

**FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY SERVICE
OF TOUR GUIDES AMONG DOMESTIC
TOURISTS IN THE HISTORIC CITY OF
BABYLON**

ALMASOODI MUTHANA FAAEQ SLEIBI

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OF TOUR GUIDES AMONG DOMESTIC
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BABYLON**

by

ALMASOODI MUTHANA FAAEQ SLEIBI

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NDP	National Development Plan
SERVPERF	Service Performance Model
SERVQUAL	Service Quality Model
WTO	World Tourism Organization

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**FAKTOR-FAKTOR MEMPENGARUHI KUALITI PERKHIDMATAN
PEMANDU PELANCONG DI KALANGAN PELANCONG DOMESTIK DI
BANDAR BERSEJARAH BABYLON**

ABSTRAK

Pelancongan domestik di Iraq semakin mendapat sambutan, terutamanya di tapak warisan seperti Babylon, dengan perkhidmatan pemandu pelancong memainkan peranan penting dalam meningkatkan tahap kepuasan pelancong. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat jurang yang ketara dalam kajian literatur berkaitan perkhidmatan pemandu pelancong dalam konteks pasca peperangan, khususnya di Iraq. Kajian mengenai pelancongan warisan dalam persekitaran sedemikian masih terhad, dengan kajian empirik yang terbatas dalam mengukur kualiti perkhidmatan atau menangani cabaran khusus yang dihadapi oleh pemandu pelancong serta dasar dan sokongan kerajaan dalam sektor pelancongan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi jurang tersebut dengan menilai jangkaan pelancong tempatan dan persepsi mereka terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan pemandu pelancong di Babylon. Dengan menggunakan model SERVQUAL dan teori Ketidakpastian Jangkaan (Expectation-Disconfirmation), kajian ini menilai pelbagai dimensi kualiti perkhidmatan, termasuk kebolehpercayaan, aspek ketara, responsif, empati, keselamatan, pengetahuan profesional, kemahiran, keupayaan, sikap, dan integriti peribadi. Reka bentuk penyelidikan campuran eksploratori berurutan telah digunakan, bermula dengan temu bual kualitatif bersama 15 pihak berkepentingan utama yang dipilih melalui persampelan bola salji. Fasa ini diikuti dengan kajian kuantitatif terhadap 394 pelancong tempatan, yang dipilih melalui persampelan rawak mudah. Hasil kajian

menunjukkan bahawa pengalaman pelancong secara konsisten melepasi jangkaan mereka dalam semua dimensi yang diukur, dengan pengetahuan profesional, kemahiran, dan integriti peribadi menunjukkan jurang positif yang ketara. Analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan bahawa jangkaan kualiti perkhidmatan memberi kesan negatif terhadap ketidakpastian, manakala persepsi memberi kesan positif. Keselamatan, kebolehpercayaan, dan pengetahuan profesional muncul sebagai faktor yang paling berpengaruh. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur dengan mengisi jurang kritikal dalam pemahaman perkhidmatan pemandu pelancong dalam konteks pelancongan warisan pasca peperangan. Ia menghalusi model SERVQUAL untuk penggunaan di bandar-bandar warisan, menawarkan rangka kerja yang disesuaikan untuk penyelidikan masa hadapan. Dari segi praktikal, penemuan kajian ini menekankan keperluan untuk penambahbaikan strategik dalam latihan pemandu pelancong, standard profesional, dan kualiti perkhidmatan, terutamanya dalam aspek empati, kebolehpercayaan, kemahiran profesional, dan pengetahuan. Cadangan termasuk mewujudkan persekitaran yang menyokong pembelajaran berterusan, pembangunan kerjaya, dan mekanisme jaminan kualiti. Pandangan ini menawarkan strategi bernilai kepada pengurus destinasi untuk meningkatkan kepuasan pelancong dan daya saing sambil memelihara warisan budaya Babylon. Penyelidikan ini merapatkan jurang kritikal, memberikan asas untuk meningkatkan perkhidmatan pemandu pelancong dan memajukan pembangunan pelancongan domestik di Iraq.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY SERVICE OF TOUR GUIDES AMONG DOMESTIC TOURISTS IN THE HISTORIC CITY OF BABYLON

ABSTRACT

Domestic tourism in Iraq has gained traction in heritage sites such as Babylon, with tour guide services playing a crucial role in enhancing tourist satisfaction. However, there is a significant gap in the literature on tour guide services in post-war contexts, particularly in Iraq. Research on heritage tourism in such settings is sparse, with limited studies addressing the application of quantitative tools to measure service quality or the specific challenges faced by tour guides in these environments. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the policy and government support for tourism sector and examining domestic tourists' expectations and perceived service quality of tour guides in Babylon. Using the SERVQUAL model and the Expectation-Disconfirmation theory, the study evaluates multiple dimensions of service quality, including reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, safety, professional knowledge, skills, abilities, attitude, and personal integrity. An exploratory sequential mixed-method design was adopted, beginning with qualitative interviews of 15 key stakeholders selected via snowball sampling. This phase informed the subsequent quantitative survey of 394 domestic tourists, selected through simple random sampling. Findings revealed that tourists' experiences consistently surpassed their expectations across all measured dimensions, with professional knowledge, skills, and personal integrity showing the positive gaps. Multiple regression analyses indicated that service quality expectations negatively influenced disconfirmation, while experiences positively influenced it. Safety, reliability, and professional knowledge

emerged as the most influential factors. The study contributes to the literature by filling a critical gap in understanding tour guide services in post-war and heritage tourism contexts. It refines the SERVQUAL model for application in heritage cities, offering a tailored framework for future research. Practically, the findings highlight the need for strategic improvements in tour guide training, professional standards, and service quality, particularly in areas such as empathy, reliability, professional skills, and knowledge. Recommendations include establishing a supportive environment that fosters continuous learning, career development, and quality assurance mechanisms. These insights offer destination managers valuable strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction and competitiveness while safeguarding Babylon's cultural heritage. This research bridges a critical gap, providing a foundation for improving tour guide services and advancing domestic tourism development in Iraq.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides the foundational framework and key features of the study on tourist expectations and perceived quality of tour guides. There are 8 sections to this chapter. It begins by providing background, and the problem statement. It then highlights the research gaps related to expectations and perceived quality of service of tour guides. This chapter explains the research questions that match with the study objectives. The breadth of the investigation is then covered in detail, along with its theoretical and practical implications and explanations of important words used in the study. Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of this chapter.

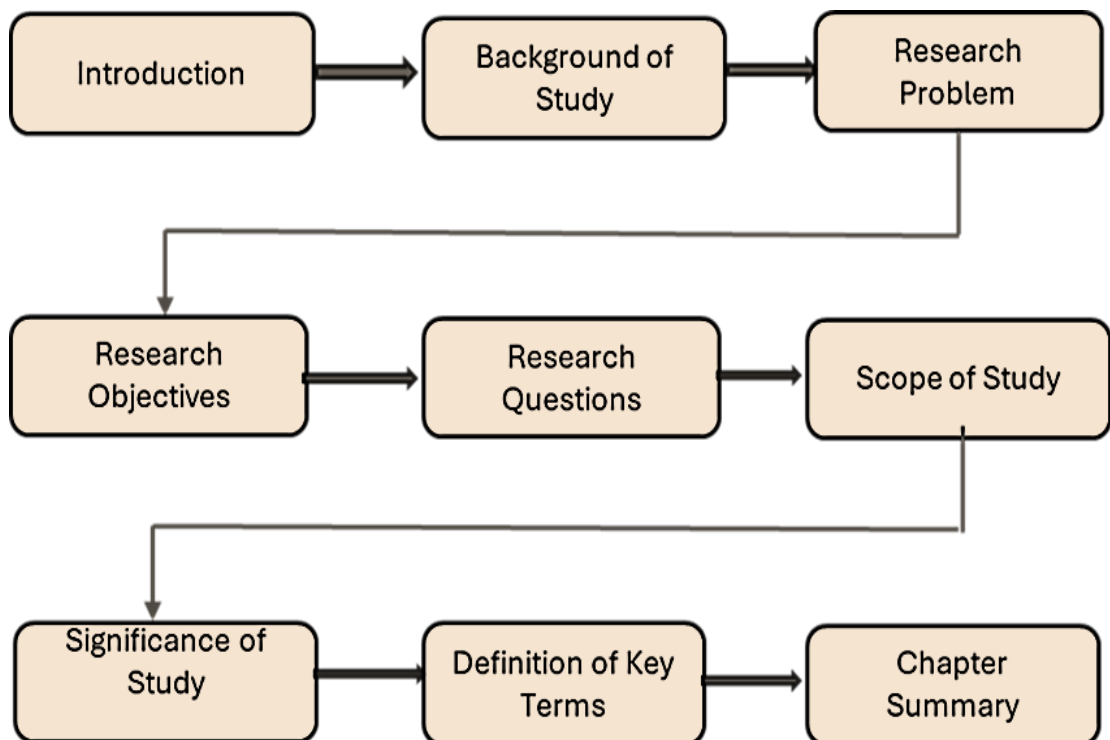


Figure 1.1 Chapter One Structure

1.2 Background of the Study

Global tourism has perceived a significant transformation in recent years, contributing to the economic development of nations that prioritize both local and international tourism. Tourism is considered a standard service industry that heavily depends on its service components. The primary objectives of the tourist industry revolve around providing exceptional service and ensuring the utmost satisfaction of tourists (Williams & Soutar, 2000; Campbell et al., 2020). Service providers are regarded as essential components of the product (Jin-Young & See-Won, 2016). The growth and expansion of the tourism industry have positioned it as the most rapidly expanding sector in the global economy (Tkachev et al., 2018). International tourism in 2023 saw 1286 million international tourists, reaching 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with total export revenues estimated at USD 1.6 trillion, close to 2019 figures (Barometer, 2023).

The tourism industry encompasses all businesses providing goods and services specifically facilitating interaction, pleasure, and leisure activities. Tourism has been recognised as a significant economic growth and development driver, contributing financially and culturally to the country (Yuan et al., 2019). The level of success achieved in the tourism industry is directly correlated with the standard of service that is delivered. Providing excellent services can give organisations a competitive advantage and make them stand out more effectively in the tourism industry (Foo et al., 2021). Furthermore, scholars and researchers direct their attention towards the development of tour guides and the expansion of the tourism industry. Tour guides play a significant role in the tourism industry by shaping tourists' first impressions of destinations and their overall experiences (Kuo et al., 2018). Tourism experts often

consider tour guides to be essential elements of tourism services, products, and experiences (Khalifah & Mustafa, 2019).

In another dimension, tour guides play an important role in promoting the advancement and development of the tourism industry because they are key players who must be considered not only in Iraq but throughout the world. As a result, tour guides have the most direct contact with tourists among all tourism occupations (Li et al., 2022). The study has reviewed numerous recent studies to examine the role performance of tour guides and the emotional state of tourists. The findings indicates that, most effective method to ensure the tourism industry's long-term growth is to ensure that every tourist has an exceptional experience (Campbell et al., 2020; Hammady et al., 2020). Therefore, the provision of high-quality services in the tourism industry plays a crucial role in shaping a destination's reputation and attractiveness (Hu et al., 2009; Khalifah & Mustafa, 2019). Hence, the role of tour guides in the tourism industry is pivotal. Moreover, one of the primary responsibilities of tour guides is to provide tourist accompaniment. Additionally, they enhance the quality of tourism.

According to Li et al. (2021), tour guides are essential in facilitating communication between tourists and the local host communities. Additionally, the quality of the tourist experience is significantly determined by the manner in which tour guides fulfill their obligations. Tour guides' services' quality influences tourists' satisfaction and their favourable experiences of the destination (Nguya et al., 2021; Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022; Cheunkamon et al., 2022). Tour guides are frequently considered the ambassadors or frontline of the country in Babylon, as they facilitate the connection between tourists and tourist attractions. The professionalism and quality of tour guides are essential for their dedication to maintaining a positive and favourable impression of the region they present to tourists. The integrity and

excellence of the tour guide are also critical to the preservation of the standard of tourism activities in Babylon, as indicated by research (Alwan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the increasing number of tourists visiting Babylon necessitates the employment of additional tour guides who are adequately trained.

Scientific studies on tourist satisfaction cover various aspects such as service quality, staff training, marketing strategies, technology, operations management, and more (Tanković et al., 2021; Suparno et al., 2021). The majority of the studies seek to better understand the needs of tourists and improve the quality of tour guide services in order to achieve their satisfaction in the growing tourism and hospitality industries. Additionally, the hospitality sector is crucial to the Iraqi economy, as it generates revenue from inbound tourism and offers employment opportunities for Iraqis. The data provided in Table 1.1 can be used to monitor the contribution of this sector to the balance of payments of Iraq.

Table 1.1 The importance of the tourism balance at current prices
(million dollars)

Balance of Payments				Tourist Balance		
Year s	Exports	Imports	Net	Tourism Returns	Tourism Spending	The Net Contribution of Tourism to the Balance of Payments
2014	83981	45200	38781	2488	4030	3.9-
2015	43442	33188	10254	4046	5271	11.9-
2016	8472	5682	2790	4870	5065	3.4-
2017	57559	32185	25374	2958	7978	19.8-
2018	86359	38875	47484	1982	7782	12.2-
2019	81585	49417	32168	3583	10827	22.5-
2020	46829	40927	5902	633	3528	49.1-
2021	50000	45000	5000	2000	4000	40.0 -

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Balance of Payments				Tourist Balance		
Year s	Exports	Imports	Net	Tourism Returns	Tourism Spending	The Net Contribution of Tourism to the Balance of Payments
2022	60100	50700	9400	6020	4500	16.17
2023	65000	52000	13000	7040	5000	15.7

Source: Data from the Central Bank of Iraq, Department of Statistics and Research, Balance of Payments Department (2021). Data for columns 2021, 2022, and 2023 were created by the researcher using Excel, based on information obtained from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Antiquities. Note: For 2022, Net Export: 60100 - 50700 = 9400. Net Tourism: 6020 - 4500 = 1520 Net Contribution: $(1520 / 9400) * 100 = 16.17\%$. For 2023, Net Export: 65000 - 52000 = 13000, Net Tourism: 7040 - 5000 = 2040 Net Contribution: $(2040 / 13000) * 100 = 15.7\%$. contributing positively to the balance of payments.

Table 1.1 demonstrates the importance of tourism to Iraq's economy. The Balance of Payments is a comprehensive accounting record of a country's financial transactions with the rest of the world (Ali, 2022). The economic impact of tourists visiting Iraq is tracked in a separate section of the country's balance of payments known as the Tourism Balance (Qasem, 2022). This means that the spending of Iraqi tourists abroad in those years exceeded the revenues of foreign tourists visiting Iraq. Moreover, a negative net balance may indicate that the Iraqi state is losing money on tourism because its expenses exceed its revenues (Hassan & Sadala, 2022). From 2021 onwards, there is a clear positive trajectory in the net contribution of tourism to the balance of payments. However, the Iraqi tourist industry's prognosis is optimistic, with increased demand and capacity development bolstered by regional governments' strategic initiatives. Tourism's net contribution to the balance of payments in 2022 and 2023 will reach 16.17% and 15.7%. This positive transformation confirms the sector's recovery and its ability to withstand after 2020. A country with a positive net balance successfully exports tourist services, brings in foreign cash and helps boost its economy.

Particularly with historically significant locations like Babylon, tourism relies largely on service quality, tour guides, and tourist enjoyment. Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangible traits all contribute to the multifaceted idea that is service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Building confidence with tourists relies on service providers—including tour guides—being able to frequently and correctly offer promised services, so known as dependability. Responsiveness stresses how willing tour guides are to assist and satisfy the requests of tourists, hence boosting the total experience. The confidence and friendliness of tour guides are key factors that enhance tourists' trust in the services provided. Empathy demonstrates the personalised attention provided by guides, which can greatly impact on the satisfaction and emotional response of tourists. Service quality can also be influenced by factors such as the appearance of the guide and the items used during the excursion, which can impact tourists' opinions (Al-Ababneh, 2013b; Li et al., 2021).

Through their expertise, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills, tour guides are key players in shaping the total tourist experience and satisfaction (Huang et al., 2015; Harley et al., 2020). Their potential to connect with tourists and convey historical anecdotes will considerably increase the stated quality of the service. Service quality, expectations, and personal experiences during the trip all impact the intricate construct that is tourist satisfaction (Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Tabaeian et al., 2023). When tourists arrive at their destination, their satisfaction often depends on how well their expectations are met or surpassed, which is influenced by their prior research and promotional materials. Although challenging circumstances can lead to unhappiness, positive interactions with well-informed and motivated advisors can foster a sense of contentment. Thus, enhancing the overall tourism experience at historical sites like

Babylon hinges on comprehending the interplay between different aspects of service quality and tourist satisfaction. This is because contented tourists are more likely to recommend the destination and revisit it in the future (Jiang et al., 2023).

Given their significant role in facilitating interactions between tourists and the rich cultural history of Babylon City, tour guides play a vital role in the development of tourism in the city (Mohsen & Hameed, 2021). In addition to providing essential information about historical landmarks, tour guides play a crucial role in creating immersive experiences that enhance tourists' understanding and admiration of Babylon's rich history. Their skill to communicate with tourists, tell tales, and deliver customised experiences considerably improves overall tourist enjoyment (Hansen & Mossberg, 2017; Ghaderi et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021). But Babylon's tour guides have numerous obstacles, notably in responding to the shifting needs of modern tourists who desire perfect, digitally driven interactions. Meeting these expectations requires on the integration of digital tools and platforms; nonetheless, many guides might lack the skills or expertise necessary to make appropriate use of them. Furthermore, the growing number of tech-savvy tourists put pressure on guides to constantly improve their service quality, necessitating the acquisition of new skills and adaptability to the rapidly changing travel scene.

Although few studies have been conducted on tour guides in Babylon, their role in the tourism industry has garnered significant academic attention. Researchers have focused on the diverse roles that tour guides play in various services (Liu et al., 2021). In the tourism sector, they regard and interpret the attributes of tour guides as critical components of the value chain (Mackenzie & Raymond, 2020). Tour guides play a crucial role as front-line employees in the tourism sector. It is crucial for them to possess a thorough knowledge of the tourists and attractions in various destinations

to enhance the tourist experience. Previous researchers have recorded this occurrence (Kromidha et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the quality of tourist services is emphasised as a critical component of tourist satisfaction and enjoyment because it encourages repeat visits to historical sites such as Babylon—as well as methods for increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty without sacrificing service quality (Giao et al., 2021). Notably, Iraq has lobbied for the preservation of the Babylon site since 1983, and they have been named to the United Nations’ distinguished list. This city, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, rose to prominence because of its magnificent hanging gardens (Vang-Roberts, 2021). The existing knowledge about the importance of tour guide and service quality in determining tourist satisfaction is primarily focused on historical Babylon. Lack of comprehensive studies examining the multidimensional aspects of service quality (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility) in the specific context of Babylon's heritage tourism. The Iraqi government has developed plans to train workers in the tourism sector as part of the National Development Plan 2018-2030 goals.

Table 1.2 Tourism Development in Iraq in Light of National Development Plan 2018-2030 Goals

Key targeted sectors	Targeted subsector	Areas of focus for development based on evidence
Tourism	• All relevant subsectors	• Human resources (training) • Service quality and certification • Promotion and advertisement • Strategic partnerships

Source: (ALI Akram Neamah; Obaid, 2022)

The tourism industry places a strong emphasis on the cultivation of human resources, the enhancement of service quality and certification, the promotion and advertising of tourism, and the formation of strategic alliances (Azeez et al., 2022).

The expansion of the tourism industry can entice foreign tourism, create new jobs, and contribute to the economy's expansion through increased tourist spending. Rebuild terrorist-affected provinces, improve public services and infrastructure elsewhere, and offer substantial public incentives to accomplish this via accurate and efficient Public-Private Partnerships (Alsaad & Lazim, 2023a).

Despite growing interest in analyzing the outcomes and process of tourist policymaking, relatively little systematic or extensive evaluation of policy outputs has been conducted of tour guides so far (Heidari et al., 2020). Tourist regulations and legislation should be created so that the tourism industry can play a significant role in deciding its tourism advantages. Unfortunately, frameworks have a clear void That establishes universally applicable standards against which policy papers can be evaluated. As a result, studies assessing and comparing the effectiveness of tourism policy texts in achieving specific goals are scarce (Ali, 2021). This establishes universally applicable criteria against which tourism policy papers can be evaluated.

To provide tour guide services quality, it is necessary for tour guides to have a deep understanding of the salient elements that contribute to tourist satisfaction. However, tourists' satisfaction with the quality of tour guide services is of utmost importance at the historic site of Babylon, as it has been empirically proven to increase tourists' overall satisfaction with tourist destinations (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022). Nonetheless, few studies have been conducted to investigate the complex relationship between tour guide service quality and tourist satisfaction in Babylon (Naiem & Husein Ali, 2023). As a result, this study was conducted to fill a knowledge gap in understanding the constructs that show associations with tourist satisfaction in general tour guiding services. This endeavor may help tour guides gain a better understanding

of tourists' needs and provide beneficial approaches to increasing tourist satisfaction (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2021).

Although tour guides have been present since tourists began visiting the ancient city of Babylon, the professional attributes of tour guides, including their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal integrity, have received relatively little focus within tourism literature (Kovalenko et al., 2021; Tanković et al., 2021). There is a lack of theoretical research to explore these aspects of tour guides. The role and characteristics of the practical tour guide remain an understudied area in tourism studies in Iraq. The Iraqi government and the travel industry in general recently recognised the importance of tour guides in the country's tourism industry. As a result, decision makers have been developing plans to improve the quality of tour guide services (Faeq, Abdulla et al., 2021). Table 1.1 shows the main production metrics for Babylon Governorate's travel and tourism sector from 2019 to 2023. This information sheds light on the sector's performance and emphasizes the importance of improving the caliber of tour guides.

Table 1.3 Private sector survey of travel and tourism companies in
Babylon 2023

Years	Number of companies	Gross production value at producer prices	Value of intermediate goods and services intermediate consumption	Value added at producer prices	Taxes and fees	Value added at basic prices	Compensation of employees	Operating surplus
2019	55	3.606.305	2.143.228	1.013.122	21.655	1.421.022	053.055	280.822
2021	55	0.012.202	1.326.222	4.123.603	41.346	4.102.320	1.485.205	2.601.300
2022	59	22.565.100	8.260.202	13.022.806	258.123	13.084.683	4.154.268	2.485.410
2023	67	0.622.245	1.005.042	3.242.128	26.550	3.216.123	1.126.065	2.082.433

Source: Researcher's compilation based on the Central Statistical Organization and Information Technology, Ministry of Planning, 2023, p. 16.

Highlights the challenges faced by the tourism sector due to the consistent fluctuations in gross production values and intermediate goods and services on an annual basis. The gross production value, for instance, did nose-dive from 3.606 million in 2019 to 0.012 million in 2021—a development as concerning as anything that makes one cast aspersions on the so-called resilience of this sector vis-à-vis external shocks, be it the pandemic or COVID-19 and other economic disruptions. This information is very instrumental in understanding the economic impacts of tourism on Babylon, as it shows trends of growth and sustainability of the industry. For example, increasing the number from 55 in 2019 to 67 in 2023 could suggest a rising interest in business opportunities connected to tourism. This could involve improving the tourist experience by providing a wider range of services to tourists. Furthermore, the indicators of gross production value and value-added provide compelling evidence of the economic impact of these enterprises. This not only reflects the sector's overall health but also its capacity to create jobs and contribute to the local economy's revenue.

These changes may affect the roles of tour guides because of the performance of the economy, which would create inconsistency in employment and their compensation level, hence affecting their service provision. Moreover, figures for operating surplus and compensation of employees further give weight to the fact that tourism business is financially viable and has the potential to invest in training and development for tour guides in terms of service quality and tourist satisfaction. These centers provide four three-year programmes that cover a wide range of subjects, including culinary arts, hotel administration, reception, and lodging services. However, as UNESCO noted in 2023, only 756 students were enrolled in these

programms for the 2021–2022 academic year, which is concerning low (McCafferty, 2023).

Furthermore, to overcome these significant challenges, the Iraqi government must conduct a thorough examination of the courses used in vocational training programmes (Nawar, 2014). The goal of this study is to ensure that tourist satisfaction is effectively addressed. The tourist expects the tour guide to be dependable and professional in his performance, as well as to stick to the agreed-upon dates and schedule. Train tour guides in the skills and knowledge needed by the business and ensure they meet its requirements (Alrawadieh & Dinçer, 2021). Furthermore, coordinated efforts are required to increase programme enrollment rates in order to have a positive economic impact and meet industry labor demands (Mohtadi et al., 2022). To attract more tourists and boost the Iraqi tourism sector, programmes that promote political stability and security must be prioritised (Al-Suraifi & Swadi, 2022). Based on even if Iraq's tourist industry has a lot of room to grow, achieving this potential would require providing suitable vocational education and training, preparing the labor force. Policymakers and stakeholders should oversee these trends to ensure the tourism industry's long-term viability and beneficial economic contribution.

In light of the current situation, this study is both vital and relevant at this critical juncture as a result of the increasing number of tourists visiting Babylon. This fact underscores the necessity of the study in relation to the critical relationship between the quality of services provided and the characteristics of tour guides (Al-Suraifi & Swadi, 2022; Alwan & Omran, 2023). Such a relationship assumes importance when considering tourism globally with respect to historical Babylon, known for its rich cultural heritage dating back thousands of years. The role of the tour guide is a vital one in that they are not just information facilitators but cultural

ambassadors who interpret Babylon's historical narratives in a friendly, understandable way. Their capacity to have the urge to communicate the sense of the site increases the level of tourist experiences at the site and makes it both enjoyable and memorable. Consequently, the dimensions of service quality, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, become really important in improving tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation (Magasi et al., 2022; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2022; Ray & Srivastava, 2023; Huda et al., 2023).

However, this does not diminish the fact that tour guides in Babylon face challenges. The expectations of modern tourists have shifted, with the majority seeking seamless, tailored experiences to their journeys through the use of digital technologies. This shift requires tour guides to embrace significant amounts of historical context while also implementing technological changes that affect how tourists consume their destinations. Moreover, the pressure of delivering quality service all the time is overwhelming in the ultra-competitive tourism environment where tourists have a great deal at their fingertips. In meeting these expectations, tour guides require constant training and development in service delivery- and technology-related competencies (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2022). It is in this respect that the study takes a critical look at the dynamics by establishing how characteristics of tour guides play out with dimensions of service quality to better the experience of tourists visiting Babylon by improving the inherent challenges facing guides in this changing landscape (Kapa et al., 2023).

1.3 Problem Statement

The ancient city of Babylon, among the list of the World Heritage of UNESCO, testifies to acquire rich cultural heritage of Iraq and its full potential as a relevant tourist

destination. But, there are huge problems associated with Babylon's tourism industry, seriously challenging its profitability and development. Al-Zwaini & Mutlaq, (2022) and Al-Suraifi and Swadi, (2022), explained that the post-war experiences and ramnant in Iraq has severely disfigured tourist infrastructure, notions of safety, and the global reputation of the country, as a consequence severely restricting the entry of foreign tourists. Babylon still has very low service quality, tourist satisfaction, and discouraging business rates (Kamel & Al Ansari, 2018). Although the government has made recent efforts to revive the business through infrastructure development, security improvements, historical site renovations, and promotional activities. This is an array of problems with the central core being the indispensable role played by the tour guides toward the enrichment and satisfaction of their tourists' experiences and better professional representation to Babylon's heritage tourism sector, namely, as cultural mediators, providers of experience, and frontline representatives in the field (Black & Weiler, 2005; Kori et al., 2007; Randall & Rollins, 2009; Huang et al., 2010; Yavuz Çetinkaya & Öter, 2015; Lin et al., 2017a; Li et al., 2021).

The problem is multidimensional. Comprehensive tourism policies and plans developed and designed only for the purpose of promoting and marketing Babylon as a leading cultural heritage site are missing (Al-Shammari & Jiyad, 2018; Al-Sultani, 2021). Lack of standards in tour guide services, ineffective training programs, as well as poor quality control processes resulting from the above policy gap, have as a matter of fact, the Ministry of Tourism estimated about 1,000 unlicensed tour guides cooperating with 500 certified professionals (Kathem et al., 2022; Gasparini & Mariotti, 2023), hence the licencing and management of tour guides still offers issues. This gap not only challenges the professionalism of the industry but also may

compromise the preservation of the cultural riches of Babylon and the quality of its experience to the tourists.

The methodological gap is that most studies use a quantitative method, such as the SERVQUAL model; however, this is not sufficient for a situation in a post-war country. Only a few studies have adopted a qualitative method by interviewing key stakeholders. This discrepancy in quality measurement leaves stakeholders in the tourism sector with no clear understanding of the expectations and experiences of the tourists, thus hindering the overall efforts to optimize the service delivery and boost general satisfaction (Aliman et al., 2014; Gnanapala, 2015; Sadeh et al., 2012; de Lima et al., 2020; Damanik & Yusuf, 2021). The barriers to maintaining high levels of service standards are even further increased by the post-war special context of Iraq, since the sector is grappling with insufficient resources, security issues, and the desire to once more restore its international image.

The existing literature on post-war heritage tourism destinations reveals significant theoretical and empirical gaps, particularly concerning World Heritage Sites operating in conflict-affected regions. Current scholarship demonstrates limited theoretical development specifically addressing UNESCO World Heritage Sites in post-war Arab contexts, with most studies focusing on European post-conflict destinations such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (Toborek, 2020; Naef & Ploner, 2016). The theoretical foundation for post-war heritage tourism emerges from the intersection of disaster recovery tourism theory by Faulkner and Vikulov, (2001), dark tourism studies by Foley and Lennon, (2000), and heritage management in fragile contexts by Rudnick et al., (2003). However, these frameworks inadequately address the unique complexities of ancient civilization heritage sites recovering from prolonged conflict periods. The Babylon case represents a distinctive convergence

requiring theoretical innovation, combining UNESCO World Heritage status with active post-war recovery in a Middle Eastern context. This necessitates developing a hybrid theoretical framework that integrates heritage tourism theory with post-conflict destination recovery models, specifically adapted for World Heritage Sites in Arab cultural contexts. The literature reveals three critical gaps: theoretical gaps where existing post-disaster tourism models primarily address natural disasters rather than prolonged conflict situations affecting cultural heritage sites, contextual gaps with minimal scholarship addressing Middle Eastern heritage sites recovering from extended conflict periods, and methodological gaps where current literature relies heavily on quantitative approaches without incorporating the unique psychological and cultural dimensions of visiting heritage sites in post-conflict settings.

Faulkner and Vikulov, (2001) Tourism Disaster Management Framework provides a foundational understanding but requires substantial adaptation for heritage sites, as the framework's phases inadequately address the cultural heritage preservation dimension during recovery. This study extends post-disaster tourism theory by incorporating heritage authenticity concerns during the recovery phase, specifically examining how tour guide service quality mediates between post-war infrastructure limitations and tourist satisfaction. Çakmak and Isaac, (2016) work on tourism in conflict zones provides relevant theoretical grounding through their concept of tourism resilience in politically unstable regions. However, their model lacks specific consideration of service quality dimensions in heritage contexts. The study contributes to conflict tourism theory by demonstrating how SERVQUAL dimensions operate differently in post-war heritage sites, where traditional service quality metrics must account for security experiences, authenticity concerns, and cultural sensitivity. Current tourist satisfaction theories assume stable operational environments, but post-

war satisfaction models must account for adjusted expectation frameworks where tourists modify expectations based on conflict-affected destination conditions, resilience appreciation factors where tourists derive satisfaction from witnessing recovery and preservation efforts, and cultural empathy dimensions where satisfaction includes contributing to post-war economic recovery. This study advances tourist satisfaction theory by proposing a Post-War Heritage Satisfaction Model that incorporates conflict-recovery variables alongside traditional service quality measures, addressing a significant theoretical void in understanding tourist satisfaction dynamics in conflict-affected heritage destinations.

The problem is compounded by the changing expectations of today's tourism because they are increasingly seeking unique, technologically advanced experiences. A Babylon tour guide must not only be able to educate oneself on vast historical information but also be able to adapt to the digital technologies and tailor impeccable, organically nurtured experiences. The ability to constantly invent and reinvent themselves in the face of such an ultra-competitive, hyper-connected global travel environment where tourists are given unparalleled knowledge and options. Their level of quality in meeting the current expected standards in a tour guide in Babylon poses a critical risk to the potential of the site to be a one-of-a-kind historical site of the world. The site should attract more regional and international tourists than domestic tourists' idea that requires careful consideration (Vena-Oya & Parrilla-González, 2024). This view is based on the global historical and cultural importance of the site, which may have special appeal for a wider international audience looking for different cultural experiences.

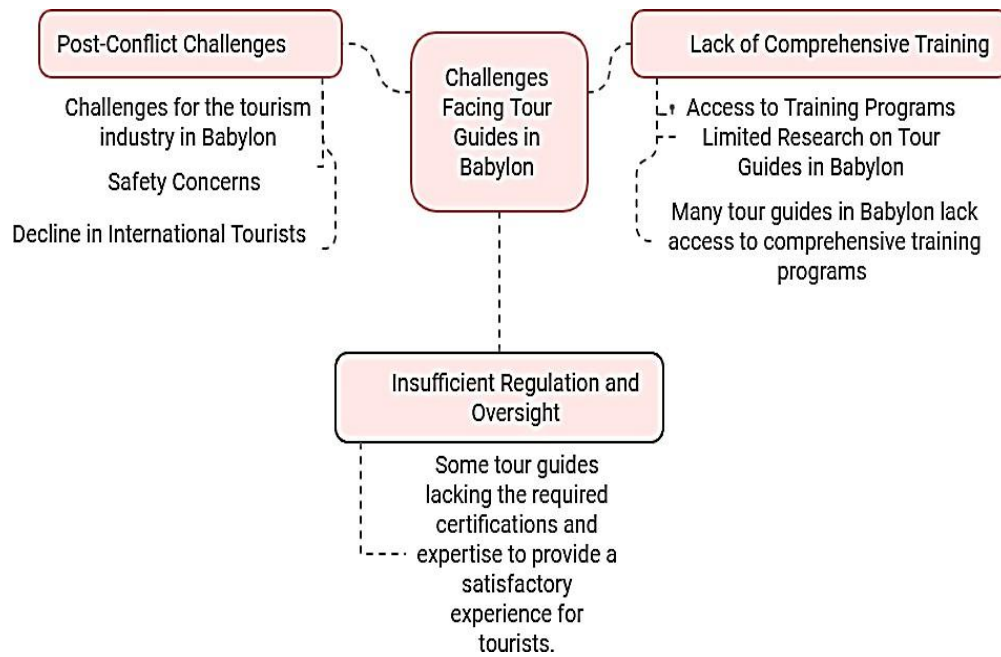


Figure 1.2 Challenges Facing Tour Guides in Babylon

Source: Author Illustration

UNESCO World Heritage status gives Babylon status on the world scene, which would create a huge influx of tourist from different geographical and cultural backgrounds who are interested in ancient civilizations. This focus on international tourism should not be at the expense of domestic tourism. A balanced approach catering to both international and domestic tourists could be more helpful for sustainable tourism development. While international tourists bring in more foreign currency and boost the country's tourism economy (Adedoyin et al., 2023). The optimum strategy would be to devise tourism policies and marketing campaigns aimed at encouraging a diversified mix of tourists. Development policies at Babylon can use the site's world heritage status as a draw for international tourists, while the promotion of domestic tourism is enhanced by education, physical access, and focused promotional campaigns. This would be a balanced approach toward making a more

resilient and sustainable tourism model for Babylon City, saving and appreciating it for local and global audiences alike.

Although many studies have focused on tour guide performance and tourist satisfaction in various contexts, research on expectations of international tourists and perceived quality of tour guide services in Babylon is not very high. Currently, during the post-war stage in the reconstruction process of the tourism industry in Iraq, international tourism is of high relevance on the international front (Al-Zwaini & Mutlak, 2022). However, in particular, the vital importance of this knowledge gap is that it reduces the designing of special targeted programs to enhance the quality of tour guide services and raise the level of overall tourist satisfaction in Babylon on the grounds of the knowledge of the particular needs, expectations, and experiences of the satisfaction theory among international tourists.

In the specific case of heritage tourism and Babylon, a significant research problem is the absence of a comprehensive model in determining the characteristics of tour guides: their professional attitude and ability, professional knowledge, professional skills, and personal integrity regarding service quality and tourist satisfaction. The consequence of leaving information gaps is an inability to institute any meaningful training programs, evaluation criteria, or quality improvement initiatives for tour guides operating in this historically and culturally rich location. Moreover, even less research exists about the impact of tour guide characteristics on the tourist experience at a historic site like Babylon, revealing a big knowledge gap about how this can be optimized to increase the role of the tour guide in tourist satisfaction and promoting ethical tourism behavior (Alazaizeh et al., 2019; Jamaliah et al., 2021).

A fundamental issue lies in the insufficient understanding of how tourists' expectations regarding tour guide service quality influence their subsequent state of disconfirmation when experiencing actual services in Babylon. The expectation-disconfirmation paradigm suggests that tourist satisfaction is primarily determined by the comparison between pre-consumption expectations and post-consumption experiences, yet this theoretical framework remains underexplored in the context of heritage tourism in post-war Iraq. The absence of empirical investigation into how tourists' prior expectations about tour guide competencies, knowledge delivery, and service standards contribute to positive or negative disconfirmation states represents a significant theoretical and practical gap. This lack of understanding prevents tourism stakeholders from accurately predicting tourist satisfaction outcomes and developing targeted interventions to align service delivery with tourist expectations.

Equally problematic is the limited comprehension of how tourists' actual experiences of tour guide service quality influence their disconfirmation states in Babylon's unique cultural and historical context. While tourists form specific experiences about various dimensions of tour guide performance including professional knowledge, communication skills, cultural interpretation abilities, and personal conduct, the relationship between these experiences and the resulting confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations remains unexplored. The post-war environment of Iraq adds complexity to this relationship, as tourists may have altered experience patterns influenced by security concerns, infrastructure limitations, and cultural sensitivity requirements that are distinct from traditional tourism destinations.

Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive understanding regarding the dynamic interplay between tourist expectations, experiences, and disconfirmation states creates significant challenges for service quality improvement initiatives.

Without empirical evidence of how expectation formation processes influence subsequent disconfirmation experiences, tourism managers cannot develop effective strategies to manage tourist expectations proactively. Table 1.4 shows Tourists Visiting Archaeological Sites in Babylon (2017-2022).

Table 1.4 Annual Number of Foreign, Arab, and Iraqi Tourists Visiting Archaeological Sites in Babylon (2017-2022).

Foreign Country	Arab Country	Iraqi Tourists	Years
3214985	17519	719211	2017
3384527	47954	731921	2018
4551354	53263	931782	2019
2078	283	935325	2021
69081	16500	932.782	2022

Source: Unpublished information from the Babylon Antiquities Department of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' Antiquities and Heritage Authority 2022.

In 2017, foreign tourism perceived a significant increase, with more than 3.2 million foreign tourists. This increase may have been attributed to the country's enhanced security posture. In 2019, the number of foreign tourists reached its highest point, surpassing 4.6 million. The COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in 2020 (data not presented) Tourism was significantly disrupted; however, there is evidence of recovery in 2021 and 2022, although it has not yet reached the pre-pandemic level. This underscores the increasing domestic and international interest in these sites.

Moreover, the issue is with regards to the regulatory and legal framework that guides tour guide operations within Babylon. Many tour guides operate without proper qualifications and oversight due to the lack of improved laws and regulations related to tour guide licencing and performance requirements (Shubbar & Kathem, 2019). This does not only affect the quality of services offered to the tourists but also raises

questions towards the protection and presentation of cultural heritage in Babylon. The lack of a proper system of professional growth of the tour guide, with courses of preparation and programs of lifelong learning, aggravates the issue with quality of services and tourist dissatisfaction even more (Faeq, Abdulla et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the problem is the absence of the integrated evaluation having multiple dimensions of quality concerning the tour guide in Babylon, based on the conceptual model of SERVQUAL, and their relative impact on the satisfaction of domestic tourists. Effective targeted development strategies require comprehension of the manner in which these elements interact with the distinctive features of tour guides, which include professional attitude and ability, professional knowledge, professional skills, and personal integrity in influencing tourist experiences (Syakier & Hanafiah, 2021a; Li et al., 2021). Without in-depth research, tour guides, tourist managers, and lawmakers are left with no clear advice on how to best focus their efforts on improving service quality and tourist satisfaction.

The comparative analysis of tour guide structures reveals significant disparities between international best practices and Iraq's current system, necessitating comprehensive reforms aligned with global standards for heritage tourism destinations. European models such as Austria's Federal Economic Chamber certification requiring mandatory 600-hour training, Greece's specialized archaeological guide licenses for heritage sites, and Italy's regional certification with cultural heritage specialization requirements demonstrate sophisticated professional development frameworks (Ap & Wong, 2001; Moira et al., 2020). Asian models including Japan's National certification through Japan Tourism Agency with cultural sensitivity training, Malaysia's Department of Tourism licensing with language proficiency requirements, and Cambodia's Angkor-specific guide certification for UNESCO sites provide relevant examples for heritage site management (Yamada, 2011; Syakier & Hanafiah, 2021).

Iraq's current system reveals structural deficiencies including licensing gaps where the current system based on 1966 and 1991 legislation contrasts with contemporary international standards, training inadequacy with minimal formal training compared to 200 to 600 hours internationally, limited quality control versus systematic international monitoring systems, and absence of continuing education compared to mandatory international professional development updates (Al-Suraifi & Swadi, 2022).

Unlike established tourism destinations, Babylon requires post-war adapted frameworks incorporating security awareness training that international models lack, cultural sensitivity enhancement for handling diverse tourist expectations in post-war settings, infrastructure adaptation skills for operating with limited resources while maintaining service quality, and psychological preparedness for handling tourists' preconceptions about conflict-affected destinations. The proposed enhancement framework includes immediate improvements implementing basic certification standards aligned with regional best practices, system development creating specialized heritage guide certification for Babylon UNESCO site with continuing professional development programs, and excellence achievement developing international certification recognition and regional centers of excellence for heritage tour guide training. This comparative analysis contributes to international tour guide literature by developing post-war tour guide theory, enhancing cultural heritage guide models through integrating UNESCO World Heritage requirements with local cultural contexts, and advancing service quality theory by demonstrating how traditional service quality models require adaptation in post-war heritage tourism settings.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Shubbar and Kathem (2019) and published in the *Journal of Administration and Economics in Iraq* concluded that there is no correlation between tour guides and a specific outcome in Iraq. The legislation governing tour guides in Iraq was initially established in 1966 and subsequently revised in 1991 to include additional guidelines and restrictions, as documented in the

Iraqi newspaper (No. 3389 on January 20, 2018). Tourism policies specify the standards and conditions necessary to obtain a license to practice the profession of tour guide, such as minimum educational qualifications, passing certain tests, and practical experience (Ap & Wong, 2001; WTO, 2005). Regrettably, there are no current legislations in place. Nevertheless, these limitations were capricious in relation to the tour guide. There is a scarcity of official practitioners and tour guides, with only around 500 tour guides currently available. Furthermore, they are undocumented. Businesses employ people as tour guides despite the fact that they lack the necessary qualifications and licenses. To the best of our knowledge, no archaeological, tourist, or religious investigation has been conducted to explore expansion activity in that region of Iraq.

Table 1.5 Activities of the Ministry of Tourism 2022.

Activity	Number	Male Participants	Female Participants
Tourism Courses	37	115	74
Workshops	25	112	33
Seminars	23	77	31
Courses for Mixed Sector (In/Out)	28	78	18
Total Cost (in Millions)	15.2	-	-
Participation of tourism Staff in Specialized Courses	433	282	151
Participation of Mixed Sector & Private Sector Employees in Training Courses	96	51	45
Issuing Graduation Documents	135	96	39
Certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	26	21	5
Issuing tourism Clearance Booklets	14	-	-
Preparing Training Certificates	180	123	57

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Training and Development Department, year 2022

The data extracted from the table is crucial for comprehending the service quality in the context of tourism in Babylon. It provides quantitative insights into the participation and training of tour guides, which play a vital role in enhancing service