



Challenges faced by HRS in the Tourism and Hospitality management education in Iraq

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Abstract

The general quality within the hospitality and tourism sector is contingent on good education and training, and the overall level of education of employees. In spite of the enormous amount of research which has been conducted across the world related to the training and education prospects in the hospitality and tourism industry there exists a big gap in this field in Iraq and this should thus be carefully considered. This research presents the recent constraining developments and the economic effect on the global and Iraqi hospitality and tourism industry. It also specifies the challenges and proposes changes that are considered to be important in order to address the problems faced. The study was based on a review of recent literature in regard to tourism and hospitality management education, and sought to make some recommendations for a possible growth of the hospitality and tourism industry in Iraq. Resolving the tricky issues will be difficult, necessitating a top-down approach that commences at the state levels. To fashion a national tourism culture invariably requires changing the erroneous attitudes of stakeholders. Furthermore, it is clear that education and training is needed to adequately prepare the future industry employees. As such the human resource management curriculum must be carefully designed and the practical training programs for tourism and hospitality industries is essential if the economic outputs for this industrial sector will grow significantly.

Keywords: HRM, Iraq tourism, hospitality management, management education

Introduction

Hospitality and tourism is a wide domain of research which acquires its rules from a large range of other disciplines such as sociology, geography anthropology, and economics. Numerous research has been conducted on how we can study tourism and hospitality, Nevertheless, no clear methodology has been advised for the tourism and hospitality management education aspects and especially for an Iraqi setting. Hospitality and tourism have shown dramatic growth in the last few decades. The diverse nature, culture, and cuisines of Iraq attract millions of visitors from the globe. The classical method of managing hospitality and tourism is still used in Iraq, therefore, a need to professionalize the management methods in this industry is essential in order to keep abreast of the global developments in the growing industry. Existing tendencies in the hospitality and tourism sector call for continuous investment in education and well developed programmes that will help to increase the quality of services provided. Investment in personnel is non-negotiable as education guides them to provide supplementary satisfaction to guests and all customers. Furthermore, satisfied employees will reveal their satisfaction in their dealings with guests, thus they will be presenting their business as a good one which cares about quality service provision and guests' satisfaction.

The global tourism industry value has grown to 3.9 % with more than one billion tourists worldwide in 2012, and this year, the tourism and hospitality industry has come back to the best situation possible now as the quantity of international visitors have risen for the whole world (Tourism Organization's data, 2013). In 2010, the overall international visitors numbers grew to 952 million and increased to 6.4 % million and accomplished a staggering 996 million



tourists globally in 2011- thus an increase rate of 4.6 %. There has been an affirmative increase in tourists and the maximum tourist arrivals in 2012 were predominantly across the whole of Europe, Oceania, America, Caribbean and North Africa.

Taking into account its long-term tendency, tourism has continued to extend and vary in the last six decades. It has become the fast-growing economic sector in the world. Many new beautiful destinations have appeared and these are different from the traditional destinations like America and Europe. The multinational tourist numbers have increased from 277 million visitors in 1980 to more than one billion in 2012 with a constant rising rate of 3.5 to 4 % in the last decade except in the economic recessions period (2001 and 2009). Tourism Towards 2030, (World Tourism Organization, 2011; Thapa & Panta, 2019), forecast that international tourist arrivals will grow by an average 3.3 percent every year from 2010 to 2030 over the whole world and the total tourist visitors will reach an estimated 1.8 billion travellers by 2030. The International Labor Organization, (2011) reports record that the hospitality and tourism industry is one the most active industries and it will provide about 235 million jobs over the world in next decade. In the next ten years up to 2030, the growth in the tourism industry economies income is expected to rise at 4.4 percent per year (World Tourism Organization, 2012).

In Iraq, the number of tourists was 892,000 in 2013. In 2012, the value of economic income from universal visitors was \$1.64 billion. Iraqi north, is considered to be a safe region of Iraq, thus it became an attraction region for tourism. In 2012, Iraqi north recorded a 70% increase in tourist visitors. Iraqi north had 106 hotels in 2007 and this number grew to 405 in 2012. Najaf and Karbala are also considered to be attractive tourist destinations and the tourism industry in the cities flourished after the end of Saddam Hussein's rule, and the number of visitors to these cities increased to 5 million in 2019 (Razzaq,2019). Thus, the tourism and hospitality industry in Iraq has become an essential sector in progressing the country's economy. In recent times the education related to the hospitality and tourism industry has been acquiring great attention from government and private sector stakeholders, and they all try to approach the education aspect positively, and are looking to introduce reforms and suitable strategies for hospitality and tourism management education in Iraq. The present research was an illustrative study of the tourism industry progression and expansion in respect to the world as well as Iraq. The reviewing of current literature was an endeavour to discover the challenges and the acquiescence that faces the HRM aspects for the educators in the Iraqi tourism industry (Newton, 2015).

Related work

Many research studies have been conducted in the domain of hospitality and tourism management education, precisely in the countries that have a notable effect in this industry. In the past, the research has been performed on frameworks including training schemes and implementing of curricula, investigation of methodologies being used in the tourism and hospitality management education offerings. A brief survey of this research is demonstrated in the following section.

Haywood, (1989) contended that education approaches customarily utilized in the hospitality and tourism education are getting to be old fashioned and that specialized information gets to be old fashioned rather rapidly. Education is not only based on the skill and knowledge a person acquires in his early life. Education skills should be updated according to social and organisation activities in the dynamic nature of the industry. Haywood's study also recommended that the students should be motivated to learn more about the tourism and hospitality industry and build up their knowledge depending on the free experimentation



allowed in work scenarios. These suggestions were also recommended in other studies such as Pavesic,(1993) and Lewis (1993).

Ritchie (1995) designed and developed a hospitality and tourism model based on a combination of the theoretical theories and practical experiments. His model constraint was on the balancing between the previous scopes. Moreover, his model emphasized the balancing between environmental preservation and economic expansion. The model also presents an equilibrium between practical HR management expertise and social sciences understanding.

Formica, (1996), and Smith and Cooper (2000) underscored the need to think about globalization and internationalization aspects. They recommended the way the global aspects should be taught in the hospitality and tourism programmes and in the developing of such programmes. Olsen et al, (1998) and Okumus et al, (2005) advocated developing hospitality and tourism education programme orientations towards strategic management. Chen et al, (1999) studied the relationships between hospitality and tourism academic programmes particularly for curricular design. They suggested an objective structure to upgrade the programmes in hospitality and tourism.

Lefever et al, (1998) produced a review on how the tourism and the hospitality industry can be improved if the education curricula are based on human-resources skills and interpersonal skills development. Chung (2000) conducted a study to produce a dynamic plan for improving tourism and hospitality curricula by focusing on teaching specialised courses, in administration, communication and foreign languages. Morgan (2004) debated that tourism and hospitability are a thing apart from the economic expenditure so what is needed should be taught. Therefore, the constraint on teaching liberal humanistic values, creativity and imagination which are essential for creating effective business managers, must be lifted.

Lam and Xiao (2000) specified the gap between the provided staff and demanded staff quality is big and declared that the key problem of tourism and hospitality education is what is often a decadent curriculum design. The study robustly excludes the notion that tourism and hospitality institutions should provide high-quality employees and not only large quantity of unskilled employees.

Collins (2002) argued that the problems in hospitality and tourism education are problems from the stakeholders' viewpoints. This research also discussed the effectiveness of the curriculum on the graduating students in cases where there is a missing component between academic and practical experience. Solent, et al (2007) recommended that tourism and hospitality related topics such as leisure, and sport education curriculum should be linked with the industrial needs.

Moreover, Echtner, (1995) suggested a three approach method of entrepreneurial, vocational and professional education in the curriculum for the hospitality and tourism education. Amoah, (1998) suggested a curriculum based on teaching the marketing subjects to face the challenges of the hospitality and tourism industry. Amoah and Baum (1997) suggested designing an education curriculum based on the consultation between the tourism stakeholders and education policy developers.

Esichaikul and Baum (1998) examined the role of policymakers in the theme of developing tourism economies. They specified the needs of the hospitality and tourism industry such as the maturity, cohesiveness and expertise needed. Mayaka and Akama, (2007) demonstrated that the third world countries suffer from shortages in resources and a well-designed tourism



training planning and the education institutions are thus unable to provide such training with an element of human resources management included. This research also suggested introducing an approach to managing the hospitality and tourism activities in such countries. Breakey et al, (2011) proffered an academic model to merge hospitality and tourism educational methods built on an analytical review of the literature. Their model illustrates the relationship between the tourism and hospitality education methods according to both the effect of the actual design and general orientation aspects that structured the tourism and hospitality curriculum programmes. Another model was suggested by Dale and Robinson, (2001) depending on general, practical, product and market-based themes in tourism education. Baum, (2002) recognised and studied a very vital issue of the predications of staff in the hospitality and tourism sector relating to the new graduate staff abilities. Baun reviewed the importance of taking into account the nature of the work in developing the skills and training requirements for the hospitality and tourism sector. Rimmington, (1999) identified the deep concerns about the quantity and quality assessment for graduate standards. Also highlighted was the impact of information technology in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Lashley, (1999) studied the assumptions of the stakeholders about the managers in the future. He emphasized that managers should have practical and organizational skills and the educators should provide a curriculum to meet these requirements. Kay et al, (2000) specified the essential components for a successful tourism and hospitality industry. These components are preserving professional skills and cultivating a trust climate with the customers' and upholding the highest possible ethical standards. They discussed the education programme and said it should take into account understanding the organizations, tasks and goals, selling techniques and analysing the forecasting reports. Littlejohn et al, (2004) discussed that the future prosperity of tourism and the hospitality sector and stated that these are hugely affected by the globalization trend and the ability of many companies to be highly competitive.

Raybould and Wilkins (2005) explored and specified that self-management skills, problem-solving and interpersonal skills are the most important skills that graduates should have. Baum, (2006) also studied the skills the graduates' staff need to have and he added to the previous skills that of aesthetics and the experience. Weber (2006) focused on the significance of teamwork and collaboration in solving the problems and challenges faced by the tourism and hospitality industry. Tesone and Ricci, (2009) also conducted a study to examine the desired general knowledge, practical skills and abilities the employees in the tourism industry should have. Much research has addressed the human resource management changes for the tourism and hospitality education in countries. Jauhari (2006) explored the connection between the requirements of the hospitality and tourism industry and the education provision in India. Recently, Situmorang, et al (2019) conducted a study on the relation between the requirements of the hospitality and tourism industry and the education providers in Indonesia. Also Afifi, et al., (2019) studied the same relationship in Oman. In addition, Campos Soria et al., (2019) explores the effect of the employees' practical skills in booming the tourism industry in Europe. Based on the presented research which was collected from pertinent studies conducted in the last thirty years relating to hospitality and tourism education subjects, the major problems and challenges have been shown to be those which face the human resource management offerings in the hospitality and tourism industry education scenario.

Research Methodology

The present research is an illustrative study in nature and records the recent challenges and trends that face human resource management in the hospitality and tourism education in the world as well as the service providers in the case of Iraq. Additionally, the methods or the



approaches that were used to resolve these challenges depending on the deductions are drawn from reviewing the existing state of the literature which suggests a way forward.

Problems in Hospitality and Tourism Management Education

The following deductions illustrate the many tourism and hospitality challenges, and also specify their context differences in the Iraq industry as well as the world industry:

Globalisation

Today, the tourism industry market is not only just local but has rather rapidly developed on a huge global scale with the manifestation of globalisation. This fact has been highlighted as one of the most severe challenges addressed by numerous researchers including Formica, (1996), Olsen et al., (1998), Smith et al, (2000), and also Okumus et al, (2005) in their recent research undertakings. These studies do not emphasise only on the policymakers role in introducing the tourism and hospitality service in a global manner to capture the international visitors but also emphasise the role of the educators in providing programs and curricula based on global needs, languages, with multicultural and multi-ethnic orientated scopes. The teachers need to thus inculcate programs to forecast the global markets and train the professional staff who should be able to meet the global hospitality and tourism industry requirements. Service delivery is often variable and difficult to standardize due to the personal nature of the contact between a customer and an employee in a hospitality or tourism business. Employees often vary in interpretation of what precisely a customer is asking, but even though service may be intangible, its quality is reflected across five broad dimensions: tangibles (appearance of physical elements), reliability (dependability, accurate performance), responsiveness (promptness and helpfulness), assurance (competence, courtesy, credibility and security), and empathy (easy access, good communications and customer understanding). These all need to be taught to students who will be future employees in a globalised work environment by well versed educators (Nicolaidis, 2014).

Development as Industry Expertise

In the future, if it is to flourish, the tourism and hospitality industry should not depend only on people just visiting certain beautiful destinations and touring around places. It should be a part of the experience in the industry. Many researchers like Chen et al, (1999), Morgan, (2004), Baum, (2006), and Dale et al, (2001) have argued this concept. They specified that the education curricula designers should add topics related to the humanistic values to accomplish the administrative objectives of creating effective managers who are able to do well in the dynamic environment in which they work. Nicolaidis (2015) states that WIL/Experiential learning/cooperative education are very important educational philosophies in which the formalization and integration of work experience into the theoretical curriculum is of the essence. If the best quality hospitality employees are to be unleashed onto the Iraqi economy a culture of learning must infuse the character of the industry.

Nicolaidis (2016) says that without the effective codes of ethics and a high level of moral intensity, a hotel cannot hope to be successful in an industry which is saturated for the most part and increasingly under the spotlight by the customers who pursue the best value for money deals. The hotel service providers need to assess the ethicality of their current service conditions from both an employees and a customer's standpoints. In addition, to lay a foundation in which employees get well trained in different areas, it is necessary to define the



term 'multiskilling' which is viewed from a number of miscellaneous perspectives. Generally speaking, multiskilling is the attainment of supplementary task-related skills and knowledge in a hotel or tourism enterprise, which empower an individual to perform a wider range of tasks and functions within a business (Nicolaidis, 2014).

Focusing on an administrative curriculum

At the current time, the demographics, the industry dynamics and organizational education are varied. Thus the position of professional staff in the workplace has become very vital and demanding. The professional staff should have multi-functional skills such as strategic thinking and the ability to resolve the complicated business framework. Many researchers such as (Lefever, 1998; Rimmington, 1999; Chung, 2000; Raybould, 2005 and Tesone, 2009) have asserted the need to be including different new-fangled managerial skills in hospitality and tourism management education curricula and programs such as marketing, information technology and economic management. They debated the curriculum and programs should be career-oriented and have a work integrated component so that and in this case, no more training is needed for the staff in the workplace.

The linkage between Educators and Policy makers

In the new industry environment, the compatibility between the policymakers requirements and the hospitality and tourism education policy is critical. Authors like Amoah, (1998), Baum, (1997), Esichaikul, (1998) have considered the significance of evolving economic destinations in the tourism and hospitality industry sectors. These researchers suggested that all the possibilities must be explored and a tourism education policy should include all the aspects and the requirements that the tourism and hospitality industry managers demand, and the educators should apply these new policies in their educational programs and designs thereof. Nicolaidis & Kearney (2012), state that policy makers need to be promoting awareness of legal requirements and liabilities in for example, food and beverage operations in hotels. There is thus a very important link between these two stakeholders - law makers and hotel operators.

Development of entrepreneurship

The tourism and hospitality teachers should be focused on improving human skills such as innovation and creativity in the graduating students who are future staff because these skills represent an essential requirement in the current global hospitality and tourism industry and are required by the dire economic situation. Many researchers (Echtner, 1995; Amoah, 1997; Morgan, 2004; Weber, 2006; and Mayaka, 2007) have specified the need of improving entrepreneurial abilities and its parameters in the hospitality and tourism industry. They also highlighted the importance of practical experiments in developing the education curriculum and the effect of that on the tourism and hospitality industry growing to important levels to address societal woes. Academics working on curricula should develop modules which are in line with the industry needs and which encourage entrepreneurship and this will likely make any training transferable to other employers and also encourage employees to be more positive about undergoing multiskilling training (Nicolaidis, 2014: 78).

Competency improvement

Developing competencies in graduating students is an essential requirement in the tourism and hospitality industry evolution. This point is discussed in many studies for example Kay, (2000), Baum, (2002), Littlejohn, (2004), Raybould, (2005) and Baum, (2006). Competent



employees should have the following skills and morals for example, realizing customer problems and helping them, preserving ethical working standards, growing a trust climate, adapting to any changes in a creative way, learning about selling approaches, understanding and analysing forecasting records, understanding teamwork, have a risk-taking ability, communication in a variety of ways and languages, a spirit of creativity, innovation, and tried experience in solving problems. The stated studies all focused on putting the practical education on an important equal footing with the education curriculum. Nicolaidis (2015) maintains that the student/trainee should be provided greater opportunities from which to learn more about how the industry functions and sanctioned to be effective in the future industry role they will serve in as is the case in for example, Germany, and this should be the primary concern of both industry and the education provider. "Appropriate employee training in multiskilling initiatives are the critical factors which promote the provision of service quality consequently, hotels that multi-skill employees should provide training which focuses on employees' professional attitudes and behaviours in the workplace, especially relating to guests" (Nicolaidis, 2014: 77).

The teachers in the hospitality and tourism education organisations should concentrate on developing such desired competencies among their students, in this case, the graduated staff will be found to be acceptable and effective in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Filling the gap between Industry and Academia

One of the crucial aspects that the teachers should be focused on, is the contrast between the tourism and hospitality industry's needs and the ability of the teachers to impart the needed soft and hard skills, information, strong work ethic and the ethos required of the professionals that are needed. There need to be more graduate students for developing the industry to the desired levels. Lamand et al, (2000), Collins et al, (2002), Jauhari et al, (2006), and also Robinson et al, (2007) and many other researchers have shown great concern for the mentioned previous aspects and have recommended serious educational maintenance in the knowledge that curriculum produces to graduates. Equally important are efficiency and standardization of tourism and hospitality education training. In this case, the graduated students from tourism and hospitality education schools can only provide industry needs if they are adequately trained.

A necessity for improving the blend between practical training and academic offerings is the essential aspect of developing hospitality and tourism industry managers in terms of quantum and the goodness of their natures' as the industry needs concerned people to serve therein. The researches also recommended that the development of curriculum and programmes related to hospitality and tourism should be done with respect to only industry's requirements and this can reduce the gap which exists between the workplace and an academic institution dramatically and lead to positive outcomes.

Discussion

The tourism and hospitality industry accounts for about one tenth of the global economy, and steady progress in this industry is forecasted in for future. Therefore, it is indispensable to devise and offer suitable programs and have strategically driven policies for all the educational aspects. Education related to industry management plays an essential role in developing the tourism and hospitality industry overall and should thus be nurtured. Productivity needs to



improve in the industry and employee speed and outputs require re-energising. Strategies must be then devised which consider an aging workforce and current workers must be stimulated to increase their adaptability and hunger for learning new skills. Ways need to be sought to consider the needs of especially Iraqi women who are wives and mothers in the workforce who are expected to work very arduous shifts in many cases (Nicolaidis, 2014:71)

Taking into account, the current world orientation and the predicament of the tourism and hospitality industry in Iraq, it can be deduced that hospitality and tourism will be need to be one of the most important tributaries for the country's economy. Iraqi educators should be related directly to the industry in the sense of consultation on needs and this will cause a practical response to all the challenges which have been recorded and highlighted in the existing literature review. Iraqi tourism and hospitality teachers can learn from the hypothesis, theories and practices that have been utilized by various industry leaders. By examining the suggestion made in this research, and the account of the industry challenges and problems posed, the teachers can further develop all their teaching curricula and this will lead to an upgrade in the quality and suitability of the graduated professionals. This, in turn, will enhance the tourism and hospitality industry and contribute to growing the downtrodden country of Iraq.

Conclusion

On the one hand, this research offers some benefit to academicians and researchers, and on the other, to the staff and the managers of the tourism and hospitality industry. Generally, this research gives an inclusive review of the current literature which is relevant to the tourism and hospitality education sector. The suggestions, which were drawn from this research, will hopefully be of interest to especially the educators and institutions. The important aspects in this research offer a guide to help handle the many challenges and problems that face the human resource management practitioners in designing the curriculum and the practical training programs for the tourism industry all aimed at towards helping the desired economic upturn for the industry sector and nation in general. The issue of human capital is significantly important to the long-term development of the tourism sector in Iraq.

Tourism and hospitality provides sorely needed employment to individuals of all ages and skill levels. This clearly is contingent on quality, available human resources needed to develop and deliver a competitive product that meets and exceeds customers' fluctuating needs. There is a clear need to carefully plan curricula to meet the needs of stakeholders in this fast-growing industry. An employee's ability to adjust to the needed changes and learn new skills is becoming a significant hiring condition. Future employees are progressively being chosen for their soft skills, i.e., their personal and interpersonal abilities and ethical stances in business conduct. The tourism and hospitality industry supports local inhabitants and encourages economic development. Tourism and hospitality jobs have many benefits but the productivity, competitiveness and growth of the entire industry in Iraq will suffer hugely if steps are not taken to address HRS needs.

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