

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**WEAVING TRADITIONAL
ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE
INTO THEMATIC
INTERPRETATION IN PARK
GUIDING IN SARAWAK
NATIONAL PARKS**

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ABSTRACT

A plethora of studies for past decade believed that the application of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) can help improved natural resource management and environmental conservation practices, but little is known regarding its interpretive communication potential in enhancing visitors experience, promoting positive attitudes and shaping on-site visitor behaviour in the context of park guiding service in ecotourism settings in national parks. This experimental research, underpinned by the TORE model of interpretation and informed research, investigated the efforts of park guides to examine whether a training-workshop on TEK theme-based interpretive guided tour could influence visitors' cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of interpretation in four selected Sarawak's national parks. An experimental quantitative research technique was adopted by employing descriptive analysis, paired t-test and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. The training-workshop elicits park guides' competency gaps and reactions to the training-workshop through pre-post self-assessment and post-training self-administered questionnaires (n=81) and visitors' outcomes of guided tours through self-administered questionnaire (n = 380) immediately after each tour ended. The study indicated that, TEK theme-based guided tour training, can successfully delivered the knowledge and skills required by park guides to help improve their capacity to effectively enhance visitor experience, promote appreciative attitudes, and influence their behaviour. The findings also illustrated that the weaving of TEK as the topic, themes and self-enforced rules in well presented thematic interpretive guided tour in ecotourism settings, appeared to have improved its impacts in making a difference in how visitors think, feel and behave with respect to things or resources of the national parks the park guides had interpreted. The study concluded that the weaving of TEK into thematic interpretation, if well planned and presented, can help park guides and park managers improve visitors' experience and better achieve the protection and conservation objectives. Future empirical studies should replicate in other national parks to determine if these findings are consistent across other national parks of socio-economically unequal, culturally and religiously diverse. Other study should also further predict the key target constructs or identifying key "drivers" constructs on the effects of TEK theme-based guided tour in a more adaptive approach.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Ensuring sustainable biodiversity conservation while affording sustainable recreational uses of natural resources in protected areas have long been as profound challenges by park managers around the world in managing these protected areas, especially those areas with Asian values (Leung, Spenceley, Gvenegaard & Buckley, 2018). Protected areas such as national parks or nature reserves are considered as global entities that provide concurrent mission of biodiversity conservation, providing and improving human welfare (Moyle & Weiler, 2016; Naughton-Treves, Holland & Brandon, 2005; Leung, Spenceley, Gvenegaard & Buckley, 2018). They provide economic, environmental services and socio-cultural benefits to the societies (Buckley, 2009); provide psychological, spiritual or recreational benefits to individual people (Worboys & Trzyna, 2005). In Asia region, protected areas are increasingly recognized for a broader suite of biodiversity, cultural, economic and social values as most countries within Asia have a tradition of respecting nature which is deeply embraced within their cultures and religions (Hamzah, Ong & Pampanga, 2013). In the species rich tropical countries, including in Malaysia, these protected areas hold one of the highest levels of biodiversity and are regarded as “colonial model” of protected areas as many were constituted during the British Colonial Era, with many of them are situated within or adjacent to the community use zones (CUZ) of various ethnic groups (Hamzah et al., 2013).

Ecotourism is increasing throughout the world, especially in species rich tropical countries where it is often being promoted in association with the management of protected areas (Weiler & Ham, 2002). These protected areas are also regarded as important drivers for conservation and sustainable development where tourism as an active industry heavily depends on the maintenance of healthy environment (Diamantis & Ladkin, 1999). The protection of biological diversity and influencing visitor behaviour while on-sites in protected areas are the primary concern for park managers and also a common focus of interpretive park guiding