



Tour Guide Competence in Gastronomy Tours

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the competence of gastronomy tour guides using content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 14 and 20 December 2021 with 20 professional tour guides with at least 8 years' experience who conduct gastronomy tours in Gaziantep, Türkiye. The following 14 themes emerged from the content analysis: level of knowledge, audio-visual media, cultural predisposition, occupational competence, specialization, culture, education/training, knowledge of products, knowledge of places for food and beverages, problem-solving skills, communication, ability to empathize, recipes, and culinary culture. The findings revealed that tour guides should know about the gastronomic elements that they present and the connection of these elements with the region's cultural and social structure. The tour guides' presentations are not well-structured in terms of the comprehensiveness of the information presented and their choice of words. Gastronomic tour guides should therefore acquire information from reliable sources and learn more about tourist psychology, tourism sociology, personal development, and communication skills, including effective and eloquent speaking.

Keywords

Tour Guide, Gastronomy Tour, Gastronomy Tourism, Competence, Gaziantep

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Introduction

Centered in Anatolia, Türkiye has hosted a wide range of civilizations over a millennia. This long history has given the region an important position in tourism through its historical and cultural assets (Akyıldız & Olğun, 2020). As a key profession for establishing social and cultural bonds between visitors and the tourism destination, tour guides have a prominent role (Jensen, 2010). For visitors, a guide is not only an individual who accompanies the tour and speaks a common language but also an intermediary who makes the unknown or complex become more understandable and simpler (Santos Veloso & dos Santos Queirós, 2019). Tour guides also enable visitors to establish connections with local people or the region's particular values (İrigüler & Güler, 2015). Given Türkiye's rich cultural diversity, tour guides may choose to specialize in certain areas of interest, which can provide added value, such as "high performance, service delivery at good quality, and competitive advantage for destinations" (Koroğlu & Gudu Demirbulat, 2017).

The growing diversity of consumer needs has increased the demand for gastronomy tourism (De Jong et al., 2018). Gastronomy tourism adds a competitive advantage to a given destination (Dirlik & Karsavuran, 2019), helps it create a unique identity (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020), helps sustain the local culture, and contributes to the economy (Çalışkan, 2013). Given its millennia of culinary culture and its food and beverage diversity, Türkiye offers great potential for gastronomy tourism (Küçükömürler et al., 2018). It is therefore essential for the country's tourism industry to promote this potential through specialized tour guides. Currently, although gastronomy tours are organized in Türkiye, many are far from being purely food oriented (Kızılırmak et al., 2016).

A number of researchers have studied tourist guiding and gastronomic tourism, such as from the perspective of tourist guides (Altıntaş & Hazarhun, 2020; Cankül & Yalçınkaya, 2021; İrigüler & Güler, 2015; Sahoo, 2020). Other studies have investigated specialization in gastronomy conceptually (Başoda et al., 2018), perceptions of students studying tourist guiding in gastronomy tours (Kök et al., 2021), the effect of tourist guides' gastronomic information on tourists' recommendation intentions (Akay & Özöğütçü, 2019), and tourists' perceptions of professional tourist guides in gastronomy tours (Seyitoğlu, 2020).

İrigüler & Güler (2015) note that not enough tourist guides currently specialize in gastronomy tours. Başoda et al., (2018) suggest that gastronomy expertise should be studied from the perspective of tourist guides, while Akay & Özöğütçü (2019) recommend conducting more studies of the relationship between gastronomy tourism and tourist guidance. According to Altıntaş & Hazarhun (2020), tourist guides should have a good command of their region's local cuisine and provide tourists with detailed

information about the cuisine's culture. Kök et al., (2021) call for more studies on gastronomy guiding while Seyitoğlu (2020) argue that studies based on face-to-face interviews with gastronomy tour participants should be conducted to obtain richer data.

Given these findings and recommendations, further research should investigate the skills and abilities of tourist guides working on gastronomy tours. To our knowledge, no study has yet directly interviewed tourist guides about this. In addition, no study has examined gastronomy tour guides' presentations to tourists. The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Accordingly, this study evaluates the gastronomy knowledge and guidance competence of professional tour guides in Gaziantep, Türkiye. As revealed in the literature review below, few studies have investigated this topic, while the research that dominates the literature mainly focuses on destination satisfaction (Prat Forga & Valiente, 2014; Erşahin & Kızılırmak, 2019; Kesici & Çakır, 2020) and tourists' satisfaction with gastronomy tour guides (Kılıçlar & Çevrimkaya, 2019). The present study was conducted in Gaziantep province, Türkiye, which has experienced high demand for gastronomy-oriented visits since it was granted the title of City of Gastronomy as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Literature Review

Guided Gastronomy Tours

A number of studies have revealed that tourist involvement in and preference for food in a given destination may play a significant role in destination choices (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012; Özaltaş Serçek & Serçek, 2015; Pou Sio et al., 2021). Local or interesting foods may direct tourists' attention and motivate them to visit a particular destination, such as Italian cuisine (Boyne et al., 2002) or far eastern and Asian cuisines (Ab Karim et al., 2010). Accordingly, specialized tour operators organize regular gastronomy tours to Asia, Italy, and France while Tuscany, Provence, Melbourne, and Sydney are the most highly promoted and marketed gastronomy destinations (Kivela & Crotts, 2005).

As a tourism product, gastronomy plays a role in communicating a destination's culture, is an important attraction element, and makes tourism-related experiences more memorable. Gastronomy elements can make a destination more competitive by conveying a perception of the place and its local culture while enriching the destination's attraction elements (Yıldız, 2016).

Gastronomy tourists wish to explore the local people's culinary culture during their visits. As a key element of culture, food can represent the destination's values and lifestyle. In recent years, a leading motivation for tourism activities is gastronomy tours to familiarize visitors with different cuisines (Frost et al., 2017). Gastronomy tourism allows cultural exchange between cities and countries, thereby promoting them. Tourists not only experience gastronomy elements but also take those elements back to their countries to share with their acquaintances (De Jong et al., 2018). With its potential to attract international tourists to destinations, gastronomy tourism has blossomed into a strategic element (Hornig et al., 2010). By offering tourists a great diversity of food and beverages, a destination can increase the number of visitors, thereby adding to the revenue generated by its tourism industry (Rogerson, 2012).

The few studies in the literature examining tour guide competence in gastronomy tours highlight that tour guides are a key element in tourism, as they play a critical role in shaping both the destination's image and the experiences of visiting tourists (Huang et al., 2010). According to Weiler & Black (2014), tour guides have the following ten prominent characteristics: educator, information provider, leader, role model, social role/catalyst, mediator, traveler, manager, public relations representative, and facilitator of access to non-public areas. Tour guides play an important role in narrating and conveying the culture of destinations, which gives tourists a better grasp of the destination's culture and positively affects the overall tourist experience. (Seyitoğlu, 2020).

Knowledge about gastronomy tourism allows tour guides to present information to tourists about the historical background, cooking techniques, and manners of consuming food and beverages tasted throughout the tour (Karamustafa & Çeşmeci, 2006). To become experts in gastronomy, tour guides must specialize in the destination's local culinary culture, activities, and places (Başoda et al., 2018). Guiding for gastronomy tours has two main components: providing information to tourists about the destination's local culinary culture and enabling tourists to have novel experiences. The former refers to conveying theoretical and on-site information about all the assets and practices in a given destination; the latter refers to providing tourists with actual experiences of the destination's practices and places.

When individuals visit a culturally unfamiliar destination, they may hesitate to consume local products. This prevents them from experiencing new tastes. Instead, they consume products similar to those in their own cultures. Tour guides can change this behavior through the perceptions they create, thereby encouraging tourists to try local dishes (Mak et al., 2016). To this, however, tour guides must be able to describe menu items, provide detailed information about their ingredients, and make suggestions when needed.

Research has produced conflicting findings regarding the culinary knowledge of tour guides in Türkiye. İrigüler & Güler (2015) reported that some are deeply knowledgeable about the country's rich culinary culture and offer significant potential for gastronomy tourism, although they also noted that it is necessary to specialize in gastronomy tour guiding. Cankül & Yalçınkaya (2021) concluded that tour guides have sufficient gastronomy knowledge despite being inadequately educated or trained. They suggested that properly training professional tour guides in gastronomy could benefit both the guides themselves and the regions they serve. On the other hand, Kök et al. (2021) found that despite their confidence about their gastronomy knowledge, students in tour guiding lack information about regional differences in Türkiye's gastronomy map. They therefore suggest that gastronomy should be incorporated into tourism curricula. Similarly, Akay & Özöğütçü (2019) revealed that the majority of tour guides have no training or education in cuisine, so their knowledge is rooted in books, magazines, TV programs, and online resources. They recommended that tour guides wishing to specialize in gastronomy tourism have a good command of the local culinary culture and practices in their destinations and be able to convey such information to tourists in detail.

Methodology

This qualitative case study aims to measure the gastronomy-related competence of those working as tour guides on gastronomy tours in Gaziantep, Türkiye. Case study is a methodology in which a single case or incident is analyzed in depth, data is collected systematically, and the occurrences are examined in a natural setting. This methodology tries to explain why the incident occurred and identify what should be focused on in future research (Subaşı & Okumuş, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 tour guides who have been professional tour guides for at least 8 years and are working in gastronomy tours organized in Gaziantep. The semi-structured interview is a technique where the number and the order of questions may change depending on how the interview progresses, while other questions may be asked if they occur to the interviewer (Kozak, 2015). The interviews in the present research were held between 14 and 20 December 2021. The respondents were asked six questions (see Table 1). For the data collection tool employed in the current study, between five and 10 questions were recommended (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Particular attention was paid to whether the respondents have worked as a tour guide for at least 8 years and regularly provide gastronomy tours in Gaziantep. This study received ethical approval numbered 2021/186 from the ethical board of Harran University, Türkiye.

The study is believed to fill a gap in the literature due to the scarcity of research into tour guide competence in gastronomy tours. It was critical to adopt a qualitative analysis methodology and propose suggestions based on the collected data. Instead

of a researcher profile in traditional research methods who intends to stay out of the research process and to remain as objective as possible, in qualitative research the researcher has become part of the process. Qualitative research defines matters and facts under an unconditioned setting with an inductive approach and concentrates on grasping the perspectives of the respondents. The notable characteristics of qualitative research are that it provides the researcher with a participating role, that it is responsive to an unconditioned setting, that it adopts a holistic approach, that it allows the manifestation of perceptions, and that it is flexible (Aydın, 2018: 3). For the reasons explained above, the present study adopted a qualitative analysis methodology.

Each interview date and time was arranged according to the respondents' availability and held through the Zoom online meeting platform. Before commencing the data collection, the respondents were briefed about the interview, the topic, and the questions to be asked. All the responses were noted, and the content was analyzed using the content analysis method. An audit trail was applied to ensure validity and reliability. This technique requires another expert uninvolved in the study to examine the emerging themes and codes. The judgment of reliability is based on the expert's conclusions about the overall process (Morrow, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Accordingly, the obtained themes and codes were examined by two academicians who are experts in gastronomy and guiding, and the final result was revealed in the direction of their reports. Reliability is also higher if the researcher has recorded the interviews and transcribed them correctly (Bal, 2016). In the present study, the interviews were made via Zoom application and transcribed accurately to ensure the study's reliability.

For the sixth question, the respondents were asked to present for the interview one of the gastronomy elements of Gaziantep that they present during the tours they guide. This question was intended to determine whether the way they present covers the gastronomy element fully and whether they demonstrate the manners expected from a tour guide. The presentations were evaluated in the light of several previous studies to determine whether the guides have sufficient knowledge of gastronomy. The respondents were not informed in advance that their knowledge would be evaluated, or that their presentations would be analyzed, to ensure that the respondents felt comfortable and made their presentations as they always do.

Table 1
Interview Questions

Interview questions	References
1. Do you believe you have sufficient knowledge of local cuisine in Gaziantep? If yes, how did you acquire the knowledge you have?	İrigüler & Güler (2015); Pavlidis & Markantonatou (2020)
2. What are the topics that tour guides should have knowledge about so as to guide a gastronomy tour?	Seyitoğlu (2020); Pavlidis & Markantonatou (2020)
3. Did you ever attend an educational or training program (course) to work as a guide in gastronomy tours? If yes, please provide brief information about it.	İrigüler & Güler (2015); Sahoo (2020)
4. What sort of questions do you receive during gastronomy tours?	İrigüler & Güler (2015); Seyitoğlu (2020)
5. What sort of problems or disputes do you face during gastronomy tours in Gaziantep? What do you do to resolve them?	İrigüler & Güler (2015); Sahoo (2020); Seyitoğlu (2020)
6. Could you please briefly present in writing a gastronomy element peculiar to Gaziantep that you use in the tours you guide?	İrigüler & Güler; (2015); Sahoo (2020); Seyitoğlu (2020); Pavlidis & Markantonatou (2020)

Research Findings

The descriptive findings about the respondents are presented in Table 2. The majority of the respondents were male (75%) and aged 30-37 years (65%). Regarding experience, 65% at least 10 years' experience as a tour guide. Regarding educational background, 35% of respondents aged 40 or over had received their tour guiding certificates by completing courses provided by the Ministry of Tourism. All the respondents with an associate degree or bachelor's degree had studied tour guiding, while 20% had a postgraduate degree. The regions where most of the respondents worked as tour guides were distributed nationally (65%). The respondents aged 37 and over with tour guide certificates from the Ministry of Tourism course predominantly work in southeastern Anatolia.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics and Occupational Qualifications of Respondents

Code	Gender	Age	Source of Tour Guiding Certificate	Years of experience	Foreign language	Work Region
R1	Male	42	Ministry course	10 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R2	Male	40	Ministry course	12 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R3	Male	35	Undergraduate	10 years	English	Countrywide
R4	Male	37	Doctorate and undergraduate	12 years	English	Countrywide
R5	Female	38	Associate degree	10 years	English	Countrywide
R6	Male	33	Associate degree	11 years	English	Countrywide
R7	Male	51	Ministry course	14 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R8	Male	35	Post-graduate and undergraduate	9 years	English	Countrywide
R9	Female	37	Post-graduate and undergraduate	14 years	English	Countrywide
R10	Female	36	Undergraduate	11 years	English	Countrywide
R11	Male	33	Undergraduate	8 years	English	Countrywide

R12	Male	35	Doctorate and undergraduate	9 years	English	Countrywide
R13	Female	45	Ministry course	10 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R14	Male	43	Ministry course	11 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R15	Male	31	Undergraduate	8 years	English	Countrywide
R16	Male	32	Undergraduate	8 years	English	Countrywide
R17	Female	33	Undergraduate	8 years	English	Countrywide
R18	Male	45	Ministry course	13 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R19	Male	49	Ministry course	14 years	English	Southeastern Anatolia
R20	Male	34	Undergraduate	9 years	English	Countrywide

The themes and codes identified from the responses provided by the respondents are presented in Table 3. The responses were analyzed meticulously, including the frequency of the codes. Further analysis of the information in Table 3 (except for the sixth question) is based on these themes and codes. In addition, the table in which the opinions of the participants are analyzed is provided at the end of the study.

Table 3
Themes and Codes Identified by Content Analysis

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi()	%	Σ%
Level of knowledge	Experience	10	19	3.67	6.79
	Reference Works	5		1.83	
	Training	4		1.47	
Audio-visual media	TV Shows	7	15	2.57	5.50
	Social Media	6		2.20	
	Radio	2		0.73	
Cultural predisposition	Place of Birth	9	18	3.30	6.60
	Residence in Gaziantep	9		3.30	
	Cooking Techniques	8		2.94	
Occupational competence	Presentation Techniques	7	29	2.57	10.64
	Cultivation Techniques for Products Used as Ingredients	6		2.20	
	History of Food and Beverages	4		1.47	
	Nutritional Tendency	2		0.73	
	Culinary Museum	2		0.73	
Specialization	Gastronomy Activities	6	11	2.20	4.03
	Knowledge of Places for Food and Beverages	5		1.83	
Culture	Local Culture	12	28	4.41	10.28
	Local Culinary Arts	10		3.67	
	Cultural Narratives	6		2.20	
Training/Education	Experience	10	16	2.20	5.87
	Training in Local Cuisine	6		3.67	
Knowledge of products	Recipes	13	45	4.77	16.52
	Organic Products	11		4.04	
	Supply of Products	11		4.04	
Knowledge of places for food and beverages	Prices	10	36	3.67	13.22
	Menu	14		5.14	
	Sanitary conditions	14		5.14	
	Taste	8		2.94	
Problem-solving skills	Ability to Establish Dialogues	10	25	3.67	9.18
	Mediation	8		2.94	
	Ability to Propose Solutions	7		2.57	

Communication	Ability to Persuade	6	11	1.83	4.03
	Use of Body Language	5		2.20	
Ability to empathize	Empathy	8	14	2.99	6.97
	Manner of Speaking	6		2.24	

fi: frequency of each code; $\Sigma f(i)$: Total frequency of each theme's codes; %: Percentage frequency of each code within each theme; $\Sigma\%$: Percentage frequency of each theme's codes within total frequency of codes

Level of Knowledge

This theme concerns how tour guides acquire their current level of knowledge to guide gastronomy tours. The majority of respondents (R1, R2, R5, R6, R7, R10, R13, R14, R18, and R19) reported that experience plays a major role. For example, R2 said: *"I believe I have a sufficient level of knowledge ... During the tours, I do my best to convey the knowledge that I have gained through my restaurant experiences."* R10 said: *"As I have lived in Gaziantep for a long time, my knowledge about the city's food and beverage culture is rich and I keep my knowledge updated by experiencing novel things as the days go by."*

Some respondents have built on their knowledge through "examination of reference works" (R1, R4, R8, R9, and R12) and "education/training" (R3, R4, R9, and R12). For example, R4 indicated that he is aware of the need for training to ensure continued self-development and that he takes steps accordingly: *"I used to review reference works to learn novel things. Then I realized that training would yield more benefits and that practical exercises as well as theoretical and practical knowledge would bring me further advantages."* Similarly, R9 said, *"I have bought a number of works describing the gastronomy and culinary culture of Gaziantep and I still read about it. Reading such publications allows you to perform better during the tours. I have gained great benefit from reading publications and reference works."*

These statements reveal that the knowledge of professional tour guides in gastronomy tours in Gaziantep mostly stem from experience and examination of reference works rather than education or training.

Audio-visual Media

Regarding the sources of their knowledge, the respondents most frequently mentioned TV shows. In recent years, the audio-visual media have unearthed a notable demand for gastronomy programs, which has particularly affected the tour guides. Accordingly, the majority of respondents learned about Gaziantep's gastronomic values of through TV shows (R1, R2, R6, R7, R14, R17, and R19) and social media. For example, R7 and R14 both said that *they learn about gastronomy by following TV shows, programs and social media about Gaziantep.*

Among the respondents, those who gained knowledge through experience, social media, and TV shows also received their employment authorization card for tour guiding via Tourism Ministry-run certification programs (R1, R2, R7, R14, and R19).

Cultural Predisposition

The respondents associated their knowledge of gastronomy with being born in Gaziantep and/or residing in Gaziantep. As R7 put it, *being born and raised in Gaziantep is a key element for him to collect knowledge about gastronomy elements in the city*. R6 stated: *"I have lived in Gaziantep for years. I can say with no hesitation that I have a perfect command of the culinary culture of this city now."* Similarly, R10 stated: *"I was born and raised in a nearby city, the culinary culture of which shows parallelism with the one in Gaziantep. Throughout my stay here I have learned more and try to reflect my experiences on the tours I guide."* These comments indicate that residing in a city for a long time allows the respondents to gain knowledge about gastronomy elements in the city concerned.

Occupational Competence

Regarding the topics that gastronomy tour guides should have knowledge of, the respondents most frequently mentioned "cooking techniques" (R4, R8, R9, R12, R15, R16, R17, and R20) followed by "presentation techniques" (R2, R4, R8, R9, R12, R15, and R16). Since gastronomy tours fall in the category of special interest tours, it is critical that the guides leading such tours have a comprehensive knowledge of gastronomy elements. More specifically, a number of respondents (R4, R8, R9, R12, R15, R16, R17, and R20) agreed on the importance of knowing how a local dish is cooked and presented, and its historical background. As R8 put it: *"The guides leading gastronomy tours should have knowledge of how the ingredients of a dish are grown and what techniques should be used for cooking ... Moreover, they should know about how a particular dish is to be presented because we receive a lot of questions from tourists in this regard."* R12 stated: *"Tour guides should know about the historical background of local dishes in a city. In Gaziantep there are culinary museums, which are a must-see element for tour guides."*

Specialization

Under this theme, the respondents most frequently mentioned "gastronomy activities," followed by "knowledge of places for food and beverages." For example, R13 said: *"I take part in gastronomy activities. For example, I always attend the international gastronomy festival in Gaziantep, strive to learn novel things, and use them in the tours I guide."* R16 said: *"You are expected to take the guests to the best restaurants offering the most delicious food. This is why we have to know about the best places in the city."*

Culture

Regarding culture, the respondents most frequently mentioned "local culture," followed by "local culinary arts." A number of respondents (R3, R4, R7, R8, R9,

R12, R16, R17, R19, and R20) agreed that tour guides must have a good command of local culture and culinary arts in a given city. R3, R8, and R16 emphasized the critical importance of local cultural knowledge: *“The guide must have information about the culture of the city. S/he must know about local culinary arts and the culinary culture in the region.”* R20 noted the importance of cultural narratives for guided tours: *“We used to listen to the stories told by our grandparents, which had elements reflecting the sociological background of the dishes. Such stories are essential for tours.”*

Training

The most frequently mentioned code for training was “experience,” followed by “training on local cuisine.” R1 stated: *“I have received no specific training in the field of gastronomy; however, I have lived in Gaziantep and worked as a tour guide for a long time, so I convey what I have gained through my experiences.”* Some respondents reported that they had attended training courses in gastronomy. For instance, R3 stated: *“I attended a one-week training course organized by the Association for Gastronomy. I believe it is an important first step, yet not enough for my development.”* Similarly, R10 said: *“I attended training organized by the metropolitan municipality of Gaziantep on local cuisine. It helped me to acquire basic knowledge on the subject.”* R9 confirmed these views: *“I studied a Master of Science in the field of gastronomy at a university. I feel glad to have received such an education.”* The interviews revealed that these ministry-certified tour guides have no specific training in gastronomy.

Knowledge of Products

Regarding product knowledge, the respondents most frequently mentioned “recipes” as tour participants most frequently ask how to prepare dishes using food products sold in Gaziantep. Respondents 2, 4, 9, 12, 15, and 16 said that they receive questions during almost every tour on how local Gaziantep dishes are prepared. For example, R4 stated: *“Almost every tour, visitors ask questions about the preparation of dishes and whether there are any preparation and cooking tricks.”* Thus, it is essential for tour guides to have such knowledge regarding local dishes.

The same number of respondents mentioned knowledge of “organic products” and “supply of products.” They noted that tourists want to buy products unique to Gaziantep during the tours. As respondents 2, 4, 9, 17, and 15 said, *they frequently receive questions from tourists on organic products and where to find them, in particular.* R17 said: *“Tourists usually ask where to find local products of Gaziantep and for advice on organic products and where to buy them.”* This theme reveals that tour guides should know about the preparation of local dishes and where to find the ingredients, particularly organic ones.

Knowledge of Places for Food and Beverages

Regarding place knowledge, the respondents most frequently mentioned menus and sanitary conditions in restaurants. The majority of the respondents (R1, R2, R4, R5, R7, R8, R9, R11, R13, R15, R17, R18, R19, and R20) agreed that they receive questions on menus. R3 stated: *“Tourists usually ask what to eat in the restaurants. Sometimes they like to see pictures of the menu.”* R13 said: *“I receive a lot of questions about the dishes on the menus. They ask whether there are restaurants with a distinctive menu.”*

Almost all respondents (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R9, R10, R11, R12, R14, R16, R17, and R18) said that tourists bear negative perceptions about sanitary conditions in the region. They highlighted that the region has a negative image in certain matters and that they receive many hygiene-related questions. R9 stated: *“Hygiene is a critical element in gastronomy tours ... Rightfully, tourists would like to know about what they eat and the conditions in which they are prepared.”* Similarly, R15 said: *“The question of whether the place has appropriate sanitary conditions is always asked. We receive questions ranging from bathroom hygiene to cleanliness of dining tables.”*

Thus, it is critical for participants on gastronomy tours that the tour guides have detailed information about the menus. In addition, some tourists would like to try several dishes at the same time. This theme has also revealed one of the characteristics and missions of tour guides. That is, by selecting decent restaurants and communicating sincerely with tourists, tour guides may help reverse tourists' negative perception regarding sanitary conditions in the region's restaurants.

Problem-solving Skills

As with many tours, gastronomy tour guides face challenges. Consequently, the respondents most frequently mentioned “Ability to establish a dialogue.” R1, R2, R5, R7, R10, R12, R14, R15, R17, R18, and R19 all reported being challenged by various problems, especially regarding restaurants, and that they try to resolve disputes through dialogue. R7 stated: *“I get negative reactions from tourists about service quality in restaurants and the high prices they set for certain products. In such a case, I try to have a dialogue with the owner of the restaurant or the person in charge.”* R12 said: *“You need to set the tone by observing the person you are addressing. For the problems concerning hygiene and service personnel, which we face quite frequently, I choose to establish a dialogue before the tension escalates.”* The respondent touched on the importance of dialogue in problem-solving.

Another code identified under this theme is “mediation.” A mediator refers to a person who helps the parties find common ground in a dispute. R3, R4, R6, R7,

R9, R11, R12, and R15 all reported acting as a mediator, especially over prices and ingredients. For example, R9 stated: *“The fact that certain local products have high price tags may drive tourists to react harshly toward business owners ... In such a case, in order to find common ground, I ask for a discount from the business owner while kindly requesting from the guests to calm their temper.”* R6 mentioned problems when tasting local dishes: *“Although I remind the staff that tourists are not used to consuming a lot of spices in food, they still add spices to dishes as they like ... So, to de-escalate the tension, I try to please both parties. I usually ask them to prepare the dishes as requested by the guests. In such cases I act as a mediator, so to say.”*

A third code was mentioned less frequently: “ability to propose a solution.” Given that the majority of respondents reported resolving problems through dialogue and mediation, this code seems to come into play if the other two practices fail to work. For example, R11 stated: *“I propose a solution when the parties cannot find common ground.”* Similarly, R8 said: *“I intervene to propose a solution when the enterprise fails to satisfy the expectations of the guests.”*

The analysis reveals that tour guides should have certain personal qualities to resolve problems. In particular, tour guides with strong communication skills are likely to be more successful in problem-solving.

Communication

The responses imply that dialogue or mediation may fall short of resolving the problems, and this is where the ability to persuade and body language step in. R3, R5, R6, R14, R15, and R16 said that some problems cannot be resolved despite communicating with business owners or staff. In such cases, they try to persuade the parties to compromise. For example, R14 stated: *“I observe that shopkeepers try to sell local products at quite high prices. Then, I kindly ask them to make a discount. If it does not work, I try to persuade them by saying that I work in the region, implying that I constantly bring tourists to his/her place.”*

Communication also involves non-verbal behaviors and body language. Some respondents, particularly those with master’s and doctorate degrees, attached great importance to the communicative effect of body language. These included R4, R8, R9, R12, and R20. For example, R4 stated: *“The body movements of a person while having a conversation may give us some hints. Depending on the type of the problem faced, effective use of body language may facilitate resolving the problem ... For instance, if the parties look nervous during a quarrel, they should be asked to sit down first. The body language of seated persons may communicate calmer messages ... This non-verbal type of communication may reveal individuals’ actual thoughts and emotions.”*

Ability to Empathize

The most frequent code under this theme was “ability to empathize.” R3, R4, R8, R9, R11, R12, R13, and R19 all reported that they sometimes admit tourists are right when they try to see things from their perspective. For example, R12 stated: *“Sometimes I find it difficult to understand certain tourist behaviors. However, things get more understandable when I put myself into their shoes.”* R13 pointed out that empathy helps her to understand the reasons behind the problems: *“Once I had a guest constantly causing tension regarding hygiene ... I learned that she had experienced hygiene-related problems in the past. After our conversation, I managed to see things from her side, which transformed my perspective toward her for the rest of the tour.”*

The “manner of speaking” also plays a key role in communication with tourists. As R3 noted: *“The staff having no idea of how to address people is a major problem in some tours ... The more decently we as tour guides behave and speak with tourists, the more decently they react.”* R10 also noted that the manner of speaking helps solve problems experienced during a tour: *“Sometimes we face problems concerning sanitary conditions or the staff... A Turkish proverb says, ‘Honey catches more flies than vinegar,’ so I speak with tourists as gently as possible.”*

Presentation of Gastronomy Elements Unique to Gaziantep

When giving their presentations about a gastronomy element unique to Gaziantep, the respondents were observed to determine whether they have sufficient knowledge about it and their use of specific skills and roles, as identified by İrigüler & Güler (2015) and Seyitoğlu (2020). These were considered relevant for the present study given the themes identified to measure gastronomy tour guide competence.

According to İrigüler & Güler (2015), tour guides should have knowledge of culinary culture and practices, adding that it is important to have visitors experience local flavors that are to be preserved. They also argue that tour guides have two key roles in gastronomy tourism. The first is to make tourists become aware of gastronomy tourism, while the second is to develop themselves in this field so that they can accurately convey the richness of culinary culture in the destination.

Seyitoğlu (2020) identified four main themes: “qualifications” (ambitious, intellectual, friendly, polite, humorous, candid, patient, energetic, positive, smiling, charming, thoughtful, moderate, warm, fun, enthusiastic, hospitable, approachable, and easy to get along with), “knowledge” (knowledgeable, elucidator, and technology use), “communication skills” (didactic, inclusion of tour members in narratives, and attention-grabbing and “value-added experience), and tourists’ “value-added experience.”

Given these findings, tour guides should exhibit these personality traits in their presentations during gastronomy tours, have relevant knowledge, prepare didactic and attention-grabbing presentations, and positively impact the overall tourist experience by ensuring that tourists' sensations are stimulated by what is narrated. Analysis of the respondents' presentations in terms of these two studies revealed the two themes presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes and Codes Identified from Presentations on a Gastronomy Element Unique to Gaziantep

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi()	%	Σ%
Recipes	How the element is cooked	18	34	35.2	70.4
	How its ingredients are prepared	12		23.5	
	Flavoring compounds	6		11.7	
Culinary Culture	Historical background	8	17	15.6	33.2
	Stories/narratives	5		9.80	
	Social structure and cuisine	4		7.84	

fi: frequency score of each code; Σfi(): Total frequency score of the codes;

%: Ratio of the codes within total frequency score; Σ%: Total percentage of the codes under each theme

Recipe

Most respondents addressed how the local dish they presented is prepared and cooked, as well as giving its recipe. For example, R2 gave the recipe for yuvalama, one of Gaziantep's famous dishes: *"Yuvalama is a famous dish in this region ... First, the chickpeas soaked in water are dried with the help of a colander and cooked for 20 minutes in a pressure cooker. Meanwhile, to prepare the mixture for the meatballs, rice and onion are smashed in the food processor and flavored with spices. Tiny pieces of the mixture are rolled into meatballs about the size of a chickpea. The meatballs are boiled ... Broth and yoghurt are mixed and cooked in a pan, then the boiled meatballs are added to this mixture."*

For some dishes, ingredients may need pre-processing before cooking, as highlighted by most respondents (R3, R4, R5, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R15, R16, R17, R20). For instance, R11 described this while explaining how to make stuffed vegetables: *"Stuffed vegetables such as aubergine and bell pepper are quite popular in this region ... I will tell you the recipe but first I would like to explain how these vegetables are processed to survive the winter... Aubergines and bell peppers grown in the summer period are hollowed out, strung on a strong cord, and left to dry under the sun on roofs or balconies. Such dried vegetables are mainly dried for the winter. If they are not subject to such pre-processing, they cannot be stuffed later."*

Flavoring compounds were mentioned the least. R2, R7, R13, R18, R17, and R20 said that local dishes are flavored with local spices and cannot be cooked without them. R3 said: *"The element flavoring a wide range of dishes in this region is spice*

... Region-specific spice mixes, in particular, are added to dishes make them more appetizing.”

Culinary Culture

Although the majority of respondents explained how local dishes are cooked, they did not provide comprehensive information about their historical background or their role in Gaziantep’s culinary culture. This suggests that some respondents do not have a good command of the historical background of the region’s local food and beverages or its culinary culture, and its relationship with the social structure.

Under this theme, “knowledge of historical background” was mentioned most frequently. Highlighting the importance of addressing the historical background of a given dish as well as its recipe, R4, R6, R8, R9, R12, R17, and R20 did so to some extent. For example, in his presentation on kebabs, R4 explained: *“It is known that animal husbandry practices allowed Turks to develop meat processing and cooking techniques. We can tell this from the works of the Anatolian Seljuk State ... Nowadays, kebab is cooked the most in Iran and also the geographical area embracing Türkiye. It is narrated in some sources that liver-based kebabs entered Anatolian culture from Iran ... According to the Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, kebab used to be consumed during the Delhi Sultanate ... Turks adapted kebabs to their own culture.”*

Another code identified under this theme was “narratives.” When describing the role of gastronomy elements in forming the region’s culture, R8, R12, R16, and R18 narrated brief stories. For example, R8 narrated a short story about his chosen dish, *çiğköfte*: *“King Nimrod asks his men to collect all the wood in the city for throwing the Prophet Abraham into a fire. Even in the houses, there is no wood left for cooking. Meanwhile, a hunter who returns from gazelle hunting gives the meat to his wife and asks her to make a meal out of it. The wife says that there is no firewood left in the house. Thereupon, the hunter mashes the gazelle meat and kneads it with spices, bulgur, salt, and chili pepper. So, rumor has it that Çiğköfte emerged like this.”*

The code “social structure and cuisine” was rarely mentioned. Some respondents touched on the relationship between a dish and the social structure. For example, R4 stated: *“Katmer, a dessert, is prepared after the wedding ceremony to send a positive message to the bride’s house. Another tradition is to prepare homemade baklava before asking for the girl’s hand for marriage The boy’s side shows generosity through the dishes they prepare for the ceremony ... The culinary skills of a bride-to-be are also tested in this way. For instance, yuvalama is hard to cook, and those who can cook yuvalama successfully are deemed skillful.”*

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study aimed to reveal the competence of tour guides in gastronomy tours in Türkiye. The interview questions were chosen by considering relevant studies. The interview responses were subjected to content analysis to identify themes and codes. These themes were level of knowledge, audio-visual media, cultural predisposition, occupational competence, specialization, culture, education, knowledge of places for food and beverages, problem-solving skills, communication, ability to empathize, recipes, and culinary culture.

The findings indicate that although tour guides do not receive adequate training in gastronomy, they have acquired knowledge from reference sources like books, journals, and periodicals. They also incorporate information acquired from TV shows and social media platforms, as revealed in previous studies by Akay & Özgütçü (2019) and Dursun & Cankül (2020). Another significant finding in the present study is that some tour guides rely purely on their own experience and do not examine reference works much. These tour guides who received their employment authorization card for tour guiding via the Tourism Ministry's six-month certification programs.

Previous research in the field (Çetin & Kızılırmak, 2012) has revealed various shortcomings. This, and the growing interest in special interest tours, had encouraged the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Tour Guides Association of Türkiye (TUREB), and Professional Chambers for Tour Guidance to organize seminars and training courses on special interest tourism. Tour guides aiming for better performance during such tours should certainly attend. Notably, through completing such training, former attendees have been relatively unaffected by negative developments and receive high wages despite various crises (Yenipınar & Yılmaz, 2019). Furthermore, tour guides who have strengthened their capacities through gastronomy-focused training have increased tourists' overall satisfaction (Akay & Özgütçü, 2019).

The respondents in the present study listed various topics that tour guides should have a good command of in gastronomy tours, particularly cooking, presentation, and cultivation techniques of the products used as ingredients. They reported that tourists usually ask questions regarding the techniques used for cooking local dishes, local organic products, where to find them, and the prices. Also, tourists ask about the cultivation conditions for the crops used as ingredients, and the relationship between the dishes' presentation and their historical background. In short, tour guides' occupational competence and knowledge are vital to satisfy tourists' curiosity.

Another important element determining the quality of the tour is the tour guide's level of cultural knowledge (Yu, et al., 2004; Tsaur & Teng, 2017). A perfect command of local culture, local cuisine, and related cultural narratives directly affects the

tourists' satisfaction. This finding is in line with those of Özbek & İskender (2021). Although cultural narratives were the least frequent code in the present study, tour guides play a key role in conveying cultural narratives to others (Byron, 2012). These not only make the tour more enjoyable but also allow such stories to reach a wider audience (Kaya & Ünlüönen, 2021), thereby encouraging more tourists to visit the destination.

Another finding is that the majority of the respondents highlighted the importance of gastronomy activities and knowledge of places for food and beverages. It is of great importance that tour guides can answer questions accurately and take the visitors to the best food and beverage enterprises in the destination. A well-guided tourist will experience higher satisfaction, which will in turn affect the destination's image. Furthermore, individuals attending gastronomy tours visit destinations not only to have a dining experience at local restaurants but also to attend national and international gastronomy events held in the destinations concerned (Göktaş, 2021). A tour guide informed about the dates, purposes, and goals of such events will certainly increase the level of satisfaction obtained from the tour.

The local cuisine reflects each destination's cultural and historical heritage (Mehul Krishna Kumar, 2019). The most frequently asked questions about the dishes as part of the heritage concerned are related to their recipes, where to buy organic products, and the prices of food products. A guide that has sufficient knowledge of the recipes and ingredients can address the cultural and historical elements of the region's gastronomy. Other frequently asked questions are related to restaurants' sanitary conditions and menus. The respondents revealed that Gaziantep's restaurants have a negative hygiene image among tourists. Tour guides can reverse this through explanations and good guidance (Seyitoğlu, 2020).

Communication and an ability to establish a dialogue emerged as a key element for tourist satisfaction, as it improves the tourists' visiting experience and satisfaction (Elmoghazy, 2019). Tour guides can resolve conflicts through effective communication with tourists; however, it is important to bear in mind that the ability to establish a dialogue is a skill to be developed (Sharma, 2020). Tour guides also mediate in disputes between enterprises and tourists (Weiler & Ru, 2007). The findings in the present study indicate that mediation may facilitate problem solving. Similarly, Cohen (1985) indicated that the leadership role played by tour guides may help solve problems, while Rabolic (2010) stated that the communicator role may serve the same purpose.

Problem-solving skills are linked to adaptation to daily life and are one of the most significant characteristics of a person (Arenofsky, 2001). Because they provide services to visitors from different cultures and regions, tour guides have to adapt. This

ability can be reinforced through certain skills. In particular, an ability to persuade and use body language effectively can help resolve problems while guiding tours.

Tour guides should convey both the physical and cultural elements of a destination in the best way possible. Therefore, the tour guide's skill in communicating with tourists will help determine their satisfaction (Arat & Bulut, 2019). These skills are also necessary for resolving the tourists' problems. Here, persuasion and body language add value to communication (Ezeh et al., 2021), so tour guides should engage both the ears and the eyes. Given that gestures convey messages as well, the use of body language may facilitate persuasion. Tour guides should therefore receive training in body language. In the present study, the findings indicate that tour guides also use empathy as a problem-solving tool, given that it is an integral part of socio-emotional relaxation (Weiler & Black, 2014). When tour guides consider tourists in terms of their emotions, they can manage to develop empathy.

As already mentioned, effective communication can increase tourists' satisfaction (Weiler & Black, 2014). Similarly, and in line with Kara and Demir (2021), we find that tour guides with strong communication and persuasion skills, accompanied by appropriate body language, can either prevent problems from arising or more easily resolve them.

During the content analysis, the respondents' presentations were also evaluated for the accuracy of their answers to the earlier questions and the information presented, their communication skills during the presentation, the quality of their spoken language, body language, and manners. Because of the previously noted scarcity of research into gastronomy tour guide competence, the analysis of these skills and manners was based on the findings of İrigüler & Güler (2015) and Seyitoğlu (2020). Analysis of the presentations revealed two main themes: "the recipe" and "culinary culture." Regarding their content, the majority of presentations merely explained how the dish is cooked and how the ingredients are processed before cooking. Many respondents provided no information on the historical background of the products presented within the framework of culinary culture, while few incorporated stories to enrich the presentations and increase the tourists' enjoyment of the tour by linking the dish with the social structure. In short, the majority of the respondents lacked the capacities required for a good presentation.

The answers given as a result of the interviews were observed and analyzed. Based on the two previous studies, not all respondents reflected certain previously identified characteristics and roles in their presentations. Overall, the presentations focused on the recipes and preparation of the dish. Few respondents addressed the dish's historical background, related cultural narratives, its place in culture, and its link with the social structure, although a majority of the respondents had completed post-

graduate programs. This indicates that the historical development of food products, their place in culture, and cultural narratives should be included in such programs.

According to the results stated in our study, some suggestions are made below:

- Gastronomy tour guides should examine reference works in the relevant field and attend training courses.
- Tour guides should rely on reference materials, not just TV shows and social media.
- Tour guides would benefit significantly from attending relevant training courses.
- Since accurate information increases tourist satisfaction, tour guides must attend relevant training courses to be able to provide specific and comprehensive information.
- Tour guides should follow gastronomy activities and be informed about the purpose of such activities. They should know which products are consumed in which places in order to guide tourists to the places that can satisfy their expectations.
- Tour guides should take private courses, receive field-specific university education, or attend courses.
- Given that experience alone is insufficient, tour guides should attend training to develop the capacities to maximize tourist satisfaction.
- Tour guides should review reference works, follow the social media accounts of gastronomy experts, and know shop prices. To keep up with the latest developments in the region, they should join groups created by other tour guides and tour guide chambers through mobile applications such as WhatsApp.
- Tour guides should help reverse the region's negative image through good communication skills. If a hygiene-related problem is experienced, they should both inform the business owner politely and report it to the relevant public authorities. They should ask restaurants to provide menu pictures.
- Tour guides should read studies of human relations and psychology and attend training courses. They should also read studies on tourist psychology and tourism sociology.
- They should learn about body language and be able to understand the body language of tourists. They should attend online or in-person training courses on body language.

- To empathize requires a basic knowledge of human psychology, which can be achieved through long experience and knowledge. Experience of different tourist types will help tour guides develop empathy.
- Tour guides should enrich their presentations beyond the recipe by incorporating gastronomy-related elements.
- To enrich their presentations and ensure that the audience enjoys it, tour guides should incorporate historical background through stories. They must also understand the links between gastronomy and each region's social structure. Tour guides should examine written and non-written materials about the region and incorporate the information into their presentations. Tour guides must also receive postgraduate education in tourism and gastronomy.

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THEME	CODE	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	N
Level of Knowledge	Experience	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	10
	Reference Works	X		X					X	X		X										5
	Training			X	X				X			X										4
Audio-visual media	TV Shows	X	X			X	X	X					X				X	X		X		7
	Social Media				X		X			X					X	X						6
	Radio		X										X									2
Cultural Predisposition	Place of Birth	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	9
	Residence in Gaziantep	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	9
Occupational Competence	Cooking Techniques				X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	8
	Historical Background of Food and Beverages				X				X	X		X		X								4
	Cultivation Techniques for the Products used as Ingredient								X		X				X	X	X	X		X	X	6
	Presentation Techniques		X		X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				7
	Nutritional Tendencies												X	X	X							2
	Culinary Museums											X								X		2

THEME	Code	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	N	
Specialization	Gastronomy activities	X	X			X							X	X	X								6
	Knowledge of Places for Food and Beverages					X	X				X				X		X						5
Culture	Local Culture			X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		12
	Local Culinary Arts			X	X		X	X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		10
	Cultural Narratives	X	X			X					X			X		X							6
Training	Experience	X	X			X	X	X						X	X	X	X						10
	Training on Local Cuisine			X	X				X	X	X		X										6
Knowledge of Products	Recipe	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		13
	Organic Products			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		11
	Supply of Products	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		11
Knowledge of Places for Food and Beverages	Price	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X						10
	Menu	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		14
	Sanitary Conditions	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		14
	Taste		X			X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		8

THEME	Code	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	N
Problem-solving skills	Ability to Establish a Dialogue	X			X	X		X			X		X		X	X		X	X	X		10
	Mediation			X	X	X		X		X		X			X		X					8
	Ability to Propose a Solution	X			X				X	X	X	X	X	X								7
Communication	Ability to Persuade			X	X	X								X	X	X						6
	Use of Body Language				X				X	X			X									5
Empathy	Ability to Empathize	X	X						X	X	X	X	X	X							X	8
	Manner of Speaking	X	X						X	X	X		X									6
Recipe	Cooking Technique	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	18
	Preparation			X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					12
	Flavoring compounds	X						X						X				X	X			6
Culinary culture	Historical background			X		X			X	X	X		X				X	X	X			8
	Narratives/stories				X				X			X	X	X			X		X			5
	Social structure and cuisine				X				X	X			X									4