

Uprising Tourism Education: Bridging the Professional Gap

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Abstract

Tourism activities as a whole have an upward trend and support to job creation, GDP and the balance of payments of many destinations. The molding of tourism industry actually lies in the four stakeholders - firms, students, educational and governmental institutions who are involved in the design, growth and execution of tourism activities. Paper accepts that to meet existing tourists' preferences and drive the future tourism demands, tourism educated and trained students plays a vital role. Another concern to an undesirable strategic long-run equilibrium lies in the employment of differently-from-tourism graduated or tourism non-graduated personnel. In order to attain an optimal equilibrium, the educational approach from educational and governmental institutions should be at par to meet the tourism industry employment requirements. Paper suggests a probable educational strategy to rely on practicable educational approaches by considering requirements of the industry.

The work draws on literature from the field of education more generally to arrive at a set of dimensions. Paper demands for the balancing between vocational training and technical education of a student thereby meeting the current tourists' preferences and future tourism demands effectively.

Key Words: Education, Employment, Stakeholders, Students, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism being a labour intensive service industry mainly dependent on the competitive advantage of qualitative personnel in delivering the tourism products or services. India is ranked 40th position in the *World Economic Forum's Most Improved Countries in the Travel & Tourism Competitive Index 2017*. According to the *International Labour Organization (ILO)'s World Employment and Social Outlook-Trends 2019*, global unemployment from 2019 to 2020 is estimated to rise from 172 million to 174 million. Tourism provides 10% of the world's GDP, 7% of global trade

and as many as one in every 11 jobs globally. It is estimated that every job in the core tourism sector creates about 1.5 additional or indirect jobs in the tourism-related economy. When indirect and induced impacts are included, the industry contributes to around one in every eleven jobs worldwide (*WTTC, 2012*). The issues involved in human resources of tourism are multifaceted: availability and quality of skilled labour, employee turnover, benefits and rewards, poor working atmosphere, employment barriers and low level education and training.

Tourism education at national or international level have been developed in unrelated manner with limited associations with the real requirements of the tourism industry. The paper analyses the gap between the tourism environment and world of tourism education. The ultimate purpose of educational institutions is to reduce sensitivity to change, developing stable environment to maintain quality workforce.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND TOURISM

The education program at any level whether regional or national or international faces challenging environment in response to the human resource requirements mentioned as below:

- Industry is accelerating with latest trends and technology
- Unfitting staffing relative to the growing novel tourism industry
- Employee Turnover of professionals at all times
- Unrefined exposing of the image of tourism careers
- Employment regulations and policies
- Meeting with the growing demanding service and requirements of customers.

TOURISM EDUCATION

There has been increase in number of tourism students pursuing higher education in tourism related courses. The researcher investigates whether tourism education meets the needs and expectations of the tourism industry's human resource requirements. Consequently, the tourism sectors have to expand the quantity of a skilled workforce in order to be able to meet the specialized demands of this mounting

tourism activity, and to offer a quality product to international visitors of high expectations.

“Today, the tourism sector is still suffering from a gap between education and skills and knowledge needs. The resulting shortages of labour with ‘future-proof’ skills continue to dent economies and harm job creation prospects. This gap can be bridged with policies that support more opportunities for appropriate industry experience, such as internships or scholarships, along with specialized education and training. Crucially, education institutions must work with industry and governments to address the sector’s talent challenges” (*The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017*).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Universities turn to be the engine for developing human assets for developing nation. The competitive nature and economic significance of the tourism industry shows the vital importance of human resource. Yet many studies have criticized that tourism and hospitality education system is not effectively preparing graduates for employment in the industry. The study analyze the gap between tourism education and high quality graduates.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are mentioned below

- To explore the perceptions of tourism industry professionals and academicians on the efficiency of university curriculum in building high quality graduates.

- To assess the opinion of tourism industry professionals and academicians in identifying the work related skills required for the tourism industry.
- To bridge the gap between the tourism education provisions and tourism industry's needs and expectations.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and the various elements of the research design are presented in database design, measurement design, sampling design and statistical design.

Database design

The secondary data for the present study have been collected from study reports, research articles, websites, and reports of expert committees and publications of various institutions.

A content analysis of tourism curriculum was done as the preliminary approach. The core subjects in tourism courses in University of Kerala based on skills and knowledge were analyzed. Grounded on this analyze, primary data was collected through two sets of structured questionnaires was designed, first to examine the views of tourism industry professionals and the other for subject experts to analyze the skills required for tourism employment.

Areas of study in tourism courses used for the study

- Organizational study
- Management information systems
- Tourism, principles and e-tourism
- Tourism products of India

- Hospitality and customer relationship management
- Global tourism geography
- Strategic management
- Destination planning and management
- International business and tourism law
- Eco tourism

Measurement design

Depending on the type of variables, nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio scales are used for the study. Likert scale is used extensively for data collection.

Sampling design

The population of the study was the travel intermediaries of tourism sector such as tour operators accredited by the Department of tourism, Kerala and travel agents accredited by IATA agents of Kerala. Total population is 214 which include 39 tour operators and 175 travel agents. The head of the department or Placement coordinator from the four universities in Kerala offering the tourism degree and/ or post graduate courses forms the other sample

Sampling method

A census method is used for analyze data from the tourism industry professionals. Also the expert opinions from the academicians representing the government institutions of tourism courses offered is also considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- The result found significant discrepancy between the opinions of tourism industry professionals and academicians. Academicians largely agree that university curriculum and

degree is significant to the tourism industry. Attitudes of industry professionals reveals that institutions fail to produce high-quality graduates.

- There is a great difference between the opinions of professionals and academic providers on the various skills and capabilities desired for work in the tourism industry. The opinion on the requirement of essential skills like oral communication, team work, organizational ability, and academic grades etc. are similar to academicians and professionals. Contrary to this, for freshers, both academicians and professionals ponder academic grades to have significant attributes. Academic grades play least role in the workplace for even freshers, when skills showcase themselves. Tourism professionals highly considers strategic skills, such as decision making, management skills, leadership abilities, and problem-solving skills.
- Significant difference exists between the views of industry professionals and academicians on the advantages of various subjects imparted. Both share a common interpretation on the importance of some subjects imparted in the university. Yet the greatest variance appear in the perceptions of industry professionals about the importance of subject of law-International business and tourism law. In this case, Universities are more aware of the potential consequences for businesses in complex legal environment.

- Oral and written communication and interpersonal communication leadership ranked first among the skills that employers found important for hospitality students to possess. Up to date knowledge and Problem Resolution lists second and inter-employee Relations ranked third.

These findings confirms the gap between the current tourism curriculum at university level, and the needs of the tourism industry. It is an evidence to recommend that tourism education should not be secluded from real world of practice thereby improving the quality of tourism with knowledge and skills to meet the expectations of the tourism industry. It is proved that a critical pedagogy in curricula result in positive effects: personal freedom, business productivity and social justice. Vocational tourism training type of education courses may make graduates as industry ready candidates as well as developing them as a rewarding, talented and skilled human resource to a greater extent.

CONCLUSION

Education backed up with effective policies and regulations drives the prospects of human resources in tourism making the tourism education noteworthy. Being a young field of education, tourism higher education will face uncertainties in the future concerning the content and nature of education that will meet the future needs. Quality education supported with industry-institute partnership, reconsidering of education curriculum, research & training in the field have to be fused for the smooth running of tourism industry. If the design of

tourism degree curriculum disregards industry needs, then the tourism education will not be sustainable and detriment the progress of the tourism industry.

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