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Expectations of Tourism Industry on Competencies and Tourism Education

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Abstract

Evolution of tourism industry dates back to 2000 years and at present it is one of the fastest growing sectors in the globe today. This has led to the growth of tourism education in the form of graduate, post graduate and certificate courses. Though many researchers have been done on tourism curriculum design but to what extent this curriculum meets the industry requirements. The main objective of the study is to understand the competencies expected by tourism industry and role of tourism education in meeting the needs of industry requirements. This study is mainly based on the review of various articles on tourism industry expectations on competencies and role of tourism education.

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Introduction

A tourism industry continues to grow and an extensive diversification of products is taking place in the industry hence, becoming one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Tourism industry is considered as a key for the development of socio-economic progress of a country. Tourism industry business volume is almost equal to that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism industry plays a significant role as a major player in international commerce and it is one of the main economic source for developing countries. UNWTO's *Tourism 2020 Vision* forecasts that international arrivals are expected to reach nearly 1.6 billion by the year 2020. East Asia and the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East and Africa are forecasted to record growth at rates of over 5% year, compared to the world average of 4.1%. The more mature regions Europe and Americas are anticipated to show lower than average growth rates. Europe will maintain the highest share of world arrivals, although there will be a decline from 60 per cent in 1995 to 46 per cent in 2020. The contribution of tourism industry to the economic development of the country depends on the quality of the tourism industry offer (UNWTO). Therefore, considering the above facts and figures it is necessary to maintain the quality and demand to remain competitive. To meet the quality and demand, tourism industry requires skilled human resources.

Education and work are two sides of the same coin, in that both should result in making a positive contribution to the creation of wealth and quality of life. The system is designed to utilize its organizational resources to transform individuals, through the educational process, into graduates who are able to contribute to both organization and the society (Frank, 2002).

The major function of tourism sector depends on the human resources. The quality of human resource is very important for the success of tourism business. For the development of human capital, tourism education plays a vital role and further contributes for the success of tourism business and that leads to economic development of tourism sector. Tourism education is considered as one of the sub-sectors of tourism and could impact the tourism sector. Tourism education plays an important role in improving the competitiveness of tourism business and in meeting the customer's satisfaction level. Though tourism education has significant impact on industry it is necessary to check the changing needs of industry.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to understand the competencies expected by tourism industry and role of tourism education in meeting the expectations of industry requirements.

Industry Expectations on Competencies

Industry requires skilled and job ready youth to meet the growing demands of the organization and to face the global competition but, in reality it's not happening. The skilled workforce required for a strong, sustainable and balanced growth. According to TV Mohandas Pai, chairman, Manipal Global Education pointed out that soft skill along with job competencies were essential to make good impression during job interviews and current young workforce don't possess soft skills (DNA, 2013).

Apart from more general skills such as interpersonal, communication, problem solving, etc delivered in travel and tourism courses it is essential to provide additional key competencies such as cross-cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, inquisitiveness, openness to new perspectives and influences, cross-cultural negotiations, managing uncertainty and complexity in international business environments, international adjustment and adaptability, and self-management play a major role in building students career at the global level (Vance and Paik, 2011).

Career competencies can be gained through education and training. In this study relationship between the career competencies and career success of Thai employees in the tourism and hospitality sector was assessed. The career competencies are computer and language skills, work spirits and ethics, team working and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills. The two career successes are assessed as objective and subjective. The results shows that career competencies have positive relationship with career success especially computer and language skills, team working and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills have major outcome on career success (Lertwannawit, Serirat & Pholpantin, 2009).

The industry will look for a professional approach that will serve the organization in a well organized way and which will meet the needs of the tourists and organization development. A fresh dynamic executive in tourism industry management will need a basic skill of operation, which should fuel the future management process of tourism organization (Thomas, 2007).

According to Ricci and Kaufman (2007) professionals give more importance to interpersonal skills as they believe that it is one of the strongest competency indicators. Employers today look for skills of the employees rather than on a college diploma. Innovation skills are essential for effective problem solving in our increasingly complex global business environment (Qiumei, 2007).

Tourism Employers emphasise on practical skills and general transferable skills but, in contrasts with educators expectation who are developing course curriculum which is more conceptual and also full of tourism-specific material (Singh, 2005).

The tourism industry looks for quality human resources who can respond positively to the planning of strategic or corporate businesses, expanding business, cost effective ways to operate business and meeting new and demanding needs of tourists. The employers look for overall intellectual ability and concentrates on flexibility, language skills including good use of English plus other foreign languages, oral and written communication skills, outgoing personalities, people skills and IT competencies (Singh, 2005).

The most desired competencies includes: teamwork, communication skills, guest service skills, professional appearance, understanding of industry expectations, pride in self and preferring to work with people over completing administrative tasks (Tesone & Ricci, 2005). Most of the graduates after their graduation are well aware of the job knowledge, but they lack in necessary job skills (Irwin, 2005).

Role of Tourism Education in Developing Competencies

The key purpose of the majority of tourism programmes is to prepare the graduates for a career in the tourism industry. However, the extent to which institutions actually delivers the programmes to meet the aims varies significantly. The availability of regular teaching staff with qualification and experience in the area of tourism plays a key role in molding right human resources for tourism and hospitality sector (Thomas & Jaykumar, 2012).

Tourism industry is often impacted by the external environment factors and it is essential to adjust to those external shocks and to plan, think and to act accordingly. Students who are going to enter the tourism industry need different skills, aptitudes and knowledge to face the challenges of industry and this requires tourism educational system to change to meet this need (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper & Antonioli, 2008).

According to human capital theory education plays very important role for the development of human capital. So, tourism education can be considered as beginning point in the training and development of human capital and developing the ability to deal with uncertainties and also infuses a sense of professionalism (Wang, 2008).

Education institutions in tourism play a vital role in developing the professional conduct and successful management of tourism industry. Creating professionals in tourism and stimulating motivations and skills is not achieved through a traditional education method. Tourism trends, industry requirements and competition in the business sector should make the training institution offer courses in a strategic way to get an accepting result and market leadership (Thomas, 2007).

Rapidly changing conditions in the world are creating career opportunities to meet the diverse needs of the domestic and international tourists, the host community and service providers. Within the organization of service providers, there are a great number of specific jobs which requires professionals. The tourism education system can play an important role in the development of quality human resources armed with professional, vocational and entrepreneurial skills (Singh, 2005).

Tourism education should be able to offer the quality that will help in responding to the needs of the tourism industry and efficiency by, studying and evaluating the costs and benefits of the wide range of education process and methods available. Additionally, it has to identify the needs and expectations of those who are involved in a system i.e. tourism employees, students and educators, to make sure that the education given and the processes adopted are valid (WTO, 2004).

The main objective of the tourism courses is to meet the needs of students and employers but the question is how it can be achieved. In the future tourism will be considered an experience economy. Many services organization are in danger of becoming commodities, traded solely on price therefore it is essential to create unique experience to their customers by dramatising or personalising the services and also involving customer in the service process. The individual needs and additional skills are currently developed by tourism and hospitality courses. Apart from critical and analytic they need to be creative and innovative. Communication skills could be used to create a narrative and a non verbal atmosphere. They need to understand their customers and interest to discover and celebrate local uniqueness (Morgan, 2004).

Hannam, Mitsche, Stone and Mordue (2004), in their study on 'Tourism Employability and the European Social Fund', discussed on employability of students undertaking tourism master programmes funded by the European Social Fund. Students at the University of Sunderland were surveyed to know the extent to which they felt that their programme had enhanced their employability in both the public and private sectors and were asked to reflect upon their own employability skills and attributes. The results indicated that students are fairly confident that they have the necessary professional employability skills and attributes for higher level employment.

Role of extra Curricular activities in developing student competencies

Co curricular activity hours enhance the knowledge of the students. It is a perfect platform that brings out a whole new world both inside and outside of the class room. Various activities help students to develop skills and knowledge that are much expected by the industry. The various benefits of co curricular activities in students association as follows:

Networking: The easy and best way to network with students who have similar interests is joining a student Association. It can help them with their career, hobby or anything that are passionate about.

Social Skills: As a student has to learn how to talk to other people from different cultures and countries, as an international student, it is an opportunity to build some social skills.

Professional experience: If students join professional chapter student association, the students will get exposed to a lot of professional careers and help build professionally. For example, if they join American Marketing Association will help them in getting the feel of professional career.

Personality development: Communication skills will improve in the individual because, of interaction with different people. Student may learn even more if he/she is on the executive board. They learn to balance education and organizational work focusing on their goals.

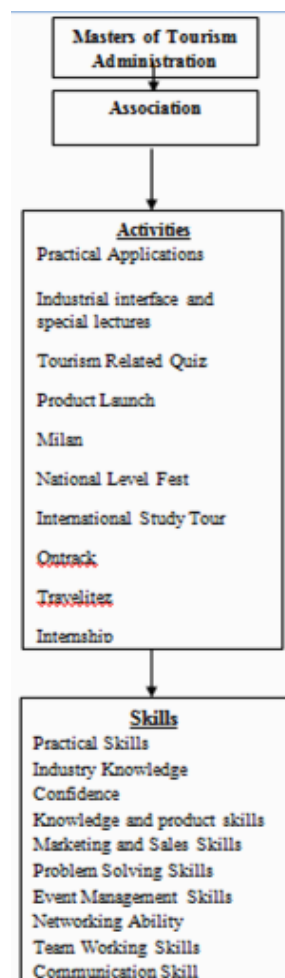
Leadership Skills: In the events if the student becomes a coordinator and takes up the responsibility or challenge to be a leader, they will learn what it takes to be a leader.

Alumni Networking: Student Associations usually tries to bring in alumni and ask them to share their experiences. It provides an opportunity for them to learn from seniors who have graduated and help them to get connected. It helps them with job search and mentoring.

Organization and Management Skills: Many of us are not familiar how an organization works and how to manage everything. If they are in the event coordinating board, they will get to learn how fundraising works, how finances work, how to market for event, how to work as a team. It helps them in the long run of their career or if they are opening their own ventures (Kumar).

A Model of Tourism Studies in Christ University

Fig 1 Christ University Tourism Students Association



Christ University Tourism Student Association (CUTA) is the association of Master of Tourism Administration (MTA) students. They organize professional and personality development activities. As shown in the figure 1 various activities along with fest and events are organized by CUTA which in turn develop various skills among the students.

The various benefits of association activities are

Practical Applications is the application of theoretical knowledge such as itinerary preparation, promotional videos on different culture, and presentations on various destinations. This will develop practical skill and product knowledge among students.

Industrial Interface and Special Lectures includes industry interface and special lectures by experts and professionals from the Travel, Tourism, Hospitality and Cargo industry. This helps the students to have a clear idea about various industries and make right decisions from their career perspective.

Tourism related quiz, this will enhance IQ level, product and knowledge skills among the students.

Product Launch is an activity of how to sell and differentiate a product in the market. This will help in developing marketing and communication skills among students.

Milan is an inter-class cultural fest which explores the hidden talent of students in cultural activities and also develops team working skills among 1st and 2nd year students. It also provide platform to develop good coordination between the classes.

Exodus is a national level tourism fest for the Tourism and Hospitality students in order to interact, network, synergize and stay connected with one another. It will further develop event management skills, team working skills, and marketing and sales skills among the students.

International Study Tour for the students of MTA is a compulsory international tour during their third semester break. This helps them to achieve better ideas about tour planning and organizing.

Ontrack Cricket and throw ball tournament is conducted for travel and tourism corporate by the tourism department. This will help to build network with corporate and also helps students to get an idea about their career.

Travelitez is a corporate quiz designed exclusively for the travel, tourism and hospitality fraternity. During this event students are able to interact with corporate and also helps in developing good relationship between institution and corporate sector.

Internship during summer break students enroll for internship and this will helps them to understand the industry atmosphere, practical experience and knowledge of product in depth.

Jharoka This event is specially organized for the alumni. This is an event that brings the MTA family under one umbrella. This helps the students to share views with their seniors and also seniors share their experience about their work in the industry.

Konkurrenz is the association of B Com Tourism Students which organizes inter class and intra class tourism activities to establish the competitive skills among the students. Figure 2 indicates various activities along with fest and events organized by B Com Tourism students which in turn help in developing necessary skills among students.

Fig 2 Konkurrenz**Advantages of Konkurrenz activities**

(JAM) Just A Minute- A member from each team has to speak on a given topic for a minute without any interruption. This will help in developing confidence and communication skills among the students.

Quiz on general knowledge and tourism product will be conducted; it will help in developing IQ skills.

Crisis management situation activity contributes in imparting problem solving skills in the students.

Product launch a product is given to a team and they have to market the product, which will develop marketing and sales skills in the students.

Hangman is an activity in which the letters to form a word should be guessed from a tourism related word or terminology. This will help in developing logical thinking among the students.

Case Studies are given to group of students to analyze the case which will develop logical reasoning and decision making skills among the students.

Alta Vista, the national level undergraduate tourism fest organized by the students of B Com Tourism and Travel Management is held every year in an endeavor to stimulate the personal, interpersonal and professional skills and event management in the students.

National Study Tour the B Com Tourism students have a national tour during their fifth semester break. All through the journey, students are given chances to develop better ideas about tourism and its emerging trends.

Indian Tourism Exhibition an exhibition regarding the various tourism destinations in India is conducted by the B Com Tourism students. Many stalls will be put up which exhibits the tourist attractions and handicrafts of different states in India. This will help to develop product knowledge in a practical way.

Apart from above activities and fest, Journal club and other research oriented activities are also conducted in order to develop the research skills among the students.

Conclusion

Tourism is a service oriented industry and it is also called as people industry. Though technology plays a significant role, human capital is very much essential for the development and growth of tourism sector. Tourism industry looks for quality human resources with various skills and abilities. According to the various resources that have been referred and reviewed by the researcher the different competencies required such as soft skills (DNA, 2013), cross-cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, inquisitiveness, openness to new perspectives and influences, cross-cultural negotiations, managing uncertainty and complexity in international business environments, international adjustment and adaptability, and self-management (Vance and Paik, 2011), computer and language skills, team working and leadership, and tourism and hospitality knowledge and skills (Lertwannawit, Serirat & Pholpantin, 2009), basic skills of operation (Thomas, 2007), interpersonal skills and innovative skills (Qiumei, 2007), practical skills, Communication skills and people skills (Singh, 2005), team work and professional approach (Tesone & Ricci, 2005) have been listed. In order to impart competencies and develop quality human resources, tourism education plays a vital role. Tourism education should provide a platform to develop and enhance the competencies in students thereby reducing the competency gap between the requirement of the industry and the qualifications provided by the tourism education. The model of Tourism Studies in Christ University (CUTA and Konkurrenz) is an example of how Christ University provides this platform to develop required competencies in students.

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