

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TOURISM ACADEMIA AND TOURISM INDUSTRY IN RAJASTHAN

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## ABSTRACT

The study of tourism is considered important due to the fact that it is a vital industry in the service sector. Despite the rapid growth in the provision of tourism higher education in the past 40 years, uncertainties remain about the content and nature of tourism degrees and how these are aligned with the needs of the tourism industry. Research has been done on tourism higher education curriculum design, industry- skills sets identification and through the researches a gap has been investigated between tourism academia and industry. This study aims to identify the reasons behind inability of education to fulfill the needs of industry and also suggest measure to bridge the gap between two .

**Keywords:** Tourism Academia, industry, gap, curriculum, skills.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century has given rise to a revolution in higher education, allowing the implementation of social progress and economic development through knowledge management and application (Pan, 2004). It is believed that education is a vehicle for social and economic transformation. It brings about progress and economic development. Therefore, the ultimate aim of every educational institution is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to achieve its set objectives. The quality of teaching and the worth of every school are to a large extent assessed on the basis of its academic achievement and how the students performed in the field level. Indeed, the development of any country in this contemporary time depends largely on the quality of education of such nation. The basis for actual development of a nation starts with the development of its human resources (Akanly, 2007).

Consequently, in Rajasthan, the skill development and enhancement of students has been a matter of concern to the government as well as the general public (Ankomah, 2010). In line with these arguments, successive governments in the state have made frantic efforts to improve teaching and learning process in tertiary institutions by introducing different skill development programmes to make the students industry- ready and one of such programme is hospitality/tourism education. At present, various tourism / hospitality certification and diploma courses are run by government ITI and Polytechnic colleges in Rajasthan. Also, the hospitality programmes are run by public and private universities either as separate entity or combined depending on the institution in question.

Tourism higher education, as a major platform for human capital development for the tourism industry (Ladkin, 2005), has a very close relationship with the economic development of the tourism industry. However, despite rapid growth in the past 40 years, tourism higher education still faces uncertainties in terms of the content and nature of tourism degrees, and this restricts employment opportunities for tourism graduates (Dale and Robinson, 2001; Airey, 2005) For instance, research work carried out globally indicated that, the educators and industry have different viewpoints and do not understand each other's perceptions. The different perceptions between educators and the industry were recognised to be a problem (Collins, 2002; Harkison, 2004b; Li & Kivela, 1989; Petrova & Mason, 2004; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005 as cited in Kim, 2008). Furthermore, researchers such as (Goodman & Sprague, 1991, Kang, Wu, & Gould, 2005, Petrova and Mason, 2004 and Ladkin, 2005 as cited in Goh, 2011 have also criticised tourism and hospitality educators for not adequately preparing students for employment in the industry. They often claim that, what educators teach in the classroom does not much current industry trends. This sometimes impedes employment opportunities for tourism graduates (Dale and Robinson, 2001; Airey, 2005, Asirifi et al., 2013). In view of this, many studies have also stressed on the important skills needed by the hospitality students in order for them to be part of the tourism industry.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education for the tourism sector is a relatively recent arrival in the education system. Although the study of tourism can trace its origins back to the 1930s or earlier (Airey et al., 2015a), it was not until the 1960s that it was established as an 'area of study in its own right and as a subject of study up to degree and diploma level' (Airey, 2005, p. 13). Tourism is a person-to-person activity, with its quality depending on the education and motivation of its employees (Sola, 2002). Thus tourism education is important to improve employees' abilities and consequently promote the tourism industry's capabilities. According

to human capital theory, proposed by Professor Theodore W. Schultz, the in 1979, education is the key to the development of human capital, with its main function being to strengthen people's ability to deal with uncertainty and help solve problems (Lo, 2005; Lin, 2005). From the point of view of human capital theory, tourism education aims to enhance people's ability in dealing with uncertainties in the tourism industry and managing future changes in the tourism labour market globally. Tourism education, often as the starting point in the training and development of human capital to undertake occupations in the tourism industry, not only adds value, raises personnel quality and infuses a sense of tourism professionalism, but also serves to sustain the local communities that underpin successful tourist destinations (Cooper, et al., 1996; Ladkin, 2005).

It was developed against a background of the recognition of the link between an educated work force and economic prosperity; a rapid expansion of higher education, including the development of many new universities and other institutions; and a growth in tourism itself (Airey, 2015). To a certain extent, tourism education acts as a strategy for promoting sustainable tourism development.

Tourism was identified, particularly by these new institutions that were relatively free from the constraints of older academic disciplines, as a new area of study that would attract students. Tourism was seen as providing a direct link to employment in a growing activity. Ayikoru et al. (2009) have pointed to the extent to which the expansion of further and higher education was very much driven by the need for an educated workforce and tourism was very much a part of this. As Ladkin (2005, p. 437) puts it, 'the vocational element of tourism education necessitates that it is considered in the wider labour market context'. Given this importance from its very beginning, it is in many ways surprising that attention to post-graduation employment and careers in tourism came in for so little attention at an early stage.

Education in India has a long history that begins from the Vedic times, continuing through the colonial period, to present times. As early as the first five centuries, centres of learning like Nalanda (in Bihar) and Taxila (now in Pakistan), had a supreme influence on scholars from as far as China and Greece, for centuries.

Researchers, such as Raina and Vats (1988), claim that Indian education was traditionally multifaceted in as much as it sought to define various states of the mind, understanding, consciousness, perception, memory, intelligence, character, behaviour and conduct. Indian education system laid emphasis on overall development of the disciple where his education will not be limited to books but beyond which will make him a better human being.

Although tourism may have been a latecomer to India (Singh, 1997, p. 301), its practice and principles had been in place centuries ago as the concept of tourism was being followed but a proper term was not given to that concept. Tourism research in India commenced in the early 1970s, when the first known authoritative study of tourism as an industry was published (Singh, 1975). Ten years from then, a few other researchers (Kaur, 1985; Singh, 1985) ventured into the phenomenon and have given their inputs.

Singh (1997) and Jithendran and Baum (2000) have investigated and documented the evolution of hospitality and tourism education and training in India. In their accounts, the Centre for Vocational Studies, University of Delhi, was identified as the pioneer institute in initializing a tourism studies programme in 1972. Parallel to this, hotel companies and the government owned Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) had been quick to set up their own training institutions to meet with the growing demand for skilled and semi-skilled manpower for a promising tourism industry.

The establishment of the Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management (IITTM) marks the right beginning of tourism (non-hospitality) education in the country in 1983 (Jithendran & Baum, 2000) a dedicated institute just for tourism education an initiative of Ministry of Tourism Govt. of India to bring out tourism professionals for the industry. In the initial phase the institute developed programmes for the in-service personnel of tourism administration, largely the government employees. Gradually, it expanded this function to service employees of the different sectors of the tourism and travel industry, such as managers, tour operators and travel agents.

Tourism, as a labour-intensive industry, is both complimented and criticised for its impact on employment. Some give credit to the tourism industry for providing a mechanism for generating employment opportunities for both developing countries with surplus labour and for industrialised countries with high levels of unemployment (Cooper et al., 1998). Others question the value and quality of tourism jobs, with a lack of higher-level jobs resulting in a lack of career development (Ladkin, 2005). While the tourism industry produces considerable employment opportunities, the growth of tourism is rigorously limited due to the lack of adequately trained personnel, which has been the major determinant diluting the positive economic benefits of tourism in a country's economy (Liu, 2002). Rajasthan being a tourism-centric state it was noted that the tourism sector is of critical economic importance in Rajasthan, especially for employment in regional areas. A major concern is that a lack of suitable staff will undermine the industry's ability to meet the expectations of service quality that tourism promotions have created. It is important that steps are taken to ensure the industry's strong growth (AHP, 2007). Concerns about lack of education and training have been accentuated by the tourism industry from the mid-1980s, when a rapid growth in inbound tourism occurred in Rajasthan. The demand for tourism services to meet international standards has led to the requirement of labour with well-trained skills. The tourism industry has started to see the need for a more sophisticated approach to human resource management, and this is reflected in a new approach to education and training of the workforce. Education has become increasingly important.

### III. RESEARCH GAP

In Rajasthan, tourism tertiary education has been facing great challenges in the development of human capital for the tourism industry. Even though the main purpose of the tourism programme is to equip students with knowledge and skills to meet industry needs, graduates are not able to articulate their skills in which they have been trained to work. Asirifietal., (2013) and Avornyo(2013). The study therefore seeks to explore the perception of employers and employees of tourism industry on the important skills needed in the world of tourism work and that of tourism education. To do this, employers of tourism industry and hospitality/tourism graduates employed in the industry were interviewed in order to ascertain what is on the ground. Along with this suggest possible measures to bridge the gap.

### IV. OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the reasons why tourism graduates are not able to meet industry needs.
2. To suggest measures to bridge the gap between tourism education and tourism industry.

### V. METHODOLOGY

#### i. Research Method Qualitative Approach

The study was conducted using qualitative research methodology. This was used to help the researcher seek the views of tourism industry employers and employees who are tourism tertiary graduates to provide key information about the needed skills that they consider as being important for the students. As qualitative research, respondents were offered the opportunity to respond to questions more elaborately.

#### ii. Instrumentation

The main instrument employed for the study was interview and the interview took a semi-structured form. Amedahe (2002 as cited in Owusu, 2010) explained that semi-structured interviews are more flexible and allows the interviewer to probe into issues and in some cases follow the order dictated by the situation. Consequently, tourism industry employers and employees who are hospitality/tourism tertiary graduates were selected to provide key information about the needed skills that they consider as being important for the students. The reason for the choice is that, they may have actually experienced what was taught in class and what was useful in the workplace. The interview was conducted at the respondent's work place and it took about 30 minutes for each respondent. Notes were taken as respondents speak.

#### iii. Population and Sampling Procedure

The population of the study was made up of all employers of tourism industry and employees who are tourism tertiary graduates and purposive sampling procedure was adopted to select total of 106 respondents which included employers and employees of different sectors of tourism industry like travel agency, hotel, airlines and guiding as key informants to provide information about the needed skills that they consider as being important for the students. According to Kumekpor (2002), purposive sampling has to do with the deliberate picking of respondents who satisfy some qualities for a given research. These respondents may not be obtained through a random sampling procedure due to the fact that the specific characteristics required of the respondents may not be randomly distributed in the universe.

#### iv. Data Analysis

In this study, notes taken were coded into categories for relevant themes. Thus, the thematic approach was employed to analyse the qualitative data that emerged from the study. According to Breakwell et al. (2006), thematic analysis considers issues which repeatedly run through responses and which are quite complex and elaborated statements which are not easily open to conversion into simple categories.

### VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### i. Expectations from Tourism Graduates

In an open question, respondents were asked to identify important skills expected from new graduates entering the workplace. To a large extent the respondents produced a list Accordingly, specific skills and desirable characteristics included the ability to apply knowledge to real life situations, the ability to approach problems creatively, to demonstrate professional behavior and appearance, and to be current with the industry.

In addition, the respondents all agreed that foreign language competence is extremely important. There is little doubt that foreign languages are invaluable when communicating with people from other countries, as is often the case in the cross-cultural interface between tourism organizations and tourists. Tourism graduates must also have excellent verbal and written communication skills and be able to understand the needs of diverse groups of customers. Taken together, these skills are necessary if the graduate is to manage guest problems effectively. This suggests that tourism employers do not simply seek graduates to provide basic service to customers, but to be able to manage the service encounter.

Participants in the interviews also felt that tourism graduates must be patient, committed and motivated in pursuing a tourism career. The industry reality is that tourism employees must be prepared to work unsocial hours, such as weekends, holidays and evenings. These conditions might require greater commitment and self-motivation than other jobs (Zehrer and Mossenlechner, 2009). As reinforcement of their earlier comment, respondents added that these characteristics are clearly linked to the issue of

having realistic employment expectations. The industry perception was also that most work is undertaken as a team effort and graduates should be able to function as team members.

The ability to accept criticism, willingness to learn, and a strong work ethic were also valued. Altogether, these personal competences were perceived by respondents as equally important to other occupational requirements of tourism jobs.

## ii. Tourism Education and Problems

Each industry in an economy has its own specific requirements that prospective workers in that industry should possess. These requirements are needed for the efficient functioning of the prospective worker and to make him/her more productive. However, in most instances, graduates of tourism are said to be incapacitated when it comes to working effectively in the industry in which they have been trained to work. Consequently, the researcher, asked the respondents to share their views on the reasons why they were not able to meet industry needs after graduations. The studies that tried to determine the problems encountered in tourism education found the following problems: problems related to acquiring the required qualities to be able to survive in the industry, problems about practice opportunities, problems with issues linked to specialization, problems with collaboration between educational institutions and tourism enterprises, and the problems related to career planning (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Amoah & Baum, 1997; Hacioglu et al., 2008). The basic problem of education in the academic tourism in Rajasthan is that there is a failure in educating staff who can use the technology efficiently and knows a foreign language, and failure in relations with tourism industry.

With regard to the issues related to students, improperly designed curriculums, limited practical training opportunities for students, inadequate class participation, low quality of education, internships that have no legal basis and lack of supervision are also other problems encountered by students (Okumus & Yagci, 2005; Hacioglu, vd. 2008; Akoglan- Kozak, 2009). It was found that these problems had a negative influence on students' intention to work in the tourism sector (Kasli et al., 2010). According to the annual activity reports for universities in Rajasthan, the rate of student attendance is about 45%. As a result, factors causing a low level of attendance become an important area of study. The problems occurring during education, in particular, are considered effective factors in absenteeism (intention to continue school). Also, inability of graduates to apply what was learnt into the job place supports an argument made by Mayaka and Akama (2009 as cited in Avornyo, 2013) that there is a lack of proper academic understanding and focused theoretic framework of most hospitality/ tourism studies.

## VII. SUGGESTION FOR BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TOURISM ACADEMIA AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

The interviewees were asked on how to bridge the gap between tourism education and the tourism industry and on the basis of their responses following suggestions have come up:

- There should be collaboration between educators and industries this will not only help the students to be industry ready but will also help to improve the quality of service provided to the guests.
- Fieldtrips to industry for teachers and students will help both to understand the latest trends and best practices of the industry, can enhance student and staff learning through experiential learning (Ritchie, 2003, Goh, 2011).
- Longer internship periods will help the students to accommodate into the working style of industry and also will help them to acquire skills to work in different department of the industry.
- More practical lessons as industry works on hands on principle therefore emphasis to be laid on skill enhancement of the student which can be achieved through practical knowledge,
- Modern equipment for practical lessons, hi-tech labs improved infrastructure updated libraries will help the students to understand the needs of the industry better.
- Not only the students but regular in-service training for teachers should be arranged where the people from industry will train the teachers by making them aware of latest trends and practices of the industry so that teachers are able to provide the industry desired skills to students,
- Regular review of the curriculum and including the industry representation for curriculum design will help to produce effective curriculum for the students,
- Competence based training, much attention be given to language training, strengthen communication courses and so forth. There should be regular conferences, seminars and workshops aimed at exchanging ideas. During such gathering, students and teachers would be well-equipped. They would gain a lot of theoretical and practical knowledge.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

From the results of this interview study, which was undertaken with tourism managers and employees who are tourism graduates, a clear picture emerges of the demands for knowledge and skills of tourism graduates. Some desired skills are generic. Communication and team skills are not specific to tourism studies, but tourism curricula should provide students with ample opportunities to develop them. Other expectations, such as the ability to apply tourism knowledge in practical situations, should be integral in tourism education courses. Personal characteristics, such as being patient and self-motivated, were also regarded as essential to achieve career success. There is an important lesson here for tourism educators and graduates that tourism employers look for both specific knowledge/ skills and personality.

Tourism as a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological area of study lends itself well to dealing with the complexities presented by a post-industrial and post-disciplinary

World, therefore it is a challenge to develop better methods for bridging the communication gap between industry and academia. Graduating without the skills necessary to carry out their professional responsibilities is damaging for both students and the

industry. Hence is it extremely necessary to invite tourism professionals to think of ways of effectively communicating their needs to tourism educators, and urge educators to be open to the expressed industry needs.

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