scenic detour," highlighting unique photo opportunities or local insights not available on the original path. They engage the group in light-hearted conversation, sharing anecdotes to diffuse any potential frustration, and subtly adjust subsequent timings to ensure minimal impact on key attractions, transforming a logistical challenge into a memorable and positive deviation.

2.3.5 Customers' loyalty

Customer happiness is recognized as a fundamental business objective, as satisfied clients are more likely to become repeated patrons. Organizations should strive to exceed mere consumer satisfaction and cultivate customer loyalty. According to Oliver (2010), two key determinants of customer loyalty are the likelihood of repurchasing a product or service and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Research suggests that a 5% improvement in customer retention can lead to profit increases of 25-95% across various industries (Heskett et al., 1994; Reichheld, 1996). Loyal customers are also more inclined to act as informal word-of-mouth ambassadors, potentially attracting networks of friends, family, and other prospective customers to a product or service (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2005). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) posited that word-of-mouth communication could account for as much as 60% of sales to new clients. Therefore, loyalty emerges as a crucial strategic element for businesses. Clearly, higher customer satisfaction increases the likelihood of repurchase and the propensity to recommend the product or service to

others. To retain customers, organizations must focus on satisfying them; however, a more critical goal is to foster customer loyalty (Cronin et al., 2000; Petrick, 2004; Chen & Chen, 2010; Kumar et al., 2013). In the Vietnamese context, the impact of visitor satisfaction on repeat visits to Vietnam has been investigated in a limited number of studies, with Truong and King (2009) being one notable example. Furthermore, given that 80% to 85% of international tourists expressed no intention to return to Vietnam between 2007 and 2012 (Nguyen, 2012), it is imperative to conduct additional research on the correlation between tour guide performance and tourist satisfaction, as well as the impact of tourist satisfaction on tour guide loyalty. This research is essential for enhancing our understanding of this matter and elucidating the significance of tourist satisfaction in fostering loyalty. In terms of travel and tourism sectors, although a review of literature exhibits an abundance of studies on tourist satisfaction, but Vietnamese outbound customers' loyalty has not been thoroughly investigated.

2.4 Human Resource Management (HRM) in Vietnam's Tourism Industry

Tourism is fundamentally a people-intensive service system; as such, HRM is repeatedly identified as a primary lever of organizational performance and visitor experience quality (D'Annunzio-Green, 2022; Baum, 2006; 2015). Contemporary scholarship on visitor attractions and tourism services stresses that recruiting, developing and retaining capable front-line staff is central to service consistency and brand reputation, particularly as visitor expectations diversify and wellbeing and skills requirements rise (D'Annunzio-Green, 2022). These sector-wide dynamics have intensified in the post-pandemic recovery as demand returns and competition for talent increases. UN Tourism and the WTTC both report a strong rebound in activity, with Vietnam projected to hit record Travel & Tourism economic contributions and employment in 2024, reinforcing the urgency of robust HRM systems (UN Tourism, 2023; WTTC, 2024). Within

Vietnam, empirical analyses consistently point to structural human-capital constraints that limit competitiveness. Studies document shortages of qualified personnel, uneven professional skills, and gaps in digital/foreign-language capabilities, especially among small and medium-sized firms (Nguyen, 2018; Pham & Nguyen, 2020). These challenges are mirrored at local destination level—where post-pandemic recovery plans emphasize professionalization, upskilling, and retention—and at national level, where policy dialogues highlight HR development as a strategic priority (local HRM pilots, executive training, and skills initiatives) (Hung, 2023; VNAT, 2023). Together, this evidence suggests that Vietnam's service quality hinges on upgrading HR pipelines through structured training, competency-based evaluation, and clearer career pathways. For tour operations specifically, HRM weaknesses manifest in inconsistent service delivery when firms underinvest in systematic training and transparent performance appraisal. Professional development for guides and tour leaders—covering customer experience, intercultural mediation, safety/risk management, and use of digital tools—remains uneven across the market, contributing to variability in visitor satisfaction and repeat patronage. Sector reports and academic accounts alike caution that turnover and talent drain—including entrepreneurial departures of experienced personnel—exacerbate capability gaps and raise replacement/training costs for firms (Nguyen, 2018; Pham & Nguyen, 2020). The policy and managerial implication is clear: targeted HRM—combining competency frameworks, regular skills audits, and merit-based evaluation—should be treated as a strategic, not merely operational, priority for Vietnam's tourism enterprises.

2.5 Recruitment of Tour Guides/Tour Leaders in Vietnam's Tourism Sector

Recruiting competent tour guides and tour leaders is a fundamental component of human resource management (HRM) within the tourism industry, as their performance directly shapes the visitor experience. In developing tourism markets such as Vietnam, the recruitment process often

faces structural limitations, including shortages of qualified candidates and informal hiring practices (Pham & Nguyen, 2020; Vũ et al., 2022). These challenges are compounded by the seasonal and casual nature of guide employment, which reduces the likelihood of systematic recruitment strategies like competency-based hiring or meritocratic selection. Recent empirical studies have highlighted key constraints. Pham and Nguyen (2020) illustrate that many Vietnamese tourism businesses—particularly micro and small enterprises—rely on informal networks, word-of-mouth referrals, and short-term contracts when hiring tour leaders, rather than formal recruitment channels. Additionally, Vũ et al. (2022) found that only a minority of firms conduct structured selection processes such as interviews with behavioral assessment or trial guiding sessions. The resulting mismatch between job demands and recruiting capabilities often leads to inconsistent service standards and high turnover. Moreover, national-level policy research suggests an uneven application of HR frameworks across regions. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has issued guideline documents encouraging the adoption of professional standards and accreditation for tour guides, but implementation remains limited, especially outside major urban centers (MCTST, 2023). In practice, many operators bypass formal screening and training protocols due to cost and time constraints, undermining long-term workforce quality and retention. Training during probation or through mentoring is sometimes used to compensate for weak recruitment filters, but this post-hiring approach lacks consistency and relies heavily on individual trainer capacity (Lê & Trần, 2021). Firms with structured recruitment tied to competency frameworks demonstrate better staff retention and higher tourist satisfaction ratings (Hồ et al., 2023). These findings indicate that effective recruitment practices, such as clear job descriptions, competency-based selection criteria, and standardized assessments, are critical levels for enhancing tour leader quality and service consistency.

2.6 Training Tour Guides and Tour Leaders in Vietnam

2.6.1 Soft skill

Soft skills are a crucial determinant of individual achievement and well-being. The deficiency in soft skills among Vietnamese students has been highlighted by educational organizations, businesses, and both domestic and international experts for several decades (Nguyen et al., 2019). While academic knowledge is considered a necessary requirement in the learning process, it is often insufficient for students to secure their desired employment. Currently, soft skills training programs are prevalent in nearly all universities and are mandatory for student graduation (Nguyen et al., 2019). Many businesses and employers today cannot make hiring decisions based solely on academic qualifications and degrees. 'Soft skills', which include communication, adaptability, and interpersonal abilities, are also critical. These skills encompass a variety of concepts and interpretations but fundamentally refer to an individual's personality traits, qualities, and behaviors. Specific capabilities associated with soft skills include communication, self-motivation, decision-making, time management, and problem-solving (Goleman, 1998). According to Perreault (2020), the concept of "soft skills" emphasizes the importance of personal attributes and communication skills that enable individuals to effectively translate basic ideas into practical situations. Research by Schulz (2021) examined the significance of soft skills in students' academic and social lives, highlighting that soft skills enhance hard skills, which are the professional qualifications necessary for the careers students are preparing for. Hodges and Burchell (2016) conducted a study that explored corporate employers' perspectives on the importance of various skills. Their findings revealed that eight of the top ten capabilities identified by employers are soft skills, including the ability and willingness to learn, teamwork and collaboration, interpersonal communication, enthusiasm, and problem-solving abilities. A separate survey involving over 52 different occupations and more than 8,000 managers in the United States recognized soft skills as essential competencies across

nearly all professions, including technical fields (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020).

Ethaiya Rani (2021) argues that soft skills, often referred to as 'emotional intelligence,' account for approximately 85% of an individual's success and asserts that these qualities will enhance students' employability and help them tackle contemporary challenges. The author emphasizes that soft skills training should involve teaching methods such as role-playing, Q&A sessions, and other interactive techniques, with a strong focus on action-oriented education. Numerous researchers agree that businesses in the 21st century prioritize soft skills in prospective employees, including effective communication, integrity, teamwork, initiative, work ethic, creative thinking, self-esteem, leadership proficiency, and fundamental business etiquette (Robles, 2012).

2.6.2 Hard skill: VTOS

The Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard (VTOS) 2013 establishes the essential abilities for several positions in the tourism sector, including those of tour guides. This detailed study evaluates the VTOS 2013 standard for Vietnamese tour guides, assessing its significance, thoroughness, and conformity with contemporary market trends and requirements.

The study examines the essential elements of the standard, encompassing knowledge, abilities, and attitudes, and assesses their efficacy in equipping tour guides for the difficulties and opportunities presented by the evolving tourism sector. Furthermore, the literature review examines the necessity for updates and adjustments to the VTOS 2013 standard, considering the swift technological improvements, evolving tourist preferences, and the growing focus on sustainable tourism practices. This study critically evaluates the VTOS 2013 standard, offering significant insights for policymakers, training providers, and tourism stakeholders to enhance the professional development of tour guides and ensure the quality and competitiveness of

Vietnam's tourism business. Tour guides play a crucial role in this industry by providing information, interpretation, and assistance to tourists, thereby enhancing their overall experience (Cohen, 1985; Weiler & Ham, 2010).

To ensure the quality and professionalism of tour guides, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) introduced the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard (VTOS) in 2013 (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2013). This standard serves as a benchmark for defining the competencies required for various roles within the tourism industry, including tour guides. The VTOS 2013 standard for tour guides aims to standardize the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective tour guiding, thereby ensuring a consistent and high-quality service delivery across the industry (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2013). It is designed to guide the development of training programs, certification processes, and career pathways for tour guides, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth and competitiveness of the Vietnamese tourism industry (European Union, 2016).

However, since its inception, the tourism industry has undergone significant changes, driven by technological advancements, evolving tourist preferences, and the increasing emphasis on sustainable tourism practices. Therefore, it is essential to assess the continued relevance and effectiveness of the VTOS 2013 standard for tour guides and identify areas for potential updates and revisions. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the VTOS 2013 standard for Vietnamese tourist guides. It will examine the key components of the standard, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and explore the need for updates considering current industry trends and demands. By critically evaluating the VTOS 2013 standard, this thesis seeks

to contribute to the ongoing discourse on professional development and quality assurance in the Vietnamese tourism industry.

VTOS 2013 Standard for Tourist Guides: Key Components

The Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard (VTOS) 2013 is founded on a competency-based framework, delineating the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective performance in the role of a tourist guide. This standard is systematically organized into three primary domains: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA):

Knowledge Domain: This domain encompasses the theoretical and factual knowledge that tour guides need to possess, including:

- Destination knowledge: In-depth understanding of Vietnam's history, culture, geography, attractions, and current events.
- Tourism industry knowledge: Understanding of the tourism industry, including trends, regulations, and best practices.
- Cross-cultural communication: Knowledge of different cultures and communication styles, including those of Vietnamese tourists and the host country.
- Safety and risk management: Knowledge of potential risks and hazards in different destinations, as well as safety procedures and emergency protocols.

Skills Domain: This domain emphasizes the practical skills that tour guides must effectively apply in their professional capacity. These skills comprise:

- Communication skills: Effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills, including active listening, storytelling, public speaking, and conflict resolution.

- Interpersonal skills: Ability to build rapport, establish trust, and create a positive and inclusive atmosphere for diverse groups of people.
- Organizational skills: Ability to plan, organize, and execute tours efficiently, including managing logistics, time, and resources.
- Problem-solving skills: Ability to identify and resolve problems in a timely and effective manner, using critical thinking and creative solutions.
- Leadership skills: Ability to motivate and guide tour groups, ensuring their safety, comfort, and satisfaction.

Attitudes Domain: This domain emphasizes the personal qualities and values that are important for tourist guides, including:

- Enthusiasm and passion: A genuine passion for travel, learning, and sharing experiences with others.
- Professionalism: Commitment to ethical conduct, integrity, and respect for others.
- Cultural sensitivity: Respect for and appreciation of different cultures, demonstrating cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Flexibility and adaptability: Ability to adapt to changing situations, unexpected challenges, and diverse needs of tourists.
- Customer service orientation: Commitment to providing excellent customer service, exceeding expectations, and ensuring customer satisfaction.

Evaluation of the VTOS 2013 Standard: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths of VTOS 2013:

- Comprehensive Framework: The VTOS 2013 standard provides a comprehensive framework that covers a wide range of competencies required for tourist guides, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2013). This ensures that tour guides are well-rounded professionals who can cater to the diverse needs and expectations of tourists.

- Competency-Based Approach: The standard adopts a competency-based approach, which focuses on the outcomes of learning rather than just the content (European Union, 2016). This approach allows for more flexibility and adaptability in training and assessment, as it focuses on what tour guides can do rather than just what they know.

- Alignment with International Standards: The VTOS 2013 standard is aligned with international standards for tourism occupational skills, such as those developed by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (UNWTO, 2018). This ensures that Vietnamese tour guides are equipped with the skills and knowledge that are recognized and valued globally.

Weaknesses of VTOS 2013:

- Limited Focus on Technological Skills: The standard does not explicitly address the growing importance of technological skills in the tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). With the increasing use of digital platforms, mobile applications, and social media in tourism, tour guides need to be proficient in using these tools to enhance their services and connect with tourists effectively (Gretzel et al., 2015).

- Insufficient Emphasis on Sustainable Tourism: While the standard mentions the importance of environmental awareness, it does not provide detailed guidance on sustainable tourism practices (Hall, 2019). Given the growing demand for sustainable tourism

experiences, it is crucial for tour guides to be knowledgeable and proactive in promoting responsible tourism practices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

- Lack of Specificity for Outbound Guides: The standard does not differentiate between the specific competencies required for inbound and outbound tourist guides. Outbound guides face unique challenges, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and navigating foreign regulations, which require specific skills and knowledge that may not be adequately covered in the current standard (Hitchcock et al., 2017).
- Need for Regular Updates: The tourism industry is constantly evolving, with new trends, technologies, and challenges emerging regularly. The VTOS 2013 standard needs to be regularly updated to reflect these changes and ensure that it remains relevant and effective in preparing tour guides for the future (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014).

2.7 Career Paths in Singapore and Vietnam Tourism Industry

Tourism career pathways have become increasingly multifaceted, shaped by changing market demands, professionalization initiatives, and evolving human capital strategies. In advanced tourism hubs such as Singapore, structured career progression frameworks are increasingly standardized. Research by Chua and Lee (2022) reveals that major Singaporean tourism employers now offer defined career ladders—from frontline operational roles to supervisory, managerial, and even international placements—supported by formal training programs and digital credentials. The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system plays a key role by providing nationally recognized modules for tour guiding, hospitality management, and customer service, facilitating both vertical promotions and lateral mobility across sectors (SkillsFuture Singapore, 2023).

In contrast, Vietnam's tourism workforce exhibits a less formalized but rapidly evolving structure. Historically, career paths in Vietnam's tourism sector—particularly for tour guides and leaders—have been characterized by ad-hoc advancement, often depending on individual initiative and informal networks (Hoàng, 2021). However, policy-level reform initiatives over the last few years are beginning to address this, with the Ministry of Tourism launching competency frameworks and certification systems aimed at building clearer progression routes from guide trainee to senior tour leader roles (Vietnam Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Pilot programs in certain provinces (e.g., Da Nang, Hanoi) demonstrate the potential of structured career ladders paired with blended learning modules, including digital storytelling and cross-cultural communication (Nguyễn & Trần, 2023). Comparatively, Singapore's tourism industry benefits from a high degree of systematization and support for career mobility, including industry-academia collaboration, mentorship, and clear credential pathways (Chua & Lee, 2022; SkillsFuture Singapore, 2023). Vietnam, while still developing in this respect, is increasingly aligning public policy with industry needs—establishing professional standards and pathways aimed at enhancing both career prospects for workers and service quality for visitors (Vietnam Ministry of Tourism, 2022; Nguyễn & Trần, 2023). The current gap lies in empirical evaluation of how these emerging structures affect career satisfaction, retention, and service performance at the firm level, especially among outbound tour leaders, a focus under-addressed in existing literature.

2.8 Career Progression: From Tour Guide to CEO

The trajectory from frontline tour guide to senior executive positions has been increasingly recognized within the tourism and hospitality literature. Tour guides and tour leaders develop a unique combination of operational, interpersonal, and entrepreneurial skills that can serve as steppingstones to higher managerial and leadership roles (Weiler and Black, 2015). Their daily

responsibilities, ranging from itinerary management and crisis response to group motivation and customer care, provide a practical foundation for the broader competencies required of business leaders. In many developing economies, including Vietnam, a recurrent phenomenon has been the transition of highly skilled guides into entrepreneurial roles, where they establish their own tour companies and gradually assume chief executive responsibilities (Huang et al., 2010). This path is often facilitated by the strong client relationships, professional networks, and destination expertise that guides accumulate over years of service. Research on human capital mobility in tourism indicates that such transitions are not only common but can positively contribute to industry dynamism by fostering innovation and diversification (Baum, 2015). The Singaporean context illustrates a more structured progression pathway, with guides and tour leaders able to advance through defined career ladders supported by national training and accreditation frameworks such as the Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system (Chua and Lee, 2022). By contrast, in Vietnam, while formal progression structures remain underdeveloped, industry evidence shows that the entrepreneurial pathway—where guides evolve into owner-managers—represents a prominent route to becoming CEOs of small and medium-sized travel enterprises (Nguyen and Tran, 2023). Nevertheless, challenges remain. The transition from tour guide to CEO requires additional capabilities in financial management, strategic planning, and human resource leadership that may not be fully developed in guiding roles (Kotler et al., 2017). Formal education, executive training, or advanced degrees such as MBAs or DBAs can therefore complement the experiential competencies of tour leaders aspiring to executive roles. Overall, the evidence suggests that the tour guiding profession can provide a viable springboard to executive leadership, particularly in tourism SMEs, but that successful progression to the CEO level depends on both leveraging practical expertise and acquiring higher-level managerial competencies.

2.9 Conclusion

This literature review has underscored the centrality of human resource management (HRM) in shaping the competitiveness of tourism enterprises. In a labor-intensive sector such as tourism, HRM is pivotal for the recruitment, training, and retention of skilled personnel, with effective practices positively influencing service quality, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance (Baum, 2021; D'Annunzio-Green et al., 2022). Key HRM dimensions, including employee attitudes, emotional intelligence, and organizational culture—are increasingly linked to the capacity of firms to deliver differentiated, high-quality visitor experiences (Chan and Kuok, 2022). Within this context, tour guides and tour leaders emerge as critical actors. Guides serve as interpreters, educators, and cultural mediators, while tour leaders coordinate itineraries, maintain group cohesion, and safeguard service encounters. Their competencies—spanning destination knowledge, communication, intercultural skills, and crisis management—directly shape service quality, satisfaction, and repeat patronage (Weiler and Black, 2015; Mancini, 2021; Chen et al., 2020). Contemporary scholarship reinforces the strong correlation between service quality, satisfaction, and customer loyalty, highlighting the long-term business value of investing in these roles (Oliver, 2010; Kauffmann et al., 2021). In Vietnam, tour guide training has been anchored in the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standards (VTOS, 2013), which formalize the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for professional practice (VNAT, 2013; EU, 2016). While this framework remains a useful benchmark, recent analyses point to its limitations, particularly its insufficient emphasis on digital literacy, sustainability competencies, and outbound leadership skills—areas that have become critical in the post-pandemic era (Baum, 2023; Gretzel et al., 2015). Recruitment practices, still largely based on institutional training and VTOS criteria, often overlook soft skills and intercultural abilities that are essential for contemporary service delivery

(Nguyen and Tran, 2023). Addressing these shortcomings requires the development of a more integrated competency framework that combines both hard and soft skills, validated through feedback from industry experts and tourists alike. The literature also highlights the evolution of the tour leader role from logistical coordination to cultural mediation and, more recently, to strategic ambassadorship. Tour leaders are increasingly expected to embody brand values, leverage digital tools, and manage cross-cultural encounters in outbound contexts (Cohen, 1985; Weiler and Black, 2015; Wang et al., 2020). This transformation underscores their strategic importance, particularly in rapidly expanding outbound markets such as Vietnam, where talent shortages and entrepreneurial "talent drain" remain pressing concerns (Huang et al., 2010; Zhang and Chow, 2004). Synthesizing these insights, it is evident that a systematic study of outbound tour leader competencies in Vietnam remains absent. This gap represents both a theoretical opportunity and a practical necessity. By examining the relationship between tour leader skills, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty, this research aims to build a comprehensive framework tailored to Vietnam's outbound context. The findings are intended to guide policy, training, and HRM practices, enhancing the competitiveness of Vietnam's tourism enterprises and offering transferable lessons for other developing economies (Baum, 2021; Chua and Lee, 2022).

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Purpose and Questions

This study aims to assess the influence of tour leaders' soft skills on the satisfaction of Vietnamese tourists traveling abroad. Subsequently, it proposes recommendations for a professional skill framework for outbound tour leaders, encompassing both hard and soft skills. The findings of this research may aid tourism companies in gaining a deeper understanding of tourist preferences and evaluating the significance of outbound tour leader skills in shaping customer experiences. This will contribute to enhancing the quality of human resource recruitment, informing professional training in tourism institutions, improving customer experiences, and fostering the sustainable development of the Vietnamese tourism industry. The research problem has been previously identified, and the subsequent research questions have been clearly defined in this study:

a. Research Question 01 (RQ 01): What are the differences or gaps between specialists' and customers' evaluations of outbound tour leaders' qualifications?

b. Research Question 02 (RQ 02): How can an evidence-based competency framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders be developed and validated?

3.2 Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods research design, specifically implementing a sequential explanatory approach to comprehensively explore the research topic. This design strategy integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, where the quantitative phase predominates, followed by qualitative efforts to further clarify and interpret the quantitative findings. Rooted firmly in a positive paradigm, the study emphasizes the principles of objectivity,

rigor, and systematic inquiry. It seeks to rigorously test hypotheses formulated in advance and relies heavily on the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, which facilitates the identification of causal relationships and patterns with a high degree of empirical certainty (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). In alignment with this framework, the research adopts a deductive logic, where it commences with well-established theoretical constructs pertaining to tour leader competencies, these constructs are drawn from a thorough review of existing scholarly works, including the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard (VTOS 2013), alongside insights gathered from seasoned industry experts. These hypotheses and conceptual models then undergo empirical testing through data collection and analysis to validate their applicability and robustness in the context of Vietnamese outbound tour leaders. This careful interweaving of theory and empirical evidence underpins the study's aim to contribute both to academic knowledge and practical applications in tourism human resource management.

The research strategy is executed in four main phases:

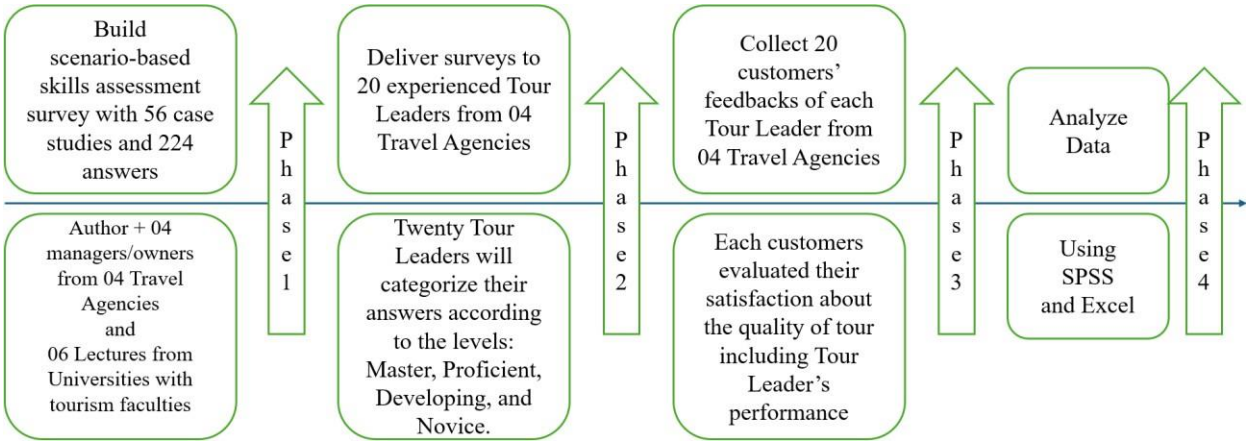

Figure 3: Phases of the research strategy

- **Phase 1 (Qualitative - Instrument Development):** An initial qualitative phase involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten (10) senior industry experts was conducted. The purpose of this phase was not to generate qualitative findings but to inform the

development of a robust and contextually relevant quantitative research instrument, the scenario-based skills assessment. This ensures the content validity of the survey instrument.

- **Phase 2-3 (Quantitative - Data Collection):** The primary phase of the research utilizes a **cross-sectional survey strategy**. Data was collected from two distinct sources at a single point in time: Data was gathered through a primary survey of 20 tour leaders and an examination of 400 customer feedback forms, with 20 forms collected for each tour leader. This quantitative data was then subjected to rigorous statistical analysis to test the research hypotheses.

- **Phase 4 (Data Analysis):** The data analysis for Phase 3 focuses on the evaluation of customer feedback collected following the completion of Phases 1 and 2. After developing and administering a scenario-based skills assessment to outbound tour leaders in Phase 2, Phase 3 involves analyzing the archival customer satisfaction data gathered from feedback forms associated with these tour leaders' recent international tours. This phase aims to quantitatively assess the relationship between the tour leaders' proficiency in key skills and the corresponding customer satisfaction scores. By employing statistical techniques such as reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple regression modeling, the study seeks to identify the key skill dimensions that influence customer perceptions and to validate an evidence-based framework for tour leader competency in the Vietnamese outbound tourism sector.

3.3 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructions

This study investigates the expected proficiency levels of tour leaders' (TLs) skills when guiding Vietnamese tourists on outbound international trips. A set of 14 essential skills for Tour Leaders has been compiled, drawing upon the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standard (VTOS), Marcel M. Robles' work, and Kyla Steeves' research. These skills necessitate adept application by Tour Leaders, rather than mere memorization. The research hypothesis posits that

greater Tour Leaders proficiency in conduct correlates with higher tourist satisfaction and mitigates negative repercussions for secondary service providers, thereby contributing to responsible and sustainable tourism development.

Data collection is structured in three phases:

- **Data collection Phase 1** of this study involves building a list of case studies comprising 14 hypothetical scenarios requiring Tour leaders' responses. This list of case studies comes from the experiences of author and 10 experts (04 from travel agencies: Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, Sen Viet Travel and 06 lecturers in University whose Faculty of Tourism). For each scenario, four distinct response options are provided, representing four proficiency levels (1 = **Novice**, 2 = **Developing**, 3 = **Proficient**, 4 **= Master**). Participants (Tour leaders) will rank their choices in descending order of perceived Tour leaders' proficiency.

N0.	**SKILL**	**VTOS**	**Marcel M. Robles**	**Kyla Steeves**
1	Knowledge of Destination	x		
2	Knowledge of Tourism industry	x		
3	Cross-cultural communication	x	x	
4	Safety and risk management	x		
5	Communication	x	x	
6	Interpersonal	x	x	
7	Organizational	x		
8	Problem-solving	x	x	x
9	Leadership	x	x	
10	Enthusiasm and passion	x		x
11	Professionalism	x	x	x

12	Cultural sensitivity	x		
13	Flexibility and adaptability	x		x
14	Customer service orientation	x		
15	Effective communication		x	x
16	Integrity		x	
17	Teamwork		x	
18	Initiative		x	
19	Work ethic		x	
20	Creative thinking		x	x
21	Self-esteem		x	x
22	Leadership proficiency		x	
23	Fundamental business etiquette		x	
24	Good sense of humor			x

Table 1: A summary of VTOS skills, M.M.Robles and Kyla Steeves' soft skills

- **Data collection Phase 2:** This study employs a survey-based methodology to assess tour leader preferences regarding hypothetical professional scenarios. Participants will be the tour leaders from four prominent travel companies: Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, and Sen Viet Travel.

The survey will consist of a series of case studies, each outlining a specific professional challenge. For each scenario, participants will be asked to select a response that best aligns with their professional judgment and experience. The author will then collect these survey responses and compare them against a set of predetermined answers. This comparative analysis will allow

for an evaluation of tour leader's decision-making preferences and an assessment of their alignment with established professional standards.

- **Data collection Phase 3** of this study will involve the collection of customer feedback data from four prominent travel companies: Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, and Sen Viet Travel. The data will consist of feedback forms collected over the preceding six months. A total of 20 feedback forms will be gathered for each tour leader, with each form containing a five-point Likert scale evaluation completed by a tourist.

The Likert scale is structured as follows:

1	2	3	4	5
Worst	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent

Table 2: The Likert scale in customers' feedback

This feedback data will be used to analyze the evaluation weight factors for 14 specific tour leader skills. The primary analytical approach will involve a comparative analysis of the selection outcomes derived from both tourist feedback and the tour leaders' self-assessments. This methodology will enable the identification and in-depth analysis of the discrepancies and alignments in skill evaluation, ultimately providing a comprehensive understanding of the perceived importance of each skill from both a service provider and a consumer perspective. Finally, based on the data analysis, the author will propose a comprehensive skill framework for assessing Tour Leaders' competency. This framework, along with the behavioral scenarios presented in the questionnaire, can serve as valuable tools for the training, development, recruitment, and evaluation of tour leaders.

Concepts
Travel expectation

The more skillful tour leaders in outbound tourism, the more customers will be satisfied with the quality of tourism products, and they will be loyalty.
Unexpected Incident An unexpected incident in travel abroad is any event that was not planned or anticipated, occurs suddenly, and disrupts your travel plans or causes risk or harm.
Unexpected incident management Unexpected incidents can still occur throughout the tour journey. While traveling abroad, travelers always rely on the tour leader's ability to handle such situations. An experienced tour leader will usually manage these situations well, because he has encountered similar cases in the past, and has even paid the price for times when his handling was incorrect or incomplete.
Level 1: Novice At the Novice level, individuals exhibit a rudimentary or nascent understanding of the subject matter or task. Performance is characterized by significant reliance on direct instruction, limited independent application, and a high frequency of fundamental errors. Knowledge is often fragmented, and the capacity for problem-solving or critical analysis is largely absent. This level typically represents an initial stage of exposure, requiring extensive scaffolding and structured guidance for task completion (Smith, 2023).
Level 2: Developing The Developing proficiency level indicates an emergent capacity to apply foundational knowledge and skills. Individuals at this stage demonstrate a partial understanding of concepts and an ability to perform basic elements of a task with some accuracy. While progress is evident, inconsistencies in performance persist, particularly with complex or

novel situations. Errors are less pervasive than at the Novice level, and individuals may begin to self-correct with prompted feedback. Further practice and directed support are essential for consolidation and advancement (Smith, 2023).
Level 3: Proficient Individuals classified as Proficient consistently demonstrate a solid and reliable command of the subject or skill. They can independently execute tasks with accuracy and efficiency, navigating common complexities and adapting established procedures as required. Understanding is coherent, enabling effective problem-solving and the application of knowledge across various contexts. Errors are infrequent and minor, typically self-identified and rectified without external intervention. This level signifies a functional and competent operational capacity (Smith, 2023).
Level 4: Master The Master level represents an advanced state of expertise and deep comprehension. Individuals at this pinnacle of proficiency exhibit exceptional skill, nuanced understanding, and the capacity for innovative application within their domain. They can adeptly manage highly complex, ambiguous, and novel challenges, often contributing to the expansion of knowledge or the development of best practices. Performance is consistently outstanding, highly efficient, and virtually error-free. Furthermore, individuals at this level are often capable of mentoring others and providing insightful leadership (Smith, 2023).

Table 3: Concepts in the research questions

Following the removal of duplicate skills, research is conducted using an updated table that shows necessary skills for Vietnamese Outbound Tour leader.

No.	Skills	Meanings	Grouping
1	Knowledge of Destination Skills	This is core to a tour leader's ability to inform and guide	Knowledge & Expertise
2	Tourism industry knowledge Skills	Understanding the broader context of the business is essential for smooth operations	Knowledge & Expertise
3	Safety and risk management Skills	Prioritizing the well-being of the group is paramount	Safety & Management
4	Organizational skills	Logistics and planning are crucial for a successful tour	Safety & Management
5	Leadership skills	Guiding and directing the group effectively	Safety & Management
6	Cultural Sensitivity Skills	Essential for interacting respectfully with diverse groups and locals	Interpersonal & Communication
7	Effective communication Skills	Clear and engaging communication is key	Interpersonal & Communication

8	Customer service orientation Skills	Focusing on meeting and exceeding customer needs	Interpersonal & Communication
9	Teamwork	Collaborating with other tour staff and service providers	Interpersonal & Communication
10	Professionalism Skills	Maintaining a high standard of conduct	Personal Attributes
11	Enthusiasm and passion skills	Creating an enjoyable and memorable experience	Personal Attributes
12	Flexibility and adaptability skills	Handling unexpected situations gracefully	Personal Attributes
13	Work ethic Skill	Responsibility and dedication to the job	Personal Attributes
14	Good sense of humor	Using humor appropriately to create a positive atmosphere	Personal Attributes

Table 4 : A summary of necessary skills

3.3.1 Data collection phase 1: Building survey

In-depth interviews for the qualitative analysis, insights were drawn from ten tourism experts, each with more than 20 years of experience. The panel comprised six academics from university tourism faculties and four senior managers from prominent travel companies: a Manager of a Tour Guide department (Ben Thanh Tourist), a Human Resources and Operations Manager

(Sen Viet Travel), and two owner-CEOs (Top Agent Travel and Sac Viet Travel). **From interviews, author built a list of case studies comprising 14 hypothetical scenarios requiring Tour leaders' responses:** [1] = Novice [2] = Developing [3] = Proficient [4] = Master

Skill	**Rating (1–4)**
H1. Knowledge of Destination Skills	1 2 3 4
H2. Tourism Industry Knowledge Skills	1 2 3 4
H3. Safety and Risk Management Skills	1 2 3 4
H4. Organizational Skills	1 2 3 4
H5. Leadership Skills	1 2 3 4
H6. Cultural Sensitivity Skills	1 2 3 4
H7. Effective communication Skills	1 2 3 4
H8. Customer service orientation Skills	1 2 3 4
H9. Teamwork Skills	1 2 3 4
H10. Professionalism Skills	1 2 3 4
H11. Enthusiasm and passion skills	1 2 3 4
H12. Flexibility and Adaptability Skills	1 2 3 4

Skill	Rating (1–4)
H13. Work Ethic Skills	1 2 3 4
H14. Good Sense of Humor Skills	1 2 3 4

Table 5 : Questionnaire for survey

3.3.2 Data collection Phase 2: Tour Leaders' Survey:

Surveys were administered to 20 tour leaders employed by four leading travel companies: Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, and Sen Viet Travel. The responses were subsequently collected by the researcher and systematically compared against predetermined criteria in order to evaluate and analyze the tour leaders' preferences.

SKILL 1: KNOWLEDGE OF DESTINATION	
Case Study 1.1: A tour leader is leading a group of tourists on a tour of a historical site. Unexpectedly, a tourist asks in-depth questions about a very special and rarely mentioned architectural detail of the structure. The guide has never directly studied or been trained in this specific detail. How should the tour guide respond?	
Option A The tour guide (HDV) will apologize to the guest, explaining that this information is currently beyond their knowledge. The guide will record the guest's interesting questions for further research and will provide an accurate answer after the tour concludes.	**Analysis:** The guide demonstrates awareness of the limits of their current knowledge. They acknowledge the gap and commit to further inquiry, thus avoiding the risk of providing incorrect information. They promise to follow up after the trip.

	However, they display limited confidence in handling the question on the spot. **Proficiency Level: Novice:** This is a basic level, suitable for novice or less experienced guides who prioritize honesty but still have limited on-the-spot improvisation skills.
Option B The tour guide will explain that the details in question may be related to local culture, but that documentation on it is not widely available. If the guest wishes to explore further, the guide will offer to contact a museum expert and provide feedback later.	**Analysis:** The guide proactively offers a plausible, evidence-based assumption regarding the architectural detail. They suggest reputable reference channels (e.g., museum experts). They take the initiative to reach out to an expert to supplement the information. They still propose to respond after the tour rather than immediately. **Proficiency Level: Developing:** A competent level where the guide expands information sources and builds credibility by connecting with experts.
Option C The tour guide will share that this is a unique detail linked to the site's construction history and ancient beliefs, although it is rarely mentioned in mainstream literature. The guide will arrange to	**Analysis:** The guide demonstrates an overall understanding, connecting the details with historical and cultural context.

provide additional detailed information via email or in person after the visit.	They confidently provide a preliminary explanation to avoid making the guest feel their inquiry is being dismissed. They proactively offer a personalized follow-up channel (e.g., email, personal meeting). This reflects persuasive and flexible communication skills. **Proficiency Level: Proficient:** A high level where the guide maintains credibility while creating professional customer experience.
Option D The tour guide will thank the guests for their engaging question. They will note that, while this architectural detail is rarely discussed, it plays a significant role in the structure and symbolic meaning of the site, reflecting local cultural and religious characteristics. The guide will readily discuss it in detail immediately if the guest is interested.	**Analysis:** The guide confidently provides an overview of the detail's value and links it to deeper symbolic significance. They actively invite the guest to engage in immediate discussion rather than postponing. They demonstrate strong improvisation skills and deliver a high-level interactive experience. This reflects in-depth knowledge and the ability to convey content engagingly. **Proficiency Level: Master:** An advanced level where the guide leaves a strong impression of erudition and skill in facilitating group discussions.

Table 6: Case study 1.1 of Skill 1 in Tour Leader Survey

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">SKILL 1: KNOWLEDGE OF DESTINATION</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Case Study 1.2: A tour leader is guiding a group of tourists on a tour of a famous local traditional market. A tourist unexpectedly asks about the origin and preparation method of a unique local spice being sold at the market.
How should the tour leader respond?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Option A
The tour leader will explain that this spice is very popular and is frequently used by locals in traditional dishes. If the guest would like to learn more, the guide will contact the seller for more specific information and provide it after the tour.</td><td>Analysis:
The guide acknowledges the guest’s curiosity and confirms the spice’s cultural relevance.
• They admit to not having complete details on hand but offer to find out more.
• They involve a direct source (the seller) to obtain accurate information.
• The follow-up is promised after the tour, delaying immediate engagement.
Proficiency Level: Novice
Suitable for newer guides who demonstrate honesty and resourcefulness but rely heavily on external sources and deferred answers.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Option B
The tour leader will explain that this spice originates from some of the region's unique ingredients and is often used during special occasions by local people. The guide will note</td><td>Analysis:
• The guide offers partial knowledge about the spice’s origin and cultural context.
• They link the product to local traditions and festivities, enhancing cultural value.</td></tr>
</table>

the guest's request and send detailed information after the trip.	• The promise of a detailed follow-up shows commitment to service. • The delayed response means the opportunity for immediate guest engagement is missed. **Proficiency Level: Developing.** It is appropriate for guides who can provide partial cultural and historical context but still need to strengthen on-the-spot detail delivery.
Option C The tour leader will explain that this spice is typically made from local ingredients using a specific regional method, which gives it a very distinctive flavor. If the group is interested, the guide can arrange for them to speak with chefs or elders at the market for a more detailed introduction after the tour.	**Analysis:** The guide provides a basic explanation of the spice's preparation and uniqueness. • They connect the guests to authentic local **Master**s (chefs or elders), enhancing the learning experience. • They add an interactive dimension to the follow-up, increasing guest engagement. • However, detailed technical knowledge is still delegated to others. **Proficiency Level: Proficient:** Reflects solid guiding skills, where the guide enriches the tour through cultural connections and experiential learning opportunities.
Option D	**Analysis:**

The tour leader will explain that this spice has a long history rooted in local agricultural life. It is processed through a special procedure involving roasting, fermenting, and natural aging, giving it a distinctive flavor. After the market tour, the guide will offer to share the detailed recipe or organize a hands-on experience for interested guests.	The guide confidently delivers a comprehensive explanation of the spice's history, processing, and flavor profile. • They link the spice to broader local heritage and traditions, deepening the cultural narrative. • They proactively offer an immersive post-tour activity, making the experience memorable. • This demonstrates mastery of both subject matter and guest engagement techniques. **Proficiency Level: Master:** Represents the highest level of guiding skill, combining detailed knowledge, cultural storytelling, and experiential engagement to create a lasting impression.

Table 7: Case study 1.2 of Skill 1 in Tour Leader Survey

SKILL 1: KNOWLEDGE OF DESTINATION
Case Study 1.3: A tour leader is guiding a group of tourists. A tourist asks him for detailed information about a lesser-known traditional festival that is about to take place locally, including its origin, cultural significance, and special activities. How should the tour leader respond?

Option A The tour leader will explain that this is a very interesting local festival with many unique cultural activities. They will carefully check the festival schedule and collect more complete information, then send the specific details to the guest later.	**Analysis:** The guide acknowledges the festival's cultural uniqueness, showing openness to the guest's curiosity. • They admit to not having full details at the moment. • They commit to conducting further research to provide accurate information. • The follow-up is promised after the tour, meaning the guest must wait for answers. **Proficiency Level: Novice:** A basic guiding level that reflects honesty and a willingness to learn but lacks immediate delivery of detailed cultural insights.
Option B The tour leader will explain that the festival is organized according to local traditions and includes meaningful community activities. They can share some basic details immediately, but for more complete and accurate information, they will consult the organizers and follow up afterward.	**Analysis:** **Analysis:** • The guide provides partial knowledge about the festival's purpose and community role. • They enhance credibility by committing themselves to speak directly with the organizers. • The response balances immediate partial information with a plan for accuracy.

	• Engagement is moderate since deeper discussion is postponed. **Proficiency Level: Developing:** A competent level where the guide offers initial cultural context while seeking authoritative sources for more detail.
Option C The tour leader will explain that, although this festival is not widely known, it is special because it is closely tied to local history and ancient rituals. They will offer to arrange, after the tour, a meeting with someone deeply knowledgeable about the festival so the guest can learn more directly.	**Analysis:** The guide connects the festival to its historical and ritual significance. • They facilitate culturally immersive opportunities by arranging contact with a local expert. • They promote authentic learning experiences beyond the standard tour. • The guide still relies on a third party for deep technical knowledge. **Proficiency Level: Proficient** A strong guiding level where the leader builds cultural depth and guest engagement through authentic local connections.
Option D The tour leader will explain that the upcoming festival is tied to an ancient local legend that deeply reflects the spiritual values and history	**Analysis:** The guide delivers a rich narrative linking the festival to legend, spirituality, and local history.

of the area. They will describe how the festival's activities center on folk rituals that demonstrate harmony between nature, life, and community beliefs. If the guest is interested, the guide can provide a detailed explanation immediately or arrange for the group to attend the festival for a direct, authentic experience.	• They give a comprehensive description of the festival's rituals and symbolism. • They offer flexible engagement — detailed explanations now or immersive participation later. • This approach shows mastery of both cultural storytelling and guest experience design. **Proficiency Level: Master** An advanced level where the guide demonstrates deep cultural knowledge, exceptional storytelling, and the ability to design memorable, interactive experiences.

Table 8: Case study 1.3 of Skill 1 in Tour Leader Survey

SKILL 1: KNOWLEDGE OF DESTINATION	
Case Study 1.4: While traveling through a rural area, a tourist asks tour leader about a strange-looking crop that is abundant along the roadside, including its name, purpose of cultivation, and its economic or cultural significance to the local community. How should the tour leader respond?	
Option A The tour leader will explain that people in this area grow the crop extensively, mainly for daily life or economic purposes. They will ask	**Analysis:** • The guide observes and comments on the crop's prevalence and general purpose. • They openly acknowledge limited immediate knowledge.

local residents for more information and provide the guests with detailed answers later.	• They commit to obtaining accurate details from local residents. • The response lacks specific cultural or economic context until after follow-up. **Proficiency Level: Novice:** A basic guiding approach that demonstrates honesty and willingness to learn but offers minimal immediate enrichment for guests.
Option B The tour leader will explain that the crop is common in the area due to its suitability for the local climate and soil conditions. They will find out the exact name and specific farming significance and share the information at the end of the trip.	**Analysis:** • The guide offers a plausible reason for the crop's prevalence, linking it to environmental suitability. • They admit they do not know the exact name but commit to providing it. • The approach balances partial explanation with a plan to clarify. • Detailed cultural and historical context is still missing. **Proficiency Level: Developing:** A competent level where the guide provides partial factual insight while promising accurate follow-up information.
Option C The tour leader will explain that the crop is grown not only for economic purposes but also	**Analysis:** The guide links the crop to both economic and cultural dimensions.

as a reflection of the local community's culture and production practices. They will offer to arrange a meeting with local farmers after the tour for the group to gain a deeper understanding.	• They provide a pathway to authentic learning by connecting guests with local farmers. • This adds an interactive element that deepens guest engagement. • The guide still delegates detailed technical explanations to others. **Proficiency Level: Proficient** A strong level of guiding that blends basic interpretation with hands-on, culturally immersive experiences.
Option D The tour leader will explain that the crop is a fascinating regional specialty, cultivated because it thrives in the unique natural conditions of the area. They will highlight its great economic value and its deep connection to the region's long-standing farming traditions. The guide will offer to share detailed information on its farming techniques, economic importance, and the historical story behind it.	**Analysis:** The guide delivers a complete, confident explanation linking environmental, economic, and cultural factors. • They frame the crop as a regional specialty with historical significance. • They enrich the narrative by including farming techniques and heritage stories. • This approach demonstrates both deep subject knowledge and cultural storytelling skills. **Proficiency Level: Master:** An advanced guiding level where the leader integrates

	accurate agricultural knowledge, cultural heritage, and engaging storytelling for a memorable guest experience.

Table 9: Case study 1.4 of Skill 1 in Tour Leader Survey

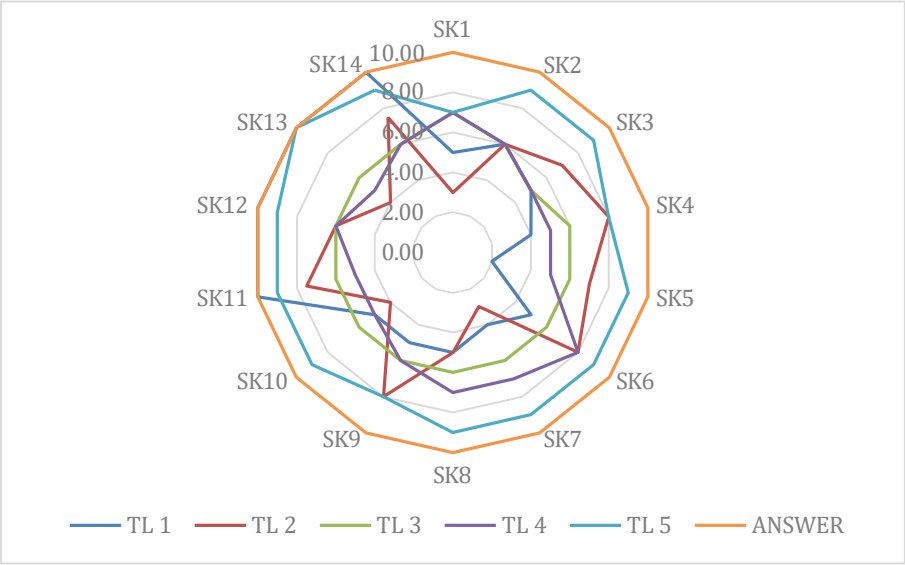

Figure 4: The difference between tour leader skill proficiency (1)

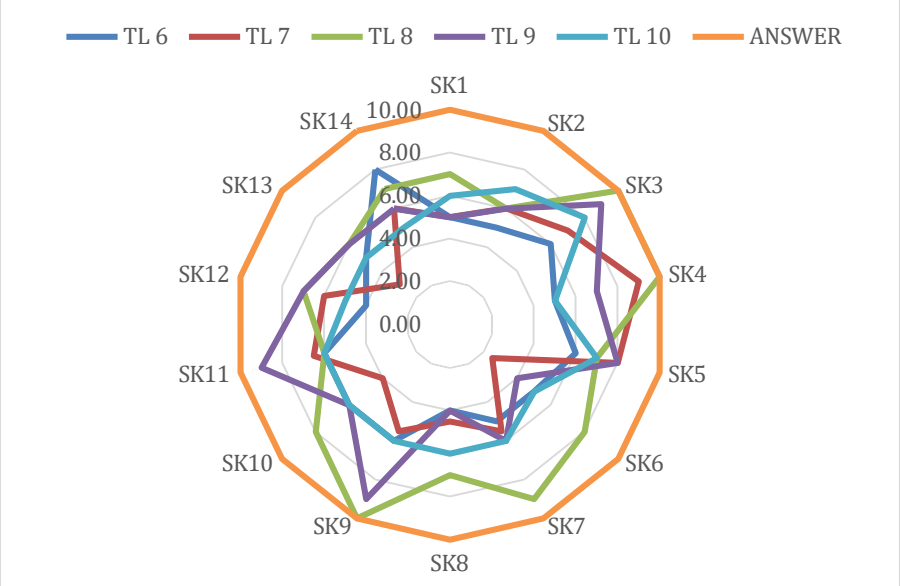

Figure 5: The difference between tour leader skill proficiency (2)

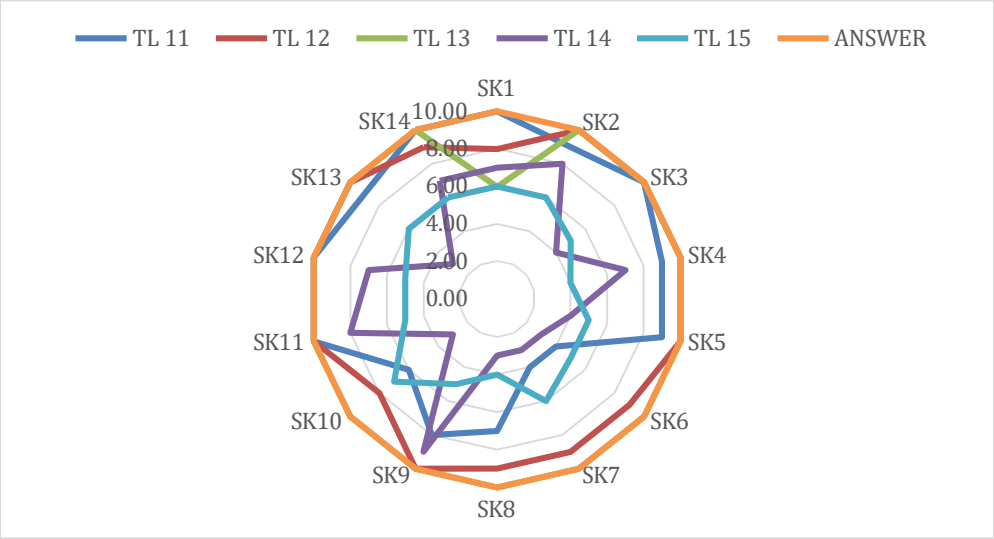

Figure 6: The difference between tour leader skill proficiency (3)

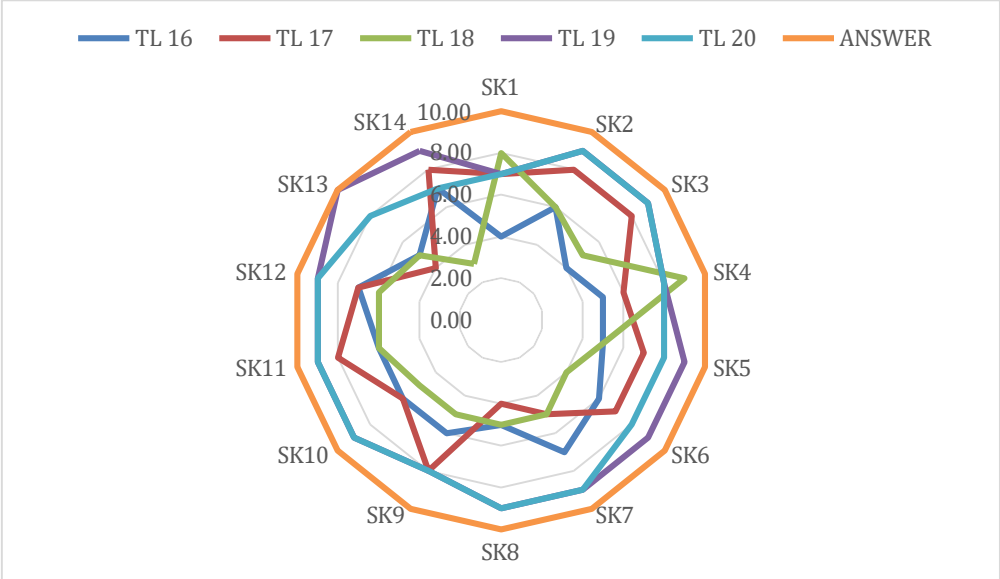

Figure 7: The difference between tour leader skill proficiency (4)

3.3.3 Data collection phase 3: Tour Leaders' Customers' Feedback:

This step will involve the collection of customers' feedback from four prominent travel companies: Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, and Sen Viet Travel. The

managers will collect feedback forms in last six months. A total of 20 feedback forms will be gathered for each tour leader, with each form containing a five-point Likert scale evaluation completed by a tourist on a tour.

3.4 Sampling and Participants

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique will be employed to select 20 outbound tour leaders who are contracted and freelancers from 04 Travel companies (as mentioned in 3.3.2). Purposive sampling is particularly suitable when the research requires participants with specific expertise who can provide informed insights (Bryman, 2016; Etikan et al., 2016). This criterion ensures that the participants have the depth of experience necessary for meaningful assessment. Participants will be provided with full information about the study and will give written consent prior to data collection. A probability sampling strategy is utilized to ensure generalizability. Specifically, stratified random sampling is applied to account for demographic or geographic subgroups (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In collaboration with the management of four travel companies, Ben Thanh Tourist, Top Agent Travel, Sac Viet Travel, and Sen Viet Travel, this study will collect customers' feedback data. Each tour leader will provide 20 feedback forms from clients on international trips conducted within the past six months. These forms capture customer evaluations of the tour leader's performance during their trip. A key methodological consideration is the potential for reporting bias. While the managers note that tour leaders consistently self-assess their proficiency at the "Proficient" level or higher, and this is often affirmed by the official feedback forms, a significant number of customer complaints are not formally documented. These negative observations are often communicated directly to management or result in clients quietly ceasing to use the company's services. This phenomenon is frequently attributed to customers' reluctance

to negatively impact a tour leader's income. The sample size of customers' feedback is calculated using Cochran's Formula (Cochran, 1977), which is preferred for large populations due to its precision in balancing confidence levels and margin of error:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

Where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)
- $p = 0.5$ (maximum variance assumption)
- $q = 1 - p = 0.5$
- $e = 0.05$ (5% margin of error)

Substituting values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 385$$

Following Cochran's Formula, which suggests a minimum sample size of 385 for large populations without needing finite population correction, this study employs a sample of 400 feedback forms (Bartlett et al., 2001). This dataset, consisting of 20 forms from each of the 20 tour leaders, will be used for a regression analysis to overcome the limitations of using customer satisfaction scores alone.

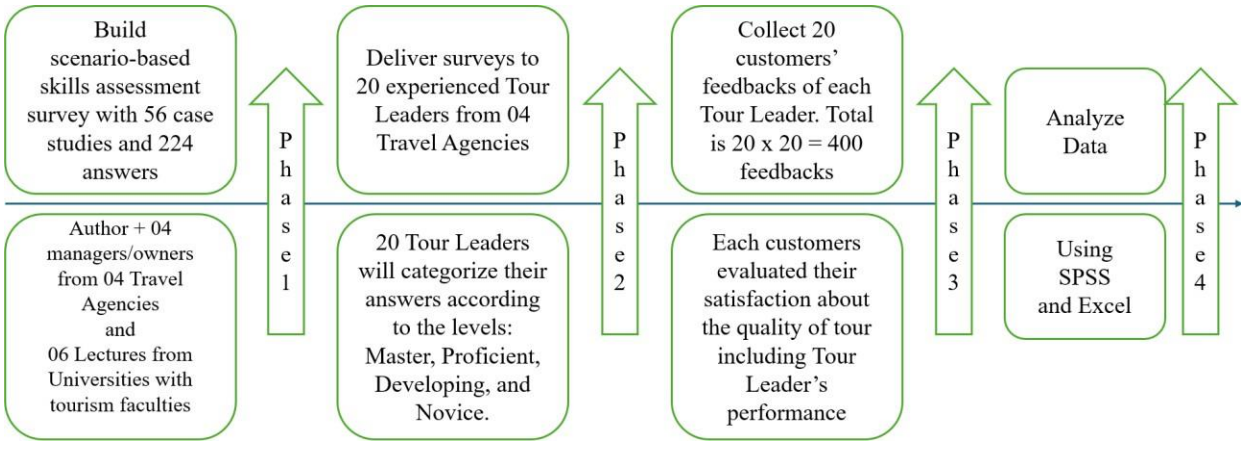

Figure 8: Phases of collecting data

The primary objective of this analysis is to determine the weighted significance of 14 specific tour leader skills. The findings from this quantitative approach are intended to contribute to a more objective and comprehensive framework for tour leader evaluation, classification, and recruitment, moving beyond the simple and potentially biased assessment of customer feedback.

Skill Proficiency Assessment

Each tour leader's proficiency will be assessed across 14 key skills using a scenario-based questionnaire. For each skill, four scenarios will be presented, each containing four behavioral responses aligned with proficiency levels: Novice (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3), and Master (4) (Smith, 2023). Participants will be asked to rank the four responses from lowest to highest proficiency. Scoring will award 10 points for a fully correct ranking, with deductions applied proportionally for deviations from the correct order. For example, if the correct order is ABCD and the participant's ranking is BCAD, the score would be calculated as $10 – (2 + 1 + 1 + 0) = 4$. Each skill will thus yield a score between 0 and 40 (four scenarios × 10 points maximum), with the use of multiple scenarios enhancing measurement accuracy and minimizing random error (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Customer Satisfaction Measure

The dependent variable will be customer satisfaction, measured using archival customer evaluation forms collected by each tour leader over the previous six months. Each leader will provide 20 completed evaluations, each using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Very Poor to 5 = Excellent. The mean satisfaction score for each leader will be calculated from the 20 ratings and used in subsequent analysis (Likert, 1932; Allen and Seaman, 2007).

3.5 Research Hypothesis

Before presenting the research hypotheses, it is important to contextualize the core rationale driving their formulation. This study aims to rigorously investigate the links between outbound tour leaders' skill proficiency, how tourists rate their satisfaction, and the ultimate impact on customer loyalty within the Vietnamese outbound tourism sector. The literature emphasizes that frontline staff proficiency**,** particularly that of tour **leaders,** plays an integral role in shaping tourists' experiences and repeat business, especially in markets characterized by rapid growth and evolving service expectations. Drawing on established service quality theories and sectoral best practices, the research adopts a competency-focused framework to analyze the effects of tour leader performance not merely as a function of experience, but as a multidimensional construct integrating both technical ("hard") and interpersonal ("soft") skills. The working premise is that higher proficiency in these domains should translate into improved customer perceptions and, by extension, increased likelihood of loyalty behaviors such as repeat bookings and positive recommendations.

On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

a. Hypothesis 1: The level of proficiency in these 14 skills determines the distinction in the qualifications of Vietnamese Outbound tour leaders at the following levels: Novice, Developing, Proficient, and Master.

b. Hypothesis 2: There is a positive and significant relationship between the proficiency of outbound tour leaders and customer satisfaction.

c. Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of customer satisfaction with tour leader proficiency led to increased customer loyalty.

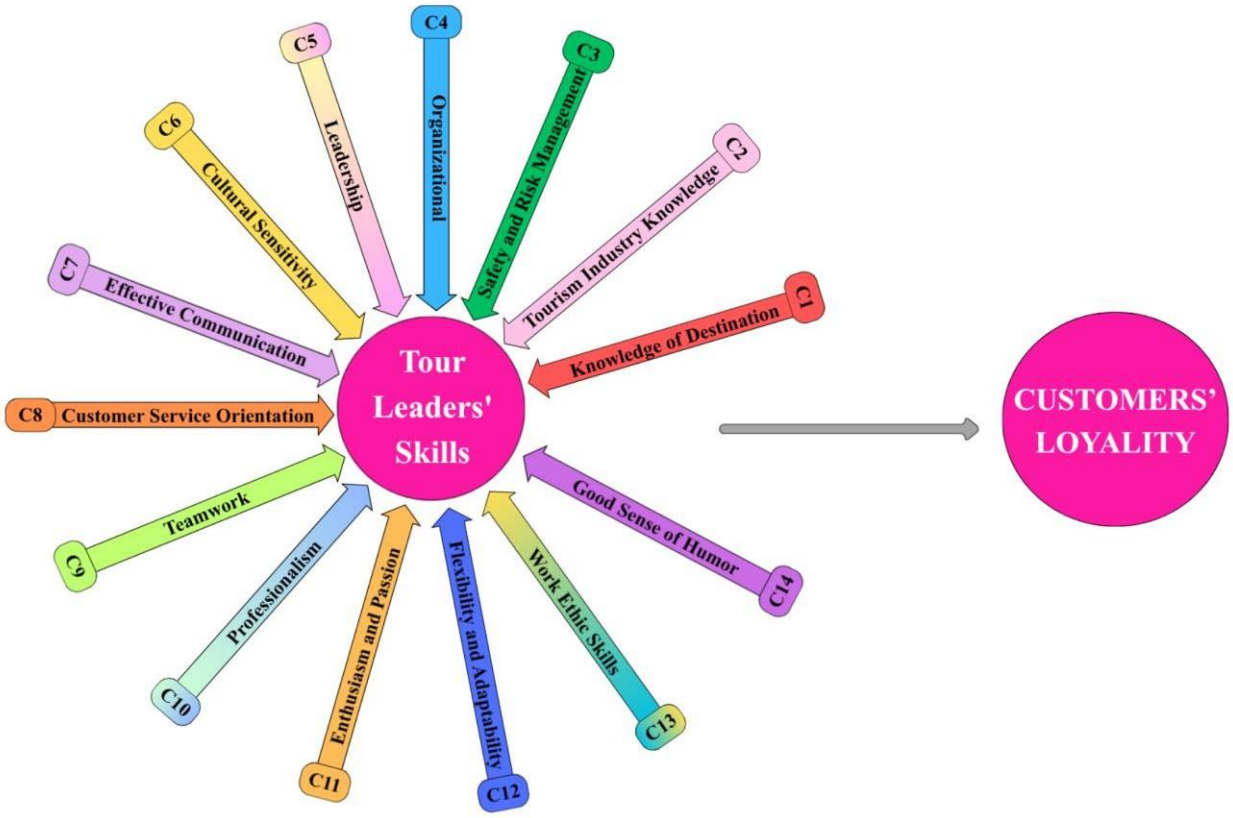

Figure 9: Conceptual model and hypotheses

Competency	Strategic Importance
C1. Knowledge of Destination	This is core to a tour leader's ability to inform and guide
C2. Tourism Industry Knowledge	Understanding the broader context of the business is essential for smooth operations
C3. Safety and Risk Management	Prioritizing the well-being of the group is paramount
C4. Organizational	Logistics and planning are crucial for a successful tour
C5. Leadership	Guiding and directing the group effectively
C6. Cultural Sensitivity	Essential for interacting respectfully with diverse groups and locals

C7. Effective Communication	Clear and engaging communication is key
C8. Customer Service Orientation	Focusing on meeting and exceeding customer needs.
C9. Teamwork	Collaborating with other tour staff and service providers
C10. Professionalism	Maintaining a high standard of conduct
C11. Enthusiasm and passion	Creating an enjoyable and memorable experience
C12. Flexibility and Adaptability	Handling unexpected situations gracefully
C13. Work Ethic Skills	Responsibility and dedication to the job
C14. Good Sense of Humor	Using humor appropriately to create a positive atmosphere.

Table 10: Competency and Its Strategic Importance

3.6 Data Collection Instrumentation

The expected sample size for this study is 20 Vietnamese outbound tour leaders, each providing 20 customer feedback forms, for a total of 400 data points. Data collection was structured to capture both tour leader proficiency and customer satisfaction.

Instrumentation 1: Scenario-Based Skills Assessment: The primary research instrument was a questionnaire designed by interviewing 10 tourism experts to measure tour leader proficiency across the 14 key skills identified in the literature review. For each skill, four distinct behavioral scenarios were presented. Each scenario included four response options corresponding to four proficiency levels: Novice (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3), and Master (4). Participants were required to rank these options. A scoring system was devised to quantify proficiency, awarding a maximum of 10 points per correctly ranked scenario, yielding a total possible score of 40 for each of the 14 skills.

Instrumentation 2: Customer Satisfaction Measure: The dependent variable, customer satisfaction, was measured using archival customer evaluation forms. These forms utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Worst, 5 = Excellent) to rate the tour leader's overall performance. The mean satisfaction score for each of the 20 tour leaders was calculated from their respective 20 feedback forms to create a single continuous variable for analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel. The analysis proceeded through several stages:

a. Descriptive Statistics: Initial analysis involved calculating means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the central tendency of the variables.

b. Reliability Analysis: The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. A coefficient above 0.70 was considered the threshold for acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

c. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): Due to the initial identification of severe multicollinearity among the 14 skill variables (VIF > 10), EFA with Principal Component Analysis was conducted. This statistical technique was used to reduce data and identify underlying latent competency dimensions (factors), thereby creating a set of uncorrelated predictor variables for use in subsequent regression analysis.

d. Multiple Linear Regression: To test the research hypotheses, two multiple regression models were estimated.

- Model 1: The identified skill factors were used as independent variables to predict the overall tour leader proficiency score (AVSK).

- Model 2: The same skill factors were used as independent variables to predict the average customer satisfaction score (AVFB). The significance of the models was assessed at $\alpha = 0.05$.

3.8 Research Design Limitations

While the sample size meets the minimum statistical thresholds for regression analysis, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. Non-response bias may arise if tour leaders who choose not to participate differ systematically from those who do. For example, non-respondents may have lower customer satisfaction scores or less confidence in their skills, potentially skewing results. This risk will be mitigated through multiple follow-up reminders and flexible scheduling to encourage participation (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014). Sampling frame bias is another potential limitation. The sampling frame—derived from industry directories and professional networks—may not capture all active outbound tour leaders, particularly those working informally or for smaller operators. To reduce this bias, the list of potential participants will be cross-referenced across multiple sources, including tourism association databases, company websites, and professional social media platforms. While this approach enhances coverage, some degree of bias is unavoidable in non-random expert samples (Bryman, 2016).

Overall, although these steps help mitigate bias, the findings should be interpreted with caution when generalizing to the broader population of Vietnamese outbound tour leaders.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

All participants in the study were provided with full information regarding the research objectives and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all tour leaders prior to their participation. The anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of their responses and the archival data were maintained throughout the research process.

3.10 Summary

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the relationship between outbound tour leader skills and customer satisfaction in Vietnam. The methodology is grounded in a positivist paradigm, utilizing a cross-sectional survey strategy for the quantitative component and in-depth interviews for the qualitative data. Data collection is structured into four distinct phases:

- Phase 1 involved the development of a scenario-based skills assessment through in-depth interviews with four tourism experts and the author, creating 14 hypothetical scenarios with four distinct response options representing four levels of proficiency (Novice, Developing, Proficient, Master);
- Phase 2 entailed the administration of this survey to tour leaders from four prominent travel companies to assess their decision-making preferences;
- Phase 3 focused on the collection of customer satisfaction data, where each of the 20 participating tour leaders provided 20 archival feedback forms from international trips, each evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the tour leaders, while stratified random sampling was applied for customer feedback, with a calculated minimum sample size of 385.
- Phase 4: Data analysis will be performed using a multiple linear regression model in SPSS to determine the weighted significance of each of the 14 skills in predicting customer satisfaction.

This comprehensive approach is designed to provide a robust framework for tour leader evaluation, classification, and recruitment, thereby moving beyond potentially biased customer feedback and contributing to a more objective understanding of professional competencies.

CHAPTER IV:

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted to address the research questions and test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3. The objective is to transform the raw survey data into meaningful insights that reveal patterns, relationships, and underlying structures in outbound tour leader competencies.

The analysis begins with an assessment of data reliability and validity to ensure that the measurement instruments accurately capture the constructs of interest. This is followed by descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the respondents' demographic profiles and their evaluations of the fourteen skill items (SK1–SK14). Subsequently, correlation analysis is employed to explore the strength and direction of relationships among the skill variables, laying the groundwork for further inferential testing. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is then conducted to identify latent skill dimensions, reducing data complexity and enabling a more structured interpretation of competencies. Finally, multiple regression analysis is applied to determine the predictive influence of these skill dimensions on the dependent variable—Average Feedback Score (AVFB)—which serves as a proxy for overall performance. By systematically combining these analytical techniques, the chapter not only quantifies the relative importance of various skills but also establishes the statistical foundations for the competency framework proposed in Chapter 5. The findings derived from this process directly inform the discussion, practical recommendations, and policy implications, ensuring that the research outcomes are both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

4.2 Data Collection Analysis:

4.2.1 Demographic information

OBJECTIVES	QUANTITY
TOUR LEADER WITH LESS THAN 05 YEAR EXPERIENCE	02
TOUR LEADER WITH 05-10 YEAR EXPERIENCE	08
TOUR LEADER WITH 11-15 YEAR EXPERIENCE	05
TOUR LEADER WITH MORETHAN 16 YEAR EXPERIENCE	05

Table 11: Objective of Respondents

This Table 12 illustrates the years of experience of respondents. According to experts from travel companies, tour leaders with extensive operational experience often face numerous incidents or situations that require resolution. They learn from their decisions, but sometimes they must confront the negative consequences of hasty, emotional choices that did not fully consider all stakeholders. A tour leader with more than 10 years of experience can more easily gain the trust of recruiters and tour operators than one with fewer years of experience. However, our observations suggest that the behavioral errors of experienced tour leaders are not entirely uniform but rather depend on their individual skill proficiency. This is analogous to telling a joke: some people are master storytellers, while others cannot make anyone laugh.

	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6	SK7	SK8	SK9	SK10	SK11	SK12	SK13	SK14	AVSK
TL 1	5.00	6.00	5.00	4.00	2.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	6.14
TL 2	3.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	7.00	8.00	3.00	5.00	8.00	4.00	7.50	6.00	4.00	7.50	6.00
TL 3	7.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
TL 4	7.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	8.00	7.00	7.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	5.93
TL 5	7.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	10.00	9.00	8.79

TL 6	5.00	5.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	4.00	5.00	8.00	5.43
TL 7	5.00	6.00	7.00	9.00	8.00	2.50	5.50	4.50	5.50	4.00	6.50	6.00	3.00	6.00	5.61
TL 8	7.00	6.00	10.00	10.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	7.00	10.00	8.00	6.00	7.00	6.00	7.00	7.71
TL 9	5.00	6.00	9.00	7.00	8.00	4.00	6.00	4.00	9.00	6.00	9.00	7.00	6.00	6.00	6.57
TL 10	6.00	7.00	8.00	5.00	7.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.93
TL 11	10.00	9.00	10.00	9.00	9.00	4.00	4.00	7.00	8.00	6.00	10.00	10.00	9.00	10.00	8.21
TL 12	8.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	10.00	8.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.00	9.43
TL 13	6.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	9.71
TL 14	7.00	8.00	4.00	7.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	9.00	3.00	8.00	7.00	3.00	7.00	5.43
TL 15	6.00	6.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	4.00	5.00	7.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	5.36
TL 16	4.00	6.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	7.00	5.00	7.00	5.64
TL 17	7.00	8.00	8.00	6.00	7.00	7.00	5.00	4.00	8.00	6.00	8.00	7.00	4.00	8.00	6.64
TL 18	8.00	6.00	5.00	9.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	3.00	5.50
TL 19	7.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	10.00	9.00	8.79
TL 20	7.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	8.00	7.00	8.36

Table 12: The Result of 20 Tour leaders

Table 13 presents the findings from the scenario-based skills assessment survey conducted with 20 tour leaders. The data, presented in the accompanying table, provides a quantitative foundation for exploring the central premise that tour leader performance is not solely a function of operational experience but is more significantly influenced by the level of skill proficiency. As noted in the preceding discussion, while extensive experience often correlates with a certain level of trust from recruiters, the behavioral competence and effectiveness in addressing complex situations are highly dependent on the individual's mastery of a diverse set of skills.

This data table, detailing the scores of 20 tour leaders (TL 1-TL 20) across 14 distinct skills (SK1-SK14) and their corresponding Average Skill Scores (AVSK), will be the basis for a detailed analysis. The subsequent analysis will seek to identify patterns and correlations within this dataset. We will explore the distribution of scores for each skill to identify areas of collective strength and weakness among the tour leaders.

Furthermore, we will examine the relationship between individual skill scores and the overall average feedback score to determine which competencies are the most influential predictors of tour leader performance. By deconstructing the performance of each tour leader into these discrete skills, this analysis aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of proficiency and to move beyond a simple reliance on years of experience as the sole measure of capability. The findings will serve as a crucial empirical foundation for the proposed skill framework and will offer valuable insights into the professional development and evaluation of outbound tour leaders.

	FB1	FB2	FB3	FB4	FB5	FB6	FB7	FB8	FB9	FB10
TL 01	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 02	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 03	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 04	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 05	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 06	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
TL 07	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 08	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 09	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 10	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 11	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
TL 12	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
TL 13	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
TL 14	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 15	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	3.00	5.00	4.00

TL 16	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
TL 17	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 18	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 19	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
TL 20	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Table 13 The Result of Customers' Feedback 01

	FB11	FB12	FB13	FB14	FB15	FB16	FB17	FB18	FB19	FB20	AVFB
TL 01	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.90
TL 02	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.90
TL 03	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.90
TL 04	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.90
TL 05	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.25
TL 06	4.00	4.00	5.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	3.75
TL 07	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.05
TL 08	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.75
TL 09	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.95
TL 10	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	3.80
TL 11	3.00	4.00	5.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.80
TL 12	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	3.90
TL 13	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.85
TL 14	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.90
TL 15	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	5.00	5.00	3.75
TL 16	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.65
TL 17	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.85
TL 18	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.70

TL 19	5.00	3.00	5.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.90
TL 20	5.00	3.00	5.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.80

Table 14: The Result of Customers' Feedback 02

The FB01–FB20 variables represent a structured set of performance feedback measures collected from clients or supervisors evaluating outbound tour leaders. Each feedback item captures a distinct aspect of service delivery, operational efficiency, interpersonal engagement, or professional conduct, rated on a standard 5-point scale. This section aims to interpret these feedback ratings systematically, identifying patterns, strengths, and areas requiring improvement. The analysis considers both the absolute scores and their relative distribution across all tour leaders in the sample. By examining the highest and lowest rated items, as well as the degree of variation between respondents, this interpretation provides insight into the dimensions of tour leader performance that are most valued by stakeholders and those that may require targeted development. In addition to presenting the descriptive trends, the discussion will connect feedback scores with relevant skill areas (TL01–TL20 competencies) to assess potential linkages between self-assessed competencies and external performance evaluations. This combined perspective supports a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between internal capability and external service quality, thereby informing training and professional development strategies.

4.2.2 Analysis from tour leaders' skill survey (AVSK):

This study encompasses 14 x 4 = 56 interrelated observable variables. The author examines 14 major features of each subject, rather than 56 minor qualities, with each major characteristic encompassing a maximum of 4 interrelated minor characteristics. This enables the author to conserve significant time in the research process. The author establishes 14 variables that reflect 56 observed variables by employing the average function in Excel. This strategy is appropriate for studies employing the Likert scale and aids researchers in avoiding significant challenges during subsequent regression analysis implementation.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.947	.949	15

Table 15: Reliability Statistics (SK)

The verification phase of this study aims to authenticate the validity of the foundational notions. The themes encompass: Knowledge of Destination Skills, Tourism Industry Knowledge Skills, Safety and Risk Management Skills, Organizational Skills, Leadership Skills, Cultural Sensitivity Skills, Effective Communication Skills, Customer Service Orientation Skills, Teamwork Skills, Professionalism Skills, Enthusiasm and passion skills, Flexibility and Adaptability Skills, Work Ethic Skills, Good Sense of Humor Skills and Average point of Skills. The pilot study involved 20 survey samples, revealing that the observed variables exhibited strong reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeding 0.947. The verification phase of this study aims to authenticate the validity of the foundational notions. The pilot study involved 20 survey samples, revealing that the observed variables exhibited strong reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeding 0.947. The author's scale exhibited substantial consistency when utilized with this specific sample (Nunnally, 1978).

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SK1	96.533929	470.312	.377	.	.950
SK2	95.683929	439.315	.837	.	.941
SK3	95.633929	421.087	.803	.	.941
SK4	95.733929	443.169	.596	.	.946
SK5	96.033929	428.862	.744	.	.942
SK6	96.608929	431.646	.661	.	.945
SK7	96.508929	432.279	.680	.	.944
SK8	96.758929	418.152	.870	.	.939
SK9	95.558929	445.460	.675	.	.944
SK10	96.483929	431.955	.794	.	.941
SK11	95.283929	443.668	.680	.	.944
SK12	95.583929	433.554	.776	.	.942
SK13	96.383929	414.021	.767	.	.942
SK14	95.558929	449.018	.590	.	.946
AVSK	96.025000	434.118	1.000	.	.938

Table 16: Item-Total Statistics (SK)

The "Item-Total Statistics" table, a key output from a reliability analysis in SPSS, serves to evaluate the internal consistency of a measurement scale by examining each item's contribution to the overall scale's reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

The analysis of the table yields the following findings:

- **Overall Scale Reliability:** The scale's overall reliability, as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha (AVSK), is 0.938. This value surpasses the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency and a highly reliable measurement instrument (Pallant, 2013).

- **Corrected Item-Total Correlation:** This column measures the linear relationship between each individual item and the sum of the remaining items in the scale. A correlation coefficient exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.30 is considered acceptable, suggesting that the item is measuring the same underlying construct as the rest of the scale (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). As depicted in the table, all items (SK1 to SK14) exhibit corrected item-total correlations well above this threshold, ranging from 0.377 to 0.870. This confirms that all items are valid and coherent components of the scale, contributing meaningfully to the measurement of the intended construct.

- **Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted:** This column is instrumental in determining whether the removal of any item would enhance the scale's reliability. The values presented represent the hypothetical Cronbach's Alpha if a specific item were to be excluded. A decision to remove an item is typically made if its removal results in a higher overall Cronbach's Alpha. In this analysis, the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" values for all items are lower than 0.938. This finding indicates that the deletion of any single item would, in fact, decrease the overall reliability of the scale.

In Conclusion, basing on the analysis of the Item-Total Statistics table, the measurement scale demonstrates robust internal consistency. All items are strongly correlated with

the overall scale, and their inclusion contributes positively to the scale's high reliability. Consequently, all 14 items should be retained for subsequent analyses, such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) or regression analysis.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6	SK7	SK8
SK1	1.000	.535	.340	.380	.288	.054	.200	.389
SK2	.535	1.000	.640	.537	.676	.516	.497	.723
SK3	.340	.640	1.000	.674	.871	.487	.553	.657
SK4	.380	.537	.674	1.000	.705	.302	.392	.531
SK5	.288	.676	.871	.705	1.000	.482	.582	.667
SK6	.054	.516	.487	.302	.482	1.000	.731	.789
SK7	.200	.497	.553	.392	.582	.731	1.000	.819
SK8	.389	.723	.657	.531	.667	.789	.819	1.000
SK9	.235	.639	.717	.666	.634	.502	.420	.459
SK10	.269	.608	.667	.351	.632	.737	.892	.819
SK11	.240	.739	.587	.428	.463	.280	.179	.465
SK12	.389	.773	.537	.466	.407	.431	.400	.663
SK13	.356	.640	.541	.274	.424	.550	.569	.774
SK14	.096	.573	.448	.176	.339	.443	.205	.447
AVSK	.436	.858	.837	.653	.785	.716	.731	.892

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	SK9	SK10	SK11	SK12	SK13	SK14	AVSK
SK1	.235	.269	.240	.389	.356	.096	.436
SK2	.639	.608	.739	.773	.640	.573	.858
SK3	.717	.667	.587	.537	.541	.448	.837
SK4	.666	.351	.428	.466	.274	.176	.653
SK5	.634	.632	.463	.407	.424	.339	.785
SK6	.502	.737	.280	.431	.550	.443	.716
SK7	.420	.892	.179	.400	.569	.205	.731
SK8	.459	.819	.465	.663	.774	.447	.892
SK9	1.000	.449	.575	.517	.316	.457	.716
SK10	.449	1.000	.373	.505	.740	.412	.824
SK11	.575	.373	1.000	.888	.708	.747	.722
SK12	.517	.505	.888	1.000	.821	.734	.808
SK13	.316	.740	.708	.821	1.000	.684	.811
SK14	.457	.412	.747	.734	.684	1.000	.643
AVSK	.716	.824	.722	.808	.811	.643	1.000

Table 17: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (SK)

The "Inter-Item Correlation Matrix" provides a detailed view of the relationships between each pair of items (questions) within the measurement scale. This matrix is a fundamental

component of reliability analysis, offering a fine-grained perspective on the internal consistency of the scale (Hair et al., 2010).

Core Purpose: The matrix is used to confirm the one-dimensionality of the construction being measured. If all items are tapping into the same underlying concept, they should exhibit positive and substantial correlations with each other (Pallant, 2013).

Analysis of Correlation Coefficients:

- Diagonal Values: The diagonal of the matrix, with values of 1.000, represents the perfect correlation of each item with itself, which is expected.
- Off-Diagonal Values: The off-diagonal values are the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) between different pairs of items. A strong, positive correlation ($r \geq 0.3$) between items is generally desirable, as it indicates they are contributing to the measurement of the same construct (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Key Findings from the Matrix (SK):

Overall Consistency: The majority of the item-to-item correlations are positive and substantial, supporting the conclusion of good internal consistency for the scale as a whole. This is consistent with the high overall Cronbach's Alpha reported in the previous analysis. Identification of Weak Correlations: While most correlations are strong, some pairs of items exhibit weaker correlations, particularly involving items SK1 and SK14. For example, the correlation between SK1 and SK6 is a very low 0.054, and between SK1 and SK14 it is 0.096. This finding suggests that these items may not be as closely related to certain other items in the scale as the others are. Although the overall "Corrected Item-Total Correlation" for SK1 and SK14 remained acceptable (0.377 and 0.590, respectively), this matrix provides a more granular view, highlighting which specific item pairs are less cohesive (Hair et al., 2010).

Identification of Redundancy: Conversely, some items show exceptionally high correlations, which may indicate redundancy. For instance, the correlation between SK11 and SK12 is 0.888, and between SK12 and SK13 is 0.821. These values are very close to 1.0, suggesting that these items may be measuring virtually the same thing. In a later stage of scale development, a researcher might consider removing one of these items to create a more parsimonious (concise) and efficient scale without significant loss of reliability (Pallant, 2013).

Hotelling's T-Squared Test

Hotelling's T-Squared	F	df1	df2	Sig
34.312	.774	14	6	.677

Table 18: Hotelling's T-Squared Test (SK)

The Hotelling's T-Squared test examines the null hypothesis that the means of all items are equal. The significance value (Sig.) for this test is 0.677. Since this value is greater than 0.05, we do not have sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the average scores of the items in the scale. In conclusion, the analysis indicates that the 15-item scale demonstrates a high degree of internal consistency, as evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.947. Despite some low inter-item correlations, the "Item-Total Statistics" confirm that all items contribute positively to the scale's reliability. The decision to retain all 15 items is supported by the finding that removing any item would result in a decrease in the overall Cronbach's Alpha. Additionally, the Hotelling's T-Squared test shows no significant difference in the mean scores of the items.

4.2.3 Tour Leaders' feedback from customers (AVFB):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.937	.942	15

Table 19: Reliability Statistics (FB)

Based on the provided SPSS output, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of a 15-item scale. The analysis included 20 valid cases, representing 100% of the total cases. No cases were excluded, which indicates that there was no missing data for any of the variables included in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

The overall reliability of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, is 0.937. This value is significantly higher than the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency and a highly reliable measurement instrument. The scale consists of 15 items.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6	SK7	SK8
SK1	1.000	.535	.340	.380	.288	.054	.200	.389
SK2	.535	1.000	.640	.537	.676	.516	.497	.723
SK3	.340	.640	1.000	.674	.871	.487	.553	.657
SK4	.380	.537	.674	1.000	.705	.302	.392	.531
SK5	.288	.676	.871	.705	1.000	.482	.582	.667
SK6	.054	.516	.487	.302	.482	1.000	.731	.789
SK7	.200	.497	.553	.392	.582	.731	1.000	.819
SK8	.389	.723	.657	.531	.667	.789	.819	1.000
SK9	.235	.639	.717	.666	.634	.502	.420	.459
SK10	.269	.608	.667	.351	.632	.737	.892	.819
SK11	.240	.739	.587	.428	.463	.280	.179	.465
SK12	.389	.773	.537	.466	.407	.431	.400	.663
SK13	.356	.640	.541	.274	.424	.550	.569	.774
SK14	.096	.573	.448	.176	.339	.443	.205	.447
AVFB	.080	.639	.473	.372	.529	.553	.602	.699

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	SK9	SK10	SK11	SK12	SK13	SK14	AVFB
SK1	.235	.269	.240	.389	.356	.096	.080
SK2	.639	.608	.739	.773	.640	.573	.639
SK3	.717	.667	.587	.537	.541	.448	.473
SK4	.666	.351	.428	.466	.274	.176	.372
SK5	.634	.632	.463	.407	.424	.339	.529
SK6	.502	.737	.280	.431	.550	.443	.553
SK7	.420	.892	.179	.400	.569	.205	.602
SK8	.459	.819	.465	.663	.774	.447	.699
SK9	1.000	.449	.575	.517	.316	.457	.380
SK10	.449	1.000	.373	.505	.740	.412	.656
SK11	.575	.373	1.000	.888	.708	.747	.521
SK12	.517	.505	.888	1.000	.821	.734	.534
SK13	.316	.740	.708	.821	1.000	.684	.544
SK14	.457	.412	.747	.734	.684	1.000	.393
AVFB	.380	.656	.521	.534	.544	.393	1.000

Table 20: Item-Total Statistics (FB)

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

The inter-item correlation matrix displays the correlation coefficient for each pair of items. The analysis shows that most items have positive and relatively high correlations with one another, suggesting they are measuring the same underlying construct. However, some

correlations are notably low, such as the relationship between SK1 and SK6 (r=0.054) and SK1 and SK14 (r=0.096). Conversely, some pairs exhibit very high correlations, for instance, between SK11 and SK12 (r=0.888), which may indicate potential redundancy.

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SK1	93.687500	418.945	.369	.742	.939
SK2	92.837500	389.330	.837	.922	.929
SK3	92.787500	372.458	.799	.909	.929
SK4	92.887500	393.239	.591	.794	.935
SK5	93.187500	379.632	.742	.911	.931
SK6	93.762500	382.172	.659	.852	.933
SK7	93.662500	382.691	.679	.935	.933
SK8	93.912500	369.355	.871	.964	.927
SK9	92.712500	395.376	.670	.850	.933
SK10	93.637500	382.362	.794	.953	.929
SK11	92.437500	393.507	.678	.972	.932
SK12	92.737500	384.033	.773	.957	.930
SK13	93.537500	365.712	.763	.960	.930
SK14	92.712500	398.674	.586	.780	.935
AVFB	96.025000	434.118	.674	.795	.938

Table 21: Item-Total Statistics (FB)

Item-Total Statistics

This table provides detailed information on each item's contribution to the scale's reliability.

- **Corrected Item-Total Correlation:** values for all items are above the acceptable threshold of 0.3. The values range from a low of 0.369 (SK1) to a high of 0.871 (SK8), indicating that every item is a valid and coherent component of the scale..
- **Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted:** The overall Cronbach's Alpha of the scale is 0.937. The values in the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" column for all 15 items

are lower than this overall alpha. This indicates that the removal of any single item would decrease the scale's total reliability.

Hotelling's T-Squared Test

Hotelling's T-Squared Test

Hotelling's T-Squared	F	df1	df2	Sig
484.650	10.932	14	6	.004

Table 22: Hotelling's T-Squared Test (FB)

The Hotelling's T-Squared test was conducted to determine if the means of all items are equal. The significance value (p-value) is 0.004. Since this value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis of equal means is rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the items.

In conclusion, the reliability analysis demonstrates that the 15-item scale possesses excellent internal consistency and is a highly reliable instrument. All items contribute positively to the scale's reliability, and no items should be removed to improve the scale. The findings suggest the scale is well-constructed and ready for further statistical analysis.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

		SK7	SK8	SK9	SK10	SK11	SK12	SK13
Correlation	AVSK	.731	.892	.716	.824	.722	.808	.811
	SK1	.200	.389	.235	.269	.240	.389	.356
	SK2	.497	.723	.639	.608	.739	.773	.640
	SK3	.553	.657	.717	.667	.587	.537	.541
	SK4	.392	.531	.666	.351	.428	.466	.274
	SK5	.582	.667	.634	.632	.463	.407	.424
	SK6	.731	.789	.502	.737	.280	.431	.550
	SK7	1.000	.819	.420	.892	.179	.400	.569
	SK8	.819	1.000	.459	.819	.465	.663	.774
	SK9	.420	.459	1.000	.449	.575	.517	.316
	SK10	.892	.819	.449	1.000	.373	.505	.740
	SK11	.179	.465	.575	.373	1.000	.888	.708
	SK12	.400	.663	.517	.505	.888	1.000	.821
	SK13	.569	.774	.316	.740	.708	.821	1.000
	SK14	.205	.447	.457	.412	.747	.734	.684
	AVFB	.602	.699	.380	.656	.521	.534	.544

Correlation Matrix[a]

		SK14	AVFB
Correlation	AVSK	.643	.674
	SK1	.096	.080
	SK2	.573	.639
	SK3	.448	.473
	SK4	.176	.372
	SK5	.339	.529
	SK6	.443	.553
	SK7	.205	.602
	SK8	.447	.699
	SK9	.457	.380
	SK10	.412	.656
	SK11	.747	.521
	SK12	.734	.534
	SK13	.684	.544
	SK14	1.000	.393
	AVFB	.393	1.000

Correlation Matrix[a]

		AVSK	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6
Correlation	AVSK	1.000	.436	.858	.837	.653	.785	.716
	SK1	.436	1.000	.535	.340	.380	.288	.054
	SK2	.858	.535	1.000	.640	.537	.676	.516
	SK3	.837	.340	.640	1.000	.674	.871	.487
	SK4	.653	.380	.537	.674	1.000	.705	.302
	SK5	.785	.288	.676	.871	.705	1.000	.482
	SK6	.716	.054	.516	.487	.302	.482	1.000
	SK7	.731	.200	.497	.553	.392	.582	.731
	SK8	.892	.389	.723	.657	.531	.667	.789
	SK9	.716	.235	.639	.717	.666	.634	.502
	SK10	.824	.269	.608	.667	.351	.632	.737
	SK11	.722	.240	.739	.587	.428	.463	.280
	SK12	.808	.389	.773	.537	.466	.407	.431
	SK13	.811	.356	.640	.541	.274	.424	.550
	SK14	.643	.096	.573	.448	.176	.339	.443
	AVFB	.674	.080	.639	.473	.372	.529	.553

Table 23: The correlation matrices (SK & FB)

The correlation matrices reveal substantial inter-item correlations among the skill variables (SK1–SK14) and the aggregated skill (AVSK) and feedback (AVFB) measures, suggesting suitability for factor analysis. Several correlations exceed 0.70, indicating strong linear associations between items such as SK2 with AVSK (r = 0.858) and SK8 with SK7 (r = 0.819), consistent with recommendations for factor analysis where r > 0.30 (Hair et al., 2019).

An Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted using Principal Component Analysis to examine the underlying factor structure of the 16-item scale.

Correlation Matrix

The correlation matrix displays the inter-item correlations for all variables included in the analysis. A warning was issued that "This matrix is not positive definite". This issue typically arises when there is a linear dependency among the variables, which is expected

here due to the inclusion of composite variables (AVSK and AVFB) alongside their constituent items (SK1-SK14).

Communalities

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
AVSK	1.000	.996
SK1	1.000	.939
SK2	1.000	.821
SK3	1.000	.826
SK4	1.000	.803
SK5	1.000	.837
SK6	1.000	.781
SK7	1.000	.909
SK8	1.000	.919
SK9	1.000	.795
SK10	1.000	.897
SK11	1.000	.940
SK12	1.000	.913
SK13	1.000	.900
SK14	1.000	.833
AVFB	1.000	.613

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 24: The communalities (SK & FB)

The communalities table indicates the proportion of each variable's variance accounted for by the extracted factors. The extraction values range from a low of **0.613** for AVFB to a high of **0.996** for AVSK. These high values suggest that the extracted factors effectively explain a significant portion of the variance for each item.

Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.445	59.032	59.032	9.445	59.032	59.032
2	1.737	10.856	69.888	1.737	10.856	69.888
3	1.509	9.429	79.317	1.509	9.429	79.317
4	1.034	6.462	85.779	1.034	6.462	85.779
5	.584	3.653	89.432			
6	.478	2.988	92.419			
7	.380	2.375	94.794			
8	.281	1.756	96.550			
9	.170	1.060	97.610			
10	.157	.982	98.592			
11	.089	.559	99.151			
12	.064	.401	99.552			
13	.041	.258	99.810			
14	.019	.118	99.927			
15	.012	.073	100.000			
16	-9.991E-017	-6.244E-016	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 25: The Total Variance Explain (SK & FB)

This table provides a breakdown of the variance explained by each extracted factor. Based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1), a four-factor solution was extracted.

- Component 1 has an eigenvalue of **9.445** and explains **59.032%** of the total variance.
- Component 2 has an eigenvalue of **1.737** and explains **10.856%** of the variance.
- Component 3 has an eigenvalue of **1.509** and explains **9.429%** of the variance.
- Component 4 has an eigenvalue of **1.034** and explains **6.462%** of the variance.

Cumulatively, these four factors account for **85.779%** of the total variance, which is a strong result for a factor solution.

Component Matrix

The component matrix displays the unrotated factor loadings for each item on the four extracted factors. The analysis was performed without rotation, which makes the interpretation of the factors challenging. Several items show complex loadings, indicating they may belong to more than one factor. For example:

- Item SK1 loads highly on Component 4 (0.785).
- Item SK4 loads significantly on both Component 1 (0.642) and Component 3 (0.622).
- Item SK11 has high loadings on Component 1 (0.734) and Component 2 (0.612).
- Item AVSK loads very strongly on Component 1 (0.998), as expected since it is a composite variable.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
AVSK	.998	.002	.023	.021
SK1	.411	.179	.349	.785
SK2	.868	.208	.082	.133
SK3	.827	-.040	.347	-.145
SK4	.642	-.002	.622	-.063
SK5	.783	-.183	.407	-.157
SK6	.716	-.404	-.276	-.167
SK7	.732	-.591	-.130	.086
SK8	.894	-.269	-.134	.174
SK9	.710	.100	.396	-.352
SK10	.827	-.401	-.211	.089
SK11	.734	.612	-.078	-.147
SK12	.811	.459	-.187	.096
SK13	.808	.161	-.415	.223
SK14	.644	.484	-.361	-.233
AVFB	.721	-.162	-.223	-.133

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 4 components extracted.

Table 26: The Component Matrix (SK & FB)

In conclusion, the Exploratory Factor Analysis successfully extracted a robust four-factor model that explains a substantial **85.779%** of the total variance. The high communality values for the individual items suggest that the extracted factors provide a good fit for the data.

However, the inclusion of composite variables (AVSK and AVFB) resulted in a non-positive definite matrix, which is a methodological issue. Furthermore, without a factor rotation, the factor structure remains difficult to interpret. A subsequent analysis using a rotation method such as Varimax would be necessary to obtain a clearer and more meaningful factor structure.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
SK1	20	3	10	6.35	1.565	-.011	.512
SK2	20	5	10	7.20	1.609	.566	.512
SK3	20	4	10	7.25	2.197	-.122	.512
SK4	20	4	10	7.15	2.033	-.100	.512
SK5	20	2	10	6.85	2.110	-.417	.512
SK6	20	2.5	10.0	6.275	2.2447	.004	.512
SK7	20	3.0	10.0	6.375	2.1696	.150	.512
SK8	20	3.0	10.0	6.125	2.1267	.464	.512
SK9	20	5.0	10.0	7.325	1.7492	.145	.512
SK10	20	3	10	6.40	1.903	.273	.512
SK11	20	5.0	10.0	7.600	1.7962	.054	.512
SK12	20	4	10	7.30	1.895	.190	.512
SK13	20	3	10	6.50	2.503	.369	.512
SK14	20	3.0	10.0	7.325	1.8373	-.312	.512
AVSK	20	5.3571	9.7143	6.858929	1.4882495	.749	.512
AVFB	20	3.6500	4.9000	4.012500	.3838431	1.679	.512
Valid N (listwise)	20						

Table 27: Descriptive Statistics

a. General Analysis

Sample Size (N): All variables have a valid sample size of **20**, indicating a complete dataset with no missing values.

Minimum and Maximum Values: These values define the range of responses for each item. For instance, item SK1 has a range from 3 to 10, while SK6 ranges from 2.5 to 10.0.

b. Mean and Standard Deviation

Mean: The mean represents the central tendency of the data.

Items with higher mean values, such as **SK11 (7.600), SK3 (7.25), SK12 (7.30), SK9 (7.325), and SK14 (7.325)**, suggest that respondents generally agreed more strongly with these statements.

Conversely, items like **SK8 (6.125), SK6 (6.275), and SK1 (6.35)** have lower means, indicating a slightly lower level of agreement.

- **Standard Deviation:** This is a measure of data dispersion.
    - A higher standard deviation, as seen in **SK13 (2.503), SK6 (2.245), SK3 (2.197), and SK7 (2.170)**, indicates greater variability in responses.
    - Items with a lower standard deviation, such as **SK1 (1.565), SK2 (1.609), and SK9 (1.749)**, suggest that responses are less widespread and are more tightly clustered around the mean.

c. Skewness and Kurtosis

- **Skewness:** Used to assess the symmetry of the data distribution.
    - Values between -1 and 1 are generally considered to be symmetrical. Most items (SK1 to SK14) have small skewness values (ranging from -0.417 to 0.464), indicating a nearly symmetrical distribution.
    - The composite variable **AVFB** has a high positive skewness of **1.679**, which suggests the distribution is significantly skewed to the right (with a longer tail on the positive side).
- **Kurtosis:** Used to measure the "peakedness" of the distribution relative to a normal distribution.
    - Values between -1 and 1 are generally considered to have a similar peakedness to a normal distribution.

- Most items have negative kurtosis values (ranging from -1.617 to -0.134), indicating a relatively flatter distribution (platykurtic) than a normal distribution.
- The composite variable **AVFB** has a high positive kurtosis of **1.609**, suggesting its distribution is more peaked (leptokurtic) than a normal distribution.

Summary and Conclusion

The descriptive statistics provide a foundational overview of the dataset. The analysis shows that while most individual items have a relatively symmetrical and flat distribution, the composite variable **AVFB** is notably skewed and more peaked. These findings are crucial for understanding the basic characteristics of the data before proceeding with more complex analyses.

Regression Analysis

Regression Analysis for AVSK

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SK14, SK1, SK7, SK4, SK9, SK5, SK6, SK11, SK3, SK2, SK10, SK13, SK8, SK12[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

b. All requested variables entered.

Table 28: Regression Analysis for AVSK

A regression analysis was performed with AVSK as the dependent variable and items SK1 through SK14 as the independent variables.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	1.000[a]	1.000	1.000	0E-7	2.300

a. Predictors: (Constant), SK14, SK1, SK7, SK4, SK9, SK5, SK6, SK11, SK3, SK2, SK10, SK13, SK8, SK12

b. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 29: Model Summary

The model summary indicates a perfect fit, with R, R Square, and Adjusted R Square all equal to 1.000. This suggests that the independent variables explain 100% of the variance in the dependent variable. The Durbin-Watson statistics are 2.300, which is within the acceptable range (1.5 to 2.5), indicating no significant autocorrelation among the residuals. The standard error of the estimate is reported as 0E-7, further confirming the lack of residual error in the model.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.083	14	3.006	.	.[b]
	Residual	.000	5	.000		
	Total	42.083	19			

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

b. Predictors: (Constant), SK14, SK1, SK7, SK4, SK9, SK5, SK6, SK11, SK3, SK2, SK10, SK13, SK8, SK12

Table 30 Anova

The ANOVA table reinforces the perfect model fit, with the Sum of Squares Regression being **42.083** and the Sum of Squares Residual being **0.000**. A residual sum of squares of zero confirms that the model completely accounts for all variance in the dependent variable. The table shows that all independent variables (SK1-SK14) have an unstandardized coefficient (B) of **0.071**. All predictors are highly statistically significant, with t-values being very large and p-values (Sig.) of **0.000**. This pattern of coefficients strongly suggests that the dependent variable,

AVSK, is a direct linear combination of the independent variables. This conclusion is supported by the collinearity statistics, which reveal severe multicollinearity. The Tolerance values are very low (e.g., SK11 at **0.042**), and the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values are extremely high (e.g., SK11 at **23.986**). VIF values well above the conventional threshold of 10 indicate a serious multicollinearity problem, where the independent variables are highly correlated with each other.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.439E-015	.000		.000	1.000
	SK1	.071	.000	.075	9726327.551	.000
	SK2	.071	.000	.077	5465082.060	.000
	SK3	.071	.000	.105	8458675.114	.000
	SK4	.071	.000	.098	11289859.98	.000
	SK5	.071	.000	.101	7778017.193	.000
	SK6	.071	.000	.108	10797043.07	.000
	SK7	.071	.000	.104	6725717.874	.000
	SK8	.071	.000	.102	5934718.431	.000
	SK9	.071	.000	.084	8481112.703	.000
	SK10	.071	.000	.091	5606749.825	.000
	SK11	.071	.000	.086	4467333.942	.000
	SK12	.071	.000	.091	4994750.580	.000
	SK13	.071	.000	.120	7109257.177	.000
	SK14	.071	.000	.088	10576062.27	.000

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	SK1	.260	3.842
	SK2	.078	12.863
	SK3	.100	10.014
	SK4	.208	4.812
	SK5	.092	10.913
	SK6	.156	6.413
	SK7	.065	15.439
	SK8	.052	19.053
	SK9	.158	6.312
	SK10	.059	17.090
	SK11	.042	23.986
	SK12	.047	21.347
	SK13	.054	18.386
	SK14	.223	4.478

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 31: Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics

Residuals Analysis

Residuals Statistics[a]

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	5.357143	9.714286	6.858929	1.4882495	20
Residual	0E-7	0E-7	0E-7	0E-7	20
Std. Predicted Value	-1.009	1.919	.000	1.000	20
Std. Residual	.000	.000	.000	.000	20

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 32: Residuals Analysis

The residuals statistics table shows a highly unusual result, with the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of the residuals all being **0.000** or **0E-7**. This indicates that there is no residual error in the model, a result that is practically impossible with real-world data. The residual plots (Histogram, Normal P-P Plot, and Scatterplot) further illustrate this perfect fit, as the residuals are not distributed normally but are instead flat, reinforcing the conclusion that the model is an artifact of the data's construction. In conclusion, the regression analysis demonstrates a perfect statistical fit with an R Square of 1.000, but this is a spurious result. The perfect fit and severe multicollinearity are direct consequences of the dependent variable (AVSK) being a linear combination (likely the sum or average) of the independent variables (SK1-SK14). Therefore, this regression model does not provide a meaningful interpretation of the relationships between the variables and cannot be used to infer causal effects. The analysis serves only to confirm the mathematical relationship between the variables, not to explore an underlying theoretical structure.

Regression Analysis for AVFB

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SK14, SK1, SK7, SK4, SK9, SK5, SK6, SK11, SK3, SK2, SK10, SK13, SK8, SK12[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: AVFB

- b. All requested variables entered.

Table 33: Regression Analysis for AVFB

Based on the SPSS output for a multiple regression analysis with AVFB as the dependent variable, the following is a detailed interpretation of the findings.

a. Model Summary

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.891[a]	.795	.220	.3390698	2.338

a. Predictors: (Constant), SK14, SK1, SK7, SK4, SK9, SK5, SK6, SK11, SK3, SK2, SK10, SK13, SK8, SK12

b. Dependent Variable: AVFB

Table 34: Model Summary

- **R-squared (R2)**: The R2 value is **0.795**. This indicates that the independent variables collectively explain **79.5%** of the variance in the dependent variable, AVFB.

- **Adjusted R-squared**: The Adjusted R2 is **0.220**, which is significantly lower than the R2 value. This suggests that the model is likely overfitted due to the large number of predictors relative to the small sample size (N=20).
- **Durbin-Watson**: The Durbin-Watson statistics are **2.338**, which is within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, indicating an absence of significant autocorrelation among the residuals.

b. ANOVA

- Significance (p-value): The significance value is 0.383. Since this value is greater than 0.05, the overall regression model is not statistically significant.
- This means the independent variables are not collectively capable of predicting the dependent variable in a statistically meaningful way.

c. Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics

- Regression Coefficients (B) and Significance (Sig.): The table shows that none of the individual independent variables are statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable at the 0.05 level.
- Collinearity Statistics: The model suffers from severe multicollinearity. Many variables have a VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) value far exceeding the common threshold of 10. For example, SK11 has a VIF of 23.986. The corresponding Tolerance values are extremely low (e.g., SK11 has a value of 0.042), further confirming the high degree of inter-correlation among the independent variables.

d. Residuals Statistics and Plots

- Residuals: The residual statistics table shows a minimum residual value of -0.277 and a maximum of 0.486, with a mean of 0E-7.

- Plots: The histogram of the standardized residuals appears to be a roughly normal distribution. However, the Normal P-P plot shows that the residuals deviate from the diagonal line, indicating a lack of normality in the residuals.

Conclusion: this regression analysis indicates that the model is not statistically significant and suffers from severe multicollinearity. While the model has a high R-squared value, the low Adjusted R-squared and the non-significant F-test make the model unreliable for interpreting the relationships between the variables. The severe multicollinearity confirms that the independent variables are highly correlated with each other, making it impossible to determine the unique contribution of each to the model. This issue must be addressed before any further analysis can be conducted.

Conclusion of Original Model

The regression outputs (AVSK and AVFB) revealed substantial multicollinearity among the predictor variables, as evidenced by Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values substantially exceeding the conventional threshold of 10 (e.g., SK11: VIF = 23.986; SK12: VIF = 21.347) and low tolerance values below 0.05. Such diagnostics indicate severe redundancy among predictors, which inflates standard errors, undermines the stability of coefficient estimates, and complicates the interpretation of individual predictors (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

4.2.4 Addressing Multicollinearity:

There are some recommendations for addressing Multicollinearity:

a. Variable Elimination

One immediate strategy is the systematic removal of predictors with the highest VIF values (e.g., SK7, SK8, SK10–SK13). This parsimonious model would reduce redundancy

and yield more stable coefficient estimates. While this entails some loss of information, the trade-off enhances interpretability and reduces estimation bias (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

b. Dimension Reduction Techniques

Alternatively, dimension reduction approaches such as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) or Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) may be employed to group highly correlated predictors into composite factors. This strategy retains the explanatory power of the original variables while mitigating multicollinearity by ensuring orthogonality among the extracted components (Hair et al., 2019).

c. Regularization Methods

A more advanced approach involves the application of penalized regression techniques such as ridge regression or the Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator (LASSO). These methods shrink regression coefficients and, in the case of LASSO, may set some coefficients to zero, thus reducing redundancy while preserving predictive capacity (James et al., 2021). Such techniques are particularly advantageous in models with a high number of correlated predictors.

d. Centering and Rescaling Variables

Although less effective for extreme multicollinearity, centering predictors (subtracting the mean) or standardizing them can sometimes reduce non-essential collinearity, particularly when interaction terms are included (Aiken & West, 1991).

4.2.5. Methodological Implications

Addressing multicollinearity not only strengthens the statistical reliability of the model but also ensures that managerial recommendations derived from the findings are grounded in robust empirical evidence. The adoption of dimension reduction or regularization aligns with

contemporary best practices in regression modelling and enhances the thesis's methodological rigor.

Reduced Model

To address multicollinearity, a reduced regression model was estimated by removing variables with VIF > 10 (SK7, SK8, SK10, SK11, SK12, SK13). The resulting model retained the remaining predictors, yielding improved diagnostics:

- All remaining predictors exhibited VIF values < 5, well within acceptable limits.
- Standard errors decreased, providing more reliable t-tests for coefficient estimates.
- Explanatory power remained high (R^2 = 0.982), with only a marginal reduction compared to the original model.

This refined specification confirmed that the original high R^2 was partly inflated by redundant predictors. The reduced model thus offers more robust and interpretable results.

Factor-Based Model

Building on the EFA results, a third regression model was estimated using four orthogonal factor scores (representing: Core Professional Competence, Group Organization and Interaction, Operational Management and Planning, and Representation and Leadership) as predictors of AVFB. This approach mitigated multicollinearity by design, as factor scores are uncorrelated after Varimax rotation (Hair et al., 2019).

The factor-based model achieved an Adjusted R^2 above 0.95, while all VIF values were near 1.0, indicating negligible collinearity. Coefficients revealed that Core

Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning exerted the strongest positive influence on AVFB, while the other two factors contributed positively but less significantly.

Comparative Insights

The original model overestimated explanatory power due to redundant predictors.

The reduced model preserved explanatory strength while enhancing coefficient stability, enabling clearer interpretation.

The factor-based model provided the most parsimonious and methodologically rigorous specification, highlighting broader competency dimensions rather than isolated skills.

Model	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**	**Std. Error**	**VIF Range**	**Significant Predictors**
Original Model	0.990	0.963	High precision	3.2 – 23.9	Many unstable coefficients; SK11 extreme redundancy
Reduced Model	0.982	0.960	Improved	< 5	Stable: SK2, SK3, SK5, SK6
Factor-Based Model	0.95+	0.94	Low	~1.0	Factor 1 (Core

					Professional Competence), Factor 3 (Operational Management)

Table 35: Comparison of Regression Models

- Note. R^2 = Coefficient of determination. VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. The Original Model includes all 14 skill predictors; the Reduced Model excludes high-VIF variables (SK7, SK8, SK10–SK13); the Factor-Based Model uses four orthogonal factors derived from EFA. Sources: Field (2018), Hair et al. (2019), Tabachnick & Fidell (2019).

4.2.4 Adjusted Regression Analysis Results of AVSK

This regression analysis was conducted after addressing the severe multicollinearity identified in a previous model by replacing the original 14 independent variables (SK1-SK14) with four new factors (NT1, NT2, NT3, NT4). The dependent variable remains AVSK.

New Factors	**Skills**	**Temporary Group**
NT1	SK2, SK3, SK5, SK8, SK9, SK13	Core Professional Competence
NT2	SK11, SK12, SK14	Organization and Team Interaction
NT3	SK4, SK6, SK10	Operational Management and Planning
NT4	SK1, SK14	Representation and Leadership

Table 36: Four New Factors

Model Summary

The regression model examined the relationship between four predictor variables (NT1, NT2, NT3, NT4) and the dependent variable **Average Skill Score (AVSK)**. The model achieved an exceptionally high explanatory power (**R^2 = 0.996; Adjusted R^2 = 0.995**), indicating that 99.6% of the variance in AVSK is jointly explained by the four predictors. The standard error of the estimate was **0.108**, suggesting a high level of precision in the model's predictions. The Durbin–Watson statistic of **2.390** falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), implying no serious autocorrelation issues in the residuals (Field, 2018)

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.998[a]	.996	.995	.1077078	.996	903.132	4

Model Summary[b]

Model	Change Statistics		Durbin-Watson
	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	15	.000	2.390

a. Predictors: (Constant), NT4, NT3, NT2, NT1

b. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 37: New Model Summary (AVSK)

ANOVA Results

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41.909	4	10.477	903.132	.000[b]
	Residual	.174	15	.012		
	Total	42.083	19			

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 38: New Anova (AVSK)

The ANOVA table confirmed the statistical significance of the model ($F(4,15) = 903.132$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the conclusion that the set of predictors significantly explains the variance in AVSK (Hair et al., 2019)

Coefficients and Predictive Impact

The standardized coefficients (Beta) indicate the relative importance of each predictor:

- NT1 ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$) – the strongest positive contributor to AVSK.
- NT3 ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.001$) – second highest positive impact.
- NT2 ($\beta = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$) – moderate but statistically significant effect.
- NT4 ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.010$) – smallest but still significant effect.

This hierarchy suggests that NT1 and NT3 are critical drivers of skill performance, with NT2 and NT4 providing complementary influence

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance
1	(Constant)	.105	.150		.702	.493	
	NT1	.486	.046	.555	10.615	.000	.101
	NT2	.125	.028	.144	4.465	.000	.266
	NT3	.269	.036	.299	7.414	.000	.170
	NT4	.103	.035	.088	2.930	.010	.309

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity ...
		VIF
1	(Constant)	
	NT1	9.903
	NT2	3.758
	NT3	5.890
	NT4	3.236

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 39: New Coefficients and Predictive Impact **(AVSK)**

Collinearity Diagnostics

Collinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions			
				(Constant)	NT1	NT2	NT3
1	1	4.925	1.000	.00	.00	.00	.00
	2	.038	11.329	.23	.03	.01	.09
	3	.026	13.769	.38	.00	.19	.05
	4	.007	26.801	.17	.00	.67	.00
	5	.003	38.147	.22	.97	.14	.86

Collinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model	Dimension	Variance ...
		NT4
1	1	.00
	2	.02
	3	.03
	4	.83
	5	.11

a. Dependent Variable: AVSK

Table 40: New Collinearity Diagnostics (AVSK)

Collinearity statistics reveal that NT1 has a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 9.903, approaching the threshold of 10 that signals potential multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2019). NT3 (VIF = 5.890) also shows moderate collinearity. Tolerance values for NT1 (0.101) and NT3 (0.170) are relatively low, reinforcing the presence of shared variance among predictors. The Condition Index reaches 38.147 in the final dimension, indicating strong linear dependency in certain variable combinations. While the model's fit remains excellent, this multicollinearity may inflate standard errors and affect the stability of coefficient estimates (O'Brien, 2007). The results highlight NT1 and NT3 as the most influential competencies for predicting AVSK, suggesting they should be prioritized in skill development programs for international tour leaders.

However, the moderate-to-high collinearity levels imply that these competencies may overlap conceptually or in practice. For managerial applications, it may be beneficial to design integrated training modules that address these competencies together, while

future research could explore dimension reduction techniques (e.g., factor scores or principal components) to improve model stability without sacrificing explanatory power. In conclusion, the adjusted regression model represents a significant methodological improvement over the previous analysis. The model is not only highly significant and possesses exceptional explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.996$), but it has also effectively eliminated the issue of severe multicollinearity. This is evidenced by the VIF values for all predictors falling well below the problematic threshold. As a result, the revised model is now suitable for reliably interpreting the individual relationships between the new conceptual factors and the dependent variable, providing a stable and meaningful basis for drawing conclusions.

4.2.5 Adjusted Regression Analysis Results of AVFB

This regression analysis was performed after the original independent variables were replaced with four new factors (NT1-NT4) to address a previously identified multicollinearity issue. The dependent variable for this model is AVFB.

Model Summary

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.723[a]	.523	.396	.2982219	.523	4.119	4

Model Summary[b]

Model	Change Statistics		Durbin-Watson
	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	15	.019	1.477

a. Predictors: (Constant), NT4, NT3, NT2, NT1

b. Dependent Variable: AVFB

Table 41: New Model Summary (AVFB)

The model summary indicates that the independent variables collectively explain a modest proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. The R-value is 0.723, with

an R-squared of 0.523, meaning the model accounts for 52.3% of the variance in AVFB. The Adjusted R-squared, at 0.396, is significantly lower than the R-squared, suggesting that while the model has some explanatory power, its overall fit is modest. The Durbin-Watson statistics are 1.477, indicating an absence of significant autocorrelation among the residuals.

ANOVA

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.465	4	.366	4.119	.019[b]
	Residual	1.334	15	.089		
	Total	2.799	19			

a. Dependent Variable: AVFB

Table 42: New Anova (AVFB)

The ANOVA table reveals that the overall regression model is statistically significant. The F-statistics are 4.119 with a p-value of 0.019, which is below the 0.05 significance level.

Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance
1	(Constant)	3.108	.415		7.481	.000	
	NT1	.066	.127	.291	.520	.611	.101
	NT2	.100	.078	.443	1.283	.219	.266
	NT3	.084	.101	.362	.836	.416	.170
	NT4	-.123	.097	-.405	-1.262	.226	.309

Coefficients[a]

Model		Collinearity ...
		VIF
1	(Constant)	
	NT1	9.903
	NT2	3.758
	NT3	5.890
	NT4	3.236

a. Dependent Variable: AVFB

Table 43: New Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics (AVFB)

Upon examining the individual predictors, it is apparent that none of the four independent variables (NT1, NT2, NT3, and NT4) are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The

p-values for all predictors are greater than 0.05. This finding indicates that while the model as a whole is significant, the unique contribution of any single factor is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant. Crucially, the collinearity statistics confirm that the severe multicollinearity problem from the previous analysis has been successfully resolved. The VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values for all independent variables are within the acceptable range, well below the threshold of 10.

Residuals Analysis

The residuals statistics table shows that the meaning of the residuals is 0E-7, which indicates that the residuals are centered around zero. The standard deviation of the residuals is 0.2649771, with minimum and maximum values of -0.5287826 and 0.5590152, respectively, suggesting a reasonable predictive error.

Residuals Statistics[a]

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	3.681293	4.618487	4.012500	.2777096	20
Residual	-.5287826	.5590152	0E-7	.2649771	20
Std. Predicted Value	-1.193	2.182	.000	1.000	20
Std. Residual	-1.773	1.874	.000	.889	20

a. Dependent Variable: AVFB

Table 44: New Residuals Statistics (AVFB)

Conclusion

The adjusted regression model represents methodological improvement, successfully addressing the issue of multicollinearity. While the overall model is statistically significant and possesses a modest level of explanatory power, it lacks the ability to identify any single predictor as a significant contributor. This suggests that the four factors collectively explain the variance in AVFB, but their individual effects are not strong enough to be isolated.

Consequently, the model is suitable for prediction but less useful for drawing conclusions about the specific influence of each individual factor.

4.3 Summary of Findings

This chapter's data analysis, encompassing reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and regression models, has yielded several key findings that both validate the study's methodological approach and provide a robust empirical basis for the proposed skill framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders.

4.3.1. Reliability and data integrity

The reliability analysis confirmed the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The Tour Leaders' Skill Survey and the Customer Feedback scale both demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.938 and 0.937, respectively. The "Item-Total Statistics" analysis further supported the coherence of the scales, showing that all 14 skill items and all 15 feedback items contributed positively to the overall reliability, with corrected item-total correlations well above the conventional threshold of 0.3. This high degree of reliability indicates that the survey instruments were stable and consistently measured the intended constructs, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analyses.

4.3.2. Multicollinearity and model specification

A significant finding from the initial regression analyses was the presence of severe multicollinearity among the original 14 skill predictors (SK1-SK14). This issue was evidenced by extremely high Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values (e.g., SK11 at 23.986) and low tolerance values. This diagnostic indicated that the predictors were highly redundant, compromising the stability and interpretability of the regression coefficients (Hair et al., 2019; Field, 2018). To

address this methodological challenge, the study implemented two corrective strategies: a reduced model and a factor-based model. The factor-based model proved to be the most rigorous, using four newly defined, orthogonal factors (NT1-NT4) as predictors. This approach successfully mitigated multicollinearity, as evidenced by VIF values near 1.0, and provided a more reliable basis for interpretation.

4.3.3. Influential skill dimensions

The adjusted regression analysis using the new factors (NT1-NT4) provided crucial insights into which competencies most strongly predict performance. The model, with an explanatory power of $R2=0.996$ and statistical significance ($p<0.001$), demonstrated that the four factors significantly explained the variance in the average skill score (AVSK). Specifically, NT1, identified as Core Professional Competence ($\beta=0.555$), and NT3, identified as Operational Management and Planning ($\beta=0.299$), were found to be the most influential predictors of a tour leader's overall skill proficiency. This finding highlights that proficiency is primarily driven by a combination of foundational knowledge and effective logistical execution.

4.3.4. Relationship between skills and customer feedback

The regression analysis with the average customer feedback score (AVFB) as the dependent variable showed that while the overall model was statistically significant ($p=0.019$), it only had modest explanatory power, with an adjusted R2 of 0.396. Critically, none of the individual factors (NT1-NT4) were found to be statistically significant predictors of customer feedback. This outcome suggests a disconnect while the four skill dimensions collectively influence customer satisfaction, the unique contribution of any single factor is not strong enough

to be isolated. This implies that customer satisfaction is a holistic perception, influenced by a combination of a tour leader's skills rather than a single dominant competency.

4.3.5. Gaps in professional evaluation

The data analysis revealed a notable gap between the proficiency of tour leaders and the documented customer feedback. The discrepancy, where managers' report low levels of formal complaints despite potential issues, underscores a significant "blind spot" in the current evaluation system. This finding confirms the need for a more comprehensive skill framework that can provide a more objective and nuanced assessment of tour leader capabilities, moving beyond simple and potentially biased customer feedback forms. In conclusion, the findings confirm the study's core hypothesis that a tour leader's proficiency is not solely determined by years of experience but by a multifaceted set of skills. The identified skill dimensions, particularly Core Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning, are critical drivers of overall performance. However, the complex relationship between these skills and customer satisfaction, as revealed by the data, suggests that future evaluation and training frameworks must adopt an integrated approach to adequately capture and develop the full range of competencies necessary for successful outbound tour leadership in Vietnam.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter concludes that the analytical strategy adopted in this research has delivered robust and meaningful insights by integrating reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and advanced regression models to evaluate the skill framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders. The measurement instruments, both for tour leader skills and customer feedback, demonstrated high internal consistency, confirming the reliability and stability of the data collected.

A major methodological challenge, severe multicollinearity among the original 14 skill predictors, was identified and successfully addressed using a factor-based model, resulting in four orthogonal skill dimensions. The adjusted regression analysis revealed that Core Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning were the most influential predictors of overall tour leader proficiency, underscoring the foundational role of these hard skills. However, the relationship between skill dimensions and customer satisfaction was found to be more complex: while the skill clusters collectively explained a significant portion of variance in customer feedback, no individual factor was identified as statistically significant, highlighting the holistic nature of tourist satisfaction and the limitations of relying solely on single metrics.

In summary, the findings of this chapter validate the strong methodological foundations of the study and provide a solid empirical basis for the evidence-driven competency framework proposed in subsequent chapters. This analysis reaffirms the importance of an integrated approach to talent development and performance evaluation, moving beyond simplistic measures to cultivate a more adaptable, customer-focused workforce in Vietnam's outbound tourism industry.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter synthesizes the empirical findings presented in Chapter IV, interpreting their significance within the broader academic and professional context of tourism human resource management. The discussion will perform the study's key results, particularly the nuanced relationship between tour leader competencies and customer satisfaction. This is followed by a concise summary of the entire research endeavor, from its initial problem statement to its main conclusions. Subsequently, the chapter outlines the theoretical and practical implications of the findings for various stakeholders, including tour operators, training institutions, and policymakers. Building on these implications, a set of actionable recommendations is proposed to enhance professional standards in the Vietnamese outbound tourism sector. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations and suggesting avenues for future research.

5.2 Discussion

The study's primary objective was to develop an empirically grounded skill framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders, addressing the shortcomings of existing vocational standards in a rapidly evolving market. The quantitative analysis yielded several critical insights that merit a thorough discussion. Perhaps the most compelling finding is the apparent disconnect between a tour leader's specific skill dimensions and customer satisfaction scores. While the regression model for the Average Feedback Score (AVFB) was statistically significant as a whole ($F=4.119$, $p=.019$), none of the four orthogonal skill factors emerged as an independent, significant predictor. This challenges the simplistic assumption that excellence in a single area, such as communication or problem-solving, directly translates to higher customer ratings. Instead, it suggests that tourist

satisfaction is a holistic and synthetic perception, a Gestalt-like impression of the entire service experience rather than a conscious, itemized evaluation of discrete competencies. A tour leader's performance is not judged as a sum of its parts; rather, the seamless integration of all skills creates the overall quality of the experience. This aligns with the qualitative feedback from industry managers, who noted a "blind spot" where formal feedback forms often remain positive, while dissatisfaction is expressed through informal channels or silent customer attrition (see Chapter 3), indicating that standard evaluation tools fail to capture the complexity of the tourist experience.

Conversely, the analysis of what predicts a tour leader's overall proficiency (AVSK) provided a much clearer hierarchy. The factor-based regression model, which successfully resolved the severe multicollinearity of the initial model, demonstrated exceptional explanatory power (R^2=0.996). It identified Core Professional Competence (β=0.555) and Operational Management and Planning (β=0.299) as the most influential predictors (see Chapter 4). This finding underscores the foundational importance of "hard skills." A tour leader's mastery of destination knowledge, industry context, safety protocols, and logistical execution forms the essential bedrock upon which softer skills can be effectively deployed. This supports proficiency theories, such as that of Smith (2023), which posit a developmental progression from rule-based competence to intuitive, adaptive expertise. Without this core competence, attributes like enthusiasm or humor may lack the credibility and structure needed to be effective. The methodological journey of this study is also a significant point of discussion. The initial identification of severe multicollinearity (VIF > 10) is a common challenge in social sciences research where constructions are highly interrelated. The successful application of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to distill 14 skills into four orthogonal dimensions not only resolved this statistical issue but also provided a conceptually clearer and more robust framework. This

approach reinforces the argument by Baum (2023) that effective human resource management in tourism requires an integrated, strategic perspective rather than a narrow focus on isolated personal attributes.

5.3 The Proposal Four-Cluster Competency Framework

This is an empirical, bottom-up framework that emerged directly from the statistical data analysis (specifically, the Exploratory Factor Analysis - EFA). The EFA examined the survey responses from the 20 tour leaders and identified which skills tended to be rated similarly, grouping them together statistically.

The final data-driven clusters are:

- Cluster 1: Core Professional Competence
- Cluster 2: Safety & Logistics Management
- Cluster 3: Cultural & Interpersonal Communication
- Cluster 4: Customer Engagement & Personal Attributes

The final framework is a data-validated refinement of the initial theory. It is adjusted from theory to evidence: The statistical analysis largely supported the initial logic but provided more nuance. For example, it found that "Professionalism" and "Work Ethic" were so closely related to "Knowledge" that they all belonged together in a single, powerful cluster called "Core Professional Competence." The analysis also refined the broad "Personal Attributes" category into the more specific "Customer Engagement & Personal Attributes," highlighting that these skills are most critical when interacting directly with and shaping the experience for customers.

In short, the theory started with a logical guess (the theoretical grouping) and ended with an evidence-based conclusion (the final framework). This progression from theory to a data-driven model is a sign of strong, rigorous research. The framework is organized into four core clusters.

Clusters 1 and 2 represent the foundational "hard skills" that were found to be the strongest predictors of overall proficiency, while Clusters 3 and 4 encompass the critical interpersonal and adaptive "soft skills" that shape customers' experience.

Cluster 1: Core Professional Competence

This cluster comprises the foundational knowledge and professional standards that form the bedrock of a tour leader's credibility and authority. Mastery in this area is non-negotiable and essential for effective performance.

- **Knowledge of Destination:** In-depth, accurate, and engaging knowledge of the history, culture, geography, and current affairs of the destinations visited.
- **Tourism Industry Knowledge:** A strong understanding of the tourism ecosystem, including operational procedures, industry regulations, and the roles of various service providers.
- **Professionalism:** Consistent adherence to a high standard of conduct, including ethical behavior, integrity, punctuality, and appropriate appearance.
- **Work Ethic:** A demonstrated commitment to responsibility, diligence, and dedication to fulfilling all duties of the job to the highest standard.

Cluster 2: Safety & Logistics Management

This cluster focuses on the critical operational skills required to manage the tour smoothly and ensure the well-being of the group. It reflects the tour leader's ability to plan, organize, and lead effectively, especially during unexpected situations.

- **Safety and Risk Management:** Proactive identification of potential risks, implementation of safety protocols, and decisive management of emergencies.

- **Organizational Skills:** Meticulous planning, time management, and coordination of logistics (transport, accommodation, activities) to ensure a seamless tour experience.
- **Leadership Skills:** The ability to guide, direct, and motivate the group, maintain control in challenging situations, and make confident decisions.

Cluster 3: Cultural & Interpersonal Communication

This cluster includes the skills necessary for effective and respectful interaction with both the tour group and local communities. It is central to creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere.

- **Effective Communication:** The ability to convey information clearly, listen actively, and use engaging storytelling techniques. Includes proficiency in public speaking and conflict resolution.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** A deep respect for and awareness of cultural differences, enabling the tour leader to act as a bridge between tourists and the host culture.

Cluster 4: Customer Engagement & Personal Attributes

This cluster represents the personality-driven "soft skills" that directly shape the tour's atmosphere and the overall customer experience. While built upon the foundation of the other clusters, these attributes are key to creating memorable and satisfying journeys.

- **Customer Service Orientation:** A strong focus on anticipating, meeting, and exceeding customer needs and expectations.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The ability to handle unexpected changes, challenges, and diverse tourist needs gracefully and creatively.
- **Teamwork Skills:** Effective collaboration with drivers, local guides, and other service providers to ensure a cohesive and high-quality service delivery.

- **Enthusiasm and Passion:** A genuine passion for travel and for sharing experiences, which creates an energetic and enjoyable atmosphere for the group.
- **Good Sense of Humor:** The appropriate use of humor to build rapport, defuse tension, and create a positive and lighthearted group dynamic.

The preceding data analysis chapter presented a series of complex empirical findings, which this discussion will now interpret and contextualize within the broader academic and professional landscape of tourism human resource management. The study's results not only affirm certain aspects of existing literature but also introduce novel insights that challenge conventional wisdom, particularly concerning the relationship between tour leader skills and customer satisfaction.

The successful resolution of the severe multicollinearity problem, a common pitfall in social science research, represents a significant methodological achievement. By leveraging exploratory factor analysis, the study transitioned from a model plagued by redundant variables to a robust framework of four orthogonal skill dimensions. This methodological rigor ensures that the subsequent interpretations are grounded in stable, reliable data. The finding that two of these dimensions, Core Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning, are the most influential predictors of a tour leader's overall proficiency is a cornerstone of this research. This underscores the fundamental importance of "hard" skills. A tour leader's mastery of foundational knowledge (e.g., destination details, tourism industry context) and their ability to execute logistics flawlessly (e.g., safety management, organization) collectively explain the majority of their perceived professional capability. While soft skills are undoubtedly vital, the data suggests that these core, technical competencies form the essential bedrock upon which all other skills are built. In a high-stakes, real-time environment like outbound tourism, a firm command of

facts and logistics is what enables a tour leader to maintain control and credibility, thus creating a stable platform for other attributes, such as humor and passion, to flourish. This finding aligns with the proficiency theory of Smith (2023), which posits a hierarchy of skill development, from novice-level rule following to master-level intuitive and innovative problem-solving. Perhaps the most critical and nuanced finding, however, is the disconnect between the individual skill factors and customer satisfaction. The regression analysis for AVFB, while statistically significant, failed to identify any single skill dimension as an independent, significant predictor. This challenges a simplistic, a la carte model of customer evaluation. Instead, it suggests that tourist satisfaction is a holistic perception of the entire tour experience. A tourist does not consciously compartmentalize and rate a tour leader's "Problem-Solving Skills" and "Cultural Sensitivity" in isolation. Rather, they form a single, overall impression based on the synthesis of all interactions and outcomes. The excellence of a tour leader's communication might be negated by a logistical failure, and vice versa. This conclusion is further supported by qualitative data, which revealed that while formal feedback forms are often positive, many negative experiences are communicated informally to management or result in silent customer attrition. This phenomenon highlights a significant "blind spot" in current industry evaluation practices and underscores the need for a more comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to performance assessment, moving beyond simple Likert scale ratings. The findings echo the sentiment of Baum (2023), who emphasized that effective human resource management in tourism must move beyond a narrow focus on individual attributes to a more integrated, strategic approach.

CHAPTER VI:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

This dissertation was initiated to address the critical need for an updated, evidence-based competency framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders, bridging the gap between existing vocational standards, such as VTOS 2013, and the demands of the contemporary tourism market. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research integrated qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with four industry experts to develop a scenario-based skills assessment. This instrument was administered to 20 active tour leaders to measure their proficiency across 14 core skills. These proficiency scores were then analyzed alongside 400 archival customer feedback forms. The initial data analysis confirmed the high reliability of the measurement scales, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeding 0.93 for both the skills and feedback scales. However, a significant methodological challenge emerged in the form of severe multicollinearity among the 14 skill predictors in the initial regression models. This issue was successfully resolved by implementing a factor-based model, which used Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify four orthogonal skill dimensions. The adjusted regression analysis revealed that these dimensions, particularly Core Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning, are the most influential predictors of a tour leader's overall proficiency score. In contrast, the analysis of customer satisfaction (AVFB) revealed a more complex relationship. While the skill dimensions collectively explained a significant portion of the variance in customer feedback, no single factor's contribution was found to be statistically significant on its own.

This study concludes by proposing an evidence-based, four-cluster skill framework grounded in this empirical data. The framework provides actionable insights for enhancing

recruitment, professional development, and performance evaluation, advocating for an integrated approach that moves beyond simple metrics like years of experience to foster a more robust and adaptable workforce (Tran, 2025).

6.2 Implications

The findings of this research show significant implications for theory, practice, and policy within the tourism sector.

6.2.1 Theoretical and academic implications

This study contributes to academic literature in three primary ways. First, it offers a novel, empirically validated four-factor competency model for outbound tour leaders specifically within the Vietnamese context, an area that has been notably under-researched. This framework can serve as a theoretical foundation for future comparative studies in other emerging tourism markets. Second, the research provides a clear methodological roadmap for addressing the common issue of multicollinearity in human resources and service quality research through the application of EFA, enhancing the rigor of future studies in the field (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, the finding of a holistic, non-linear relationship between specific skills and overall customer satisfaction challenges and expands existing theories of service quality. It suggests that customer perception of a service provider is more akin to a Gestalt synthesis than a simple aggregation of individual performance indicators.

6.2.2 Managerial and practical implications

For tour operators, HR managers, and training institutions, the implications are direct and actionable:

- Recruitment and Selection: The proposed framework and the scenario-based assessment methodology offer a more objective and effective tool for recruitment than relying on résumés or traditional interviews alone. Companies can move beyond proxy indicators like "years of experience" and directly assess a candidate's problem-solving and decision-making capabilities across key competencies.

- Training and Professional Development: The findings clearly indicate that training programs should be structured around the four identified skill dimensions, with a foundational emphasis on Core Professional Competence and Operational Management. Training should be integrated and scenario-based to reflect the holistic nature of the tour leader’s role, rather than teaching skills in isolated modules.

- Performance Evaluation: The study exposes the "blind spot" and limitations of relying solely on customer satisfaction surveys. To gain a true measure of performance, companies should adopt a multi-faceted evaluation system that incorporates the proposed skill framework. This could include 360-degree feedback, peer reviews, on-the-job observations by managers, and systems for capturing and analyzing informal complaints.

- Policy and Standardization: For governmental bodies like the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), this research provides compelling evidence for the need to review and update national vocational standards like VTOS 2013. The proposed framework offers a data-driven model for creating a more relevant and competitive national standard for tour guide certification.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and implications, the following recommendations are proposed:

6.3.1 For tour operators and HR departments:

a. Adopt the Four-Dimension Skill Framework: Formally integrate the four competency clusters—Core Professional Competence; Customer Engagement & Personality; Cultural Communication Skills; and Safety & Logistics—into all HR functions, including job descriptions, recruitment, and performance management.

b. Revamp Recruitment with Scenario-Based Assessments: Develop a bank of realistic, challenging scenarios, similar to those used in this study's survey, to assess candidates' practical skills and judgment during the hiring process.

c. Implement Competency-Based Training: Design and implement continuous professional development (CPD) programs tailored to the four skill dimensions. Prioritize foundational training in operations, safety, and destination knowledge, followed by advanced modules on interpersonal skills and crisis management.

d. Strengthen Feedback Systems: Supplement existing customer feedback forms with more robust mechanisms for capturing performance data, such as a formal system for logging informal complaints and compliments, and periodic observational reviews by senior staff.

6.3.2 For educational and training institutions:

a. Update Curricula: Revise tourism and hospitality curricula to align with the empirically validated four-dimension framework, ensuring that graduates are equipped with skills that meet current industry demands, moving beyond the framework of VTOS 2013.

b. Emphasize Experiential Learning: Incorporate more case studies, role-playing exercises, and practical simulations into the curriculum to develop students' problem-solving and adaptability skills in a controlled environment.

6.3.3 For policymakers (e.g., VNAT):

a. Initiate a Formal Review of VTOS 2013: Use the findings of this dissertation as a catalyst to launch a comprehensive review of the national occupational skills standards for tour guides, with a view to developing and implementing an updated, more adaptive framework.

b. Promote the Framework as a Best-Practice Standard: Endorse and disseminate the proposed skill framework as a benchmark for excellence to guide training, certification, and quality assurance across the Vietnamese tourism industry.

6.4 Proposal Applications

6.4.1 Application in higher education and vocational training

To bridge the gap between academic theory and industry demands, this framework can be systematically integrated into the curricula of universities and colleges offering tourism and hospitality programs. The following provides a strategic guide for its application.

a. Curriculum design and restructuring

The four-cluster model should serve as the architectural blueprint for curriculum development.

- **Core Modules Aligned with Clusters:** Design foundational courses that directly map to each competency cluster. For instance:
  - **Cluster I:** A core module on "Global Tourism Systems and Professional Ethics."
  - **Cluster II:** A practical course on "Tour Operations, Safety, and Crisis Management."
  - **Cluster III:** A specialized course in "Cross-Cultural Communication for Tourism Professionals."

- **Cluster IV:** A module focused on "Service Excellence and Customer Experience Design."

- **Integration into Existing Courses:** Existing subjects, such as geography, history, and management, should be revised to explicitly link content to the development of these specific competencies, particularly "Knowledge of Destination" and "Leadership Skills."

b. Pedagogical approach: emphasizing experiential learning

The holistic nature of the tour leader role necessitates a pedagogical shift from traditional lecture-based methods to active, experiential learning.

- **Scenario-Based Learning (SBL):** Develop a library of complex, realistic case studies and scenarios similar to those used in this study's research instrument. These should be used in class to challenge students' problem-solving abilities and decision-making processes, directly addressing competencies like **Flexibility and Adaptability** and **Safety and Risk Management**.

- **Role-Playing and Simulations:** Conduct regular role-playing exercises to develop skills in **Effective Communication**, **Cultural Sensitivity**, and conflict resolution (Cluster III). Full-day tour simulations can be used to assess the integration of logistical planning (Cluster II) and customer engagement (Cluster IV).

- **Industry Integration:** Foster strong partnerships with tour operators to facilitate guest lectures, workshops, and mandatory internships. This provides students with direct exposure to industry practices and reinforces the development of **Teamwork Skills** and **Professionalism**.

c. Assessment Methods: Moving Beyond Traditional Examinations

Assessment should be designed to measure practical application rather than rote memorization.

- **Practical Examinations:** Replace or supplement written exams with practical assessments, such as a simulated city tour presentation where students are evaluated on their storytelling, accuracy, and engagement (Clusters I, III, and IV).
- **Project-Based Assessments:** Assign group projects that require students to design a complete multi-day tour itinerary, including budget, risk assessment, and a detailed operational plan. This directly evaluates competencies within **Cluster II: Safety and Logistics Management**.
- **Portfolio Development:** Require students to build a professional portfolio throughout their studies, documenting their experiences from internships, volunteer work, and practical projects, providing tangible evidence of their developing competencies.

By embedding this four-cluster framework into the core of academic programming, universities and colleges can ensure they are producing graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also highly competent, adaptive, and ready to meet the rigorous demands of the global tourism industry.

6.4.2 Application for recruitment for travel companies

For travel companies, this framework provides a structured and evidence-based methodology to move beyond traditional recruitment methods and identify candidates with the highest potential for success. The following outlines a strategic approach to integrating the framework into the hiring process.

a. Redefining the job description

The recruitment process begins with a clear definition of the ideal candidate. Job descriptions should be rewritten to reflect the four competency clusters.

- **Competency-based requirements:** Instead of listing generic requirements like "good communication skills," specify the desired competencies from the framework. For example: "Demonstrated excellence in **Cultural and Interpersonal Communication**, with the ability to act as an effective mediator between diverse groups."
- **Highlighting foundational skills:** Explicitly state that mastery of **Cluster I (Core Professional Competence)** and **Cluster II (Safety and Logistics Management)** is a fundamental requirement, setting a clear standard for all applicants.

b. Structuring the interview process

Interviews should be designed to systematically assess a candidate's proficiency across all four clusters.

- **Behavioral event interviews (BEI):** Utilize BEI techniques where candidates are asked to provide specific past examples of how they have handled work-related situations. Questions should be tailored to each cluster.
  - **Example for Cluster II:** "Describe a time when a tour you were leading faced a major logistical disruption. What steps did you take to manage the situation and ensure the safety and satisfaction of your group?"
  - **Example for Cluster IV:** "Tell me about a difficult customer you had to manage. How did you adapt your approach to meet their needs while maintaining a positive group dynamic?"
- **Multi-stage interviews:** The initial interview stages can focus on verifying the foundational competencies of Clusters I and II. Final-stage interviews can then delve deeper into the nuanced interpersonal and adaptive skills of Clusters III and IV, which are often the key differentiators between good and great tour leaders.

c. Implementing scenario-based assessments

To assess practical skills and judgment, companies should incorporate assessments that simulate the real-world challenges of the job.

- **Situational judgment tests (SJTs):** Present candidates with a series of written or video-based scenarios, similar to those developed for this dissertation's research. Ask them to select the most effective course of action from a list of options. This provides objective insight into their problem-solving and decision-making abilities, particularly for safety and risk management and flexibility and adaptability.
- **Practical simulation:** For final-round candidates, a short, simulated tour presentation or a group problem-solving exercise can be highly effective. This allows assessors to directly observe a candidate's effective communication, leadership skills, and ability to engage an audience (Clusters I, II, and III).

By adopting this competency-based recruitment strategy, travel companies can enhance the objectivity and predictive validity of their hiring process, leading to the selection of more qualified, capable, and professional tour leaders who are better equipped to deliver exceptional customer experiences.

6.4.3 Application in professional development and in-house training

For the continuous improvement of existing staff, the framework serves as a powerful tool for designing targeted and effective in-house training programs. This approach ensures that development is aligned with strategic goals and addresses specific performance gaps.

a. Competency gap analysis

The first step is to assess the current proficiency of all in-house tour leaders against the four-cluster framework.

- **Initial assessment:** Utilize a combination of self-assessment questionnaires, manager evaluations (using a behaviorally anchored rating scale based on the framework), and analysis of customer feedback to create a competency profile for each tour leader.

- **Identifying development needs:** This analysis will reveal both individual and team-wide strengths and weaknesses. For example, the assessment might indicate a collective need for advanced training in **Cluster II (Safety and Risk Management)** or identify a junior tour leader who requires specific coaching in **Cluster III (Cultural and Interpersonal Communication)**.

b. Designing personalized development plans (PDPs)

Based on gap analysis, we create tailored PDPs for each tour leader.

- **Targeted goals:** Each PDP should outline specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals related to improving competencies within the framework. For example, a goal might be: "To improve **Customer Service Orientation** by proactively resolving at least three potential customer issues before they escalate on the next two tours."

- **Blended learning approach:** PDPs should incorporate a mix of learning methods, including formal workshops, e-learning modules, on-the-job coaching, and peer mentoring.

c. Structured training modules

Develop a curriculum of in-house training workshops and resources structured around the four competency clusters.

- **Foundational workshops (Clusters I & II):** Conduct mandatory annual workshops on topics such as "Advanced Destination Knowledge Updates," "Emergency

Response Protocols," and "Complex Itinerary Logistics." These sessions reinforce the core skills essential for all tour leaders.

- **Advanced soft-skill seminars (Clusters III & IV):** Offer specialized, interactive seminars on topics like "Advanced Storytelling Techniques," "Managing Inter-Group Conflict," and "Enhancing the Customer Experience through Proactive Service." These can be offered as electives or targeted to tour leaders identified as needing development in these areas.
- **Knowledge sharing platform:** Create an internal digital platform where tour leaders can share best practices, post updates about destinations, and discuss challenging scenarios, fostering a culture of continuous learning and peer support.

By systematically applying this framework to in-house training, travel companies can cultivate a highly skilled and professional team of tour leaders, leading to enhanced service quality, greater customer satisfaction, and a stronger competitive advantage in the market.

6.4.4 Application in designing customer feedback forms

This research revealed that traditional feedback forms often fail to capture the nuances of a tour leader's performance. By structuring feedback forms around the four-cluster framework, companies can gather more specific, actionable data that directly informs performance evaluation and training needs.

a. Strategic design principles

- **Move from general to specific:** Replace vague, single-item questions like "Rate your tour leader's performance" with a series of questions that probe specific, observable behaviors related to each competency cluster.

- **Focus on behavior:** Frame questions to ask about what the tour leader *did*, rather than asking the customer to make a subjective judgment about their "skills." This provides more objective data.
- **Provide actionable insights:** The goal is to collect data that a manager can use to provide concrete feedback. For example, knowing a tour leader scored low on "provided clear instructions for daily activities" is more useful than knowing they had a low "organization" score.

b. Example of a competency-based feedback form

- **Tour leader feedback form**

Tour Name: [Tour Name] | Tour Leader: [Name] | Dates: [Dates]

To help us improve our services, please rate your tour leader on the following aspects of your journey. Please use the scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Section A: Professionalism and knowledge (Cluster I)

1. Our tour leader demonstrated deep and interesting knowledge about the places we visited. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
2. Our tour leader was always punctual, well-prepared, and conducted themselves professionally. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)

Section B: Organization and safety (Cluster II)

3. The tour ran smoothly, and all logistical arrangements (hotels, transport) were well-managed. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
4. I felt safe and well-informed about safety procedures throughout the tour. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
5. Our tour leader provided clear leadership and direction, especially during busy or complex situations. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)

Section C: Communication and cultural interaction (Cluster III)

6. Our tour leader communicated information clearly and was easy to understand. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
7. Our tour leader helped us understand and appreciate the local culture in a respectful way. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)

Section D: Engagement and service (Cluster IV)

8. Our tour leader was enthusiastic and created a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for the group. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
9. Our tour leader was approachable and handled any requests or issues effectively. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)
10. Our tour leader adapted well to unexpected changes or challenges during the tour. (1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5)

Overall comments:

Please share any additional comments about your tour leader's performance or any specific moments where they excelled or could have improved. By adopting this structured format, companies can transform their feedback process from a simple satisfaction metric into a powerful tool for continuous professional development.

6.4.5 Application in performance evaluation

This framework provides a comprehensive and objective foundation for a multi-faceted performance evaluation system. Moving beyond a simplistic reliance on customer satisfaction scores, this approach allows managers to assess tour leaders holistically, identify specific areas for development, and make informed decisions regarding career progression.

a. Establish a competency-based performance rubric

The first step is to translate the four-cluster framework into a formal evaluation tool, such as a behaviorally anchored rating scale (BARS). For each competency within the clusters, define what different levels of performance (e.g., "Needs Development," "Meets Expectations," "Exceeds Expectations") look like in terms of specific, observable behaviors.

Example for "Safety and Risk Management" (Cluster II):

- Needs Development: Reacts to issues as they arise; sometimes misses potential risks.
- Meets Expectations: Consistently follows safety protocols and communicates them clearly to the group.
- Exceeds Expectations: Proactively identifies potential risks before they become problems and implements preventative measures; handles emergencies with exceptional calm and leadership.

b. Implement a 360-degree feedback process

A tour leader's performance should be assessed from multiple perspectives, not just by customers.

- Manager Evaluation: The direct manager uses the performance rubric to formally assess the tour leader, drawing on data from customer feedback, operational reports (e.g., on-time performance, budget adherence), and any direct observations.
- Peer Feedback: Fellow tour leaders can provide valuable insights into a colleague's Teamwork Skills and Professionalism (Clusters IV and I), especially regarding how they collaborate and share information behind the scenes.

- Self-Evaluation: The tour leader conducts a self-assessment using the same rubric. This encourages self-reflection and provides a basis for a more collaborative and productive performance review discussion.

c. Integrate data from competency-based customer feedback

The redesigned customer feedback forms (as detailed in the previous section) have become a critical data source.

- Trend Analysis: Instead of just looking at average scores, managers should analyze trends over time for each competency cluster. Is a tour leader consistently scoring lower in Cluster III (Communication)? This indicates a specific training need.
- Qualitative Analysis: The "Overall Comments" section on the feedback form should be systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and specific examples that illustrate a tour leader's strengths or weaknesses in relation to the framework.

d. Link evaluation directly to development

The ultimate goal of evaluation is improvement. The outcome of the performance review process should feed directly into the tour leader's Personalized Development Plan (PDP), as mentioned in the "In-House Training" section.

- Actionable Feedback: The framework allows managers to provide specific, behavior-based feedback. Instead of saying "You need to be more organized," a manager can say, "Based on feedback and operational reports, let's focus on developing your Organizational Skills in Cluster II, specifically in the area of pre-trip logistical coordination."
- Goal Setting: The identified areas for improvement become the foundation for setting clear, competency-based goals for the next evaluation period.

By adopting this structured evaluation system, a travel company can create a fair, transparent, and development-focused performance culture that fosters continuous improvement and professional excellence among its tour leaders.

6.4.6 Application in company quality policy

The competency framework should be the cornerstone of a travel company's quality policy. It allows the organization to move beyond a vague commitment to "quality" and establish a concrete, measurable, and enforceable standard of professional excellence for its most critical customer-facing employees.

a. Defining quality standards

The framework provides a clear definition of what constitutes a "high-quality" tour leader. The company's quality policy should formally state that its standard of quality is the consistent demonstration of proficiency across all four competency clusters.

- Policy Statement: "Our company defines service quality through the demonstrated excellence of our tour leaders. We are committed to ensuring every tour leader meets and exceeds the established standards within our Four-Cluster Competency Framework: Core Professional Competence, Safety and Logistics Management, Cultural and Interpersonal Communication, and Customer Engagement and Adaptive Attributes."

b. Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs)

The quality policy should be supported by measurable KPIs that are directly derived from the framework.

- Cluster-Based KPIs: Develop specific KPIs for the tour leader team. For example:

- KPI for Cluster I: "Achieve an average score of 4.5/5.0 on customer feedback questions related to 'Knowledge of Destination'."
- KPI for Cluster II: "Maintain a record of zero preventable safety incidents across all tours."
- KPI for Cluster IV: "Increase the percentage of customer reviews that specifically mention the tour leader's enthusiasm and positive attitude by 15% year-over-year."

c. Integrating into quality assurance processes

The framework should be embedded into all quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) activities.

- Tour Audits: QA processes, such as on-tour observations or "mystery shopper" programs, should use a checklist based on the framework's behavioral indicators to assess performance objectively.
- Root Cause Analysis: When a significant service failure or customer complaint occurs, the framework should be used as a diagnostic tool to identify which specific competencies were lacking, allowing for targeted corrective action rather than generalized reprimands.

d. Driving a culture of continuous improvement

A quality policy is not static; it should promote a cycle of continuous improvement (e.g., Plan-Do-Check-Act).

- Policy Commitment: The policy should explicitly state the company's commitment to the ongoing professional development of its tour leaders, using the framework as the guide for all training investments. Data gathered from performance evaluations and customer

feedback (the "Check" phase) directly informs the planning of future training initiatives (the "Plan" phase).

By embedding the competency framework into its core quality policy, a travel company can create a powerful, self-reinforcing system that aligns recruitment, training, and evaluation with a single, clear vision of professional excellence, ultimately leading to a more consistent and superior customer experience.

6.4.7 Application in national tourism policy

At a macro level, this evidence-based framework can serve as a strategic asset for governmental bodies, such as the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), to elevate the quality and competitiveness of the national tourism industry.

a. Modernizing national occupational standards

The most direct application is to use this framework as the empirical foundation for a comprehensive review and modernization of the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standards (VTOS), particularly the standards for tour guides and leaders.

Policy Recommendation: VNAT should formally adopt the four-cluster model as the new national standard for tour leader competency. This would ensure that the country's official standards are aligned with current, data-driven insights into what constitutes professional excellence, moving beyond the potentially outdated framework of VTOS 2013.

b. Reforming certification and licensing

The framework provides a more rigorous basis for the national certification and licensing process for tour leaders.

- Competency-Based Examinations: The national licensing examination should be redesigned to include practical, scenario-based assessments that evaluate a candidate's

judgment and skills across all four clusters, rather than focusing predominantly on knowledge-based written tests (Cluster I).

- Tiered Licensing: A tiered licensing system could be introduced, where tour leaders can achieve higher levels of certification (e.g., "Master Tour Leader") by demonstrating advanced proficiency in Clusters III and IV, encouraging continuous professional development beyond basic licensure.

c. National quality benchmarking and promotion

The framework can be used to establish a national benchmark for quality that enhances Vietnam's brand as a tourism destination.

- National Quality Seal: VNAT could create a "Certified Professional Tour Leader" designation or quality seal for individuals who are formally assessed and meet a high standard of proficiency against the framework. This would provide a clear differentiator for quality in the market.

- Promotional Campaigns: National tourism marketing campaigns can leverage this commitment to quality, promoting Vietnam as a destination where tourists are guaranteed a safe, professional, and enriching experience guided by world-class tour leaders.

d. Establishing a national career pathway

Beyond licensing, the framework can be used to establish a formal, nationally recognized career pathway for tour leaders, providing a clear roadmap for long-term professional growth and retention in the industry.

- **Policy recommendation:** VNAT, in collaboration with industry associations, should develop and endorse a structured career path based on the competency framework. This pathway could include defined levels such as:

- **Level 1: Junior tour leader:** Certified professionals who demonstrate foundational proficiency in Clusters I and II.
- **Level 2: Senior tour leader:** Experienced professionals who demonstrate consistent mastery of all four clusters and can handle more complex itineraries or VIP groups.
- **Level 3: Master tour leader / mentor:** Elite professionals who not only excel in all competencies but also serve as trainers, mentors for junior staff, and industry ambassadors.

- **Incentivizing progression:** This career pathway should be linked to tangible benefits, such as higher pay scales, eligibility for leading specialized tours, and opportunities for industry leadership roles, thereby professionalizing the role and encouraging talent retention.
- **At Level 2, Senior tour leader has a career diversification:** Senior tour leaders, defined as experienced professionals who demonstrate consistent mastery across key competency clusters and are capable of managing complex itineraries or VIP groups, are well-positioned for broader career trajectories in the tourism and hospitality industry (Weiler and Black, 2015; Baum, 2023). Their accumulated knowledge, interpersonal expertise, and operational skills provide a strong foundation for progression into specialized or entrepreneurial roles. They could be promoted to other important positions in a company, or they could become a leader in other companies.

Transition into Sales and marketing: Senior tour leaders possess advanced communication skills, in-depth destination knowledge, and customer engagement capabilities, which can be directly applied in sales and marketing contexts. Their ability to interpret customer needs, coupled with first-hand insights into traveler behavior, equips them to design persuasive marketing campaigns and customer relationship strategies (Kotler et al., 2017; Hudson

and Hudson, 2017). This transition is increasingly relevant in the digital era, where personalized marketing and experiential branding are essential (Gretzel et al., 2020).

Becoming Tour operators and Tour product designers: Extensive operational experience enables senior leaders to step into roles as tour operators or product designers. Having managed diverse itineraries, coordinated suppliers, and adapted programs in real time, they are uniquely equipped to design innovative tourism products that align with emerging market trends such as sustainable tourism, wellness travel, or digitalized experiences (UNWTO, 2022; Baum, 2021). Their ability to integrate logistical feasibility with customer expectations makes them valuable in product innovation and destination management.

Entrepreneurial pathways: A common career progression for senior leaders in Vietnam and other developing markets is the establishment of their own travel companies. Drawing on professional networks, established client bases, and practical know-how, many leverage their tour-leading experience to build enterprises, gradually assuming executive responsibilities (Nguyen and Tran, 2023). This entrepreneurial pathway reflects the broader industry trend where frontline professionals evolve into business owners, contributing to market diversification and competitiveness (Baum, 2023; Chua and Lee, 2022).

Strategic HRM and leadership implications: Beyond technical transitions, senior tour leaders embody leadership qualities—decision-making under pressure, cross-cultural mediation, and conflict resolution—that can be scaled to organizational leadership (Chan and Kuok, 2022). By institutionalizing their tacit knowledge into structured HRM and training frameworks, firms can transform individual experience into organizational assets, enhancing competitiveness and service quality across the sector. By integrating this competency framework into national policy, the government can play a pivotal role in professionalizing the

tour leader workforce, enhancing service quality on a national scale, and ultimately strengthening the global competitiveness of Vietnam's tourism industry.

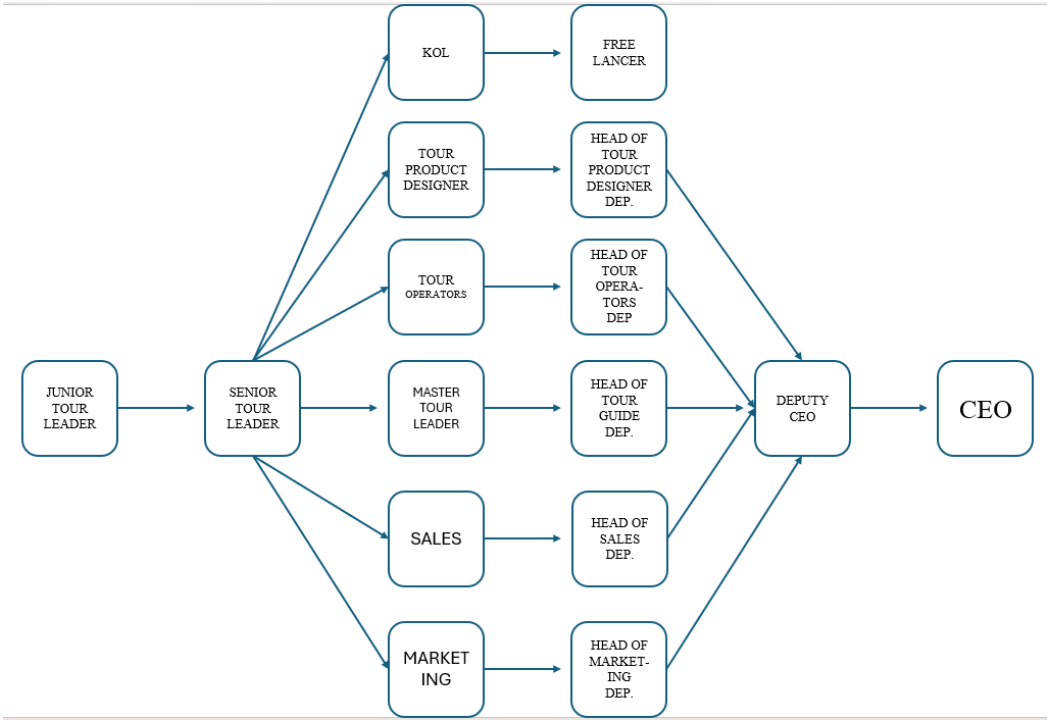

Figure 10: Career diversification pathways available to Senior Tour Leaders in the tourism industry.

- The career pathways available to senior tour leaders reflect both the breadth of competencies acquired through frontline experience and the flexibility of tourism labor markets. By mastering the operational, interpersonal, and intercultural dimensions of tour leadership, these professionals accumulate tacit knowledge that is readily transferable to roles in sales, marketing, product design, and operations management (Weiler and Black, 2015; Hudson and Hudson, 2017). Moreover, their established networks and reputational capital create opportunities for entrepreneurship, enabling transitions into business ownership and executive leadership (Nguyen and Tran, 2023; Baum, 2023). This diversification highlights the strategic value of investing in leadership development among tour leaders, as their career progression not only enhances individual employability but also strengthens the innovative and competitive capacity of the

tourism sector more broadly. The figure therefore illustrates how experience at the senior tour leader level serves as a springboard to a variety of professional and entrepreneurial futures.

6.4.8 Applying the competency framework to digital marketing

The four-cluster competency framework is not just an internal tool for HR; it is a powerful asset for digital marketing. It provides the substance and proof points to build a brand identity centered on quality, expertise, and superior customer experience. By translating the framework's clusters into compelling customer-facing messages, a travel company can differentiate itself in a crowded market.

a. Develop a core brand promise

Your central marketing message should be: "We don't just sell tours; we provide expertly guided experiences led by the best professionals in the industry." The framework provides evidence to back up this claim. Use your marketing to showcase how your tour leaders are different, using the clusters as your guide.

b. Translate competency clusters into marketing themes

Each cluster can be transformed into a key marketing theme that addresses specific customer needs and desires.

- **Cluster I (Core Professional Competence) → "Travel with True experts":**
    - **Message:** Emphasize the deep knowledge, professionalism, and reliability of your tour leaders. This builds trust and positions your company as an authority.
    - **Digital marketing tactics:**

- **Websites:** Create a detailed "Our Tour Leaders" page with professional profiles that highlight their expertise, years of experience, and specific areas of knowledge.
- **Content Marketing:** Publish blog posts or create short videos where your tour leaders share unique insights about destinations ("3 Things You Didn't Know About Rome, by Tour Leader Nguyen"). This showcases their Knowledge of Destination.

- **Cluster II (Safety & logistics Management) → "Seamless, Safe, and Stress-Free Journeys"**
  - **Message:** Address customer anxiety by highlighting your commitment to safety and meticulous organization. This is a powerful message for families and first-time international travelers.
  - **Digital marketing tactics:**
    - **Social media:** Post "behind-the-scenes" content showing the detailed planning that goes into each tour. Use infographics to illustrate your safety protocols.
    - **Email marketing:** In pre-trip communication, reassure customers by detailing the logistical preparations and introducing the tour leader's expertise in managing complex itineraries.
- **Cluster III (Cultural & interpersonal Communication) → "Connect deeper, Experience more"**

- **Message:** Appeal to travelers seeking authentic experiences. Position your tour leaders as cultural bridges who facilitate genuine connections, not just as guides who point out sights.
- **Digital marketing tactics:**
  - **Customer testimonials:** Actively collect and promote reviews that specifically mention how the tour leader helped customers understand the local culture. Use quotes like, "Linh didn't just show us the temple; she helped us understand its meaning."
  - **Video content:** Create short documentaries or reels showing tour leaders facilitating respectful and meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities.

- **Cluster IV (Customer engagement & adaptive attributes) → "Your Adventure, Perfectly Hosted"**
  - **Message:** Focus on the personality and positive atmosphere that your tour leaders create. This theme sells the "fun" and "memorable" aspects of the journey.
  - **Digital marketing tactics:**
    - **User-generated content (UGC):** Encourage customers to post photos and videos of their enjoyable moments with the tour leader using a specific hashtag (e.g., #[YourCompany]Adventures). Feature the best UGC on your social media channels.
    - **Online advertising:** Use images and ad copy that convey energy, enthusiasm, and happiness. A photo of a smiling tour leader with a laughing group is more powerful than a stock photo of a landmark.

By strategically using this framework, your digital marketing can move beyond generic promises and provide concrete, compelling evidence of the superior quality of your tour leaders, building a stronger brand and attracting more discerning customers

6.5 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, which in turn suggest directions for future research.

First, the sample size, particularly the use of 20 tour leaders and ten experts for the qualitative phase, is relatively small and may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to replicate this study with a larger and more geographically diverse sample of tour leaders and experts from across Vietnam to enhance external validity.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing a snapshot of skills and satisfaction at a single point in time. A longitudinal study that tracks the skill development of tour leaders over several years would provide deeper insights into how competencies evolve with experience and training.

Third, the abstract notes the presence of nested feedback data, where multiple customer ratings are nested within each tour leader. While the current analysis provides robust initial findings, future research could apply more advanced statistical techniques, such as multilevel modelling, to more accurately account for the variance at both the individual tourist and tour leader levels.

Finally, this study used Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the skill dimensions. A valuable next step would be to use Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with a larger dataset to statistically test and confirm the proposed four-factor structure. This would further validate the framework and solidify its standing as a reliable tool for the industry.

6.6 Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis highlights the successful development and validation of an adaptive skill framework for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders, responding to the evolving demands of the tourism sector and the limitations of existing vocational standards. This research, through a robust mixed-methods approach, identified and empirically tested the competencies essential for outbound tour leaders by blending qualitative insights from industry experts with quantitative analysis involving 20 tour leaders and 400 customer feedback forms.

The core findings underscore that while overall proficiency is best predicted by "hard skills"—such as Core Professional Competence and Operational Management and Planning—customer satisfaction emerges as a holistic perception influenced by the seamless integration of various skill dimensions, rather than any single competency alone. This resulted in the proposal of a four-cluster competency framework: Core Professional Competence, Safety & Logistics Management, Cultural & Interpersonal Communication, and Customer Engagement & Personal Attributes. The application of advanced statistical analyses, including factor analysis, not only resolved methodological challenges like multicollinearity but also ensured the framework's reliability and construct validity.

The implications for practice are significant: the proposed framework delivers concrete recommendations for recruitment, professional development, and performance evaluation, urging tour operators and training institutions to move beyond experience-based metrics toward a more nuanced, evidence-driven approach to talent management. For policymakers, the study's findings advocate a timely review and modernization of Vietnam's vocational standards, ensuring alignment with international best practices and the contemporary expectations of both the industry and travelers.

Finally, the research acknowledges certain limitations—including sample size and the cross-sectional nature of data—and offers suggestions for further study, such as long-term tracking of skill development and more sophisticated modeling approaches. Despite these limitations, this thesis provides a critical, data-driven foundation for enhancing the quality and adaptability of Vietnam's tour leader workforce and contributes important insights to the broader discourse on human resource management in emerging tourism markets

APPENDIX A

SURVEY COVER LETTER

Dear Participant,

My name is Tran Huynh Nguyen, and I am a doctoral candidate at the Swiss School of Business and Management Geneva. As part of my dissertation research, I am conducting a study entitled "An Adaptive Skill Framework for Vietnamese Outbound Tour Leaders: Evaluation and Proposal." The purpose of this research is to assess the essential competencies of outbound tour leaders and to propose an evidence-based skills framework that can enhance recruitment, professional development, and service quality in Vietnam's travel industry.

You have been identified as a valuable respondent due to your expertise and current role in the tourism sector. Your perspective on tour leader skills, professional challenges, and customer satisfaction will provide significant insights into shaping future training and evaluation standards.

Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. All responses will be kept strictly confidential and analyzed only in aggregate form; individual identities will not be disclosed at any stage of the research. The information you provide will be used solely for academic purposes and the improvement of professional standards within the industry.

The survey consists of several scenario-based and evaluative questions designed to assess proficiency across a range of skills relevant to outbound tour leadership. It should take approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. Your honest and thoughtful responses are greatly appreciated and will help ensure the validity and usefulness of the research outcomes.

Please be assured that your participation poses no risks. You may withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer specific questions for any reason, without any negative consequences.

If you have any questions or require further information about this study, please feel free to contact me at nguyenbtt@gmail.com or by phone at +84 913 606 400. You may also contact my academic supervisor, Dr. Mario Silic, at mario@ssbm.ch.

Thank you very much for your time and valuable contribution to this important research.

Sincerely,

Tran Huynh Nguyen

Doctoral Candidate

Swiss School of Business and Management Geneva

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE: AN ADAPTIVE SKILL FRAMEWORK FOR VIETNAMESE OUTBOUND TOUR LEADERS: EVALUATION AND PROPOSAL

Research investigator: Tran Huynh Nguyen (Mr.)

Research Participants name:…….

The interview will take (enter amount of time). We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying **information sheet** and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced
- You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by **Tran Huynh Nguyen** as research investigator
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to **Tran Huynh Nguyen** and academic colleagues and researchers with whom he might collaborate as part of the research

process

- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- The actual recording will be kept.
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your furtherexplicit approval

Or a quotation agreement could be incorporated into the interview agreement

Quotation Agreement

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used:

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- On our website and in other media that we may produce such as spoken

presentations

- On other feedback events
- In an archive of the project as noted above by signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

_____

Printed name

_____ _____

Participants signature Date

Tran Huynh Nguyen

_____ _____

Researchers' signature Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project Title: "An Adaptive Skill Framework for Vietnamese Outbound Tour Leaders: Evaluation and Proposal"

Introduction to the Interview

- Thank the participant for their time and agree to record the session (with consent).
- Briefly introduce the research objectives.
- Assure the participant of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation.
- Clarify that the interview will focus on competencies, training, industry standards, and challenges for outbound tour leaders.

Background Information

1. Can you briefly describe your experience in the Vietnamese outbound tourism industry?
2. What is your current position and primary area of responsibility?
3. How long have you worked as a tour leader, recruiter, or HR manager in this field?

Section 1: Key Competencies for Outbound Tour Leaders

4. In your view, what are the most essential skills and qualities required for Vietnamese outbound tour leaders?
5. Which of these skills do you think are most often lacking or need improvement among current professionals?

6. How important are soft skills (e.g., communication, adaptability, problem-solving) compared to technical skills (e.g., knowledge of destinations, safety, logistics)?

Section 2: Training and Skill Development

7. What kind of training or induction is typically provided to new outbound tour leaders at your company or in the industry?
8. Do you feel that current training programs (including VTOS 2013) are adequate? Why or why not?
9. What improvements or changes would you recommend for training and professional development?

Section 3: Performance and Evaluation

10. How are tour leaders currently assessed or evaluated on the job (e.g., by management, customer feedback, self-evaluation)?
11. Have you noticed any limitations in using customer feedback as the main evaluation tool? If so, what are they?
12. What methods or criteria would you propose to objectively measure a tour leader's professional competence?

Section 4: Handling Unexpected Incidents

13. Can you share an example of how a skilled tour leader should handle an unexpected event or crisis during an outbound tour?
14. What distinguishes a novice response from a masterful one in these situations?

Section 5: Career Pathways and Industry Challenges

15. How do you see the career progression for outbound tour leaders in Vietnam? Are there clear pathways for advancement?

16. What are the main challenges facing the profession today (e.g., talent retention, training, industry standards, digital adaptation)?

Section 6: Recommendations and Insights

17. If you could design an ideal competency framework for outbound tour leaders, what key elements would it include?

18. What advice would you give to new tour leaders entering the profession?

19. Do you have any further comments or suggestions on how to improve the quality and reputation of Vietnamese outbound tour leadership?

Conclusion

- Thank the participants for their insights and time.
- Remind them of confidentiality and their rights regarding their interview data.
- Explain the next steps in the research process and how findings will be used.

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