

Intercultural Anxiety as an Affective Mechanism in Professional Service Encounters: Training, Contact Frequency, and Communication Competence among Inbound Tour Guides

Min Lu¹, Songyu Jiang^{2*}, Jirawan Deeprasert³

¹*Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand*

Email ID: 1642110381108@rmutr.ac.th

^{2*}*Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand*

Email ID: jiang.song@rmutr.ac.th

³*Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand*

Email ID: jirawan.dee@rmutr.ac.th

Abstract

International tourism recovery has intensified the complexity of intercultural service encounters, making intercultural communication competence a critical professional capability for licensed inbound guides. This study examines how intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency influence intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides in southwest China, with intercultural anxiety serving as a mediating mechanism. A quantitative survey was conducted with 600 licensed tour guides engaged in inbound tourism services in southwestern China. The data were analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM). The results indicate that both intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency significantly reduce intercultural anxiety and directly enhance intercultural communication competence. Intercultural anxiety has a significant negative effect on intercultural communication competence and partially mediates the relationships between the two developmental factors and communication competence. These findings suggest that tour guides' intercultural communication competence is shaped not only by structured training and repeated intercultural interaction, but also by the reduction of anxiety, which enables guides to mobilise communication resources more effectively under service pressure. This study provides empirical support for a framework linking developmental conditions, affective mechanisms, and service competence in intercultural tourism service research.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication Competence; Intercultural Training Experience; Service Interaction Frequency; Intercultural Anxiety; Inbound Tour Guides

1. Introduction

With the recovery of international tourism and the continuous optimisation of China's inbound travel facilitation policies, cross-border tourism service has entered a stage of rapid revitalisation. In 2024, China received approximately 132 million inbound tourist visits, and this recovery continued in the first quarter of 2025, when inbound tourist visits reached 35.02 million, representing a 19.6% year-on-year increase (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2025). At the policy level, China has further improved travel convenience for foreign visitors by extending the visa-free transit stay to 240 hours and expanding the eligible ports and stay areas, which has strengthened the accessibility of inbound travel and increased the likelihood of intercultural service encounters (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2024). These policy and market changes indicate that tourism service is no longer shaped only by destination attractiveness, but also by the ability of frontline tourism workers to respond to culturally diverse visitors in real time. For licensed inbound tour guides, daily work increasingly involves cultural explanation, itinerary coordination, foreign-language communication, misunderstanding clarification, complaint response, and service recovery across different cultural backgrounds (Kapa et al., 2022). **Therefore, intercultural communication competence has become a core professional capability rather than a supplementary communication skill, because communication failures may directly affect tourist satisfaction, perceived service quality, destination image, and the competitiveness of international tourism destinations (Trang & Phuong, 2023).**

Southwest China provides a particularly meaningful context for examining this issue because the region combines rich ethnic and cultural resources, distinctive destination narratives, and growing inbound tourism service demands. Licensed inbound tour guides in this region often serve simultaneously as cultural interpreters, itinerary coordinators, service mediators, and frontline problem solvers. Their intercultural communication competence is therefore not limited to the ability to transmit information accurately, but is reflected in whether they can

communicate appropriately and effectively when visitors' expectations, communication styles, complaint expressions, and service evaluation standards differ across cultural backgrounds. However, the rapid recovery of cross-border tourism does not automatically mean that frontline intercultural service competence has developed at the same pace. In practice, some guides receive limited, fragmented, or overly general intercultural training, while others lack sufficient exposure to diverse intercultural service encounters. When dealing with culturally sensitive explanations, itinerary changes, complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery, guides may experience uncertainty, nervousness, and fear of negative evaluation. These conditions reveal a practical gap between increasing intercultural service demand and the uneven development of tour guides' intercultural communication competence.

Against this practical background, intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency can be understood as two key developmental conditions for tour guides' intercultural communication competence. Intercultural training experience provides structured or semi-structured preparation by helping guides understand cultural differences, learn appropriate communication strategies, and rehearse responses to complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery situations (Bennett, 2017). Service interaction frequency, by contrast, offers repeated exposure to real intercultural encounters, allowing guides to accumulate practical feedback, refine communication strategies, and become more familiar with culturally diverse service expectations (Qin & Zhang, 2025). Nevertheless, training and interaction do not automatically translate into competent intercultural communication. In high-pressure service encounters, guides may still experience intercultural anxiety when they are unsure about culturally appropriate behaviour, worried about being misunderstood, or concerned that communication mistakes may damage service evaluations (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Such anxiety may weaken confidence, reduce attentional control, encourage avoidance, and limit guides' ability to clarify meaning or repair misunderstandings during intercultural service encounters. Therefore, intercultural anxiety provides an important affective mechanism for explaining how intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency are translated into intercultural communication competence. This logic is also consistent with the simplified model of the present study, which positions intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency as two antecedent variables, intercultural anxiety as the mediating variable, and intercultural communication competence as the outcome variable.

Although previous studies have recognised the importance of intercultural communication competence in tourism and hospitality (Liu et al., 2022; Trang & Phuong, 2023), less attention has been paid to licensed inbound tour guides in southwest china as a distinct frontline service group. Existing research has often examined training, intercultural contact, or communication competence separately, while offering limited explanation of the affective process through which developmental conditions are converted into enacted competence. In particular, the mediating role of intercultural anxiety in linking intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency with intercultural communication competence remains insufficiently examined in the context of inbound guiding work. The current model therefore focuses on seven hypotheses: Two paths from intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency to intercultural anxiety, one path from intercultural anxiety to intercultural communication competence, two direct paths from the two antecedent variables to intercultural communication competence, and two mediation paths through intercultural anxiety.

To address this gap, this study examines how intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency influence intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides in southwest china, with particular attention to the mediating role of intercultural anxiety. Specifically, this study has three objectives:

- 1) To examine the effects of intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency on intercultural anxiety among licensed inbound tour guides in southwest china.
- 2) To examine the effects of intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, and intercultural anxiety on intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides in southwest china.
- 3) To test the mediating role of intercultural anxiety in the relationships between intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, and intercultural communication competence.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Intercultural communication competence in inbound guiding work is not a fixed personal attribute, but a service capability formed and displayed through repeated work-based learning and real interaction. Foundational intercultural communication research emphasises that competence should be evaluated through both appropriateness and effectiveness in specific cultural and situational contexts, rather than through general knowledge or communicative confidence alone (Koester & Lustig, 2015). Social cognitive theory explains capability development as a process shaped by environmental conditions, personal regulation, and behavioural

enactment, rather than by individual traits alone (Bandura, 2001). In the present context, intercultural training experience functions as a structured learning condition because it provides guides with cultural knowledge, response strategies, and opportunities to rehearse communication in situations such as complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery. Service interaction frequency functions as a practice-based exposure condition because repeated intercultural encounters allow guides to test responses, adjust communication strategies, and accumulate situational feedback. Intercultural communication competence is therefore understood as an enacted outcome that emerges when learning resources and repeated practice are converted into appropriate and effective communication performance in real tourism service encounters.

A learning-and-practice explanation remains incomplete, however, when intercultural service encounters involve uncertainty, evaluation pressure, and emotional tension. Anxiety and uncertainty management theory argues that effective intercultural communication depends on whether individuals can manage uncertainty about others' meanings and anxiety about their own communicative performance within a workable range (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). This logic is particularly important in tour guiding because guides may be unsure how visitors interpret politeness, dissatisfaction, apology, delay, or service failure, while also worrying that inappropriate responses may escalate complaints or damage service evaluations. Intercultural anxiety captures this affective constraint. When anxiety becomes salient, guides may narrow their attention, hesitate to clarify meanings, avoid deeper interaction, or rely on rigid scripts, even when they have received training or accumulated prior contact experience. In tourism service contexts, such uncertainty and emotional strain can weaken frontline workers' ability to transform prior experience into adaptive communication performance (Katsaros, 2025).

Taken together, the two theories offer a coherent explanation of both competence formation and competence enactment. Social cognitive theory clarifies how intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency provide the learning resources and practice opportunities through which communication competence can develop. Anxiety and uncertainty management theory clarifies why these developmental conditions may still fail to produce competent performance when anxiety disrupts attention, confidence, and flexible response. Within this integrated logic, intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency are not only direct developmental conditions for intercultural communication competence, but also conditions whose effects are partly channelled through the reduction of intercultural anxiety.

2.2 Hypothesis Development

Intercultural training experience refers to structured or semi-structured learning experiences through which licensed inbound tour guides acquire cultural knowledge, intercultural service norms, and practical strategies for handling culturally diverse service encounters (Liang, 2024). Service interaction frequency refers to the extent to which licensed inbound tour guides repeatedly engage in intercultural service interactions with international tourists and related service actors during routine inbound tourism service work (Almasooudi & Rahman, 2023). In inbound guiding, intercultural anxiety often arises when guides are uncertain about visitors' culturally shaped expectations, unsure whether their explanations or apologies are appropriate, or worried that service misunderstandings may escalate into complaints (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Intercultural training experience may reduce such anxiety by making culturally ambiguous service situations more interpretable, because scenario-based preparation provides guides with response repertoires for clarification, complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020). Training can also strengthen guides' perceived preparedness and control, which reduces the likelihood that culturally diverse encounters will be appraised as threatening or unmanageable. Service interaction frequency may reduce intercultural anxiety through repeated practice, because frequent encounters allow guides to observe how different visitors express dissatisfaction, request clarification, respond to apologies, and evaluate service recovery (Xiao et al., 2022). As guides accumulate practical feedback from real communication episodes, intercultural encounters become less unfamiliar and more predictable, which can lower perceived uncertainty and emotional tension. This reasoning leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Intercultural training experience negatively influences intercultural anxiety among licensed inbound tour guides.

H2: Service interaction frequency negatively influences intercultural anxiety among licensed inbound tour guides.

Intercultural communication competence refers to licensed inbound tour guides' ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in culturally diverse tourism service encounters, including cultural explanation, misunderstanding clarification, complaint response, expectation coordination, and service recovery (Koester & Lustig, 2015). In guiding work, this competence is enacted under time pressure and service-evaluation pressure, which means that guides must sustain attention, interpret visitors' meanings, and select context-appropriate responses during culturally sensitive interactions. Intercultural anxiety may undermine this competence because anxiety consumes cognitive resources and increases self-monitoring during intercultural communication

(Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). When guides are anxious, they may hesitate to ask follow-up questions, avoid deeper clarification, or rely on rigid scripts rather than adapting their responses to visitors' culturally shaped expectations. Such responses are especially damaging in complaint handling and service recovery because effective intercultural communication requires timely explanation, reassurance, apology, and negotiation. Intercultural training experience may directly strengthen intercultural communication competence because training provides guides with cultural knowledge, communication norms, response strategies, and rehearsal opportunities for difficult service situations (Urgun et al., 2025). When training is connected to real guiding scenarios, it can help guides develop practical communication repertoires for explaining cultural meanings, clarifying misunderstandings, and repairing service failures. Service interaction frequency may also directly strengthen intercultural communication competence because repeated contact with culturally diverse visitors provides practical feedback and opportunities to refine communication behaviour (Fan et al., 2022). Through frequent interaction, guides can develop stronger situational judgement, greater sensitivity to culturally shaped cues, and more flexible response strategies in real service encounters. This reasoning leads to the following hypotheses:

H3: Intercultural anxiety negatively influences intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides.

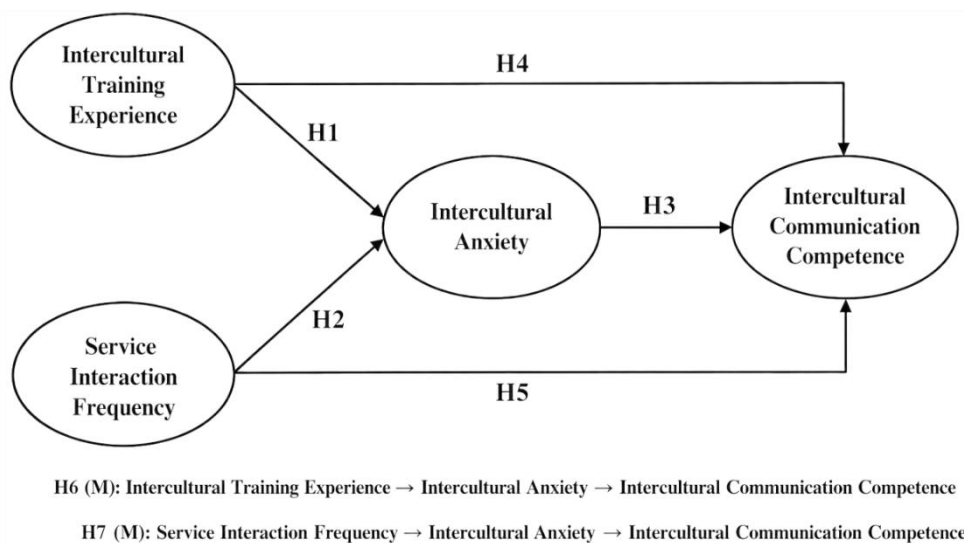
H4: Intercultural training experience positively influences intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides.

H5: Service interaction frequency positively influences intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides.

Intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency may provide licensed inbound tour guides with communication resources, but these resources do not automatically become competent performance in real service encounters. In intercultural guiding work, guides must enact their knowledge, strategies, and prior experience under uncertainty, time pressure, and service-evaluation pressure (Pu et al., 2023). When anxiety becomes salient, these resources may be difficult to mobilise because guides may focus on avoiding mistakes rather than interpreting visitors' meanings and selecting flexible responses (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Intercultural anxiety therefore represents an affective mechanism through which developmental conditions are converted into enacted intercultural communication competence. Intercultural training experience may support competence partly by reducing the anxiety attached to culturally uncertain service situations (Jerinic-Ivic et al., 2025). Scenario-based training can make difficult encounters more interpretable by preparing guides for clarification, complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery (Waqanimaravu & Arasanmi, 2020). When guides feel better prepared, they are less likely to appraise culturally sensitive encounters as uncontrollable or threatening. Lower anxiety then allows guides to allocate more attention to visitors' meanings, maintain confidence during difficult interactions, and select more flexible responses in real service situations. In this process, intercultural anxiety functions as the affective pathway through which training experience is translated into intercultural communication competence. Service interaction frequency may also support competence through an affective pathway, but its source lies in practice-based familiarity rather than structured preparation. Frequent intercultural encounters expose guides to recurring patterns of visitor expectations, complaint expressions, clarification requests, and service-recovery evaluations (Liang, 2024). As these encounters become more familiar and less unpredictable, guides are more likely to experience reduced anxiety and stronger perceived control in intercultural communication. Reduced anxiety then enables guides to use accumulated interaction experience more flexibly in clarifying misunderstandings, adjusting communication strategies, and maintaining appropriate and effective service relationships. This reasoning leads to the following hypotheses:

H6: Intercultural anxiety mediates the relationship between intercultural training experience and intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides.

H7: Intercultural anxiety mediates the relationship between service interaction frequency and intercultural communication competence among licensed inbound tour guides.



4) Figure 1. Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Participants and Sampling

The subjects of this study were licensed inbound tour guides working in Southwest China, specifically in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Chongqing and Tibet/Xizang. Eligible respondents had to have a valid tour guide qualification or licence, be currently employed in inbound guiding work, and have recent first-hand experience in cross-border or intercultural tourism service communication. Guides whose work was limited to domestic same-language guiding, administrative support, sales or logistics and did not directly handle inbound services were excluded.

A province-based stratified quota sampling method was used in conjunction with purposive field recruitment and eligibility screening for this study, as a complete and publicly available sampling frame of licensed inbound tour guides with recent cross-cultural service experience was unavailable. The target sample size was set at 600 respondents, and based on the reference distribution of the licensed-tour-guide workforce in the five Southwest China regions, these were allocated: Yunnan (190), Sichuan (194), Guizhou (86), Chongqing (96), and Tibet/Xizang (34). Cooperate with travel agencies and tourism enterprises to organise guide associations, tour-operation networks and field contact points for respondent recruitment. All questionnaires were filtered based on the eligibility criteria, and the final dataset of valid responses for analysis reached 600. Licensed inbound tour guides in this study were defined as licensed guides who had recently participated in or provided services for foreign tourists in China. Eligibility was determined by self-reporting licence status, current job, recent inbound service experience, and service language or market information.

3.2 Questionnaire and Measurement

The four contents of the questionnaire were: intercultural training experience, frequency of service interaction, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence. A total of 30 indices will be used to measure in this study. Frequency of service interaction in this study refers to how often licensed inbound tour guides have cross-cultural service interactions with international tourists and related service entities during inbound tourism service encounters, such as itinerary explanation, service coordination, complaint handling, emergency communication and service recovery. Excluding the frequency of service interaction, all other constructs were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree". The items were related to the work of licensed inbound tour guides in southwest China, including cultural explanation, guest communication, misunderstanding clarification, complaint handling, service coordination, and service recovery.

The ten indicators of intercultural training experience are shown below. The above indicators were used to evaluate whether the intercultural training focused on practical communication skills, addressed real intercultural service problems, employed scenario simulations or case-based practice, provided shared response strategies, offered follow-up feedback or coaching, promoted confident participation, fostered initiative in addressing intercultural misunderstandings, supported the sharing of intercultural service knowledge and strategies, reflected the quantity of training received in the past 12 months, and showed how recently the training was conducted in relation to the current needs of the inbound tourism market (Abdelhamied, 2019).

Service interaction frequency had 7 indicators. These indicators evaluated the frequency of support and coordination provided by guides for the service needs of culturally diverse tourists, whether culturally diverse guests or guest-related cases were referred to other departments or partner organisations, how often work-related service information was shared, how often repeated communications were made to coordinate services for culturally diverse tourists, how intensively intercultural service communication took place, whether interaction occurred with tourists or service providers from different cultures, and in what circumstances of specific service situations such as itinerary explanation, complaint handling, emergency coordination, or service recovery intercultural interactions occurred (Liang & Zhang, 2011).

Intercultural anxiety had 5 items. The above items aimed to determine whether guides felt stressed or nervous when communicating with tourists and clients from different cultures, whether they were afraid to speak up during service provision, whether they had confused or scattered thoughts in cross-cultural service situations, and whether they felt uneasy in such communications; no fear of speaking up was designated as a reverse-coded item (Rimkeeratikul, 2023).

The 8 indicators of intercultural communicative competence were used. These items examined whether the guides could achieve their communication goals through rational communication and service-relevant speech acts, such as requests, refusals, apologies, expectation management, timely clarification of misunderstandings, preservation of guests' dignity during complaints and service recovery, avoidance of cultural overgeneralisation, reflection on how one's own culture affects service communication, and recognition that others' responses may be rooted in different cultural values and beliefs (Jin, 2023).

3.3 Data Analysis and Processing Procedures

All responses were screened for eligibility, missing values, inconsistent qualification information and obvious response-pattern problems before the formal analysis. Then, a series of analyses was performed on the dataset: descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic and professional attributes of the respondents; reliability and validity were tested via Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, factor loadings, average variance extracted and discriminant validity tests; structural equation modelling was applied to examine the five direct paths among intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence; and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to assess the two indirect effects through intercultural anxiety. To enhance the robustness of the structural model, gender, age, education level, province, guiding experience and the main service language/market were added as control variables because these demographic and professional attributes may affect intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence. Gender, age, education level, province, guiding experience and the main service language/market were included as control variables in the structural model to reduce the possible impact of demographic and professional differences on intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence. Before the principal investigation, 50 licensed inbound tour guides who met the same conditions as those in the main sample were selected for a pilot test. The pilot results showed acceptable preliminary measurement quality: the standardised factor loadings of intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence ranged from 0.68-0.84, 0.70-0.83, 0.67-0.81 and 0.69-0.85 respectively. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.91 for intercultural training experience, 0.86 for service interaction frequency, 0.88 for intercultural anxiety, and 0.92 for intercultural communication competence; the corresponding composite reliability values were 0.90 - 0.94 and the mean values were 0.62 - 0.69. The above results are higher than the general acceptance criteria of 0.70 for Cronbach's α and composite reliability and 0.50 for average variance extracted (AVE), indicating that the questionnaire has good reliability and is suitable for the formal survey. Minor modifications to the wording were made after the pilot test to enhance the clarity and relevance of the items for the full-scale data collection.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical Considerations. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the approximate time needed to complete the questionnaire, and their right to withdraw at any time before submitting their answers. Consent was obtained from the subjects for data collection. No personal information was collected, and all the answers will only be used for study. The questionnaire did not have to disclose private data from the respondents or confidential information about their employers or identifiable tourist cases. Safely store the data and, in an aggregated manner, protect the identity and confidentiality of the respondents.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the demographic and professional features of the 600 licensed inbound tour guides in the final sample. The table will be used to verify that the sample corresponds to the intended research population and

whether it covers the regions, professions and service markets sufficiently for the following SEM analysis. The above demographics and occupations have been included as control variables in the structural model because they may affect intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication ability.

The proportion of men to women was about 60:40, so there were about 327 men and 273 women. In terms of age, the group aged 26-35 was the largest (39.3%), followed by those aged 36-45 (29.5%), and thus most of the participants fell within the main working age of the tour guide profession. In terms of education, 388 of the respondents had a bachelor's degree (64.7%), and 125 had a master's degree or higher (20.8%); thus, the sample was reasonably educated and capable of completing the questionnaire.

The distribution of regions met the planned sampling quota in Southwest China. The respondents were from Yunnan (31.7%), Sichuan (32.3%), Guizhou (14.3%), Chongqing (16.0%), Tibet/Xizang (5.7%), etc., and thus did not have an excessive concentration in a single province or municipality. Among the guidance experience groups, 33.0% of the respondents have worked here for 6-10 years and 22.0% for more than 10 years. Therefore, more than half of the sample had been working as a professional guide for at least six years. For the main service language or market, English was the most common category at 44.7%, followed by Thai at 13.0%, Japanese at 11.5%, Korean at 10.3%, French at 6.2%, and other languages or markets accounted for 14.3%. The overall structure of the sample was suitable for analyzing the intercultural training experience, frequency of service interaction, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence of licensed inbound guides in Southwest China.

Table 1. Sample Information

Category	Item	N	%
Gender	Male	327	54.5
	Female	273	45.5
Age	18–25	98	16.3
	26–35	236	39.3
	36–45	177	29.5
	46 or above	89	14.9
	Diploma or below	87	14.5
Education Level	Bachelor's degree	388	64.7
	Master's degree or above	125	20.8
	Yunnan	190	31.7
Province / Municipality	Sichuan	194	32.3
	Guizhou	86	14.3
	Chongqing	96	16
	Tibet/Xizang	34	5.7
	Less than 3 years	112	18.7
Guiding Experience	3–5 years	158	26.3
	6–10 years	198	33
	More than 10 years	132	22
	English	268	44.7
Main Service Language / Market	Thai	78	13
	Japanese	69	11.5
	Korean	62	10.3
	French	37	6.2
	Others	86	14.3

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the 30 observed measurement items. The above analysis has been carried out to determine the mean, standard deviation and distribution of the data before reliability, validity and structural model tests.

The range of the mean scores for intercultural training experience was 3.43 - 3.76, and most respondents had a moderately positive experience of the training. Items with high frequency of service interaction had mean values between 3.46 and 3.74, indicating that the respondents had relatively frequent cross-cultural service contact. The range of intercultural anxiety items was 2.96 - 3.34, and therefore, the level of anxiety was moderate rather than very high or very low. The mean values of the recorded ranges for intercultural communication competence were 3.63 and 3.81, showing that most respondents felt reasonably competent in cross-cultural service communication.

The standard deviations were between 0.86 and 1.08, so the responses had a certain spread and were not all close to the same scale. The range of skewness values was -0.61 to 0.19, and the range of kurtosis values was -0.71 to -0.08. As skewness and kurtosis values within ± 2 are generally regarded as acceptable for normality assessment in SEM, the results did not show a significant deviation from normality. The reverse-coded item IA5R had been recoded prior to reliability, validity and structural model tests. All of them, together, were suitable for further statistical analysis according to the descriptive results.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Measurement Items

Variable	Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intercultural Training Experience	ITE1	3.71	0.91	-0.42	-0.31
	ITE2	3.64	0.96	-0.38	-0.46
	ITE3	3.58	0.98	-0.29	-0.52
	ITE4	3.67	0.92	-0.44	-0.22
	ITE5	3.49	1.01	-0.27	-0.61
	ITE6	3.76	0.89	-0.51	-0.18
	ITE7	3.62	0.94	-0.36	-0.4
	ITE8	3.69	0.93	-0.47	-0.25
	ITE9	3.43	1.04	-0.21	-0.68
	ITE10	3.55	0.97	-0.32	-0.51
Service Interaction Frequency	IF1	3.62	0.95	-0.39	-0.34
	IF2	3.46	1.02	-0.25	-0.63
	IF3	3.57	0.99	-0.31	-0.55
	IF4	3.66	0.93	-0.43	-0.29
	IF5	3.74	0.88	-0.54	-0.16
	IF6	3.69	0.91	-0.48	-0.23
	IF7	3.51	1	-0.28	-0.59
Intercultural Anxiety	IA1	3.11	1.05	0.12	-0.71
	IA2	2.96	1.08	0.19	-0.69
	IA3	3.04	1.02	0.15	-0.63
	IA4	3.08	1.07	0.11	-0.7
	IA5R	3.34	0.98	-0.26	-0.44
Intercultural Communication Competence	ICC1	3.78	0.88	-0.56	-0.12
	ICC2	3.69	0.91	-0.43	-0.28
	ICC3	3.72	0.89	-0.49	-0.21
	ICC4	3.66	0.94	-0.38	-0.35

ICC5	3.63	0.96	-0.35	-0.42
ICC6	3.75	0.87	-0.52	-0.17
ICC7	3.7	0.9	-0.46	-0.26
ICC8	3.81	0.86	-0.61	-0.08

4.2 Reliability and Data Suitability Analysis

Table 3 shows the internal-consistency reliability of the four constructs. Cronbach's α was employed to verify whether the items in each construct were consistently associated with the same underlying factor. A Cronbach's α of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for quantitative research, and a value exceeding 0.80 is generally regarded as good internal consistency.

Based on the above analysis, the ten items of the intercultural training experience showed strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's α of 0.923. Service interaction frequency achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.884, and intercultural anxiety was 0.872; both met the required conditions. Intercultural Communication Ability also showed good reliability and had a Cronbach's α of 0.918. Since all four constructs had alpha values greater than 0.70, the reliability analysis showed that the measurement items were internally consistent and suitable for the following tests of validity and model.

Table 3. Reliability Analysis

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Intercultural Training Experience	10	0.923
Service Interaction Frequency	7	0.884
Intercultural Anxiety	5	0.872
Intercultural Communication Competence	8	0.918

Table 4 shows the KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity to determine whether the data set is suitable for factor analysis. The KMO value indicates the degree of sampling suitability; a value of 0.70 or more is considered acceptable, 0.80 or higher is relatively good, and 0.90 or more is considered excellent.

The KMO value of this study was 0.949, so it was suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant; approximately $\chi^2 = 12483.615$, degrees of freedom (df) = 435, and $p < 0.001$. Therefore, it can be seen that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that the observed variables have sufficient common variance. Therefore, the dataset was suitable for confirming factor analysis.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Result
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.949
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-square	12483.615
df	435
Sig.	< 0.001

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 5 shows the goodness-of-fit indices of the four-factor measurement model. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine whether the observed indicators appropriately represented the four latent constructs of intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence.

Some general-purpose goodness-of-fit indices were employed in the model assessment. The χ^2/df value should be less than 3.00; RMSEA should be less than 0.08; and GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI should all exceed 0.90. All of the above indicators met the requirements: $\chi^2/df = 2.086$, RMSEA = 0.043, GFI = 0.918, AGFI = 0.904, NFI = 0.931, TLI = 0.956, and CFI = 0.961. The above values show that the measurement model fits the data reasonably well, and the four constructs are reasonably represented by their corresponding observed items.

Table 5. Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference Standard	< 3	< 0.08	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90
Result	2.086	0.043	0.918	0.904	0.931	0.956	0.961

Table 6 shows the results of convergent validity, including standardised factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted. Convergent validity is used to determine if the items that are supposed to measure the same thing are indeed related to that thing. Factor loadings of 0.60 or higher are generally considered acceptable; CR values above 0.70 indicate good construct reliability, and AVE values exceeding 0.50 show that convergent validity has been achieved.

The standardised factor loadings were between 0.638 and 0.832, so all the items loaded reasonably on their respective constructs. The corresponding CR values for intercultural training experience, service interaction frequency, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication competence were 0.914, 0.886, 0.864 and 0.913, respectively. All of these values exceeded the 0.70 threshold. The AVE values are also higher than the recommended level; they are 0.516, 0.528, 0.561 and 0.567. Based on the above results, the four constructs showed acceptable convergent validity, and the retained items collectively accounted for a significant portion of the variance in their respective latent variables.

Table 6. Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Intercultural Training Experience	ITE1	0.742	0.914	0.516
	ITE2	0.718		
	ITE3	0.691		
	ITE4	0.764		
	ITE5	0.638		
	ITE6	0.817		
	ITE7	0.703		
	ITE8	0.736		
	ITE9	0.652		
	ITE10	0.713		
Service Interaction Frequency	IF1	0.724	0.886	0.528
	IF2	0.672		
	IF3	0.706		
	IF4	0.751		
	IF5	0.806		
	IF6	0.735		
	IF7	0.683		
Intercultural Anxiety	IA1	0.758	0.864	0.561
	IA2	0.686		
	IA3	0.731		
	IA4	0.823		
Intercultural Communication Competence	IA5R	0.742	0.913	0.567
	ICC1	0.781		

ICC2	0.724
ICC3	0.746
ICC4	0.681
ICC5	0.708
ICC6	0.832
ICC7	0.752
ICC8	0.79

Table 7 shows the discriminant validity results according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity was used to verify that the four constructs were not correlated with one another. Based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than the correlation of that construct with others.

The diagonal values are the square roots of AVE. As shown in Table 6, based on the AVE values, the diagonal elements are 0.718 for intercultural training experience, 0.727 for service interaction frequency, 0.749 for intercultural anxiety, and 0.753 for intercultural communication competence. These values were relatively large compared with the corresponding inter-construct correlations. For instance, the correlation between the experience of intercultural training and intercultural communication ability was 0.547, which was lower than the square root of AVE for both constructs. The absolute correlation between the frequency of service interaction and intercultural anxiety was also 0.419, which was lower than the square root of AVE for both variables. Therefore, the four constructs exhibited good discriminant validity.

Table 7. Discriminant Validity

Construct	ITE	IF	IA	ICC
ITE	0.718			
IF	0.481	0.727		
IA	-0.371	-0.419	0.749	
ICC	0.547	0.503	-0.462	0.753

Note. ITE = intercultural training experience; IF = service interaction frequency; IA = intercultural anxiety; ICC = intercultural communication competence. Diagonal values are the square roots of AVE.

4.4 Structural Model and Direct Effects

Table 8 shows the goodness-of-fit indices of the structural model. Therefore, the hypothesis model which shows the connection among intercultural training experience, frequency of service interaction, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication ability, is suitable for the data after this analysis.

The same fitting standards as those in the measurement model were used. The results show that $\chi^2/df = 2.214$ and RMSEA = 0.045; both are within the acceptable range. The incremental fit indices also met the recommended criteria: GFI = 0.912, AGFI = 0.901, NFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.948 and CFI = 0.954. Although these values were slightly lower than the measurement model fit indices, all the indices met the acceptable standards. Therefore, the structural model can be used as the foundation for testing the direct and mediating effects of the above hypotheses.

Table 8. Structural Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI
Reference Standard	< 3	< 0.08	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90
Result	2.214	0.045	0.912	0.901	0.924	0.948	0.954

Table 9 shows the direct-effect results for H1-H5. This paper wishes to find out whether intercultural training experience and the frequency of service contact are associated with changes in intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication ability, as well as whether intercultural anxiety predicts a decrease in intercultural communication ability. A direct path was determined to be statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05.

First of all, the results show that intercultural training experience is negatively correlated with intercultural anxiety ($\beta = -0.247$, $CR = -5.744$, $p < 0.001$) and supports H1. Frequency of service interaction was also negatively associated with intercultural anxiety ($\beta = -0.315$, $CR = -7.683$, $p < 0.001$) and supported H2. Based on the above analysis, guides with more extensive cross-cultural training and a greater number of cross-cultural service experiences were less anxious about culture.

The path from intercultural anxiety to intercultural communication competence was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.286$, $CR = -7.333$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H3. Therefore, it can be inferred that a higher degree of intercultural anxiety is related to lower intercultural communication ability. On the other hand, intercultural training experience also significantly improved intercultural communication competence ($\beta = 0.354$, $CR = 8.634$, $p < 0.001$) and supported H4. Service interaction frequency also positively correlated with intercultural communication competence ($\beta = 0.238$, $CR = 5.289$, $p < 0.001$) and thus supported H5. In short, the direct-effect results show that the training and interaction provided the conditions for development, and intercultural anxiety acted as a negative affective constraint on communication competence.

Table 9. Direct Effects Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	SE	CR	p-value	Decision
H1	ITE $\rightarrow$ IA	-0.247	0.043	-5.744	< 0.001	Supported
H2	IF $\rightarrow$ IA	-0.315	0.041	-7.683	< 0.001	Supported
H3	IA $\rightarrow$ ICC	-0.286	0.039	-7.333	< 0.001	Supported
H4	ITE $\rightarrow$ ICC	0.354	0.041	8.634	< 0.001	Supported
H5	IF $\rightarrow$ ICC	0.238	0.045	5.289	< 0.001	Supported

Note. The model controlled for gender, age, education level, province, guiding experience, and main service language/market.

Table 10 shows the explained variance of the endogenous variables. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in the model that can be explained. It shows the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables.

Intercultural training experience and frequency of service interaction jointly accounted for 27.8% of the variance in intercultural anxiety ($R^2 = 0.278$). Therefore, both of the above development conditions can be said to be relevant in explaining the affective mechanism. Intercultural training experience, frequency of service interaction and intercultural anxiety jointly accounted for 52.6% of the variance in intercultural communication competence ($R^2 = 0.526$). Therefore, the model has accounted for more than half of the variation in the dependent variable. Generally speaking, the R^2 values show that the constructed models are relatively good at explaining variations in both intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication ability.

Table 10. Explained Variance

Endogenous Variable	Predictors	R^2
Intercultural Anxiety	ITE, IF	0.278
Intercultural Communication Competence	ITE, IF, IA	0.526

4.5 Mediation Analysis

Table 11 shows the bootstrapping results of the mediation analysis. Therefore, this study examines whether intercultural anxiety is a mediator in the path from intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency to intercultural communication competence. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to obtain a robust test for indirect effects, and a normal distribution of the indirect effect was not assumed. Mediation occurs if the 95% confidence interval does not include 0.

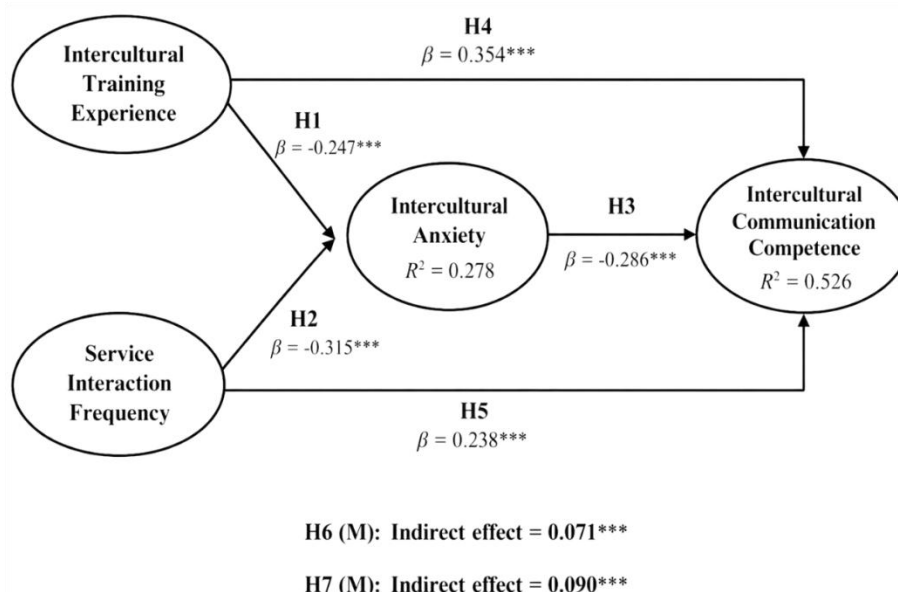
The indirect effect of intercultural training experience on intercultural communication competence through intercultural anxiety was significant (indirect effect = 0.071, Boot SE = 0.019, 95% CI [0.037, 0.112], $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H6. The indirect effect of service interaction frequency on intercultural communication competence via intercultural anxiety was also statistically significant (indirect effect = 0.090, Boot SE = 0.022, 95% CI [0.049, 0.138], $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H7. As shown above, after adding intercultural anxiety, the direct effects of intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency on intercultural communication competence were still significant; thus, both mediation effects can be regarded as partial mediations.

According to the results of mediation, intercultural training experience and the frequency of service interaction both directly and indirectly enhanced intercultural communication ability by reducing intercultural anxiety. This result supports the proposed affective mechanism, that is to say, intercultural anxiety explains some of the changes that occur in learning-based and practice-based conditions when they are enacted as intercultural communication competence.

Table 11. Mediation Effects Results

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value	Decision
H6	ITE → IA → ICC	0.071	0.019	0.037	0.112	< 0.001	Supported
H7	IF → IA → ICC	0.09	0.022	0.049	0.138	< 0.001	Supported

Figure 2 shows the structural model results by combining direct effects, explained variance and mediation effects in a single figure. According to the above results, both intercultural training experience and the frequency of service interaction negatively affect intercultural anxiety, and intercultural anxiety is also associated with lower intercultural communication competence. At the same time, intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency are also positively correlated with intercultural communication competence; thus, training-based learning and practice-based exposure directly and indirectly contribute to the development of this competence. The R^2 values show that the model explains 27.8% of the variance in intercultural anxiety and 52.6% of the variance in intercultural communication competence. H6 and H7 have also shown that the significant indirect effects of these two variables indicate that intercultural anxiety serves as a partial mediator in the path from intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency to intercultural communication competence.



Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure 2. Structural Model Results for Intercultural Communication Competence among Licensed Inbound Tour Guides

5. Discussion

Based on the above results, we have found a reasonable explanation for the construction of intercultural communication ability among licensed inbound tour guides in Southwest China. First, intercultural training experience and frequency of service interaction were found to significantly reduce intercultural anxiety; thus, both organised learning and multiple service encounters help guides manage the uncertainty in cross-cultural interactions. According to the theory of anxiety and uncertainty management, the above results are in line with

the hypothesis that anxiety will decrease when individuals are more able to foresee the meaning and assess their own communication responses in cross-cultural interactions (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). In the present study, intercultural training experience seems to reduce anxiety by improving guides' preparedness for culturally sensitive communication, complaint handling, misunderstanding repair, and service recovery, and service interaction frequency lowers anxiety through increased familiarity with various visitor expectations and service communication patterns.

Second, intercultural anxiety negatively affected intercultural communication competence; therefore, anxiety was not only an emotion but also a barrier to interpreting meaning, staying calm, and responding flexibly in real service situations for a guide. Therefore, intercultural competence can be viewed as the behaviour people show when interacting in different cultural environments rather than as having general cultural knowledge (Koester & Lustig, 2015). Third, intercultural training experience and the frequency of service interaction were both positively correlated with intercultural communication competence, thus supporting the social cognitive theory that competence develops through learning resources, behaviour practice and feedback-based adjustment (Bandura, 2001).

The Path coefficients are used to investigate these reasons further. The frequency of service interaction was negatively associated with intercultural anxiety, and this relationship was stronger than that with the experience of intercultural training; thus, repeated actual contact with international tourists may be more effective in reducing uncertainty and emotional stress. Intercultural training experience was more closely related to intercultural communication competence than the frequency of service interaction; therefore, structured training may offer an organised system of communication strategies that exposure alone cannot provide. Therefore, inbound tour guides need to be exposed to cross-cultural service environments repeatedly and participate in professional-design training to enhance their quality of intercultural services.

Based on the results of mediation analysis, intercultural anxiety partially mediates the effect of both developmental conditions and intercultural communication ability on one another. Therefore, through cross-cultural training experiences and various service interactions, guides will be able to learn knowledge and strategies on how to better use these resources under pressure, and at the same time, the emotional barrier preventing guides from using these resources will also be reduced. In short, according to the above results, to cultivate the tour guides' cross-cultural communication ability, it is necessary to create a good external environment and regulate one's own emotions; otherwise, cross-cultural anxiety will arise and hinder the implementation of training and practice in service.

6. Theoretical Implications

Research on intercultural communication competence has been extended to inbound tourism service encounters, and now it needs to be demonstrated under conditions of cultural differences, service pressure and real-time visitor evaluations. Most existing ICC studies have viewed competence as a multi-faceted set of individual abilities, including cultural knowledge, attitude, awareness, motivation and communication skills (Deardorff, 2006). Conceptual reviews have further highlighted the complexity of ICC, but most of this literature still discusses competence at a general level of interpersonal, educational or cross-cultural adaptation rather than within high-pressure tourism service encounters (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Recently, research in tourism and hospitality has also found that employees who serve foreign visitors may overestimate their own cross-cultural awareness; thus, self-assessed ability is not always the same as actual service ability (Koc, 2021). This study extends the above research by applying the Internet Case Study (ICS) method to the work of licensed inbound tour guides and believes that competence is not merely an attribute of individuals, but a manifestation through cultural explanation, misunderstanding clarification, expectation coordination, complaint response and service recovery. Based on the above, the application of intercultural competence in various environments needs to be considered, as well as its actual results (Koester & Lustig, 2015). More importantly, the results show that in inbound guiding work, ICC should be conceptualised as a context-dependent professional performance that is realised by mobilising intercultural resources under service pressure. Recently, an increasing number of demands have emerged for the practical application of ICC theory in various fields; that is to say, professional environments where cultural differences affect service quality and customer satisfaction are particularly prone to such problems (Yazıcı Ayyıldız, 2024). In light of the above, ICC research has shifted from abstract cultural awareness to investigating how competence is manifested in frontline tourism interactions, and the impact of communication failure on service quality and visitor perception is now evident.

Secondly, this paper extends the theoretical system of ICC development by distinguishing between intercultural training experience and the frequency of service interactions as two types of developmental paths. Many previous studies have considered training, exposure, contact and experience as general good conditions for the development of intercultural competence, but they have not always clarified whether this competence results from organised learning resources or repeated real-life practice. According to Social Cognitive Theory, capability development

is a process that occurs under certain environmental conditions, self-regulation and behaviour enactment (Bandura, 2001). Later work further clarifies that human agency manifests as intentional behaviour, self-reflection and adaptive regulation; it helps us understand how learning and experience turn into performance (Bandura, 2001). In light of the above logic, intercultural training experience can be viewed as an engineered learning resource that offers structured preparation, cross-cultural knowledge, response strategies, scenario-based practice, and feedback support. Empirical hospitality research also supports the idea that training activities improve service quality and customer satisfaction, motivate customers to behave in a certain way, and thus can be considered a resource for developing staff capabilities (Abdelhamied, 2019). On the other hand, the frequency of service interaction is an emergent service-based practice that exposes guides to repeated conversations with visitors, different cultural expectations, complaint expressions and service recovery scenarios. Research on intergroup contact has shown that several times after the first encounter, the psychological distance decreases due to increased familiarity and a reduction in uncertainty; thus, the interaction is more likely to function as a learning resource than simple introduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Based on the above analysis, both factors increase the Internal Consistency of Correlates (ICC), but do so through different pathways. Intercultural training experience contributes through planned preparation and transferable response repertoires; service interaction frequency contributes by accumulating familiarity, situational judgment, and feedback-based behaviour modification. Thus, the study will refine the social cognitive explanation for the development of ICC by separating designed learning resources from emergent service-based practice and no longer consider experience as a uniform developmental input.

Third, this paper identifies intercultural anxiety as the emotional reason for the change in attitudes under altered circumstances of life and intercultural communication ability. According to the theory of anxiety and uncertainty management, people need to be able to handle the uncertainty of others' meanings and their own anxiety about communication performance in intercultural communication (Presbitero & Attar, 2018). Based on the comparison of intercultural theories, anxiety and uncertainty may also be problems in cross-cultural communication or within groups (Stephan et al., 1999). Recently, some empirical studies have found that intercultural anxiety is negatively related to the effectiveness of intercultural communication, and thus acts as a psychological barrier to cross-cultural interaction (Khukhlaev et al., 2022). Most of the previous research has viewed intercultural anxiety as merely a barrier to communication (Logan et al., 2014); however, this paper finds that anxiety is also linked to deficits in competence development. By placing intercultural anxiety within the developmental conditions and ICC, this study shows that intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency enhance competence by expanding guides' communication resources and reducing the affective burden that hinders the application of these resources. It can be seen that, in terms of theory, training-based knowledge and interaction-based experience do not automatically translate into proficient communication in real-life service situations. They need to be emotionally appealing in order to motivate behaviourally. With reduced anxiety, the guides will be able to pay more attention to their work, be more confident, clarify the meaning of culture-sensitive service, and respond flexibly. Therefore, intercultural anxiety should not be seen as a negative psychological phenomenon, but rather as an explanation for how learning-based and practice-based conditions are related to enacted service performance.

In short, this paper presents a research system of "developmental conditions, affective mechanisms and service qualities" to explore the application of ICC for licensed inbound tour guides. Social cognitive theory and anxiety and uncertainty management theory have been combined in this framework to demonstrate that the development of self-efficacy involves both the accumulation of competence resources and the affective conditions under which these resources are employed. In contrast to the previous studies that examine ICC as an all-encompassing individual ability, this study explores how ICC is realised in a particular frontline tourism service environment. In addition to studies that focus solely on training or contact, structured intercultural training experience and repeated service interaction frequency have been distinguished as two different developmental paths. Before this study, most research on anxiety in communication has treated it as a negative hindrance; however, it has now been discovered that intercultural anxiety is responsible for the gap between learning and applying knowledge in real work settings. The above studies have provided a particular case of how licensed inbound tour guides can use their training and experience in interaction to deliver high-quality cross-cultural service communication.

10. Practical Significance

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations for enhancing the intercultural communication ability of licensed inbound tour guides in Southwest China have been identified, such as intercultural training experience, frequency of service interaction, and intercultural anxiety. Based on the analysis above, the cultivation of intercultural communication ability for tourism enterprises and travel agencies should be based on scenario-based training systems rather than general guidance or sporadic policy education; real-life situations, such as communicating with visitors from different cultures, handling misunderstandings, managing complaints,

coordinating itineraries and providing service recovery, can be simulated in such training. Therefore, the quality of training can be improved by designing short but frequent modules on cross-cultural service scripts, apology strategies, clarification techniques, expectation management and culturally sensitive response routines; at the same time, follow-up coaching and post-incident feedback should be provided to help guides transform training into practical communication repertoires.

Tour guide associations and training institutions need to pay more attention to both the quantity and timeliness of continuing education, ensure that the training content is closely linked to the actual problems faced by inbound service staff, and otherwise fail to reduce their anxiety or improve their work efficiency. Destination management organisations and regional tourism authorities should consider the frequency of service interaction to develop a new way of building guiding competence: organises regular opportunities for intercultural contact, peer case sharing, supervised service practice and cross-market exposure so that interaction is a form of deliberate practice rather than cumulative stress. Frontline licensed inbound tour guides are at risk of negative impacts from intercultural anxiety, so they need to develop practical anxiety-management habits, such as preparing in advance of work, reflecting on difficult experiences after they occur, practising repair talk in advance, and gradually facing more complex cross-cultural service situations.

In short, the mediation results suggest that to improve intercultural communication ability, external development conditions need to be strengthened by providing suitable training and rich interaction platforms, and at the same time, emotional barriers that prevent guides from using these resources in high-pressure situations should be reduced. Enhance the cross-cultural communication skills of inbound tour guides in areas with diverse cultures and ethnic groups in Southwest China, provide culturally appropriate explanations, avoid unintentional offenses, and cultivate more positive perceptions among foreign visitors of these places to promote the harmonious development of tourism. The above practical paths can help tourism enterprises, professional training institutions, destination managers and individual guides reduce unnecessary communication failures, improve the quality of service recovery, strengthen the competitiveness of Southwest China's inbound tourism services, and promote more culturally sensitive development of inbound tourism.

11. Limitations and Future Research

Based on the above analysis, intercultural training experience and the frequency of service interactions can boost licensed inbound tour guides' intercultural communication ability directly and indirectly by alleviating intercultural anxiety. This shows a new type of emotional support for developing intercultural service skills, but also raises more problems that need to be solved. Because the current evidence comes from a cross-sectional survey, it can only reveal the structural relationships among training, interaction, anxiety and competence in a single moment in time and not how these relationships develop over time. Therefore, future research can use a long-term study design to determine whether cross-cultural training leads to a sustained reduction in anxiety, whether repeated cross-cultural interactions gradually accumulate into stable competence, and whether anxiety changes at different times in one's career or during a service period. Although self-reported data are appropriate for measuring the experience of training and exposure to interactions and anxiety, intercultural communication ability is finally displayed in actual service situations. In the future, based on the survey data, we will collect tourists' evaluations of guides, supervisors' ratings and service observations to determine whether the perceived abilities of the guides align with their actual communication behaviour. The other subject of study is licensed inbound tour guides in Southwest China, which has particular ethnic, cultural and cross-border tourism characteristics. In the future, other areas may be selected for model testing, an in-depth comparison of inbound guiding groups will be carried out, and it will be determined whether the same mechanism applies to domestic tour guides, freelance guides and tourism employees in all international service areas. Finally, the current model has intentionally reduced the scope by considering only training experience, frequency of service interaction, intercultural anxiety and intercultural communication ability. In the future, studies can extend this framework to include organisational support, service pressure, language proficiency, cultural intelligence, digital training resources and destination-level service systems to provide more comprehensive explanations of how intercultural communication competence is developed and applied in tourism service work.

12. Conclusion

Research has been conducted on how the experience of intercultural training and the frequency of service interactions affect the intercultural communication ability of licensed inbound tour guides in Southwest China, with intercultural anxiety as a mediating factor. Based on the survey of 600 people and structural equation modelling, both having participated in intercultural training and frequently receiving service interactions can reduce intercultural anxiety and improve intercultural communication ability. Intercultural anxiety, in turn, reduces intercultural communication ability; thus, anxiety serves as a type of emotional barrier to intercultural

tourism service at the frontline. Mediation analysis shows that intercultural anxiety partially mediates the paths of intercultural training experience and service interaction frequency on intercultural communication competence. Based on the above analysis, the development of tour guides' intercultural communication ability requires both systematic training and frequent contact with foreign cultures; at the same time, a low-stress environment must be created to enable effective learning. In short, the study has found a specific path of "developmental conditions – affective mechanism – service competence" and provided empirical evidence to explore how licensed inbound tour guides convert training and interaction experience into high-quality cross-cultural service.

References

1. Abdelhamied, H. (2019). The Impact of Training Activities on Quality of Service, Customer Satisfaction and Behavioral Intention. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 7(1), 135-148. <https://doi.org/10.15640/jthm.v7n1a14>
2. Almasooudi, M., & Rahman, S. (2023). International Tourists' Satisfaction with Tour Guide's Service Quality at Babylon Archaeological Site. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 18, 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.180102>
3. Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1>
4. Bennett, M. (2017). Intercultural Communication Training, Overview. *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0178>
5. Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. (2024). China's visa-free transit policy has been comprehensively relaxed and optimized. https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202412/content_6993129.htm
6. Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. (2025). Ministry of Culture and Tourism: The "China Travel" market demonstrates strong recovery momentum and broad development prospects. https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/bumen/202505/content_7024301.htm
7. Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>
8. Fan, D. X. F., Tsaur, S.-H., Lin, J.-H., Chang, T.-Y., & Tsa, Y.-R. T. (2022). Tourist Intercultural Competence: A Multidimensional Measurement and Its Impact on Tourist Active Participation and Memorable Cultural Experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(2), 414-429. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287520982372>
9. Gudykunst, W., & Nishida, T. (2001). Anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived effectiveness of communication across relationships and cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations - INT J INTERCULT RELAT*, 25, 55-71. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(00\)00042-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(00)00042-0)
10. Jerinic-Ivic, Z., Loufrani, S., & Elidrissi, D. (2025). Intercultural competence in the context of intercultural service encounters: A multilevel and dynamic approach. *European Management Journal*, 43(5), 850-864. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2024.08.010>
11. Jin, S. (2023). Unleashing the potential of social media: Enhancing intercultural communication skills in the hospitality and tourism context. *Sustainability*, 15(14), 10840. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151410840>
12. Kapa, M. G., de Crom, E., & Hermann, U. (2022). An Exploration of Tourist Guides' Competencies to Create Memorable Tourist Experiences. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 44, 1350-1358. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.44421-953>
13. Katsaros, K. (2025). Gen Z Tourism Employees' Adaptive Performance During a Major Cultural Shift: The Impact of Leadership and Employee Voice Behavior. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 171. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15020171>
14. Khukhlaev, O., Novikova, I., & Chernaya, A. (2022). Interpersonal Mindfulness, Intergroup Anxiety, and Intercultural Communication Effectiveness Among International Students Studying in Russia. *Front Psychol*, 13, 841361. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.841361>
15. Koc, E. (2021). Intercultural competence in tourism and hospitality: Self-efficacy beliefs and the Dunning Kruger effect. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82, 175-184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.04.003>

16. Koester, J., & Lustig, M. W. (2015). Intercultural communication competence: Theory, measurement, and application. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 48, 20-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.006>
17. Liang, R.-D., & Zhang, J.-S. (2011). The Effect Of Service Interaction Orientation On Customer Satisfaction And Behavioral Intention: The Moderating Effect Of Dining Frequency. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 24, 1026-1035. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.09.082>
18. Liang, W. H. (2024). Cultural friction during intercultural service encounters with Chinese tourists: perspectives from hotel employees in Australia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2318868. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2318868>
19. Liu, Y., Liu, J., & King, B. (2022). Intercultural communicative competence: Hospitality industry and education perspectives. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 30, 100371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2022.100371>
20. Logan, S., Steel, Z., & Hunt, C. (2014). Investigating the Effect of Anxiety, Uncertainty and Ethnocentrism on Willingness to Interact in an Intercultural Communication. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46, 39-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022114555762>
21. Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751-783. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>
22. Presbitero, A., & Attar, H. (2018). Intercultural communication effectiveness, cultural intelligence and knowledge sharing: Extending anxiety-uncertainty management theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 67, 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.08.004>
23. Pu, P., Cheng, L., Samarathunga, W., & Wall, G. (2023). Tour guides' sustainable tourism practices in host-guest interactions: when Tibet meets the west. *Tourism Review*, 78(3), 808-833. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-04-2022-0182>
24. Qin, L., & Zhang, H. (2025). Impact of rich cultural tourism experience on tourist satisfactions and behavioral intentions toward Ningxia's cultural heritage: Moderation role of perceived cultural distance. *Plos one*, 20(11), e0336220. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0336220>
25. Rimkeeratikul, S. (2023). Communication Apprehension and Intercultural Communication Apprehension among MA Students at a Public University in Bangkok. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 16(1), 429-447. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/263450>
26. Spitzberg, B., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, 2-52. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071872987.n1>
27. Stephan, W. G., Stephan, C. W., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1999). Anxiety in intergroup relations: a comparison of anxiety/uncertainty management theory and integrated threat theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(4), 613-628. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(99\)00012-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00012-7)
28. Trang, T. T. T., & Phuong, V. T. (2023). Needs Analysis About Intercultural Communicative Competence Among Undergraduate Tourism Students. *Journal Psycholinguist Research*, 52(6), 2599-2620. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-023-10012-1>
29. Urgun, D., Seidel, J., Vangeli, E., Borges, M., & de Oliveira, R. F. (2025). Exploring the impact of cross-cultural training on cultural competence and cultural intelligence: a narrative systematic literature review. *Frontiers Psychology*, 16, 1511788. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1511788>
30. Waqanimaravu, M., & Arasanmi, C. (2020). Employee training and service quality in the hospitality industry. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 23, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2020.1724850>
31. Xiao, B., Liang, C., Liu, Y., & Zheng, X. (2022). Service staff encounters with dysfunctional customer behavior: Does supervisor support mitigate negative emotions? *Frontiers Psychology*, 13, 987428. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.987428>
32. Yazıcı Ayyıldız, A. (2024). Service quality implications of cross-cultural differences in tourism and hospitality. *Multidisciplinary Business Review*, 17, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.35692/07183992.17.1.2>