

Reassessing Hospitality Education to Foster Connections Between Industry and Academia

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Abstract

The pandemic has had widespread impacts on Hospitality and Tourism, including its educational sector. It has brought challenges such as adapting to technology, addressing student counseling needs, managing enrollments, handling student behavior issues, and ensuring effective practical training in areas like Food Production and Food & Beverage management. These challenges underscore the necessity for reforms within this sector. Traditional academic practices must be reevaluated to incorporate new technologies and innovative teaching methods, while also introducing new subjects like soft skills, startups, and entrepreneurship. The longstanding gap between industry and academia needs to be reexamined, with a focus on enhancing mutual understanding through better information exchange. Research suggests that although academics often propose changes to hospitality training, industry acceptance can vary. While technical skills remain vital, both sectors should prioritize developing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, strategic planning, and leadership skills in their curricula. The goal should be to equip students with competencies that add significant value. Academic programs offer foundational skills and transferable knowledge, complemented by practical industry experience. Balancing these skill sets presents a significant challenge for both sectors. External factors such as globalization and technological advancements underscore the need for international competencies, emphasizing problem-solving and critical thinking. This paper aims to assess the quality of hospitality and tourism education across various dimensions—curriculum, faculty, strategic planning, administration, student achievement, and resources—and proposes strategies to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between industry and academia.

Keywords: Academician, Reevaluate, Education, Skills, Hospitality, Technology

Introduction

Hospitality education encompasses a vast and distinctive field dedicated to preparing individuals for careers in the Hospitality Industry. This industry, marked by its diversity and recent challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, is expanding rapidly, creating abundant job opportunities.

As the Hospitality Industry evolves, the education sector must grow alongside it in terms of curriculum development, faculty quality, strategic planning, administrative management, student achievements, and resource management. The industry demands service-oriented professionals with proficient soft skills and professional knowledge, qualities that Hospitality Education programs aim to impart.

Formal education in hospitality is essential for supplying talent to this dynamic industry, offering programs from certificates to postgraduate levels to meet vocational demands effectively. Total Quality

Management (TQM) ensures that educational institutions deliver value aligned with their goals and objectives, crucial for maintaining educational excellence.

Curriculum and instruction are pivotal components of quality education, requiring alignment with program objectives, current trends, and effective teaching methods tailored to foster desired learning outcomes. Strategic planning ensures institutional goals are understood and achieved through continuous improvement and stakeholder feedback. Administrative management, including effective leadership and student management, ensures operational efficiency and compliance with educational standards.

Student achievements and resource management also significantly impact educational quality, emphasizing the need for well-equipped training facilities and effective resource allocation. Hospitality Management Education serves to formalize industry preparation, attracting students willing to invest years in formal education despite opportunities for on-the-job training.

Despite the proliferation of hospitality programs, quality assurance remains a challenge, with Higher Education institutions facing high societal expectations and competitive pressures for accreditation. Educational quality is multidimensional, influenced by various stakeholders, and demands rigorous evaluation frameworks.

Review of Literature

Professional knowledge and skills can be cultivated through various avenues, including training programs sponsored by governments or enterprises, trade associations, community colleges, or universities (Barrows, 1999).

The concept of educational quality draws parallels from the business community (Fenich, 1999), where the definition of quality is contingent upon customer expectations, needs, competitors' offerings (Grönroos, 2007), and how educational institutions define themselves, their programs, and the expectations they set for students (Fenich, 1999).

It's crucial to note that assessing educational quality involves multiple dimensions and cannot rely on a single indicator (Cheng & Tam, 1997). According to a recent survey of over 32,000 students globally, interest in hospitality and tourism programs has risen by 9%, driven by diverse program options. Certificate programs are ideal for professionals seeking focused upskilling, while broader undergraduate or graduate programs provide comprehensive industry insights (Educations.com).

An integral aspect of this framework includes performance metrics used to evaluate organizational performance and goal achievement (Al-Turki and Duffuaa, 2003). The expansion of tourism and hospitality programs worldwide, exemplified by developments in Egypt since 1975, underscores the growing importance of accurate program evaluation (Abou Taleb, 2009; Mohamed Hosny Mohamed and Toka Fahm, 2014).

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of higher education, particularly in evaluating and measuring quality, there is a notable dearth of empirical research (Winn & Cameron, 1998). Thus, exploring academic perspectives on departmental quality is crucial for institutions aiming to uphold and enhance academic standards (Robbins, 2005).

Academic departments function as service organizations within educational institutions, serving roles in education, research, and community engagement, often with a semi-autonomous structure (Al-Turki & Duffuaa, 2003). Their objectives typically include producing highly qualified graduates, fostering lifelong learning, promoting effective communication and teamwork skills, advancing disciplinary knowledge through research, and offering continuous professional development (Al-Turki & Duffuaa, 2003).

Institutions can also benefit financially and build symbiotic relationships with the tourism industry (Du, 2003), underscoring the interplay between academia and professional sectors in shaping educational outcomes and industry standards.

Methodology

The Literature Review examined key research to understand hospitality education's nature and identified reasons for necessary changes based on input from educators and industry professionals.

Methodologically, both secondary data from academic journals, government websites, and publications were utilized alongside primary data collection methods. This involved in-depth interviews with academics, hospitality professionals, management, and administrative personnel in the educational sector. Due to time and resource constraints, 15 interviews were conducted using convenience sampling.

The structured interviews focused on six key aspects: strategic planning, curriculum and instruction, resources, faculty, student achievement, and administrative management. Questions were open-ended, covering topics such as the retention of traditional versus new subjects in the curriculum, the role of theory in hospitality education, the need for faculty members with industry experience, and the importance of strategic planning in hospitality and tourism institutes.

Interviews were conducted via phone, email, and group discussions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. The combined use of secondary and primary data collection methods aimed to enhance the study's findings by providing comprehensive and detailed insights into the research topic.

Data Analysis

The paper argues that educators must fully understand the implications of reducing the practical and vocational aspects of programs, emphasizing the need for adjustments in program management and administration to support student completion.

Strategic planning in educational institutes plays a crucial role in developing educational programs that align with global development strategies, ensuring a supply of highly qualified manpower and research support (Al-Turki & Duffuaa, 2003). Successful institutes achieve this through well-planned strategic plans that include mechanisms for monitoring, control, and adjustment. The effectiveness of these institutes often hinges on the performance of their academic departments (ADs). With the rapid growth of the hospitality and tourism industry, the number of universities and institutes offering such programs has increased significantly, leading to program saturation and duplicate investments. This proliferation has resulted in some institutes offering incomplete courses, impacting overall efficiency.

Challenges faced by hospitality programs include inadequate educational resources, financial constraints, high infrastructure costs compared to other fields, and limited teaching facilities. Many newly established institutes offering hospitality and tourism programs are still developing and lack industry connections, limiting internship opportunities for students.

The curriculum and instruction in hospitality and tourism programs often lag behind industry demands, with varied syllabi and curricula across different institutes. Although practical training is recognized as essential, it is typically delayed until the final year of study or conducted in limited scope, hindering students' hands-on learning experiences. There is a call for a balanced approach between theory and practical training to better prepare graduates for the industry.

Faculty quality and self-assessment are critical for ensuring program quality in hospitality education (Lee Harvey, 2004). However, the opinions of faculty members are sometimes overlooked in decision-making

processes, despite their valuable insights into program improvement. The influx of educators from non-hospitality backgrounds further complicates this issue, as many lack industry experience or the necessary qualifications, impacting the quality of education.

Student achievement in hospitality programs is often hindered by inadequate practical training and lower entry requirements compared to other disciplines within the same institutes. The administrative management of hospitality programs, dominated by non-tourism disciplines, suggests a limited scope that may not meet industry-specific needs.

Regarding instructional learning and evaluation of learning outcomes, there is a lack of certified mechanisms for on-the-job training and industrial training evaluation, often treating these experiences as merely a part of students' assessment without clear criteria for assessment. Continuous assessment methods, though present in many institutions, rarely align with intended learning outcomes, necessitating improved evaluation systems to better track student progress and program effectiveness.

Overall, the study highlights the need for systematic improvements in curriculum design, faculty qualifications, practical training opportunities, and assessment methods to enhance the quality and relevance of hospitality education programs.

Conclusion

The study assesses the hospitality and tourism program across six dimensions: strategic planning, curriculum and instruction, resources, faculty, student achievement, and administrative management. Findings reveal significant challenges faced by this program. To enhance the quality of hospitality and tourism education, the following actions are recommended:

- 1. Curriculum Review:** The current curriculum design lacks industry input, resulting in graduates who do not meet industry needs. Industry experts should be involved in curriculum development to ensure it meets labor market requirements. Emphasizing practical training over classroom lectures in vocational institutes will better equip students with the necessary skills before entering the workforce.
- 2. Faculty Development:** Many instructors lack industry experience. Implementing regular industry training for instructors and inviting industry practitioners as guest lecturers or for practical courses can bridge the gap between academic theory and industry practice.
- 3. Industry Collaboration:** Strengthening ties with the industry through tailored training programs, consultancy projects, and management collaborations will better align educational offerings with industry demands.
- 4. Enhanced Accreditation:** Establishing stricter accreditation criteria for hospitality and tourism programs is crucial. This includes assessing the quality of instructors, facilities, and curriculum. Partnerships with organizations like UNESCO can help in improving management standards.
- 5. Entry Requirements:** Implementing entry interviews for prospective hospitality and tourism students can ensure that only those genuinely interested and suited for the industry are admitted. This will help maintain the quality of graduates and their alignment with industry expectations.

Hospitality and tourism education has played a vital role in the industry's development but faces challenges in keeping pace with industry advancements in curriculum design and instructor qualifications. Urbanization and educational levels among city residents also impact tourism development. Accurately evaluating program quality is increasingly important for the industry's growth.

This paper lays the groundwork for discussions on addressing these challenges to enable hospitality organizations to effectively recruit, train, and retain talent for the future.

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