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# EFFECTIVENESS OF TOUR GUIDES' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*Tour guides are a part of the tourism industry whose roles are like key employees introducing tourists to businesses and allowing them to experience it profoundly. Some businesses need the tour guides in both direct and indirect ways to help them publicize and introduce their businesses to people more, so the tour guides' English communication skills are extremely essential. Therefore, this research mainly aims to evaluate the effectiveness of tour guides' English communication skills at historical attractions. A sampling group consisting of 400 foreign tourists is used who have used tour guide services at historical attractions from Thai tour guides. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients as well as ETA correlation coefficients are used for the data analysis. The research discovers that welcoming the tourists and self-introduction are at the highest level. They can communicate in English correctly and appropriately with the ability to present information naturally. According to the result of the correlation coefficient analysis between the tourists' personal data and effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions, it is discovered that the tourists' religions are positively associated with the tour guides' communication skills is at a low level with a statistical significance of 0.05.*

**Keywords:** Tour Guide, English, Communication Skill, Historical Attraction, Thailand

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in pre-COVID-19 crisis had been an outstanding industry worldwide as it brought vast income to many countries leading to development in several sectors (Razzaq, Sharif, Aziz, Irfan & Jermisittiparsert, 2020). Likewise, Thailand has been one of the countries driven by tourism for decades. It created over three trillion baht of income for the nation in 2018. Moreover, there are about 38 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand each year (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018; Fongtanakit, Somjai, Prasitdumrong & Jermisittiparsert, 2019; Jermisittiparsert & Chankoson, 2019). After the spread of COVID-19, the tourism industry has been severely impacted and is at the lowest point currently. Regardless of the current struggling situation, the tourism industry will be able to rebound right after the end of the pandemic. Consequently, to prepare for the return of the tourists, developing the tour guides' English communication skills is necessary as it is a medium for mankind to build good relationships with each other regardless of continents or countries. It is the key to blend nationality, cultural, or traditional differences and help people to live together peacefully while reducing individuals' conflicts. English language has long been the world's lingua franca. It is a second language in several countries where English is not their native language (Ahmad, 2016). Hence, no matter which work or occupation one does for a living, English language skills are considered to be essential basic skills to develop. Likewise, Tour guides are a part of the tourism industry whose roles are like key employees of the organization. They introduce tourists to businesses and allow them to experience it profoundly. Some businesses need the tour guides in both direct and indirect ways to help them publicize and introduce their businesses to foreigners more.

A tour guide is one of the careers that significantly requires English communication skills (Al-Okaily, 2021) due to the role as the country's representative introducing a nation's culture to foreign tourists along with businesses to people globally. Therefore, good English communication skills will be a medium linking the tourists' understanding with information about the attractions (Leclerc & Martin, 2004). Moreover, pronunciation and vocabulary usage, which are parts of listening and speaking skills, are important skills for the tour guides (Le, 2020). To present information about the nationally important historical attractions which is highly sensitive and profound to foreign tourists, the tour guides need to have English communication skills and ability to choose vocabulary well to avoid miscommunicating the information. They also play a major role in building a good experience for the tourists (Mackenzie & Raymond, 2020). As a result, it is highly important to focus on the management of the tour guides' communication effectiveness at the historical attractions to develop their foreign tourist guiding skills. Besides, the literature review related to this issue is still limited.

## **Objectives**

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the tour guides' English communication skills at the historical attractions
2. To suggest a guideline for developing the tour guides' foreign tourists guiding skills

## **Concepts and Theories**

### **Tour guides' Communication Skills**

Tour guides' communication skills refer to the ability to explain roles and relationships of something such as tourist attractions, historical backgrounds, or general stories while publicizing an organization at the same time. It aims to educate, entertain, or encourage tourists' awareness more on preservation and value of things (Tuntipisitkul & Chimpimon, 2018). Tilden (1957) adds that it helps raising the tourists' understanding and awareness on value of the attractions. Not only do the information and stories relate with each other, more importantly, they must have presentation techniques to draw the tourists' attention before revealing the key information they want to express. Saentong (2002) proposes that good tour guides' communication skills requires the following qualification: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skill. Meanwhile, Kaewkasi & Hetthong (2019) as well as Tuntipisitkul & Chimpimon (2018) who study the tour guides' English communication problems find that they encounter English communication problems, especially in listening to different English accents among non-native speakers. This is considered to be an obstacle for the tour guides, so it is greatly essential to quickly develop their communication skills, especially English language so that they become professional which can help building reliability for the organization.

### **Important Topics of Tour guides' Communication Skills**

As tour guides play a role as cultural ambassadors, they need to be well-rounded and able to tell a story about the country or other subjects accurately. More importantly, they must express it in a cheerful way which can create enjoyment among the tourists. They also play a role in introducing them to the organization more (Wozniak, 2010). Therefore, communication skills should not be taken for granted. English communication skills are required for presenting information to the foreign tourists effectively (Mak et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2014; Al-Okaily, 2021). Important topics for their communication skills include appropriate vocabulary and idiom usage, using grammar correctly based on the story, using correct word order and conjunction, clear pronunciation of words and sentences, intonation in the presentation, punctuation in the storytelling, fluent storytelling, and using appropriate language level with the foreign tourists

(Aunruen, 2005; Lo & Sheu, 2008; Wozniak, 2010; Kaewkasi & Hetthong, 2019; Ketphan, 2019).

### **Tour Guides' English Language Usage**

English communication aims to respond to the demands of learners with different occupations who want to apply English in their careers appropriately and effectively (Prachanant, 2012). As the tour guides are parts of tourism industry, English is required for interacting with the foreign tourists (Huang et al., 2010). However, communication problems can occur due to knowledge, educational, cultural, and language differences between the tour guides and foreign tourists, so it is vital to reduce miscommunication problems as much as possible (Sitthilad, 2020). Problems of English language usage among Thai tour guides are mostly related to grammatical speaking errors, appropriate idiom usage, listening skill, and interpretation skill (Hewings, 2004; Aunruen, 2005). These problems are caused by the difference between the sound system of Thai and English language. To learn any foreign language, it is not only about knowing vocabulary and sentence structure, it is necessary that one must also understand a meaning of the word pronounced (Sitthilad, 2020; Tamba, 2017).

### **Principles of Presentation**

English language is tremendously important in the tourism industry as a communication tool. A number of academic institutes offering English for tourism course have emerged to support the growth of tourism and hospitality industry (Prachanant, 2012). Pronunciation is an essential skill to learn. If a learner cannot pronounce a word, it can lead to many problems and obstacles when learning. It is not enough for tour guides to know only vocabulary and sentence structure. They must also be able to pronounce sounds in English language clearly so that native speakers can understand them (Tuaycharoen, 2001). As defined by Torut (2001), a good English speaker is a person who can pronounce the sounds in English accurately and closely to native speakers along with clear and correct intonation. In this way, the native speakers will be able to understand what the foreign speaker says. Stress and intonation are necessary in English pronunciation (Ronakiat, 2005). Changing stress and intonation can affect the meaning of words and appropriateness in communication (Kelly, 2003; Griffiths, n.d.).

Therefore, English pronunciation for presentations is a key to help tour guides learn and develop their pronunciation skills and confidence. Besides, correct pronunciation is also necessary for speaking and listening. It makes the interpretation become more efficient which can reflect the organization's image.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Population and Sampling Group**

This research is designed as a quantitative research in which researcher conducts the data collection through purposive sampling by collecting questionnaires from 400 foreign tourists who have used a tour guide service to visit historical attractions, based on Yamane (1973)'s calculation as there are 39,916,251 foreign tourists visiting Thailand (Ministry of Tourism & Sport, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

Regarding data collection and validity check, the researcher selected a questionnaire as a tool for the data collection designing the questions based on a literature review of trustworthy sources to follow the objectives of this study. After the mentioned procedure, it was reviewed by three experts to reassure its validity: 30 sets of the questionnaire were applied among the

sampling group before using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to check the reliability revealing a value of 0.852 as a result. This is regarded as acceptable since it turns out to nearly equal 1. Before the actual usage of this questionnaire was distributed among the sampling group, human research ethics were examined as well.

## Data Analysis

In the data analysis procedure, two statistical methods are employed: descriptive and inferential statistics. Firstly, descriptive statistics used in this procedure include mean and standard deviation. Secondly, inferential statistics including Spearman's rank correlation coefficients and ETA correlation coefficient are applied for analyzing variables associating the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions. A benchmark of the respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills based on their personal data is conducted by using T-test and one-way ANOVA.

## RESULTS

An analysis result of the respondents' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions are done by using mean and standard deviation as shown in Table 1 – 3. The result of the respondents' personal data relating to the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions is carried out by using Spearman's rank correlation coefficients and ETA correlation coefficient as shown in Table 4. Lastly, an analysis of the effectiveness benchmark of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions is done by using T-test and one-way ANOVA as shown in Table 5 – 6.

<b>Table 1</b>				
<b>SHOW LEVELS OF THE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS IN THE ASPECT OF THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN DIFFERENT TOPICS WITH AN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE LEVEL</b>				
<b>Ability to communicate by using appropriate English language level</b>	<b>Opinion Levels (n=400)</b>			<b>Rank</b>
	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<b>Level</b>	
1. Greeting visitors and self-introduction	4.39	0.51	High	1
2. Introducing themselves and their team	4.09	0.31	High	4
3. Introducing a tour program	4.35	0.51	High	2
4. Informing rules and regulations of the tourist attraction	3.38	0.53	Average	10
5. Informing time appointment	3.87	0.34	High	5
6. Giving directions	3.85	0.36	High	6
7. Warning tourists when necessary	3.41	0.59	Average	9
8. Explaining an overview of each tourist attraction	4.11	0.35	High	3
9. Explaining background and importance of the tourist attraction	3.08	0.36	Average	11
10. Sharing trivia and stories about the tourist attraction to the visitors	3.82	0.40	High	7
11. Giving recommendation about souvenirs available at the tourist attraction	3.74	0.45	High	8
12. Using appropriate language to solve unexpected problems	2.98	0.24	Average	12
Total	3.75	0.20	High	

According to Table 1, the tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions mostly show that they think that the tour guides have the ability to communicate in different topics is at an appropriate language level, especially welcoming tourists and self-introduction, introducing a tour program, and explaining about an

overview of each attraction. However, the skill to be improved is appropriate language usage when dealing with unexpected problems.

**Table 2**  
**SHOW LEVELS OF THE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS IN THE ASPECT OF THE TOUR GUIDES' ENGLISH COMPETENCY**

A tour guide's ability to use English language	Opinion Levels (n=400)			Rank
	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Level	
1. Using accurate and appropriate vocabularies	4.48	0.65	High	1
2. Using accurate and appropriate phrases	4.40	0.64	High	3
3 Using grammar correctly in accordance with the story	3.03	0.20	Average	6
4. Using correct sentences	2.96	0.19	Average	8
5. Using correct conjunctions to link sentences	2.81	0.41	Average	9
6. Pronouncing vocabularies and sentences clearly	2.99	0.22	Average	7
7. Using intonation in the presentation	2.74	0.45	Average	10
8. Spacing when telling a story	4.02	0.18	High	4
9. Fluency of story telling	3.82	0.40	High	5
10. Using appropriate language level with the tourists	4.44	0.63	High	2
Total	3.57	0.22	High	

According to Table 2, the tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions mostly demonstrate their thoughts that the tour guides' English competency is good, especially using correct and appropriate vocabulary and language level. On the other hand, they should improve their intonation in the presentation.

**Table 3**  
**SHOW LEVELS OF THE RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS IN THE ASPECT OF THE TOUR GUIDES' PRESENTATION SKILL**

Presentation ability	Opinion Levels (n=400)			Rank
	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Level	
1. Be knowledgeable on the subject	4.40	0.51	High	2
2. Be able to present the subject precisely	4.29	0.49	High	5
3. Be able to present naturally	4.43	0.60	High	1
4. Encourage the tourists to participate in the presentation	3.38	0.51	Average	12
5. Create a positive atmosphere during the presentation	2.82	0.40	Average	15
6. Have story telling techniques	3.43	0.63	Average	11
7. Be able to understand different tourists' accents	2.99	0.22	Average	13
8. Be able to summarize the gist of the story	2.98	0.24	Average	14
9. Be able to answer tourists' questions	4.37	0.51	High	3
10. Have good interaction with the tourists during the presentation such as facial expression and eye contact	3.95	0.28	High	8
11. Telling a story with confidence	4.36	0.59	High	4
12. Giving the tourists a chance to ask questions	4.12	0.37	High	6
13. Stand at an appropriate distance from the tourists	3.53	0.53	High	9
14. Have background knowledge on cross-cultural communication	3.48	0.57	Average	10
15. Use appropriate posture during the presentation	4.03	0.20	High	7
Total	3.77	0.23	High	

According to Table 3, the tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions appears that they acknowledge the tour guides' presentation skill is at an impressive level, especially the ability to give a presentation naturally,

being knowledgeable about the topic, and being able to answer the tourists’ questions. However, they should improve their ability of creating a nice atmosphere during the presentation.

**Table 4**  
**SHOW CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE RESPONDENTS’ PERSONAL DATA AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS**

Personal Data	The effectiveness of the tour guides’ communication skills at the historical attractions	
	Value	p-value
Gender	$\eta=0.160$	0.074
Age	$r_{sp}=0.067$	0.178
Education	$r_{sp}=-0.044$	0.377
Occupation	$\eta=0.145$	0.358
Income/year	$r_{sp}=-0.065$	0.193
Status	$\eta=0.055$	0.157
Continent	$\eta=0.141$	0.356
Religion	$\eta=0.143$	0.025*
Purpose of visiting to Thailand	$\eta=0.094$	0.084
*p<0.05		
$r_{sp}$ =Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficients		
$\eta$ =Eta		

According to Table 4, the analysis result of correlation coefficients between the respondents’ personal data and the effectiveness of the tour guides’ communication skills at the historical attractions shows that the tourists’ religions are positively associated with the tour guides’ communication skills at a low level with a statistical significance of 0.05 ( $\eta=0.143$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Meanwhile, gender, age, marital status, continent, occupation, average annual income, educational level, and travelling purpose to Thailand are not associated with the effectiveness of the tour guides’ communication skills at the historical attractions at all.

**Table 5**  
**SHOW A BENCHMARK OF THE RESPONDENTS’ OPINIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS BASED ON GENDER \*P <0.05**

The effectiveness of the tour guides’ communication skills at the historical attractions	Male (n=172)		Female (n=228)		t	p-value
	X	SD	X	SD		
Total	3.68	0.18	3.74	0.18	-3.226*	0.001

**Table 6**  
**SHOW AN ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TO COMPARE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TOUR GUIDES’ COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT THE HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS BASED ON PERSONAL DATA**

Personal Data	Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Age	Between group	93.229	34	2.742	1.172	0.240
	Within group	854.281	365	2.340		
	Total	947.510	399			
Education	Between group	11.389	34	0.335	0.748	0.848
	Within group	163.488	365	0.448		
	Total	174.878	399			
Occupation	Between group	74.221	34	2.183	0.995	0.480
	Within group	800.889	365	2.194		

	Total	875.110	399			
Income/year	Between group	204.363	34	6.011	1.092	0.337
	Within group	2008.877	365	5.504		
	Total	2213.240	399			
Status	Between group	21.531	34	0.633	1.123	0.297
	Within group	205.866	365	0.564		
	Total	227.397	399			
Continent	Between group	150.464	34	4.425	1.076	0.358
	Within group	1500.534	365	4.111		
	Total	1650.998	399			
Religion	Between group	37.077	34	1.091	1.175	0.236
	Within group	338.673	365	0.928		
	Total	375.750	399			
Purpose of visiting Thailand	Between group	27.743	34	0.816	0.725	0.873
	Within group	410.955	365	1.126		
	Total	438.698	399			

According to table 5 and 6, they show that male and female tourists have different opinions towards the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions with a statistical significance of 0.05. Regarding other data including age, educational level, average annual income, marital status, continent, religion, and travelling purpose to Thailand, it is noticeable that the tourists have indifferent opinions towards the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions.

## CONCLUSION

According to tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills in the aspect of 1) "the ability to communicate in different topics with an appropriate language level" are overall at a high level. When considering by topic, it reveals that the three topics receiving the highest average are welcoming tourists, self-introduction, introducing a travel program, and explaining about an overview of each attraction. However, the topic with the lowest average is appropriate language usage when dealing with unexpected problems; 2) "the tour guides' English competency" is overall at a high level. When considering by topic, the study shows that the three topics receiving the highest average are correct and appropriate vocabulary usage, using an appropriate language level based on each tourist, and using appropriate idioms, whereas the topic with the lowest average is using intonation in the presentation; 3) "the tour guides' presentation skill" is overall at high level when considering by topic, being able to give a presentation naturally, being knowledgeable in the presented topic, and being able to answer the tourists' questions. Meanwhile, the topic with the lowest average is creating a nice atmosphere during the presentation. Furthermore, the analysis result of correlation coefficients between the respondents' personal data and the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions demonstrates that the tourists' religions are positively associated with the tour guides' communication skills which are at a low level with a statistical significance.

## DISCUSSION

Tour guides play a major role in presenting the nation's culture among foreign tourists visiting Thailand. Communication skills are considered as the key in this career as well as a major element of hospitality and tourism industry (Matkasimova & Makhmudov, 2020). Meanwhile, the English language is the lingua franca people use to communicate worldwide (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011; Morris & Maxey, 2014). Hence, the main objectives of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the tour guides' English communication skills at the

historical attractions. The result demonstrates that most of the tourists' opinions on the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions appears that they think their skills are at a good level. They can communicate in different topics with an appropriate language level such as welcoming tourists and self-introduction, introducing a tour program, and explaining about an overview of each attraction. Especially, they can use correct and appropriate vocabulary and language level. Excitement, nervousness, or an unexpected situation can cause their English to sound confusing for the tourists sometimes, and they probably cannot understand what the tour guides say. Consequently, it is vital to improve intonation in the presentation because mispronunciation or incorrect intonation can lead to the tourists' misunderstanding (Ronakiat, 2005; Kelly, 2003; Griffiths, n.d.). Torut (2001) adds that tour guides must have good English speaking skills and be able to pronounce English words correctly and closely to a native speaker as much as possible. They must also pronounce with correct intonation based on language level as well. Similarly, Papassaro & Klomkul (2020) further suggest that tour guides need to develop a variety of vocabulary usage along with a nice and polite communication method in order to communicate with the tourists. In addition, creating a nice atmosphere during the presentation is another topic to be improved. If they cannot present historical contents attractively, the tourists will get bored and not be impressed with that trip. Therefore, improving presentation techniques to be more interesting, exciting, or convincing is not less essential for their performance than other topics. The result also shows that the tour guides' presentation skill is at a good level such as expressing information naturally, being knowledgeable about the topic, and being able to answer the tourists' questions. However, it can be noticed from the result that the tour guides' skills requiring improvement are appropriate language usage when dealing with unexpected problems, intonation in the presentation and ability to create a nice atmosphere during the presentation. These skills reflect that good and flawless communication will build the tourists' trust towards the tour guides' efficiency and standard (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011).

According to the correlation coefficient analysis between the respondents' personal data and the effectiveness of the tour guides' communication skills at the historical attractions including age, educational level, occupation, average annual income, marital status, continent, religion, and travelling purpose, it can be noticed that the tourists' religions are positively associated with the tour guides' communication skills at a low level with a statistical significance. This agrees with Boonnumsirikij (2019)'s study which finds that religions can influence the tourists' decision to use a service due to social norm that focuses on livelihood and living as a society. Considering the context of each religion, it can be seen that they are different from each other. Likewise, Mattila, et al., (2001) also discovers that the tourists' religions relate with their behaviors on choosing the destination, expectation towards service quality, and type of destination. Moreover, the study also collects information about major social marketing and public policies in the tourism and hospitality industry (Abu-Alhaija et al., 2018). On the other hand, Forghani, et al., (2019) sees that religions do not have a significant statistic relation with the tourists, but facilities, activities, and add-on services are still important elements to be developed since they are dominant factors influencing the development of religious tourism (Sammani, 2018). According to the research's result, businesses or other organizations related to the aforementioned topics can improve and develop the tour guides' skills to be more efficient, which can indirectly benefit the businesses in building their strength and uniqueness with their quality human resource as suggested in the recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote and develop the tour guides' ability to use appropriate language when dealing with unexpected problems as well as intonation practice for presenting information to the tourists. It is also necessary to maintain and keep developing their efficiency in expressing information naturally, being knowledgeable about the topic, and being able to answer the tourists' questions.
2. Promote and develop the tour guides' ability to create a nice atmosphere during the presentation to make the information sound more interesting, exciting, and convincing to the tourists

3. Promote and being mindful about the tourists' religions. Organizations can build their strength and uniqueness by showing their mindfulness about the tourists' religions such as preparing a place of worship or suggesting hygienic foods and beverages permitted in their religions.
4. Promote and develop a "best practice" of the presentation through a real-time or off-time training by creating lessons for development. Creating a learning model for the tour guides to learn from "best practice" should be done to promote the development of English communication skills as it allows them to learn from both various successful models and mistakes in form of real-time and off-time lessons.
5. Develop and create a tour guide's center application or "tour guide learning application" by applying tour guide's frequent mistakes as main data for the application and focusing on mobile device learning. In the globalization era, it is undeniable that nothing is more convenient than learning through a mobile device as it is compact so that it almost becomes a part of the human body. Therefore, to allow the tour guides to learn about the frequent mistakes real time, creating a learning application by focusing on mobile device learning will become the most effective way for them to learn.
6. Promote and support the tour guides to consistently reskill and upskill their performance each year or creates a credit bank system for each course or training session at a college or university in order to promote lifelong learning education among the tour guides. Due to a change of people's lifestyle nowadays, learning at schools, institutes, or universities might not meet the demands of full-time employees or those who cannot manage to attend the class as scheduled by the institutes. As a result, adjusting a learning method to match the tour guides' lifestyle is necessary because their working time is flexible, and their daily lifestyle can be constantly changed. So, promoting a study based on a credit bank system or lifelong learning education can become the learning method that can greatly meet the tour guides' demand. Moreover, it can help facilitating them for learning new things anywhere and anytime.

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