



The Reality Of Tourist Guidance And Its Role In Developing The Tourism Sector In Iraq (An Analytical Applied Study)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Hussein Munaam Khalaf

Najaf Technical Institute, Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University 31001 Al-Najaf, Iraq Department of Tourism, Iraq

ABSTRACT

This research aims to highlight the vital role played by the tour guide in promoting and developing the tourism sector in Iraq, a country with rich historical, religious, and cultural tourism potential. However, this sector suffers from a lack of infrastructure and qualified human resources, particularly in the field of tour guiding.

The research also reviews the concept of tour guiding, the skills and functions of the guide, and their role in improving the tourist experience and promoting a positive image of the country, which positively impacts economic and cultural tourism revenues. It also discusses the reality of tour guiding in Iraq and the obstacles facing those working in this field, such as a lack of training, weak legislation, and a lack of community awareness of the importance of this role.

The researcher relied on a descriptive-analytical approach and used field tools such as questionnaires and interviews to collect data from a group of tour guides, officials, and tourists. The research concluded that the tour guide has a direct impact on tourists' feelings of comfort, satisfaction, and their intention to repeat visits, and that the lack of competent or absent guides negatively impacts Iraq's tourism image. The research concludes with practical recommendations for enhancing the role of the tour guide through training and qualification, updating legislation, and activating the role of governmental and private tourism institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most prominent economic and social sectors that contributes to supporting national income, providing job opportunities, and promoting cultural exchange between people. Iraq possesses unique tourism assets that combine religious, historical, and natural tourism. Its land is home to ancient civilizations such as the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian, in addition to holy sites that attract millions of visitors annually.

The tour guide is a pivotal element in the tourism process, serving as the link between the tourist and the local community. Through them, the country's cultural, historical, and civilizational image is conveyed professionally and humanly. A successful guide not only presents information but also contributes to building a positive impression of the country, which enhances the tourist's desire to return and share their experience with others. However, the reality of tourist guidance in Iraq suffers from several problems, most notably the lack of trained personnel, weak qualification programs, and the absence of regulation and legislation supporting the profession. Hence, the importance of this research, which aims to study and analyze the role of the tourist guide in developing the tourism sector in Iraq, identify the most prominent challenges facing it, and offer practical proposals for developing this vital role in light of local and international changes.

The profession of tourist guidance has evolved into a specialized field, requiring comprehensive academic and

professional preparation in light of the rapid changes in the modern tourist's expectations. The tourist is no longer satisfied with sightseeing alone; they also seek to understand the country's cultural, historical, and social context. The quality of tourist guidance is an essential indicator of the state's professionalism in managing its tourism sector. In the Iraqi context, attention to the human element—and specifically the role of the tourist guide—is an urgent necessity for rebuilding Iraq's image as a safe and culturally rich tourist destination, after decades of political and security challenges that have negatively impacted the tourism sector. The guide is the first to interact with the tourist and the last to bid them farewell. He represents the country's culture, values, and history, making him a crucial factor in shaping the tourists' experience and satisfaction.

This research also seeks to shed light on the effectiveness of the current role of the tour guide in Iraq and analyze the extent of his contribution to tourism development. This is achieved through a field study that surveys the opinions of stakeholders and identifies gaps and challenges, to provide scientific and practical recommendations that will support this vital sector. Therefore, this research represents a serious attempt to understand the relationship between tour guide performance and the reality of tourism in Iraq, as well as the extent to which investment in this aspect is feasible for developing the tourism sector and increasing its contribution to the national economy.

First: The Research Problem:

The tourism sector is one of the vital sectors that can effectively contribute to supporting the national economy and achieving sustainable development, especially in a country rich in historical, cultural, and religious heritage like Iraq. Despite Iraq's vast and diverse tourism potential, the tourism sector continues to suffer from weak performance and inadequate planning, declining tourist numbers, and low tourist satisfaction with the services provided, which negatively impacts the country's tourism image. Among the factors influencing the tourist experience and the quality of services offered, the role of the tour guide stands out as a key element in direct interaction with tourists and conveying a positive or negative image of the tourist destination. However, the reality of tour guiding in Iraq indicates limited specialized competencies, weak qualifications and training programs, and the absence of legal and regulatory frameworks that support this profession. Based on the above, the research problem is defined in the following central question:

What is the role of the tour guide in developing the tourism sector in Iraq?

This central question gives rise to several sub-questions, including:

1. How competent are the tour guides working in Iraq?
2. How does tour guide performance affect tourist satisfaction?
3. What are the obstacles that limit the effectiveness of tour guides in Iraq?
4. What are the possible means of enhancing the role of the tour guide in promoting Iraqi tourism?

Second: Research Hypotheses:

Given the importance of the role of the tour guide in developing the tourism sector, and based on the research problem, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

Main Hypothesis:

The tour guide plays an effective role in developing the tourism sector in Iraq.

Sub-Hypotheses:

1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the competence of the tour guide and tourist satisfaction with the tourism experience in Iraq.
2. Developing the skills of tour guides contributes to improving the quality of tourism services provided to tourists.
3. Organizational and administrative obstacles negatively impact the performance of tour guides in Iraq.
- 4- The absence of training and qualification programs leads to the weakening of the effectiveness of tourist guidance in Iraq.

Third: Research Objectives:

This research aims to highlight the importance of the role of the tourist guide in developing the tourism sector in Iraq, through a set of main and sub-objectives:

Main Objective:

Analyzing the role of the tourist guide in promoting and developing the tourism sector in Iraq.

Sub-objectives:

1. Identify the skills and qualifications required for a practical tourist guide.
2. Study the reality of tourist guidance in Iraq in terms of guides and their level of qualifications.
3. Determine the impact of tourist guide performance on tourist satisfaction and overall experience.
4. Monitor the challenges and obstacles facing the tourist guidance profession in Iraq.
5. Provide practical proposals for developing the tourist guidance profession to contribute to the development of the tourism sector.

Fourth: The Importance of the Research:

The importance of this research is highlighted by its shedding light on an essential and relatively neglected aspect of Iraqi tourism research: the role of the tour guide as an influential human element in the success of the tourism experience and in enhancing Iraq's image as a tourist destination. The importance of the research is evident in the following aspects:

1. Scientific and Academic Importance:

The research contributes to enriching the literature and studies related to tour guiding, particularly in the Iraqi context, where specialized studies in this field remain limited.

2. Applied and Practical Importance:

The research provides practical recommendations that can be implemented by tourism stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, tourism authorities, and training institutes, to develop the competence of tour guides.

3. Supporting Tourism Development:

It demonstrates how investing in the human element, represented by the tour guide, can positively impact the quality of tourism services and increase tourist satisfaction, thus contributing to the development of the tourism sector as a whole.

4. Enhancing Iraq's Tourism Image:

The research highlights the importance of the tour guide's role in correcting stereotypes about Iraq and conveying a civilized and humane image that reflects the country's richness and cultural diversity.

Fifth: Research Methodology:

The research relied on an organized scientific methodology to achieve its objectives and answer its questions, through the following:

1- Methodology Used: Descriptive Analytical Methodology:

This method was adopted due to its suitability for the nature of the research, as it enables the description of phenomena related to the reality of tour guiding in Iraq and the analysis of the tour guide's role and its impact on the development of the tourism sector.

2- Data Collection Tools:

A- Questionnaire: A questionnaire was prepared and directed to a sample of: (tour guides working in Iraq, tourists (local and foreign)), and some officials in tourism institutions

to gauge their opinions about the tour guide's performance and its impact on their tourism experience.

B- Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with several experts and workers in the tourism sector to obtain in-depth qualitative

information.

C- Field Observation:

Gathering direct observations from field trips within Iraq.

Sixth: Research Sample:

The research sample consists of several individuals involved in and specialized in tourism, including:

1. Tourist guides in several Iraqi governorates
2. Tourists (local and foreign) who have visited tourist sites in Iraq
3. Officials in governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with tourism
4. The sample will be selected either randomly or intentionally, depending on the availability of individuals and their connection to the study topic.

They do not necessarily represent all working or visiting groups in Iraq, but they constitute a qualitative indicator that can be built upon.

Seventh: Spatial and Locational Boundaries:

The study is limited to a select number of cities and tourist sites in Iraq, including Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, Mosul, and Erbil, to represent the religious, cultural, and historical diversity of tourism in the country.

Regarding the timeframe, this study was conducted in 2025, and its results may reflect the conditions and circumstances of that period. This means that future changes may affect the accuracy of some results.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of the Research

First: Tourism: Concept and Importance:

1- Concept:

Tourism is defined as an activity undertaken by individuals when they temporarily move to places outside their usual environment for recreation, entertainment, culture, or for purposes other than permanent work. Tourism encompasses various types, including religious, cultural, environmental, therapeutic, and sports tourism, making it a multifaceted activity where the economic, social, and cultural aspects intersect. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism refers to the activity of people traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for more than 24 hours and less than a year, for purposes other than work. Thus, tourism is one of the most prominent social and economic phenomena, constituting a major contributor to economies in various countries around the world (UNWTO, 2019, p. 15).

Al-Hassan defined it as: "A cultural and economic tool simultaneously, aiming to achieve cultural communication between peoples and drive development in countries with tourism potential" (Al-Hassan, 2020, p. 13). Al-Dulaimi, on the other hand, believes that tourism represents a direct reflection of a country's ability to improve its internal environment and effectively manage its natural and historical resources (Al-Dulaimi, 2018, p. 31).

2- Importance: The importance of tourism lies in its multidimensional role, which can be addressed as follows:

A- Economic Importance:

Tourism is one of the most significant sources of national income in many countries worldwide, contributing a substantial percentage of the gross domestic product. It stimulates other related sectors, such as transportation, hotels, traditional industries, and restaurants (Saleh, 2017, p. 44). It also creates direct (such as a tour guide) and indirect job opportunities in supporting sectors.

According to the World Tourism Organization's 2023 report, tourism's contribution to the global GDP reached approximately 9.1% and provided more than 300 million jobs (UNWTO, 2023, p. 6).

B- Social and Cultural Importance:

Tourism plays a significant role in broadening the horizons of local communities, enhancing their cultural awareness, and creating opportunities for cultural exchange between people. It also contributes to strengthening national belonging through pride in heritage and historical sites (Al-Hashemi, 2021, p. 18).

C- Heritage Preservation:

When tourism is managed sustainably, it encourages the protection of historical and natural monuments. It contributes to funding restoration and maintenance work, ensuring the sustainability of resources for future generations (UNESCO, 2020, p. 10).

C- A tool for sustainable development:

Tourism is a means of diversifying the national economy, especially in countries that rely on limited resources such as oil. It also contributes to the development of rural and remote areas by attracting investment and infrastructure (Al-Ani, 2019, p. 62).

C- Tourism in Iraq:

Iraq is one of the wealthiest countries in terms of archaeological and religious sites. However, this vital resource has not been optimally exploited due to security challenges and shortcomings in tourism policies. However, recent years have witnessed a gradual improvement in awareness of the need to activate the tourism sector, particularly in the areas of religious and cultural tourism, making the development of tourist guidance pivotal to the success of this approach (Al-Shammari, 2023, p. 27).

Second: The Concept of Tourist Guidance (Concept, Characteristics, Roles)

1- The Concept of Tourist Guidance

Tourist guidance is one of the most important human elements that influence the quality of tourism services provided to tourists, as it represents the primary link between the visitor and the tourist site. The World Tourism Organization defines it as: "An activity carried out by a qualified and specialized person to provide accurate and simplified information and explanations about tourist and cultural sites to visitors, while ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for them" (UNWTO, 2018, p. 9).

Al-Khatib (2020) defined tourist guidance as: "The art and science of leading and directing visiting individuals or groups in an organized manner, connecting them to the place they are visiting by providing purposeful cognitive, cultural, and behavioral content" (Al-Khatib, 2020, p. 14).

The tour guide represents an unofficial ambassador for their country, as they are the first person with whom the tourist interacts, and visitors often base their judgment of the quality of the experience on the guide's performance (Al-Asadi, 2019, p. 23).

2- Characteristics of an Effective Tour Guide

The tour guide profession requires a set of characteristics that combine academic qualifications, personal skills, and communication abilities. The most prominent of these characteristics are:

A- General culture and in-depth knowledge: Comprehensive familiarity with the country's history, geography, and heritage.

B- Professionalism and discipline: Punctuality and respect for professional etiquette and ethics.

C- Flexibility and adaptability: Dealing calmly with various types of tourists and trip circumstances.

D. Tactfulness in dialogue: The ability to convey information engagingly and clearly.

E. Physical and psychological readiness: To bear the burdens of long travel and interact with diverse groups.

F. Proficiency in foreign languages: Especially English, in addition to other languages, according to market needs.

A study by Abdul-Jabbar et al. (2022) showed that "95% of tourists evaluate their tourism experience based on the quality of the guide's guidance and interaction, more than their evaluation of the site itself" (Abdul-Jabbar et al., 2022, p. 61).

3- The Roles of the Tourist Guide:

The roles of the tour guide are numerous and varied depending on the tourist situation. They can be summarized as follows:

A- The educational and informational role: Providing tourists with accurate and helpful information about the sites

they visit.

B- The promotional role: Through good performance and a positive impression, the guide serves as a means of promoting the country as a tourist destination through the tourists themselves.

C- The organizational role: Organizing the tourist program and ensuring that trips proceed smoothly according to the schedule.

C- The preventive role: Educating tourists about local laws and regulations and avoiding risks.

C- The cultural interactional role: Creating a state of positive cultural interaction between visitors and the local community.

H- The humanitarian and psychological role: Providing psychological and moral support to tourists, especially in emergencies.

Al-Sayed (2021) emphasizes that "the tour guide does not only perform a functional role, but also constitutes an integral part of the tourist's emotional experience and may be the primary reason for repeating or refraining from visiting" (Al-Sayed, 2021, p. 37).

Chapter Two:

The History of Tourist Guiding in Iraq

First: The History of the Tourist Guiding Profession in Iraq

Iraq is a country with a profound cultural heritage spanning thousands of years. It has been the site of successive civilizations, such as the Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Islamic civilizations, making it rich in archaeological and religious sites. This historical diversity led to the need for the profession of tourist guidance, which gradually evolved from its traditional forms to a more organized and professional form. Here, we provide a brief overview of the development of the tourist guide profession in Iraq, from its origins to its contemporary reality.

The need for tourist guidance in Iraq dates back to the Sumerian and Babylonian eras, when priests or scribes accompanied visitors to temples and explained the rituals, inscriptions, and symbols to them. This constituted a primitive form of guidance (Abdul Aziz, 2003, p. 112). In the Islamic era, especially in cities such as Kufa and Najaf, jurists and scholars played a role in guiding pilgrims and visitors and explaining the importance of religious sites, which added a spiritual character to the profession (Al-Ani, 1998, p. 89). During the Ottoman era (1517–1917), Iraq was included in the plans of European travelers and orientalists who sought to discover the Near East during this period. Visitors sought the help of local guides who spoke Turkish or Arabic and knew the roads and important sites, especially in Baghdad and Mosul (William, 2009, p. 150). Despite the lack of official organization of the profession, this era constituted an essential prelude to the role of guidance as a means of understanding local heritage.

The twentieth century, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, witnessed a qualitative development in the tourism sector in Iraq. Tourism institutes and colleges were established, graduating specialized tour guides (Ministry of Culture, 1991, p. 32). Government companies, such as the "Travel and Tourism Company," organized visits to sites such as Babylon, Ur, and Hatra, under the supervision of professional guides (Hassan, 1995, p. 46). Interest also began to be drawn to the use of foreign languages to expand the international tourism base.

After 2003, the tourism sector suffered a near-total collapse due to the deteriorating security situation and instability, resulting in the closure of many tourism offices and institutes, as well as a marked decline in the number of qualified guides (UNESCO, 2006, p. 10). Nevertheless, individual and collective initiatives to revive the sector emerged in some relatively stable areas, such as the Kurdistan Region, Najaf, and Karbala (Department of Religious Tourism, 2022, p. 4). The tour guide profession faces several challenges, most notably: the lack of precise legal regulation, a dearth of specialized courses, and the decline of foreign language proficiency among many guides (Saeed, 2020, p. 76). However, there is increasing international support for tourism projects, indicating promising future opportunities for the profession's development, particularly in light of the interest in cultural heritage (UNDP, 2023, p. 23).

The history of the tour guide profession in Iraq demonstrates that it is deeply rooted in history; however, it requires a legal and professional framework that meets international standards. Through the support of specialized institutions and the intensification of training programs, Iraq can regain its position as a leading tourist destination, and the tour guide profession can once again play its role in conveying an actual image of Iraq to the world.

Second: The Reality of Tour Guides in Iraq

The reality of the tour guide profession in Iraq suffers from an apparent shortage of qualified tour guides, the result of long-standing accumulations dating back to periods of security disruption and institutional instability. Available statistics indicate that the number of officially licensed tour guides in Iraq does not exceed 300, most of whom are concentrated in specific cities such as Baghdad, Erbil, and Karbala (Saeed, 2020, p. 76). This shortage is attributed to the government's weak strategic planning for the qualification of tourism personnel, as well as the limited availability of specialized training programs and the inadequacy of curricula in tourism institutes compared to international standards (Hassan, 1995, p. 47). In terms of competence, a large percentage of those working in this field lack modern language skills, particularly in common languages such as English and French, which hinders Iraq's ability to professionally receive foreign tourists (UNDP, 2023, p. 23). The absence of a clear legal framework regulating the profession has allowed the emergence of uncertified guides at some religious and historical sites, posing a threat to the quality of tourism services provided (UNESCO, 2006, p. 11). Some individual initiatives, supported by civil society organizations and international organizations, have begun to develop the capabilities of guides through short-term workshops. Still, their impact remains limited and irregular at the national level (Department of Religious Tourism, 2022, p. 5).

Although Iraq is one of the wealthiest countries in the world in historical and religious tourism resources, the reality of tourist guidance there still suffers from significant structural and institutional challenges, limiting its contribution to the development of the tourism sector and negatively impacting the quality of the tourist experience.

This weakness is attributed to several factors, the most important of which are:

1. Lack of qualified personnel:

The number of formally and professionally employed tour guides in Iraq remains limited, and these personnel often lack specialized training or sufficient proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English and French, leading to a gap in communication with foreign tourists (Al-Shammari, 2021, p. 39).

A study by Al-Moussawi (2022) in the governorates of Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf showed that over 70% of tour guides work without accredited certificates or formal training, often relying on personal knowledge or limited field experience (Al-Moussawi, 2022, p. 51).

2. Lack of institutional and legislative regulation:

Iraq lacks an adequate legal framework to regulate the tour guide profession, including licensing, training, and professional supervision. There is also no strong union that brings together guides, defends their rights, or regulates the standards of professional practice (Al-Dulaimi, 2020, p. 27).

3. Weak professional development and qualification programs:

There is a noticeable absence of specialized training centers in tourist guidance within the tourism education framework in Iraq. Furthermore, universities and institutes do not offer comprehensive academic programs that graduate professional guides at the globally required level (Ali, 2023, p. 66).

1. Security and Administrative Challenges:

Some security and administrative challenges hinder the free and smooth practice of tourist guidance, especially in the archaeological sites located in the northern and western governorates. This makes some guides reluctant to work in these areas, leading to a lack of regular guidance coverage.

2. Overreliance on Religious Tourism:

Tourism in Iraq focuses heavily on religious tourism (especially in Karbala, Najaf, and Samarra), which has led to the

neglect of other sectors such as environmental, cultural, and archaeological tourism. This has been reflected in the quality of guidance provided, which is often limited in content and does not diversify with the diversity of tourism types (Abdul Razzaq, 2018, p. 49).

3. Weak community and cultural awareness of the profession

The profession of tour guiding in Iraq is still viewed as a marginal or temporary profession, rather than a professional one requiring high qualifications. This societal perception reduces young people's interest in specializing in it and weakens its attractiveness as a career path (Abdullah, 2019, p. 37).

4. Low salaries and lack of social protection

Tour guides often suffer from low wages and the lack of health and social insurance systems, particularly those working in the private sector or with travel agencies. This is one of the main reasons why many people are reluctant to continue in the profession (Saeed, 2020, p. 49).

Third: Positive Indicators

There are some positive indicators and potential for developing the reality of tour guiding in Iraq, including:

1. The efforts of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities to launch limited training courses for guides.
2. Growing awareness among some private tourism institutions of the importance of guiding as an essential service.
3. Limited international cooperation with organizations such as UNESCO and the UNDP to develop tourism cadres.
4. Some Iraqi universities have begun to include "tourist guidance" courses in their academic curricula.

However, these steps are still in their infancy and require comprehensive strategic plans to activate the tourism guidance profession as a key component in national tourism development.

Chapter Three: The Practical Aspect
The Practical Aspect of the Research

First: Introduction to the Practical Aspect

This part of the research aims to collect field data that enables the researcher to understand the reality of the tourism guidance profession in Iraq from the perspective of sector actors, namely: tourist guides, tourists (local and foreign), tourism company owners, as well as specialists and academics in the tourism sector. A questionnaire was used to gather quantitative and qualitative information that contributes to analyzing the reality of the profession, identifying challenges, and proposing solutions for its development.

Second: The Study Sample

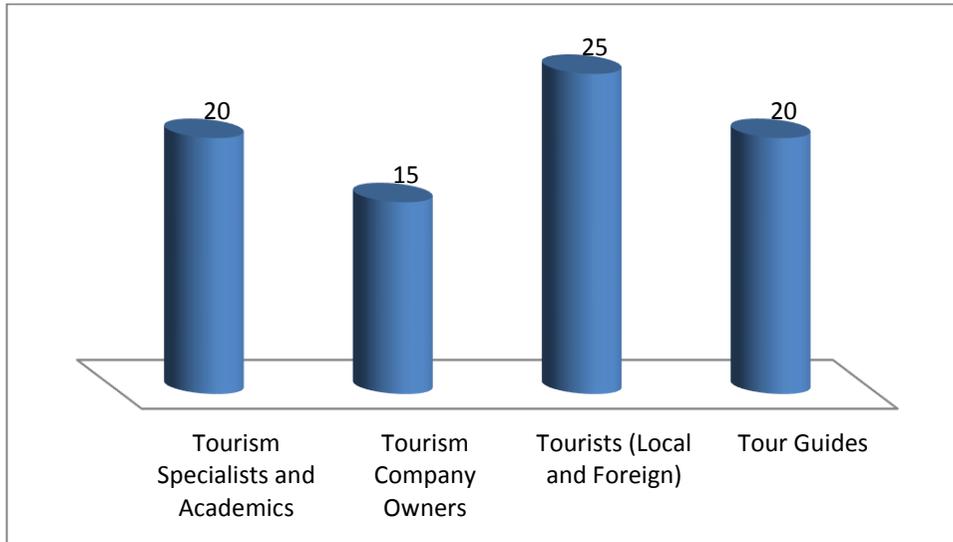
Table (1) and Figure (1) show that the study sample consisted of 80 participants, who were selected intentionally, distributed across Baghdad, Najaf, and Erbil, using paper and electronic forms. The following are as follows:

Table (1): Target Groups in the Research Sample

Number	Category
20	Tour Guides
25	Tourists (Local and Foreign)
15	Tourist Company Owners
20	Tourism Specialists and Academics
80	Total

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (1): Graphical representation of the target groups in the research sample



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table 1)

Third: Study Tool: Questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared consisting of 20 questions divided into three axes:

Axis One: The Current Reality of Tourist Guidance (Questions 1–7)

Axis Two: The Efficiency and Role of Tourist Guides in Serving Tourists (Questions 8–13)

Axis Three: Future Challenges and Proposals (Questions 14–20). The questions were constructed in a closed (multiple-choice) format, while some were open-ended to obtain qualitative feedback.

Fourth: Program Used for Analysis

Questionnaire data were entered and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. The analyses also included frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) between the four categories, and a descriptive analysis of open-ended questions.

Axis One: The Current Reality of Tourist Guidance

Question 1: Do you think the number of guides is sufficient?

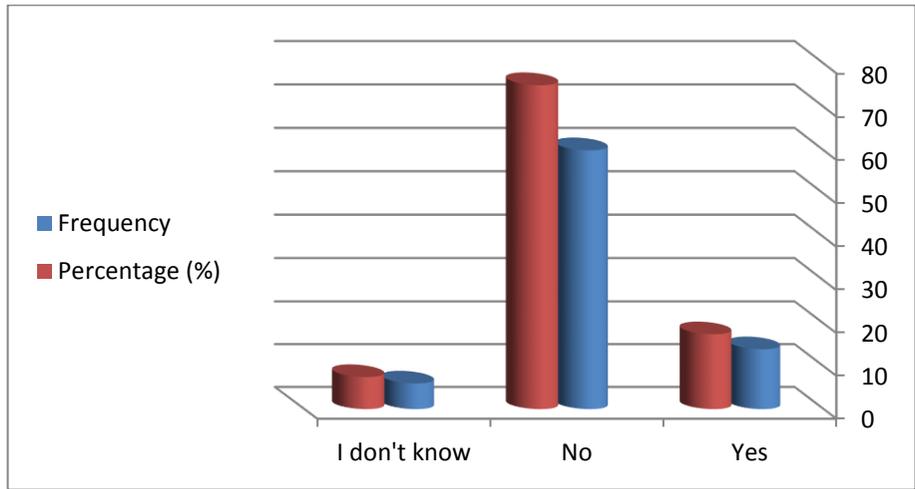
Table (2) and Figure (2) show that 75% of participants believe the number of guides is insufficient, indicating a clear gap between demand and supply in the tourist guidance market within Iraq.

Table (2) Frequency of the number of guides for the research sample

Ratio	Repetition	Answer: Yes
17.5	14	No
75	60	I don't know
7.5	6	Answer: Yes

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (2): Graphical representation of the frequency of the number of guides in the research sample.



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table 2.

Question 2: Is there an official body that licenses and monitors the work of guides?

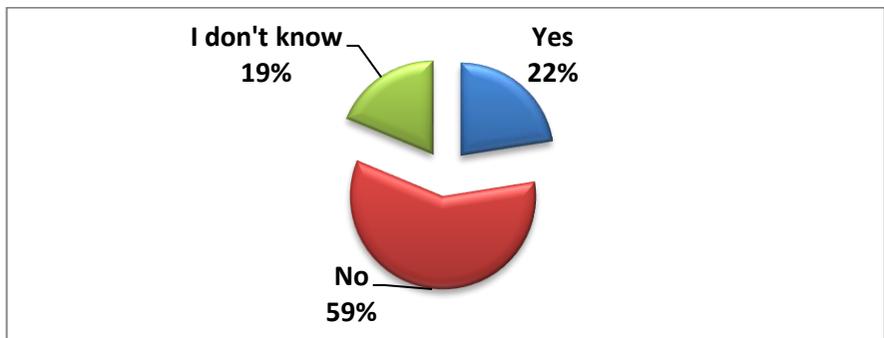
The field study, based on Table 3 and Figure 3, found that more than 50% believe that the absence of an effective official body weakens the professionalism of the profession and makes it vulnerable to intrusion and random practice.

Table (3): Frequency of official bodies that license and monitor the work of guides.

Ratio	Repetition	Answer
22.5	18	No
58.75	47	Answer: Yes
18.75	15	I don't know

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (3): Graphical representation of the frequency of official bodies that license and monitor the work of guides.



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table 3)

Question 4: What is the most common type of tourist guidance?

Table (4) and Figure (4) show that religious guidance is the most prevalent type, especially in the cities of Karbala

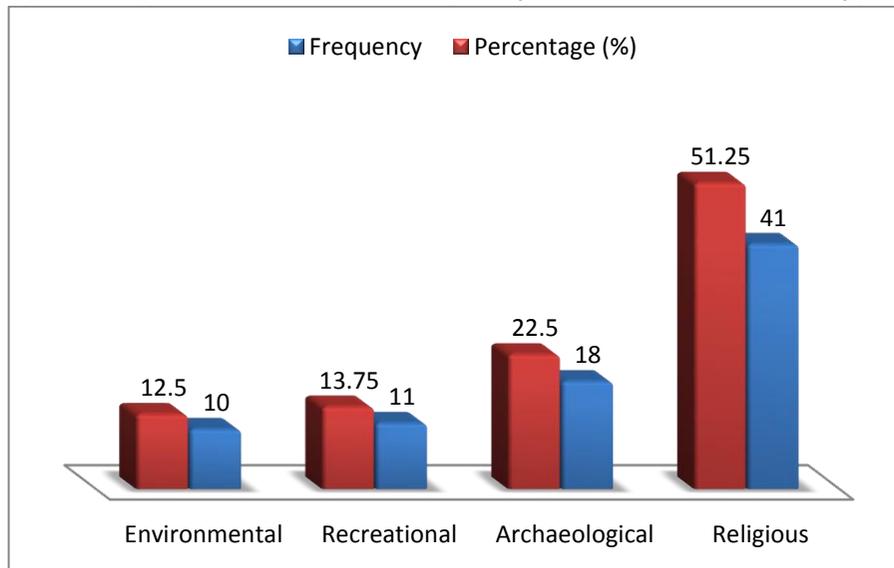
and Najaf. This reflects the concentration of tourism efforts in this type of tourism, with a lack of diversification of other types of guidance.

Table (4) Frequencies of the most common types of tourist guidance

Ratio	Repetition	Type
51.25	41	Religious
22.5	18	Archaeological
13.75	11	Entertainment
12.5	10	Environmental

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (4) Graphical representation of the frequency of the most common type of tour guide.



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table (4)

Second Axis: Tourist Guide Competence and Role

Question 8: Do tour guides possess sufficient language skills?

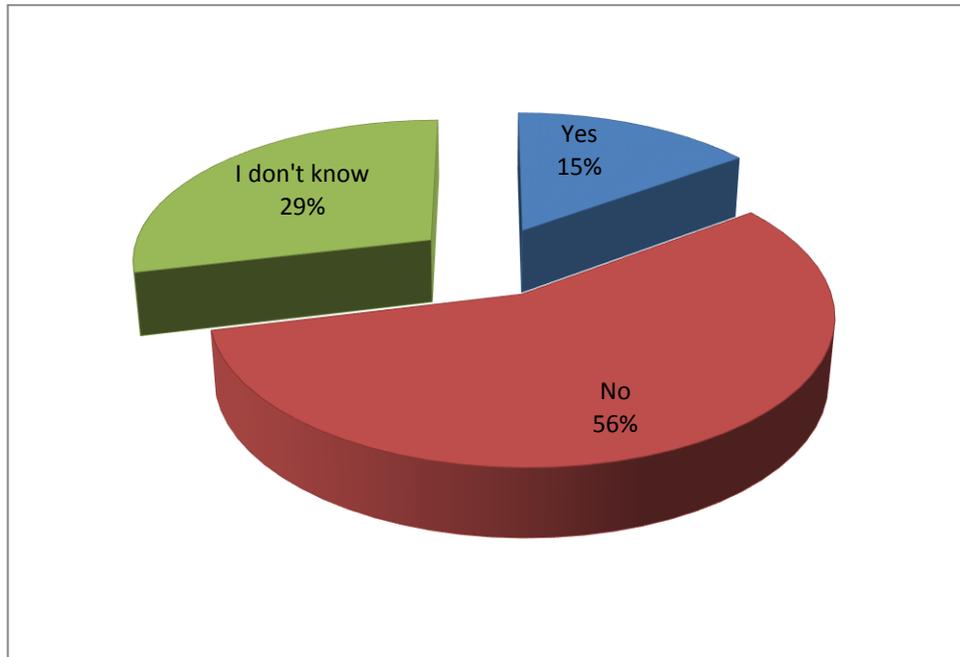
Table (5) and Figure (5) show that 56% of participants believe that the guides' language skills are weak, which negatively impacts the service provided to foreign tourists and limits Iraq's ability to attract them.

Table (5): Frequencies of guides with sufficient language skills

Ratio	Repetition	Answer
15	12	Yes
56.25	45	No
28.75	23	I don't know

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (5) Graphical representation of the frequencies of counselors who possess sufficient language skills



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table (5)

Question 10: Does the guide deal professionally with tourists?

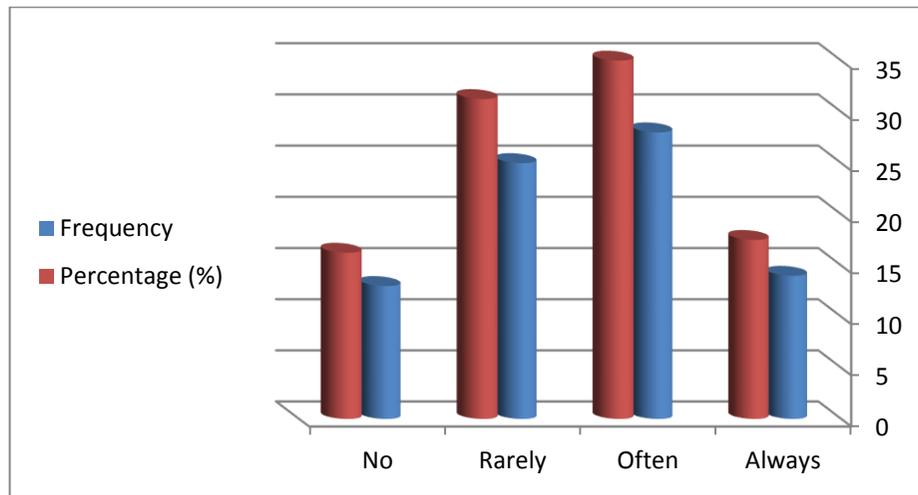
Table (6) and Figure (6) show a clear discrepancy. However, what is striking is that only 47.5% of participants believe that guides often or always deal professionally, reflecting the need for ethical and behavioral training.

Table (6): Frequencies of guides who deal professionally with tourists

Ratio	Repetition	Answer:
17.5	14	Always
35	28	Often
31.25	25	Rarely
16.25	13	No

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Figure (6) Graphical representation of the frequency of guides who deal professionally with tourists.



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table (6)

Third Axis: Challenges and Suggestions

Question 14: What are the most prominent challenges facing the counseling profession?

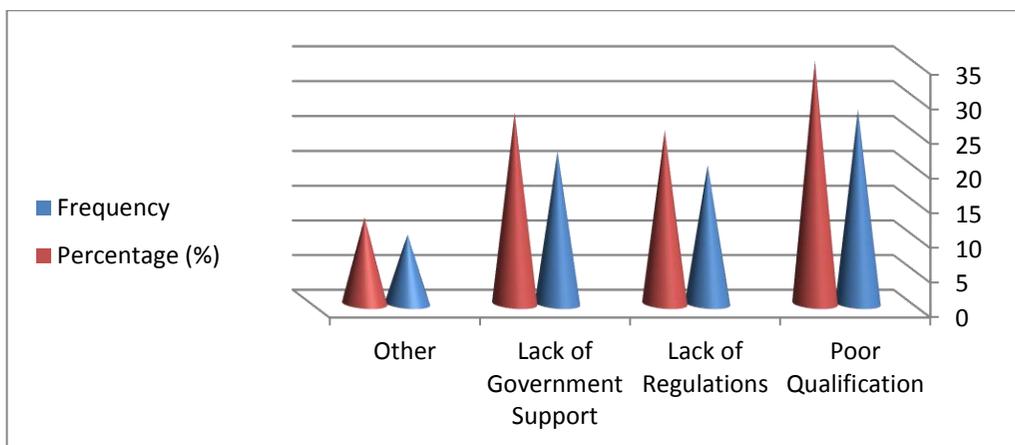
It is clear from Table 7 and Figure 7 that most participants believe that poor qualifications are the biggest obstacle, followed by the absence of legislation, which requires urgent regulatory and educational intervention.

Table (7): Frequencies of Challenges Facing the Counseling Profession

Ratio	Repetition	Answer
35	28	Weakly qualified
25	20	absence of laws
27.5	22	Lack of government support
12.5	10	Other

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Table (7) Graphical representation of the challenges facing the counseling profession



Source: Researcher's work based on data from Table (7)

Question 18: Can tourist guidance contribute to economic development?

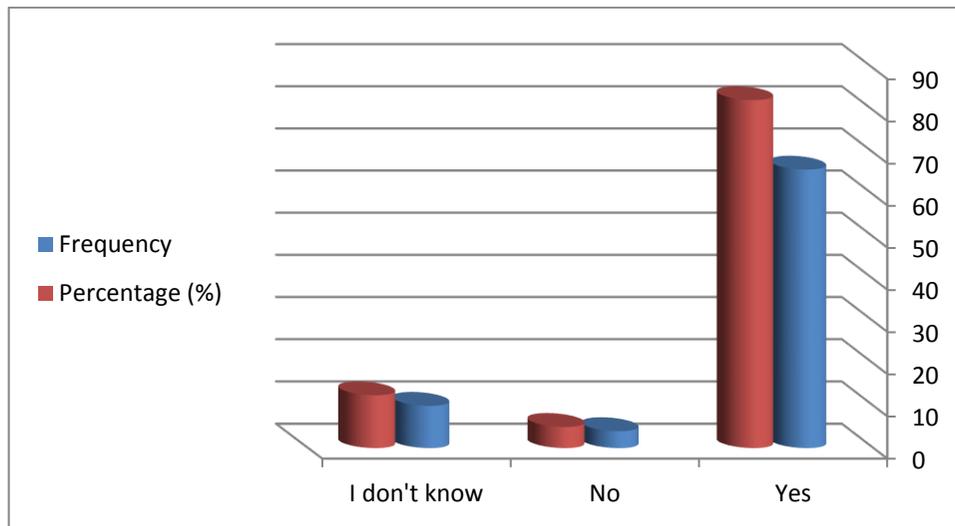
It is clear that a very high percentage (more than 80%) believe that tourist guidance is an effective tool for developing the local economy, reflecting an awareness among stakeholders of the importance of this sector.

Table (8) Frequencies of tourist guidance's contribution to economic development

Ratio	Repetition	Answer
82.5	66	Yes
5	4	No
12.5	10	I don't know

Source: Researcher's work based on questionnaire data.

Table (8) Graphical representation of the frequency of tourist guidance's contribution to economic development



Source: Researcher's work based on data in Table 8.

The above demonstrates an apparent shortage in the number of qualified tour guides. Many guides also lack language skills and professional training. Tourist guidance is primarily focused on religious aspects, while other forms of guidance are neglected. Furthermore, the field lacks precise legal regulation and ongoing training. Nevertheless, participants agreed on the importance of the tour guide as a developmental and economic tool. This research demonstrates that, despite its deep historical roots, the tour guide profession in Iraq continues to face significant challenges at the organizational, professional, and human levels. Nevertheless, awareness of the importance of this profession among workers and the public opens the door to real opportunities for reform and development. Advancing tour guiding not only contributes to improving the tourist experience but also constitutes a fundamental pillar for revitalizing tourism as a promising sector in the Iraqi economy.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

First: Results:

Based on an analysis of the survey results and the theoretical aspect of the research, the researcher reached a set of findings that reflect the reality of the tour guide profession in Iraq. These findings can be summarized as follows:

1. The lack of qualified tour guides: The survey results showed that approximately 75% of participants believe that the number of tour guides in Iraq is insufficient, especially in non-religious cities, indicating a flaw in geographical distribution and institutional planning.
2. An apparent weakness in language skills: More than 56% of participants expressed that tour guides do not possess sufficient foreign language skills, which negatively impacts the reception of foreign tourists and weakens the chances of promoting Iraq globally.
3. The absence of legislation regulating the profession: More than half of the sample believed that there is no effective official body to license and monitor the work of tour guides, leading to unregulated practice and recurring cases of random tour guides.
4. Guidance focuses on religious tourism: 51% of participants confirmed that tourist guidance is primarily focused on religious tourism, revealing a weakness in the development of archaeological, environmental, and recreational guidance models, despite Iraq's potential in these areas.
5. Lack of ongoing qualification and training: The problem of poor qualification emerged as the most prominent challenge, accounting for 35% of participants' responses, with many stressing the lack of sustainable professional development programs for tour guides.
6. General awareness of the importance of guidance as a development factor: Despite the challenges, 82.5% of participants confirmed that tourist guidance can effectively contribute to the development of the tourism sector and the national economy, a positive indicator upon which future planning can be built.

Recommendations

Based on the above results of the field and theoretical study, the researcher recommends a set of practical and organizational recommendations to develop the reality of the tourist guide profession in Iraq:

1. Establish a national body to regulate the tourist guide profession, affiliated with the Ministry of Culture or Tourism, and responsible for licensing, supervision, and ongoing training of guides.
2. Revitalize tourism institutes and colleges, developing their curricula to meet the requirements of the local and international labor market, and focusing on practical training and languages.
3. Launch continuous professional development programs for tourist guides, including specialized courses in languages, communication skills, and local history.
4. Diversify tourist guides in Iraq, moving beyond religious tourism, while promoting environmental, archaeological, and recreational guides, especially in the north and west of the country.
5. Support private and youth initiatives that aim to provide independent guide services through funding, training, and facilitating licensing.
6. Integrate the private sector in developing the profession, through partnerships between tourism companies and academic institutions to provide training and employment opportunities for new guides.
7. Establish a national database of tour guides, including their names, specialties, areas of work, and languages, to facilitate access to them and organize the tourist guidance process.
8. Cooperate with international organizations such as UNESCO and UNDP to support technical and institutional training programs and bring in expertise from countries that have successfully developed the tour guide sector.

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Survey Form

Dear Participant,

Please answer the following questions accurately and objectively. This data will be used for academic research purposes only. They will be treated with strict confidentiality for the research titled "The Reality of Tourist Guidance in Iraq and Its Role in Developing the Tourism Sector."

With thanks and respect.

**Assistant Professor
Hussein Munim Khalaf
Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University**

			Female				Male	Gender
			+40		+40		Under 25	Age
	Specialist/Academic		Tourism company owner		Tourism company owner		Tour Guide	Category

General Information (Optional):

First axis: The current reality of tourist guidance:

Answer						Question	N
	I don't know		No		Yes	Do you believe the number of tour guides in Iraq is sufficient to meet the demand?	1
	I don't know		No		Yes	Is there an official body that licenses and monitors the work of tour guides?	2
	Rare	A little	Average		Wide	How widespread is the tour guide profession in your governorate?	3
	Environmental	Entertainment	Attractive		Religious	What is the most prominent type of tour guide currently available?	4
	No	Rarely	Somet		Yes	Do tour guides enjoy a good	5

				imes		Alwa ys	reputation among tourists?		
	Non - exis tent		Weak		Avera ge		Larg e	Is there a clear government interest in developing the tour guide profession?	6
			Unkno wn		Conce ntrate d in certai n cities		Bala nced	What is your opinion of the geographical distribution of tour guides?	7

Axis II: The competence and role of the guide

The third axis: Challenges and proposals:

الإجابة				Question:	N.	
	Somewhat		Yes	Yes	Do the guides have sufficient language skills?	1
	Weak		Excellent	Excellent	How familiar are the guides with Iraq's history and heritage?	2
No	Rarely		Always	Always	Does the guide interact professionally with tourists?	3
	Weak		High	High	To what extent does the guide contribute to improving the tourist experience?	4
	No			Yes	Have you received formal training as a participant in the sector?	5
	Not important		Useful	Essential	How important is having a tour guide for tourists?	6

Answer					Question	No.		
	ضعيف		مقبول		جيد	ممتاز	What are the most prominent challenges facing the tour guide profession?	1
							What are your suggestions for developing the profession?	2
		Maybe		No		Yes	Do you see the need to establish a tour guide union?	3
	independent organization		Higher education		Tourism	Ministry of Culture	What is the most appropriate body to oversee tour guides?	4
		I don't know		No		Yes	Can tour guides contribute to economic development?	5
	Other		Lack of support		Lack of laws	Poorly qualified	What is your overall assessment of the level of tour guides in Iraq?	6