



Implementing Cross-Cultural Communication in Tour Guiding Styles. A Study of Foreign Tourists in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of cross-cultural communication in shaping the guiding styles of Indonesian tour guides when interacting with foreign tourists. Using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with professional tour guides, the research identifies key patterns in communicative strategies, cultural sensitivity, and adaptive behavior. Findings reveal that tour guides act not only as informants but also as cultural mediators, educators, and group facilitators. Drawing upon Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Kolb's experiential learning theory, this study demonstrates how guides develop cultural intelligence and intercultural competence through both formal training and field-based experiential learning. Moreover, the use of interpretive guiding techniques such as culturally contextualized humor, reflective dialogue, and personalized storytelling enables guides to foster mutual understanding and enhance the quality of tourist experiences. The research highlights the importance of integrating intercultural education into guiding practices as a key competency in global tourism, particularly in culturally diverse destinations such as Indonesia

Keywords:

Tour Guiding, Cross-cultural Communication, Educational Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, human mobility across borders is increasing, whether for business, education, or tourism. International tourism is a highly dynamic and competitive sector, where intercultural interaction is an integral part. One key actor in the foreign tourist experience at a new destination is the tour guide. Tour guides not only serve as conduits of information about local history, culture, and attractions, but also act as cultural bridges, fostering understanding between guests and the local community. According to (debi Rusmiati, 2025) Tour guides play a role in promoting a tourist destination. This is because tour guides are the spearhead of tourism and promote the image of the destination and their country. In practice, tour guides spend the most time with tourists, as they handle them from arrival to the end of a tour.

Tour guides are understood as a profession that provides information to tourists, packaged with interpretation, so that tourists receive interesting, meaningful, and communicative information and travel experiences. This is in line with what Weiler & Ham stated (Randall and Rollins, 2009) Tour guides have a number of responsibilities as providers of tourist experiences. Meanwhile, Pond (2009) in (Hanan and Sugianto, 2021) He stated that a tour guide is a responsible trip leader. Therefore, tour guides are required to possess specialized skills, including guiding techniques, extensive knowledge, and communication skills.

In the research (Hanan and Sugianto, 2021) There are three communication strategy criteria that a tour guide must have: first, the tour guide communicates meaning to tourists, second, the tour guide is aware that the linguistic and sociolinguistic structures needed to articulate meaning are not shared knowledge among tourists. Third, the tour guide stops trying to find alternatives if the meaning he wants to convey has been intersubjectively understood by tourists. Communication skills are very important for tour guides because tour guides not only handle domestic tourists, but also handle foreign tourists. According to (Jayawarsa, 2024) A foreign tourist is an individual who comes from one country and travels to another country other than their place of residence. Meanwhile (Rusdianto, 2015) says that foreign tourists are people who travel to a place and stay there for a certain period of time, either voluntarily or because of coercion.

In recent years, the Ministry of Tourism has focused on increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia. This is due to the impact foreign tourists have on the economy.



Figure 1 Foreign Tourist Visit 2024
Source : Ministry Tourism of Republic Indonesia

The figure above shows that foreign tourist visits to Indonesia in 2024 through all entry points in December amounted to 1,244,372, which experienced an increase of 8.72% from tourist visits in December 2023 which amounted to 1,144,542. Based on data from the Ministry of Tourism, there are 5 countries with the highest number of visits in 2024, namely Malaysia with a total of 221,039 visits, Singapore with 175,542 visits, Australia with 148,322, China with 82,385 and Timor Leste with 68,189. This shows that tourism resources, especially tour guides as the spearhead of tourism, must have skills in cross-cultural communication with foreign tourists to create an interesting experience and foreign tourists can return to visit Indonesia.

The role of tour guides for foreign tourists is to bridge tourists with local communities and tourist attractions. In this research, (Debi Rusmiati, Elly Malihah, 2022) She stated that tour guides play a role in educating tourists about ethics, etiquette, and following applicable rules when visiting a tourist attraction, both verbally and through the media. Communicating with foreign tourists is certainly not easy, especially given their diverse backgrounds. This is because foreign tourists face cultural differences when visiting Indonesia. Through communication, tour guides can build trust with foreign tourists. Building intense communication between tour guides and tourists using cross-cultural communication. Inability to adapt to cultural differences can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and even dissatisfaction with their travel experience. Therefore, the ability to implement adaptive cross-cultural communication is a key competency for professional tour guides.

In line with the development of communication science, cross-cultural communication theory now places more emphasis on adaptive competence, as explained in the Adaptive Intercultural Communication Competence model by (Nurazizah, 2021). This theory states that successful intercultural communication is influenced not only by language proficiency or cultural norms, but rather by an individual's ability to flexibly adapt their communication behavior to different cultural contexts. Motivation, cultural knowledge, and adaptive behavioral skills are key pillars in building effective communication in an intercultural environment.

In the context of tour guiding, implementing cross-cultural communication involves not only mastery of a foreign language, but also a deep understanding of the values, norms, social etiquette, nonverbal expressions, and interaction styles of tourists from various cultural backgrounds. An adaptive guiding style allows guides to adjust the way they convey information, choose appropriate humor, regulate the use of body language, and manage tourists' expectations regarding the service provided. Cross-cultural communication in guiding requires guides to understand the differences in communication styles of tourists based on their cultural origins. (Hall, 1976) Distinguish between high-context and low-context cultures, which influence how messages are delivered and interpreted. Tourists from countries like Japan, Saudi Arabia, or Indonesia rely more on contextual cues and indirect communication (high-context), while tourists from Germany, the Netherlands, or the United States tend to use explicit and direct communication (low-context). Failure to understand these differences can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and even interpersonal conflict.

Erik Cohen (1985) in his article "The Tourist Guide: The Origins, Structure and Dynamics of a Role" emphasized that guiding style is strongly influenced by the social and cultural roles played by the guide. Cohen divided guiding styles into four typologies: pathfinder, mentor, animator, and leader. In cross-cultural practice, these roles demand high flexibility because guides must be able to adapt their roles to the diverse expectations of

foreign tourists. Previous research by (Salazar, 2006) also shows that guides often have to adapt local narratives to suit tourists' cultural expectations without sacrificing local cultural authenticity. This requires intercultural communication competence, as stated by (Tsaor and Teng, 2017), which states that the effectiveness of guide communication is influenced by cultural sensitivity and the ability to understand differences in perceptions, values, and cultural symbols of tourists.

Tour guides play a strategic role in bridging interactions between tourists and the cultural environments they visit. (Cohen, 1985), Tour guides not only serve as transmitters of factual information, but also play a cultural, social, and symbolic role in the overall travel experience of tourists. Within the framework of sociological tourism theory, the role of guides is seen as a central actor that enables the process of mediating meaning between "guests" (tourists) and "hosts" (local communities). (Cohen, 1985) identification role of tourist guide is : 1). Pathfinder: A guide acts as a guide and guide to the flow of the tourist journey. They are responsible for the physical navigation and safety of tourists, especially in the context of mass tourism. 2). Mentor: A guide acts as a conduit of information, explaining the cultural values, history, and symbolic meaning of a place or activity. In this role, they become an educational agent for tourists. 3). Animator: A guide creates a fun, lively, and comfortable atmosphere. This role requires interpersonal skills and creativity in managing group dynamics. 4). Mediator: A guide acts as an intermediary between the value systems and norms of tourists and the local community. In the context of cross-cultural communication, this role is crucial for preventing intercultural misunderstandings and maintaining social harmony. 5). Representative: A guide is seen as a representative of the local community or even the nation. Their attitudes and behavior reflect the cultural image of the destination visited by foreign tourists.

These five roles demonstrate that tour guides are complex actors: they not only facilitate the physical journey but also navigate cultural differences, construct narratives, and create authentic experiences. In the context of cross-cultural communication, especially in multicultural destinations like Indonesia, a guide's ability to adapt to tourists' communication styles is an essential indicator of intercultural competence. Within the framework of cross-cultural tourism, tour guides serve as informal educators whose communication practices help to reduce cultural barriers and enable the co-construction of knowledge between visitors and local societies.

However, in reality, there are still significant differences between local communication standards and the expectations of international tourists. Cultural differences in communication styles (direct or indirect), emotional expression, and interpretation of nonverbal behavior often lead to conflict or discomfort in the guiding process. This challenge requires tour guides to possess high levels of cultural intelligence and communication adaptation skills. In Indonesia, studies such as (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022) dan Putra & Astina (2019) Studies show that domestic tour guides experience various challenges in communicating with international tourists, ranging from language barriers, differences in emotional expression, to adapting communication styles. In this context, understanding cross-cultural communication becomes not only important but essential to improving the quality of the tourist experience.

In the tourism and communication literature, there is still little research specifically examining how cross-cultural communication is implemented in tour guiding styles, particularly in the context of tourist destinations in Indonesia. Most previous studies have focused on service aspects or general tourist satisfaction, without delving deeper into the intercultural communication processes that occur in guiding practices. (Kolb, 1984), in his

Experiential Learning Theory, emphasizes that effective learning occurs through a dynamic cycle consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This model has proven highly relevant in tourism education, particularly for tour guides who are actively engaged in intercultural interactions.

Recent research by (Wang, Zhang and Dolah, 2025) published in *Education Sciences* (MDPI), shows that implementing experiential learning in heritage tourism through interactive and reflective field activities significantly enhances conceptual understanding and strengthens tourists’ engagement with local culture. A similar approach applies to professional tour guides, who sharpen their cultural intelligence through real-life experiences, reflective practices based on their interactions with international tourists, and experimentation with alternative communication strategies tailored to the guests’ cultural backgrounds. Through this learning cycle, guides develop adaptive and interpretive communication strategies. For example, when engaging with high-context tourists, they learn to craft symbolic and polite narratives; while for low-context tourists, they adopt a more structured and factual communication style.

Edward T. Hall felt a different kind of anxiety T.Hall (Hall, 1976) which in theory discusses misunderstandings between cultures not due to malicious intent, but rather due to differences in ways of thinking, communicating and understanding reality. The concept of cross-cultural communication put forward by (Hall, 1976) High Context Communication is a form of message delivery where most of the information is embedded in the physical context or internalized within the individual and only a small portion is conveyed through speech or explicit verbal codes. Meanwhile, Low Context Communication is the opposite of high context communication where most of the information is conveyed explicitly through clear and direct verbal language or linguistic codes with little dependence on situational context or interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of this concept is to explain intercultural communication failures, primarily because people from low-context cultures (e.g., America) often don't understand the silent codes or non-verbal cues of high-context cultures (e.g., Japan or Indonesia). Conversely, people from high-context cultures find Western communication rude, overly open, and impolite. Edward T. Hall classifies countries based on high and low context as follows:

<i>High-Context Cultures</i>
Japan
China
Arabic Countries
Greece
Spain
Italy
England
France
North America
Scandinavian Countries
German-speaking Countries
<i>Low-Context Cultures</i>

Figure 1: Country Classification base on Coressponding High/Low Context Cultures
(Initial Source: Hall, 1976, Hall & Hall 1990, update by several follow up studies (Hall, 1976))

Based on the image above, it is clear that Edward T. Hall classified countries that have a tendency towards high context communication and low context communication. Japan, China, the Middle East, Greece, Spain, Italy, England, and France. Meanwhile, North America (including the United States and Canada), Scandinavia (including Sweden, Norway, Denmark), and Germany are included in Low Context Communication. The

fundamental difference between these two cultural categories lies in the mechanism of conveying communication meaning, namely whether meaning is more explicitly encoded through verbal language, or is implicit through social context, interpersonal relationships, and prevailing cultural norms.

The characteristics of communication in High Context Cultures (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2021) as follows; 1). The meaning of communication is conveyed indirectly, with much information implied through situations or expressions rather than through words. 2). Social context and interpersonal relationships are key to understanding a message; people who already know each other typically don't need lengthy explanations. 3). Nonverbal communication is dominant, involving body language, vocal intonation, or even silence, which carry specific cultural meanings. 4). Relational closeness and social intimacy are highly valued, as this communication tends to be more personal and long-term. 5). Avoiding direct confrontation is considered polite, and people prefer subtle ways to express disagreement or criticism. 6). Traditions or cultural norms provide a common framework for understanding messages, so not all information needs to be explicitly stated..

Next are the characteristics of Low Context Culture communication (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2009) as follows: 1). The meaning of communication is conveyed directly and explicitly, with most of the information expressed verbally. 2). Social context and personal relationships don't significantly influence comprehension of information because it's already fully communicated verbally. 3). Nonverbal communication plays a minor role, as the primary meaning lies in the spoken words. 4). Interpersonal relationships are functional and task-based, rather than emotional or social. 5). Open to direct confrontation and explicit criticism as they are considered honest forms of communication. 6). Cultural norms and customs are not the primary reference for understanding messages, as information must be fully articulated.

Hofstede, is an anthropologist and psychologist who formulated the theory of cultural dimensions, which has become one of the most influential approaches to cross-cultural communication. Hofstede's theory identifies six cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and finally, indulgence versus restraint. (Ibrahim and Irfan, 2017). In the context of tour guiding, understanding the cultural dimension is very important because the interaction between tour guides and foreign tourists often involves significant differences in cultural background.

Tour guiding style is not simply about conveying information; it also reflects communication styles influenced by the cultures of both guides and tourists. For example, tourists from countries with low power distance (such as the Netherlands or Sweden) tend to expect an equal and participatory relationship, while tourists from individualistic cultures may prefer direct, personal, and efficient explanations. On the other hand, Indonesian tour guides from collectivistic and high power distance cultures often prioritize politeness, social harmony, and indirect communication.



Figure 2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory Geerts Hofstede 1980 (Ibrahim and Irfan, 2017)

This theory has six dimensions (Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018) is :

- **Power Distance Index (PDI)**
This dimension describes the extent to which inequalities in power and social status are accepted and perceived as normal in a society.
In societies with high power distance, hierarchical structures are strictly adhered to, and individuals tend to accept decisions of those in authority without question. Conversely, in societies with low power distance, equality and participation are emphasized, and relationships between superiors and subordinates are more egalitarian.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)**
This dimension measures an individual's degree of attachment to their social group. In individualistic cultures, ties between individuals are loose, and each person is responsible for themselves. Personal interests take precedence over group interests. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, there are strong social bonds between group members, and loyalty to the group is a primary value.
- **Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)**
This dimension refers to the distribution of gender roles in society and the dominant values they value. Societies with masculine values emphasize achievement, competition, and material success. Conversely, societies with feminine values prioritize quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and social awareness.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)**
This dimension measures a culture's tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty, and change. Cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance tend to have numerous rules and procedures to minimize uncertainty and exhibit resistance to new innovations. Conversely, cultures with low UAI scores are more flexible, open to change, and tend to tolerate ambiguity.
- **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)**
This dimension reflects the extent to which a society prioritizes future values over traditional, short-term values. Cultures with a long-term orientation value perseverance, thrift, and the ability to adapt to change. Conversely, cultures with a short-term orientation emphasize respect for tradition, social norms, and achieving quick results.
- **Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)**
This dimension indicates the extent to which a society allows individuals the freedom to fulfill their emotional needs, pleasures, and desires. Cultures with values of indulgence encourage the free expression of individual impulses and desires. Conversely, cultures of restraint emphasize strict social control, with an emphasis on norms and self-control.

While the phenomenon in the field is that tour guides serving foreign tourists from Malaysia may seem similar at first glance due to the inherent Malay culture in Indonesia, a tour guide must be able to understand the language. For example, the word "pusih" in Indonesia refers to a headache, but in Malaysia, "pusih" refers to a "circling" or "spinning around." This lack of communication skills can lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, the guiding style of Malaysian foreign tourists differs from that of European tourists, stemming from the tourists' vastly different backgrounds. Given this phenomenon, further research is needed on the implementation of cross-cultural communication in tour guiding styles for foreign tourists.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a thematic analysis design as explained by (Creswell, 2018). This study aims to explore the deeper meaning of cross-cultural communication experiences carried out by tour guides in their guiding practices for foreign tourists. This type of research is a descriptive-qualitative case study, because it focuses on a specific phenomenon in the field: how communication strategies are developed and implemented in intercultural interactions in the Indonesian tourism sector.

The selection of this approach aligns with the research objectives, namely to understand the process of adaptation and interpretation of meaning in the context of intercultural communication, as well as to uncover the socio-cultural dynamics underlying guiding practices. This research draws on Hofstede's 1980 theory of cultural dimensions (Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018), the concept of high and low context communication (Hall, 1976), and the social role of tour guides according to (Cohen, 1985) as a basis for analyzing data and interpreting findings.

The subjects of this study were 15 professional tour guides purposively selected based on their experience serving international tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those from countries known to have significant differences in communication styles (high-context vs. low-context). The informants came from major tourist destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta, which also reflect Indonesia's sociocultural diversity.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews to obtain comprehensive information on the tour guides' experiences, communication strategies, and adaptations to the differences in values, norms, and communication styles of foreign tourists. Interviews were conducted both in person and online, recorded (with the interviewees' consent), and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted through a six-stage thematic approach, as explained by (Naeem *et al.*, 2023), and supported by a qualitative analysis framework (Creswell, 2022). The six stages include:

1. Familiarization of the data, by rereading the transcripts to understand the narrative context;
2. Identification of important keywords and phrases from the interviewees' statements;
3. Coding the data, by labeling relevant sections such as "communication adaptation," "cultural mediation strategies," or "intercultural communication barriers";
4. Development of key themes, such as "adaptive communication strategies," "the relational role of guides as cultural intermediaries," and "experiences in dealing with different communication contexts";
5. Interpretation and conceptualization of the themes, linked to the cross-cultural communication theories of Hofstede, Hall, and Cohen; and
6. Development of a conceptual model, as a synthesis of research findings regarding the relationship between the role of tour guides, tourists' cultural contexts, and communication styles used.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation techniques (from multiple locations and informant profiles), member checking (confirming results with informants), and audit trail (systematically recording the analysis process) were used. This approach allows for in-depth and reflective exploration of the dynamics of intercultural communication in the

tourism context, as well as providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of cross-cultural competence in the tour guiding profession.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Resource Person Profile

No	Tourist Guide	Types of foreign languages	Domicile	Length of work
1.	R1	Malaysia	Bandung	5 Years
2.	R2	Jerman	Bandung	30 Years
3.	R3	Belanda	Bandung	25 Years
4.	R4	Jepang	Bali	15 Years
5.	R5	Malaysia	Bandung	6 Years
6.	R6	Mandarin	Bandung	15 Years
7.	R7	Brazil	Yogyakarta	12 Years
8.	R8	Arab	Bandung	7 Years
9.	R9	Inggris	Bandung	10 Years
10.	R10	Korea	Palembang	9 Years
11.	R11	Jerman	Yogyakarta	15 Years
12.	R12	Mandarin	Yogyakarta	12 Years
13.	R13	Inggris	Bandung	7 Years
14.	R14	Arab	Bandung	5 Years
15.	R15	Malaysia	Garut	8 Years

Source: Data processed by researchers

The table above displays 15 tour guides who served as informants for this study. They were selected based on their foreign language skills relevant to international tourists frequently visiting Indonesia. These 15 guides represent tourists from both high-context and low-context cultural areas, as defined by Edward T. Hall, and reflect the diversity of cross-cultural interactions occurring in the field. Most of the tour guides reside in Bandung,

a leading tourist destination in Indonesia, particularly for tourists from Malaysia, the Netherlands, and the Middle East. Additionally, some guides reside in Bali, Yogyakarta, and Palembang, cities that are also hubs for international tourism.

The tour guides' work experience backgrounds are very diverse, ranging from relatively new with 5 years of experience, to those with more than 30 years in the profession. For example: R2, a German-speaking tour guide, has the longest experience at 30 years, which makes him an important source in understanding communication patterns with Central European tourists. R1, R5, and R15, as guides for Malaysian tourists, show a fairly stable work experience in the range of 5 to 8 years. Mandarin and Japanese guides also have quite long experience (12–15 years), reflecting the high demand from the East Asian market.

Table 2
Characteristics of Foreign Tourist

No	Country of origin	Cultural Context	Dominant Communication Characteristics	Implications for Guidance Style
1	Malay	High Context	Indirect, respecting good manners	Use an emotional and polite approach
2	Germany	Low Context	Direct, logical, focused on facts	Convey information clearly and systematically
3	Dutch	Low Context	Open, direct, respectful discussion	Use a rational and argumentative approach
4	Japan	High Context	Subtle, full of symbols, avoiding conflict	Use non-verbal language and contextual explanations
5	Tiongkok (Mandarin)	High Context	Formal, hierarchical, relational	Emphasize ethics and structure in communication
6	Brazil	Medium/High	Expressive, warm, spontaneous	Build interpersonal relationships and a relaxed atmosphere
7	England	Low Context	Direct, polite, individualistic	Use communication that is to the point but remains friendly.
8	Arab (Timur Tengah)	High Context	Full of symbols, emotional, honor-based	Respect religious values and cultural customs

Source: Data processed by researchers

The table of characteristics of foreign tourists presents a classification of communication approaches based on country of origin, grouped into high-context and low-context cultures according to Edward T. Hall's (1976) cross-cultural communication theory. This division aims to map the verbal and non-verbal communication preferences of each tourist, thereby assisting tour guides in designing targeted interaction strategies.

Countries such as Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China (Mandarin), and Arabia are included in the category of high-context cultures, which are characterized by indirect, relationship-oriented communication, and considering social norms and hierarchical structures. In the interview results, foreign tourists visiting Indonesia, especially Malaysia,

Arabia tend to be more relaxed in guiding foreign tourists. However, according to Edward T. Hall, Japanese tourists and tourists from Korea are included in the High-Context Culture, when confirmed with foreign tour guides, tourists from these countries tend to uphold ethics but in terms of time must provide accurate information. If the tour guide provides information that does not match the facts that occurred, then tourists from these countries will feel disappointed with the service provided by tourists. This was confirmed by R1, R5, R15, R4, R6, R12, R8, R14 and R10 but related to the style of tour guidance, tour guides must know the background of the tourists they will be handled. In this context, tour guides are required to be more sensitive to non-verbal expressions, maintain ethical politeness, and avoid confrontational communication. Strategies frequently used by guides include a narrative approach, the use of cultural symbols, and an emphasis on spiritual and emotional values in explaining local culture.

In contrast, tourists from countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom tend to lean toward low-context cultures, which emphasize clarity of message, logical structure, and individual expression. Field interviews revealed that tour guides serving German, Dutch, and British tourists tend to be more honest about the service they receive. If a tourist finds the service unsatisfactory, they will be honest about it, as tourists from these countries value honesty as a motivator. In terms of the information conveyed to tourists, tour guides interpret it logically. This is because tourists from low-context cultures have a strong desire to learn more about Indonesian culture. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings in communication, tour guides should interpret information logically. Another guiding style that tour guides should employ when serving low-context tourists is to be more direct in terms of time.

When dealing with this type of tourist, tour guides must be able to convey information concisely, factually, and systematically. Furthermore, openness to discussion and argumentation is crucial for maintaining the guide's credibility and professionalism. Meanwhile, tourists from Brazil exhibit more expressive and interpersonal communication characteristics, occupying a middle ground between high- and low-context cultures. In this case, guides utilize humor, emotional interactions, and open body language to create a friendly and enjoyable relationship.

This table demonstrates that understanding the cultural context of a tourist's origin serves not only as passive knowledge but also as a crucial foundation for developing an adaptive and cross-culturally aware guiding style. The role of tour guides as cultural mediators is becoming increasingly complex, as they must balance the delivery of information with the interpretation of meaning within the cultural framework of their guests. Therefore, successful communication in guiding activities depends not only on foreign language skills but also on cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural intelligence.

3.1 Guiding Style Strategy as a Cultural Mediator

Based on the results of field interviews with tour guides who handle high-context culture tourists, in conveying Indonesian culture, high-context culture tourists have almost the same as cultures in Indonesia such as Malaysia, Korea, Japan where in these countries have legends that are still believed by their people. While in contrast to countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Arabia where in these countries there are rarely or even no legends or folklore that develop in their communities. However, when handling tourists from Malaysia who tend to have almost the same culture, the tour guide must pay attention to the language used. This was confirmed by the tour guide who handled Malaysian tourists because during the implementation of the tour there was a language misunderstanding. The

tour guide informed that the trip would turn around, but the Malaysian tourists did not understand the meaning of turn around, because in Malaysian, turn around means dizzy, while dizziness in Indonesian means a headache.

Meanwhile, research on tour guides dealing with low-context culture tourists suggests that these tourists tend to dislike small talk and prefer definite and detailed information. Certainty in dealing with low-context culture tourists is key. Low-context culture tourists, when they ask about the schedule, must be answered in a structured manner and meet their expectations. This occurred with a tour guide who handled a Dutch tourist in West Java, where there was a replica of a floating market. However, the Dutch tourist thought it was like the floating market in South Kalimantan. As a result, upon entering the attraction, the Dutch tourist was disappointed, as it did not meet their expectations.

Another aspect of dealing with Japanese tourists who are reluctant to ask direct questions is that the guides proactively provide explanations, use a gentle tone, and incorporate local cultural context into the narrative. Meanwhile, with German or Dutch tourists, the guides prefer a systematic and to-the-point explanation structure. This kind of adaptation demonstrates the communication flexibility and cultural intelligence that are core skills of a guide.

3.2 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions in Guidance Practice

During the theme identification process, Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimensions emerged in the narratives as guides explained tourists' responses to specific situations, such as time, authority, and travel preferences. In terms of power distance, tourists from Arabia or China valued structure and firm instructions more, while tourists from the UK or Australia expected equality in communication.

Similarly, in terms of uncertainty avoidance, Japanese, French, and Korean tourists tend to demand neat itineraries and structured information. To address this, guides work around this by preparing detailed daily briefings and using visuals such as location maps or reference images.

3.3 The Interactional, Communicative, and Educational Roles of Tour Guides

Findings from the fieldwork reveal a consensus among all informants regarding the central role of tour guides in ensuring safe, comfortable, and meaningful travel experiences for international tourists. Tour guides are not merely providers of factual information; they also function as safety officers, security facilitators, and social mediators, offering comprehensive support to tourists throughout their stay in Indonesia. From an interactional perspective, tour guides are instrumental in creating an inclusive and socially conducive atmosphere. Within Cohen's (1985) conceptual framework, the guide is positioned as a key figure in managing group dynamics among tourists. Communicative strategies employed by guides including the use of culturally sensitive humor, reflective questions, and the sharing of personal experiences demonstrate their capacity to foster interpersonal relations and facilitate intercultural engagement. This role becomes particularly critical when guiding tourists from collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Malaysia), where group harmony and social cohesion are highly valued within the travel experience.

Beyond these interactional and communicative functions, tour guides also serve as educational agents who contribute significantly to informal learning processes. According to the *interpretive guiding* approach (Weiler & Ham, 2002), guides do not merely convey information but interpret cultural meanings in ways that stimulate cognitive and affective engagement. This aligns with Kolb's (1984) *experiential learning theory*, wherein effective learning occurs through a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this context, the interaction between guide and tourist becomes a dynamic learning space, enabling the transformation of cultural perspectives, the development of empathy, and the enhancement of intercultural literacy. Thus, the role of the tour guide may be conceptualized as a simultaneous embodiment of intercultural communicator, experiential educator, and strategic actor in fostering mutual understanding within the global tourism landscape.

3.4 Cross-Cultural Skills as a Key Competence

The code grouping results also showed that all interviewees highlighted the importance of cultural intelligence as a core competency in the guiding profession. This skill is acquired not only through formal training but also through hands-on learning in the field and reflection on experiences interacting with multinational tourists. Most guides reported frequently sharing best practices through informal discussion forums with each other. They developed sensitivity to tourists' cultural values and expectations, including in terms of body language, the use of humor, and how to convey sensitive information.

3.5 Comparison of Research Findings with Edward T. Hall's Theory

The results of this study indicate a strong correspondence between tourist communication styles and the theoretical framework of high-context and low-context cultures as formulated by Edward T. Hall (1976). From Hall's perspective, high-context cultures—such as those of Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China, and Arab countries—rely on implicit, relational, and symbol-rich communication. Field findings confirm that tourists from these countries tend to place high value on politeness, harmony, and sensitivity to social norms. Tour guides serving this segment adopt strategies such as the use of cultural narratives, traditional symbols, and an emphasis on spiritual and emotional values, which align with Hall's theoretical predictions.

However, this study also found nuances not fully captured by Hall's framework. For example, although Japanese and Korean tourists fall into the high-context category, they exhibit a high preference for information accuracy and punctuality characteristics typically associated with low-context cultures. This phenomenon suggests that in guiding practice, cultural variables cannot be understood solely dichotomously, but rather require a hybrid cultural context approach that recognizes overlapping values.

In contrast, tourists from low-context cultures such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom exhibit straightforward, transparent, and fact-based communication behavior, consistent with Hall's description. This study's findings add an important detail: low-context tourists not only expect clear information but also tend to express criticism directly when services fall short of expectations. This requires tour guides to possess assertive yet diplomatic communication skills, so that tourists' feedback can be managed without creating tension in relationships.

Furthermore, field findings identified Brazilian tourists as occupying a medium-context position, where verbal communication is open but still utilizes emotional and

relational elements. This has not received significant discussion within Hall's framework, so this study provides an additional contribution by identifying a category of mid-context cultures relevant to the global tourism context.

Overall, these findings enrich Hall's theory by demonstrating that the cultural context in cross-border communication is dynamic, shifting depending on the travel situation, destination, and individual expectations. Therefore, adapting a guiding strategy requires more than just referring to high- and low-context categorizations, but requires a thorough analysis of individual and situational traveler profiles.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the success of international tour guiding relies not only on foreign language proficiency but also on cultural intelligence and the ability to adapt to tourists' communication contexts. Tourists from high-context cultures (e.g., Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China, and Arab countries) tend to value indirect communication, politeness, and contextual explanations. Conversely, tourists from low-context cultures (such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) demand clear, structured, and factual information. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, significantly influence tourists' expectations, requiring tour guides to adjust their communication styles and interaction strategies to maintain satisfaction and avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, tour guides play a strategic role as cultural mediators, bridging differences in values and creating a harmonious tourism experience.

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