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Applying Interpretation Principles to a Non-Western (Japanese) Training Context

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Interpretive guides play an indispensable role in achieving tourism and sustainability outcomes. Although interpretation theory and best practice principles are supported by literature, they have been primarily developed in Western countries. Little work has been done to evaluate the cross-cultural applicability of using Western-based interpretation in training non-Western interpretive guides. This study evaluates the use of Western-based interpretive competencies in a Japanese training context. The efficacy of the training was assessed using quantitative and qualitative pre- and post-training data from all 42 trainees. Training programs were successful in improving trainees' perceptions of the importance of links between individual roles and organisational goals, TORE (thematic / organised / relevant / enjoyable) qualities, story development, and reflection. They also improved trainees' perceptions of their own capacity related to TORE. However, programs did not impact trainees' ratings of their capacity to use storytelling or to foster reflection in their interpretive tours. These findings suggest that, when informed by the literature and research, Western-based interpretive competencies can successfully equip Japanese interpretive guides to utilise best practice principles to meet interpretive and organisational goals. Improvements, such as practice and reflective opportunities, are suggested for future training. More knowledge and evidence are needed to build a training framework that can help interpretive guides in other non-Western contexts to make use of best practice interpretation in their work.

Key Words: interpretation, training, organisational goals, sustainability

Introduction

Guides require a range of hard and soft skill competencies, that include group management, tour operation, health and risk management, language translation, communication with visitors, and interpretation of heritage resources (cf. Black, Ham, & Weiler, 2001; Weiler & Black, 2015). Typically, the focus of guide training is on hard skill sets, that attend to operating and managing tours, rather than soft skill sets focusing on communicating about resources and engaging visitors, both emotionally and intellectually (herein called interpretation). However, effective interpretation, and by extension interpretation training, is recognised for the positive

impacts it has on visitor satisfaction, the visitor experience and the tourism industry as a whole (Ham & Weiler, 2007; Moscardo, 2017a; Powell & Stern, 2013). Moreover, guides who are well-trained in interpretation (herein referred to as interpretive guides) have been shown to be highly effective in eliciting desired sustainability outcomes within their visitors, such as fostering pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours both during and post-tour (Ballantyne & Packer, 2013; Weiler & Black, 2015).

Interpretive guide training programs are seen as important in developing competencies that can help achieve sustainability outcomes (Weiler & Kim, 2011). Weiler and Ham (2002) were some of the

earliest authors to provide empirical support for cultivating interpretive competencies in training programs. Researchers argue that interpretive guide training components and competencies should be based on best practices that have been informed by theory and confirmed with empirical evidence, in order for training to be effective (Weiler & Ham, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014).

Interpretation theory and principles have been applied globally and across myriad tourism and recreation contexts; however, for the most part these have been developed in Western countries (Skibins, Powell, & Stern, 2012). In evaluating training programs in Central and South America, Weiler and Ham (2002) suggested training content and methods should be informed by the literature on best guiding practices and have appropriate cultural context to maximise effectiveness. This strategy was successfully adopted by Weiler and Walker (2014) who demonstrated increased positive outcomes from a literature-based, contextualised training program for interpretive guides in Tonga. With the exception of these two studies that describe the use of Western-based interpretation to effectively train non-Western guides, empirical support for cross-cultural relevancy of interpretation theory and principles is limited, and research is needed to examine cultural and regional needs within training and potential gaps in cross-cultural relevancy.

This paper examines the applicability and efficacy of an interpretive training program, based on Western-based interpretive theory and principles, in the non-Western context of Japan. The primary objective of the literature review component of the paper is to identify and examine the applicability of Western-based interpretive principles in a Japanese interpretive training context. The objective of the empirical component of the paper is to assess the efficacy of a training program that highlights Western-based interpretive theory and principles delivered to Japanese interpretive guides.

Literature Review

Interpretation Theory and Competencies for Sustainability Outcomes

A primary objective of interpretation is to provoke visitors (Tilden, 1957), including getting them to think, care, and act in ways that are consistent with sustainability outcomes (Weiler & Kim, 2011). According to Ham (2013), provocation can be purposefully facilitated via four interpretive qualities that are underpinned by theories and research: being thematic, organised, relevant, and enjoyable. Ham uses the acronym – TORE – to capture these four qualities, arguing that the intentional incorporation of these helps interpreters not only to satisfy visitors but to achieve organisational goals and sustainability outcomes, as evidenced by researchers (e.g., Ham & Weiler, 2002; Powell & Ham, 2008). Adopting TORE in interpretive works is widely practiced in Western countries, and developing competency in the use of TORE could be applied in non-Western countries.

In addition to TORE, mindfulness through storytelling, has been advanced as an approach to provocation (Moscardo, 2009, 2017b). Mindful visitors are more likely to pay attention to and comprehend things they are seeing, hearing, or experiencing and thus are more likely to be provoked into positive changes in attitude, appreciation, and behaviour. Walker and Moscardo (2014) stated that mindfulness is a necessary condition for visitors to identify their own values, which can lead to sustainable outcomes. Storytelling leads to mindfulness in a way that can attract and hold the attention of visitors, encourage them to add their own knowledge and experiences to the stories, and allow them to form their own stories (Moscardo, 2017b; Nielsen, 2017). Packer, Ballantyne, and Uzzell (2019) studied Australian visitors at a war heritage setting in Australia and Turkey and found that storytelling helped visitors connect with the narrative, which increased the emotional impact of the experience, and consequently influenced attitudes to war and peace. Telling a story is thus a central function of interpretation (Ham, 2013; Moscardo, 1999; Tilden, 1957).

In addition to TORE and mindfulness, Packer and Ballantyne (2013) suggest that visitors' reflection on the experience is needed to provoke sustainability-related outcomes because outcomes are often derived from critiques of one's own practice and transformation of perspectives. For example, studies of Australian wildlife tourism found reflective engagement to be important to cognitive and affective processing of the experience, which in turn contributed to visitors' short- and long-term learning (Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011), adoption of environmentally sustainable behaviours (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011), and behavioural intentions (Ballantyne, Hughes, Lee, Packer, & Sneddon, 2018). Additionally, studies have found positive impacts of reflection on environmental behaviours one or more years after a visit to a South African aquarium (Mann, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2018) and on learning at war heritage sites in Australia and Turkey (Packer *et al.*, 2019).

Being reflective applies to interpretive guides as well. The capacity of a guide to critically observe the experience they provide, reflect on their values, and see from the visitor's perspective, enables them to better facilitate reflective engagement (Christie & Mason, 2003; Walker & Moscardo, 2014; Walker & Weiler, 2017). Christie and Mason (2003) reviewed training programs in Western countries and were critical of the overemphasis on knowledge transmission and hard skill acquisition. They suggested learning techniques that promote critical reflection of interpretive guides' own values and assumptions in training, such as through journal writings and small group discussions. Self-reflection by trainees is also reported as effective for development of personal and professional skills to facilitate transformative tourism experience (Lackey & Pennisi, 2019; Weiler & Ham, 2002).

These studies indicate that to attain the interpretation objective of provoking visitors towards sustainability outcomes, such as pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours, competencies in applying the TORE qualities, mindfulness, and reflective engagement need to be advanced. To do so, competencies associated with TORE, such as writing a theme

and effective use of introductions and conclusions, along with storytelling and reflection ought to be developed. These Western-based competencies should be applicable in non-Western contexts to help achieve interpretive outcomes. However, few studies have examined this issue.

One such study is Weiler and Walker's (2014) delivery and evaluation of a guide training program in Tonga. They designed a training program, based on empirical evidence in the literature regarding guides' roles and the efficacy of interpretive principles, and examined the relevancy of these Western-based interpretive principles to the Tongan context. Focusing on the role of communication to enhance the experience, the authors applied six principles of interpretation – ITREAL: involving, thematic, relevant, enjoyable and engaging, accurate, and logical. Results showed significant improvements in the guides' perceived importance of their role as experience broker and competencies regarding interpretive principles. Of particular note, the training improved guides' understanding of and capacity to apply interpretive principles to their tours as well as their perceived importance of and capacity to enhance the visitors' experience.

These findings indicate that developing competencies by applying Western-based interpretive principles in non-Western contexts is possible and that training in a non-Western context can be informed by Western literature. According to Weiler and Walker, training ought to enable trainees to not only develop interpretive competencies but also see the links between their roles and expected outcomes. In an effort to enhance training impacts, Walker and Weiler (2017) developed a training model for marine ecotourism guides that included facilitating guides' awareness, critical reflection, appreciation of ecotourism goals, and their roles in achieving goals.

Others also claim the importance of these links. Ballantyne and Hughes (2001) observed that trainees were not aware of their roles in achieving ecotourism goals, particularly via interpretation, and pointed to the need for training to emphasise the role that guides play in facilitating ecotourism goals. In examining

the effects of personal interpretation in US National Parks, Stern *et al.* (2013) contended that recognising and articulating clear, meaningful objectives for interpretive outcomes enhances interpreter efficacy and that developing training with organisational goals in mind helps enhance performance. Thus, envisioning the links between an interpretive guide's role and goals, including sustainability outcomes, should be given more attention in training.

These findings suggest that, to achieve sustainability outcomes, Western-oriented interpretive competencies, such as TORE, storytelling, and reflective engagement, could be applied and developed globally. Furthermore, a focus should be placed on developing a trainee's capacity to reflect on their own role and values in relation to interpretation and the organisational goals they are attempting to achieve.

Interpretation Competency Development in Japan

In a review of Japanese ecotourism policy documents and guiding practices, Yamada (2011) notes that, although there is an emphasis on interpretation, the rationale to inform the development of training programs and frameworks that equip guides with interpretive competencies is lacking. To explore the environment in which interpretive competencies are fostered, training needs and impact assessments were conducted in Japan (Yamada, 2014; Yamada & Skibins, 2019). A summary of the training issues and challenges uncovered in these studies is found in Table 1.

One key training need that was identified was the discrepancy between trainers' and trainees' perceptions of the interpretation profession, indicating a diversity of definitions of interpretation and the profession as a whole (Yamada, 2014). This is related to general challenges facing the Japanese interpretation profession for overall growth, and identified the following specific challenges to growth:

- 1) ambiguity in operationalising interpretation,
- 2) minimal public recognition of the value of interpretation, and
- 3) a lack of performance and learning opportunities.

A lack of training frameworks and quality assurance of training were also identified as challenges for competency development, leaving trainers to rely on anecdotal experiences and knowledge (Black *et al.*, 2001).

An impact assessment of a training program in Japan with pre-, during-, and post-training questionnaires by Yamada and Skibins (2019) further documented training challenges (Table 1). A gap between understanding and operationalisation was identified, which corresponds to the aforementioned needs assessments. Although the trainees perceived the definitions and principles of interpretation as important, they reported difficulty in applying these. The study concluded that training should include exercises to help trainees:

- 1) operationalise interpretive principles,
- 2) articulate their role and processes in achieving interpretive and organisational goals, and
- 3) encourage reflection on the training experiences.

Table 1: Challenges of interpretive competency development in Japan and implications for training

Issues / Challenges	Suggestions / Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of training frameworks • The ambiguity of operationalising interpretation • A lack of performance and learning opportunities • Quality assurance of training • Little recognition of interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining rationale for training programs • Operationalising interpretive definitions and principles • Offering opportunities for first-hand practice and participant interactions during training • Articulating and linking to interpretive role and organisational goals • Evaluating training impact

Note: above descriptions are derived from previous research (Yamada, 2011, 2014; Yamada & Skibins, 2019)

Without articulation and reflection, achievements of interpretation are rarely acknowledged by interpreters, organisations, and / or society as a whole.

The minimal public recognition of interpretation and the profession in Japan may be due to the lack of recognising interpretation's strategic role in an organisation's mission and goals. Low visibility of the achievement of interpretation in relation to organisational and sustainability outcomes likely results in little public recognition of the profession, which subsequently lowers the need for interpretation. A strong training framework is needed, which includes subject areas, competencies to be taught, teaching and learning approaches and evolves around relevant literature of interpretive theory and principles (e.g., Christie & Mason, 2003; Ham, 2013; Moscardo, 2009; Packer & Ballantyne, 2013; Tilden, 1957; Walker & Weiler, 2017; Weiler & Walker, 2014). This could help to break this downward spiral.

Implications for Interpretive Training in a Japanese Context

The foregoing reviews of the two bodies of literature – interpretation competency and its development in Japan – together provide a basis for determining a framework and content for Japanese interpretive training. Specifically, interpretive training in Japan needs to achieve the following competencies:

First, helping trainees to identify and align their interpretive goals to their organisational goals will aid in their understanding of how their individual roles help fulfil organisational objectives. For example, the US-based National Association for Interpretation defines interpretation as a mission-based communication process and goes on to state that being aware of organisational missions and goals is of paramount importance. Stern *et al.* (2013) recognised the relationship between interpretation and organisational mission and goal, stating 'the clear definition of the specific outcomes that employees can produce to accomplish the overall mission of the agency' (p. 96) helps interpreters acknowledge their tasks. This is particularly important in the Japanese

training context, as links between interpretive guides' roles and organisational goals would help lessen the ambiguity of interpretive definitions and the profession as a whole.

Second, competencies to accomplish such goals need to be acquired to help trainees to operationalise the definition and principles of interpretation. In previous research in Japan, being experiential (Tilden, 1957) and utilising TORE qualities (Ham, 2013) were well acknowledged by trainees as elements of interpretation. A training framework that provides opportunities for trainees to practice applying TORE qualities is needed.

Third, story development should be emphasised to encourage mindfulness and reflective engagement because storytelling can emotionally and cognitively engage visitors. Stern *et al.* (2013) suggested training in storytelling is as important as developing knowledge on resources, visitors, and interpretation. Trainees should be instructed to develop stories relating to the theme(s) of the guided experience.

Fourth, to develop the capacity for reflective engagement and mindfulness, 'the training itself needed to be reflective and mindful' (Weiler & Walker, 2014, p. 98). In the previous research in Japan, trainees demonstrated their learnings through reflection in a small groups and reflection journals. These reflections should be optimised with strategic instructions at each phase of an experiential learning process from experiencing to reflecting to applying, as Packer and Ballantyne (2013) advocated. In this manner, trainees can develop greater capacity to be reflective and mindful.

In addition to these four areas of competency, as suggested by the previous research (Table 1), opportunities to practice first-hand and interact with others should be included in the training. Collectively, these provide the rationale for the framework and content of interpretive training in a Japanese context. The remainder of this paper outlines a training program that seeks to respond to these suggestions in an effort to help increase training effectiveness in Japan.

Methods

Application to the Japanese Interpretive Context: A Case Study of Two Training Programs in Japan

In responding to the aforementioned suggestions for the Japanese interpretive training context, two types of training programs, were designed and delivered from 2018 – 2019. The three-day program contained theoretical explanations that underpin the definitions, principles, and outcomes of interpretation, the application of TORE (Ham, 2013), story development (Moscardo, 2009), and reflection opportunities (Packer & Ballantyne, 2013). The one-day program primarily focused on TORE.

In the beginning of each training, participants were asked to identify the mission and goals of their organisation and possible links between these goals and their roles and tasks (Weiler & Walker, 2014). At the end of each day (i.e., three times in the three-day program and once in the one-day program), trainees were asked to answer open-ended questions about their learning and its application to their job in a reflective journal format (Christie & Mason, 2003). Small group discussions were also offered in the three-day training as an opportunity to reflect on the learning and interact with other trainees (Ham & Weiler, 2002).

The three-day programs were offered twice, and the one-day program was offered once. Two lead trainers conducted the training with one assistant trainer in the three-day and two assistant trainers in the one-day program. The three-day programs involved a total of 20 participants who self-reported to have been engaging in interpretive tasks and working at heritage sites, geo parks, nature parks, nature centres, and nature schools across the nation. The one-day program included 22 participants who were in-service interpretive professionals at city parks, nature parks, or nature observatories in Tokyo. Trainees' age varied from 20s to 60s, gender was quite equally split (20 men and 22 women), and affiliations widely spread across the nation. In total, 42 individuals participated in the programs.

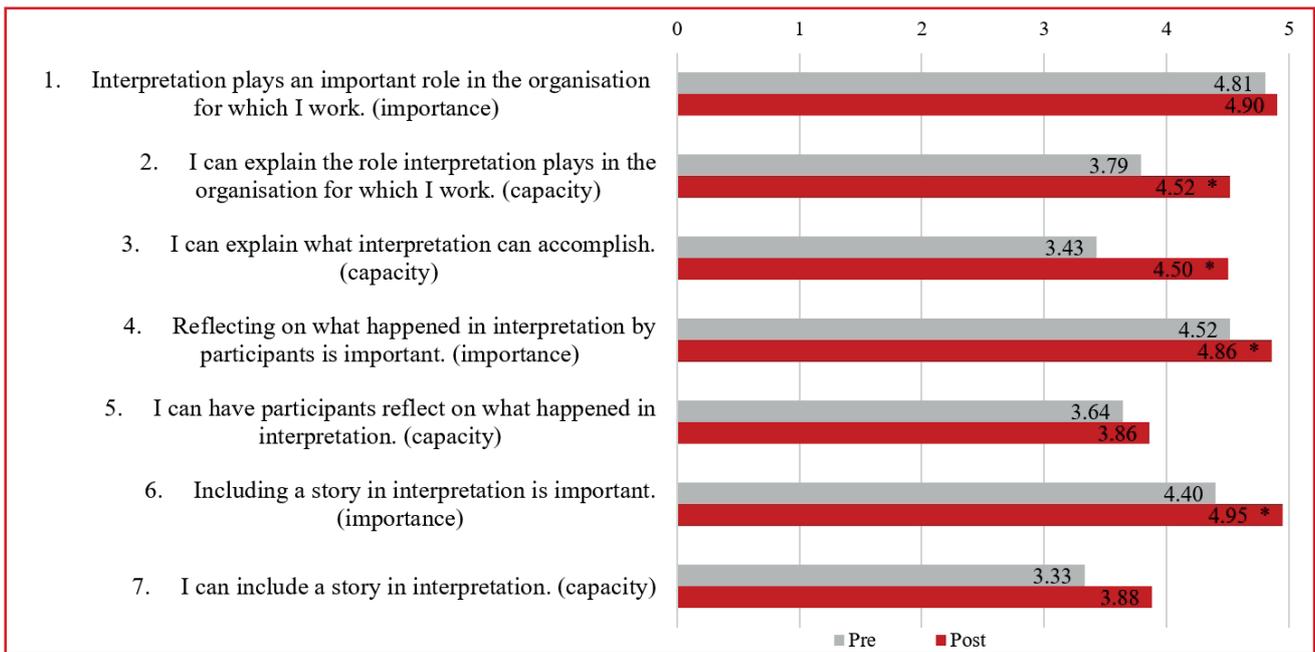
Data Collection and Analysis

Pre- and post-training questionnaires were provided to all trainees to complete on a voluntary basis at the beginning and immediately following the training (Weiler & Walker, 2014). These were administered using a respondent numbering system that preserved the anonymity of the trainee to reduce social desirability bias, while allowing for matched-pairs analysis. Both closed (rating) and open-ended responses were included. One open-ended question in the pre- and post-training questionnaires asked, 'what is the most important thing when you deliver interpretation?'

Following to the previous research (Weiler & Walker, 2014), with the basis of interpretive competencies reviewed in the first part of this paper, the pre- and post-training questionnaires included an identical set of 24 questions regarding the competencies (skills and knowledge) covered by the training. Trainees answered each of 24 questions from two perspectives: (i) how *important* they felt these skills or knowledge were to delivering effective interpretation; and (ii) how well they could *demonstrate* these skills or knowledge. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (3) 'neither agree nor disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. The instruments were administered in Japanese, and responses and results were later translated into English

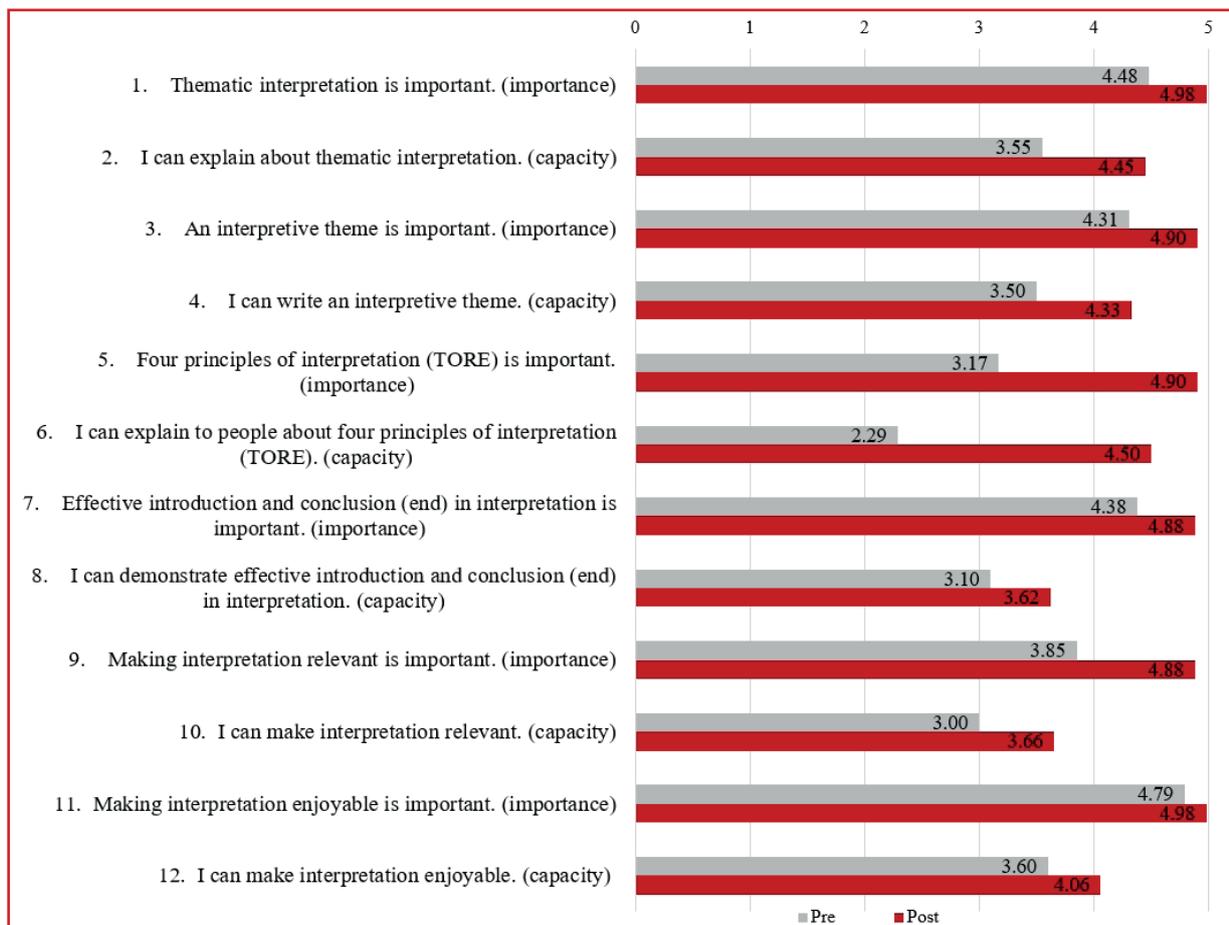
The statistical analysis used for the identical scale questions was a paired-sample t-test to determine if there was a significant difference between each respondent's pre- and post-training responses. The open-ended questions were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) beginning with the first coder identifying recurring themes and concepts in relatively short answer responses. These response-derived categories (themes) and their response examples were subsequently analysed by a second coder familiar with the results and questionnaires. This second iteration of the themes was then independently considered by the first coder to check the agreement and disagreement, and the disagreements were discussed by the two coders to

Figure 1: Respondents’ perceptions of links to organisational goals, reflection, and story development



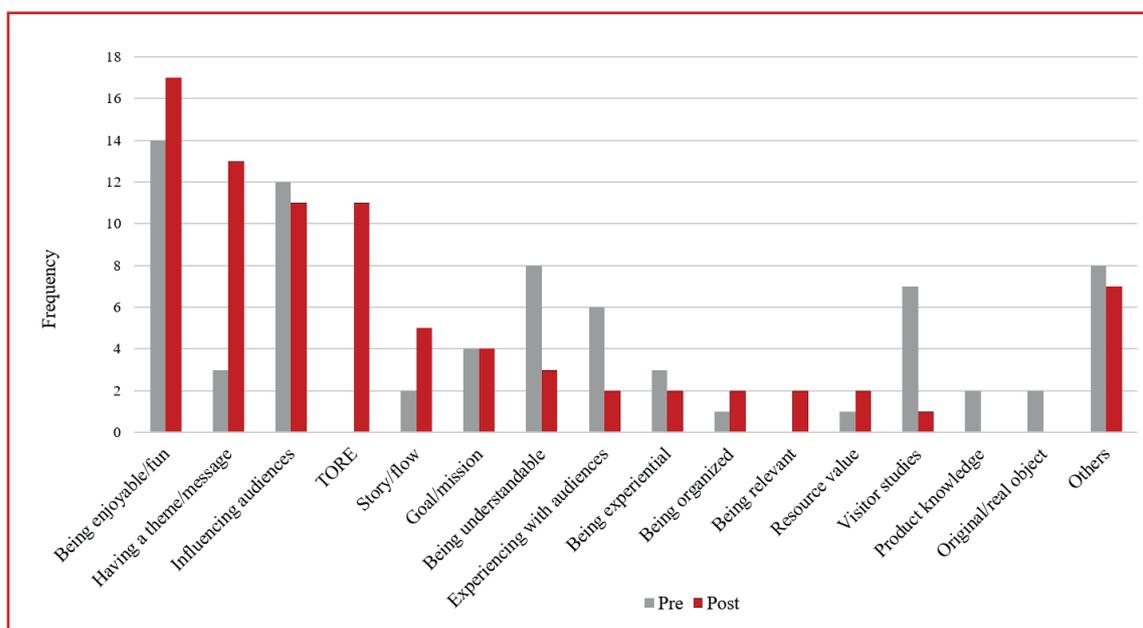
Note: * $p < .05$, $n = 42$, and $df = 41$

Figure 2: Respondent’s perceptions of TORE qualities



Note: all $p < .05$

Figure 3: Frequency of responses to ‘Most important things for interpreters in delivering interpretation’ (pre and post training)



Source: Thematic analysis of open-ended responses

Table 2 Thematic labels and descriptions for Figure 3 (most important thing of interpretation)

Theme	Theme description
Being enjoyable / fun	Being fun, interesting, enjoyable program
Having a theme / message	Having a theme / message
Influencing audiences	Causing changes in audience’s motivation, interest, emotion, liking, attitude, etc.
TORE	Thematic, organised, relevant, and enjoyable
Story / flow	Having a story or flow, structuring from introduction to end in a program
Goal / mission	Goal of interpretation, organisational mission
Being understandable	Easily understandable, readily transferable
Experiencing with audiences	Experiencing and feeling together, learning together, sharing the feeling together with audiences
Being experiential	Including first-hand experiences
Being organised	Well-organised structure, organising along a theme, explaining logically
Being relevant	Contents becoming personal and relevant to audiences
Resource value	Values and features of a resource
Visitor studies	Understanding audience need, desire, interest, age, response, and capability
Product knowledge	Knowledge of resource to be interpreted
Original / real object	Using an original and real object
Others	Accuracy, communication, speaking skill, not one-way, not to teach, honesty, mysterious, memorable experience, respecting diversity

reach a consensus. The final set of themes presented in this paper represents a consensus between the two coders.

Results

Figure 1 shows pre- and post-training means for the seven items related to interpretive competencies:

- 1) linking interpretive role and organisational goals,
- 2) reflection, and
- 3) story development.

Items were worded to be consistent with the content of the training. No items received a mean score below the midpoint of 3. The mean scores were higher in post-training than in pre-training for all seven items, with four showing statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.05$). The only *importance* item that did not show statistically significant improvement was in relation to the importance of interpretation in the workplace, but this can be explained by the fact that this item was already rated very highly ($M = 4.81$) pre-training. Respondents' *capacity* to carry out reflection and story development were not significantly improved and remained at a moderate level ($M < 3.80$).

Figure 2 presents the pre- and post-training ratings of the respondents on 12 items relating to the application of specific TORE qualities. Only one item received a mean score below the midpoint of 3, and that was the pre-training rating of the trainee's *capacity* to explain TORE. Training positively impacted respondents' views of both the *importance* of the interpretation principles and their own *capacity*, with statistically significant improvement on all 12 items ($p < 0.05$). The largest improvement from pre-training to post-training was observed on the *importance* of TORE (3.17 in pre- to 4.90 in post-, $p < .001$) and the *capacity* to explain TORE (from 2.29 to 4.50, $p < .001$). Respondents' *capacity* to carry out an effective introduction and conclusion ($M = 3.65$) and make interpretation relevant were rated lower ($M = 3.62$) than other items, while respondents' perceived *importance* of these items was quite high ($M = 4.88$ respectively).

As evident in Figure 1 and 2, the *importance* score exceeded the *capacity* score for every single item, while the degree of these discrepancies decreased for most elements post-training. This indicates the efficacy of the training in improving capacities that trainees rate as important.

Figure 3 captures the responses to the open-ended questions after thematic analysis, in order from most to least frequently occurring themes in post-training. The full response descriptions for each of the themes that appear in Figure 3 are presented in Table 2. As illustrated in Figure 3, the most common response provided to this open-ended question pre-training was that interpreters should look out for visitors' enjoyment of interpretive programs. The frequency with which this was mentioned even increased in the post-training responses. The frequency with which open-ended comments were made regarding the importance of having an interpretive theme or message post-training was more than four times its occurrence pre-training. Responses on TORE qualities were considerably increased from zero pre-training to 11 post-training.

Discussions

Weiler and Walker (2014) suggest that cultural context needs to be examined in order to generalise Western-based interpretive principles and training to non-Western contexts. To respond to this call, this paper has considered the applicability of Western interpretive principles to the Japanese context, identified suitable training content and then developed, delivered, and assessed the efficacy of that training.

Overall, trainees' perception of the *importance* of the four interpretive competencies –

- 1) links between interpretive role and organisational goals (Weiler & Walker, 2014),
- 2) TORE qualities (Ham, 2013),
- 3) story development (Moscardo, 2009), and
- 4) reflection (Packer & Ballantyne, 2013)

– showed significant improvement from pre to post training scores (Figures 1 and 2). Some of these

changes may be partially attributable to lower levels of awareness and perceived importance prior to the training. Many of the trainees had no previous training or exposure to Western interpretive principles due to the fact that little to no interpretive literature is available in Japanese. Nonetheless, the post-training responses of the *importance* of all items were remarkably high, over a 4 on a 5-point scale. This may have been associated with respondents' heightened recognition of their roles in their organisation, because guides' appreciation of tourism goals and their roles in achieving goals enhance training impacts (Walker & Weiler, 2017). The findings indicate successful linking between a trainee's role and organisational goals. Respondents' perceived importance of TORE showed the largest improvement among all items.

A few individual *capacity* items did not improve significantly from pre- to post-training, nor did the organisational role for interpretation. Respondents already strongly agreed pre-training that interpretation played an important role in their organisation (as mentioned in the results, it received the highest rating of all items). The two items that remained in the moderate category regarding TORE qualities, albeit significantly higher post-training, were related to the trainees' capacity:

- 1) I can demonstrate effective introductions and conclusions, and
- 2) I can make interpretation relevant.

Other items that remained moderate both pre and post training included the respondents' *capacity*:

- 3) I can include a story in interpretation, and
- 4) I can have participants reflect on what happened in interpretation.

This lack of change may be the result of insufficient practical exercises during the training, as observed in previous research (Yamada & Skibins, 2019). This could be evidenced by the gap between *importance* scores and *capacity* scores for each pair of items, which indicates a gap between what trainees hoped to achieve and their capability. As already noted, this gap narrowed from pre- to post-training for most elements which suggests positive training effects.

The findings also indicate insufficiency in the use of reflective exercises and journals (Ham & Weiler, 2002) and in the development and delivery of a story (Moscardo, 2017b). This may indicate a characteristic of the researched population who may have a less developed capacity for reflection, something that may or may not be associated with cultural background. More strategic methods to encourage reflection and mindfulness may need to be considered in future training in order to equip interpretive guides to foster reflective and mindful visitors, as scholars suggest (Christie & Mason, 2003). Additionally, it may be conceivable that reflection ability of interpreters has not received sufficient attention in both Western and non-Western countries and that training and measurement of this skill has not yet been established. Training in this skill in both geographical regions may provide further insight and a future research focus. It is suggested to offer more opportunities for practicing learned concepts, as hands-on learning opportunities have been shown to help operationalise knowledge and skills in the Japanese training context (Yamada & Skibins, 2019). As Black and King (2002) pointed out, continuous on-the-job training opportunities are also an important element of an effective training framework.

Informed by the literature and research, this study of interpretive competency training in Japan extends the findings of Weiler and Walker's (2014) study of guide training in Tonga. The majority of competencies examined in both contexts showed significant improvement after participating in the training programs. While respondents highly rated the *importance* of interpretation (i.e., 'an important role that interpretation plays in an organisation' in Japan and 'need for interpretation' in Tonga) pre-training, they showed significant improvements in their *capacity* to explain the importance of interpretation after the training. This suggests the training in both contexts better equipped trainees to articulate their individual roles in their organisations. This is important, in that it can help interpretive guides to cultivate positive organisational commitments for interpretation and its associated visitor outcomes (Stern *et al.*, 2013).

Similarly, as in Tonga, this study found very high levels of agreement, pre-training, for the *importance* of making interpretation enjoyable, therefore, showing little improvement after participation. On the other hand, in both contexts, respondents rated their capacity to make interpretation enjoyable significantly higher in post-training than pre-training. Both perceived *importance* and *capacity* to describe interpretive principles (i.e., TORE in Japan and six pillars in Tonga) were significantly improved from moderate ratings to highly positive ratings after participating in the training in both contexts. This supports interpretive principles developed in Western countries being applicable in non-Western countries.

The findings of this research demonstrate that the training challenges previously found in the needs and impact assessments (Table 1) can be addressed by designing training programs based on the relevant literature (e.g., Christie & Mason, 2003; Ham, 2013; Moscardo, 2009; Packer & Ballantyne, 2013; Tilden, 1957; Walker & Weiler, 2017; Weiler & Walker, 2014). The significant improvements provide evidence of training efficacy, which in turn may help to heighten the valuing of interpretation in Japan. Additionally, the lack of statistically significant improvement in two interpretive competencies (story development and reflection) suggests some deficiencies in the training framework and further supports the need for hands-on learning and for opportunities to demonstrate the application of interpretive principles during the training.

Training should also be based on the needs of the profession. In a needs assessment of interpreter training in the U.S. National Park Service, Powell, Depper, and Wright (2017) found interpreters sought to incorporate visitor studies into interpretation. This is consistent with the present research that found some pre-training responses in open-ended questions expressed understanding of visitors as important in delivering interpretation. Although visitor studies is not a principle of interpretation, understanding and responding to visitor needs and expectations is a competency required of interpretive guides (Weiler & Ham, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014)

and is therefore incorporated into the US National Park Service's Interpretive Equation (Lacome, 2003) and in the Walker and Weiler (2017) training program. Thus, visitor studies may be another area for inclusion in future interpretive guide training in Japan and elsewhere.

It is acknowledged that trainees' self-reports of what they learned or gained from training provides only part of the picture of the efficacy of the training. On-the-job observations and responses from visitors would provide a more complete picture of training impacts. This type of evaluation is rarely carried out in evaluating training of any type due to its high resource-intensity and with too many in-field variables that cannot be controlled or accounted for (Weiler & Walker, 2014). Nonetheless, field-based evaluations are needed.

It needs to be acknowledged that this paper focused on a single training framework in Japan. Wider application to other cases in and out of the country is needed before generalising beyond the present study context, particularly for non-Western professionals being trained to deliver interpretive guiding for non-Western visitors. As Weiler and Black (2015) point out, training differs between and within countries and between institutions. Notwithstanding these limitations, the results of this research reveal that training informed by empirical evidence in the literature regarding interpretive competencies, training, and challenges can be effective in impacting trainees' perceptions of both the *importance* and their *capacity* in relation to interpretive competencies.

Conclusion

The premise of this research was that interpretive guides will have greater capacity to achieve sustainability goals if trained with Western-based interpretive theory and principles. In responding to Weiler and Walker's (2014) call, this research examined the efficacy and cultural relevancy of using Western-based interpretive principles within a culturally appropriate training framework to deliver interpretive guide training in Japan. As such, it analysed the usefulness of Western-based

interpretive principles and identified the content and delivery of training suitable for the Japanese interpretive context. This empirical study provides further evidence that, if underpinned by literature and previous research that are relevant to the particular context, training in non-Western countries can successfully deliver the competencies required by interpretive guides to improve their capacity (Ham & Weiler, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014). It provides a foundation not only for developing and delivering training contextualised to Japanese interpretation, but also offers insights in designing training elsewhere that requires cross-cultural perspectives. Similar research in other non-Western countries is needed to build a case for the global applicability of core competencies required of interpretive guides.

The findings of the current study can be used to facilitate discussions on how interpretive guides can be trained and to what degree they can contribute to the tourism industry and sustainability goals.

As demonstrated in this study, training efforts can be systematically evaluated, and lessons learned from evaluations can be used to inform future training (Weiler & Ham, 2002). However, as Weiler and Walker (2014) suggest, research is needed to ascertain the robustness of trainees' self-reported impacts of training on the delivery of interpretation in the real world. Moreover, evaluation by managers regarding the impact of the training on desired organisational outcomes including sustainability outcomes would add another useful layer. This at the same time

could heighten public recognition of the profession in Japan (Yamada, 2014), obtain visitor support for management policy and financial support for organisations in the tourism and recreation industries (Black, 2018; Moscardo, 2017a), and contribute to sustainability beyond tourism (Moscardo, 2017a). It is imperative to support interpretive guides to recognise and value their roles and the goals and principles of interpretation in meeting organisational and sustainability needs.

In summary, on-going training and evaluation in the workplace along with research in other contexts is needed for both interpretive training and practice, to fully understand how well training and practice are aligned and able to cope with the challenges facing the interpretive profession in Japan and beyond.

Future research should identify and examine the efficacy of other interpretive competencies and 'best practices' (e.g., Skibins *et al.*, 2012) in a particular context, which would facilitate building a training framework to guide the design of a series of training programs in a particular country or context. In so doing, needs and impact assessments of training programs may be required to illustrate context-specific needs and challenges, as this research was underpinned by them. Future research should investigate how to create opportunities for trainees to practice learned competencies in a limited amount of time in training. To further contribute to tourism and sustainability, more knowledge is needed on effective training of interpretive guides.

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