Examining Tourism and Hospitality Curriculum Based on the Business Employers' Needs

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Abstract

This study examines approval levels of tourism and hospitality industry employers with regard to the curriculum offered by tourism and hospitality colleges in the Diploma Programs. The investigation involves two objectives: the characteristics of teaching methodology in tourism and hospitality programs and the essential skills and knowledge required by the industry. In this study, a sample of 58 tourism industry establishments listed with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities active database in Jordan have taken the questionnaire. Throughout this process, descriptive statistic was used to analyze the data. Results concerning the characteristics of teaching methodology and course content by the industry employers show poor approval level. It was significant that the personal qualities set are of great importance to hospitality and tourism employers. This, the researcher suggests, could be a source of input to curricula for future improvements. The results of the study also show that Jordanian colleges have to ensure that new graduates have adequate practical knowledge and skills. The study recommends that colleges should give more priority to enhancing their programs quality through more involvement of the industry in the design of curricula.

Keywords: Tourism & hospitality colleges, tourism employer's needs, curriculum, Jordan

Introduction

Despite the current negative impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) on the hospitality and tourism industry worldwide, there is still a need for hospitality employees to continue learning and training to improve guest services (Hyasat et al., 2022). Therefore, to keep up with workforce demands in the future, it will be crucial for tourism and hospitality colleges to keep their finger on the pulse of the skills and education needed for employees. This is not only to fill anticipated jobs but to adequately prepare workers to compete in an educationally progressive world (Baum, 2015; Tracey, 2014). College-level tourism and hospitality programs need to be planned and designed to improve the skills that should prepare graduates to be qualified (Brown et al., 2020). These skills should qualify graduate students to deal with changing demands in the tourism & hospitality industry (Tracey, 2014; Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018). The traditionalism of the tourism curriculum to meet business requirements was raised as a major issue in different countries (Khuong, 2016; Luka, 2012; Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018). The design of the tourism curriculum did not meet the developments in the tourism sector and its needs in harmony with technology and inputs development in many developing countries (Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018).

According to Mustafa (2018), Jordan, similar to many developing countries, the link between tourism and hospitality colleges and the tourism and hospitality industry is missing. This missing link has been called into question by key stakeholders in light of ongoing changes in the complex tourism and hospitality industry (Mustafa, 2018). The tourism and hospitality courses introduced are concentrated on theoretical sides, while the vocational experience they

gain does not meet the market needs which forms an obstacle for them to receive the required jobs (Mustafa, 2017). Students' problem, according to Mustafa (2017), is their poor workplace skills, including leadership, creativity, and communication skills. They quality these problems to the lack of technology and laboratories needed at these colleges to improve students' achievements. Tourism and hospitality colleges, therefore, should give more priority to enhancing their curriculums' quality through more involvement of the industry in the design of curricula (Mustafa, 2018).

For Jordan, tourism is a key driver for economy; it is the single largest employer and the highest generator of foreign exchange. The potential for economic and social development stemming from tourism is high. Therefore, in a dynamic industry such as the hospitality & tourism industry, the demand for skilled workers is also high. According to the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA,2020), anecdotal feedback from employers found that there were big differences between colleges and employer needs. Tourism and hospitality colleges should be lecturing about the skills necessary for graduates to have. Unfortunately, nowadays universities and colleges leave some of these skills to be educated by the employers. This gap is exceptionally high and the tourism and hospitality industry instructive foundations didn't graduate students with the necessary assumptions for employers in all tourism industry exercises in Jordan. The assumption gap makes a high contest of unfamiliar labor forces on the tourism industry jobs in Jordan according to the Jordan Strategic Forum (JSF, 2019). Zagonari (2009) states that four main stakeholders should be involved in the design of educational programs for the toruism & hospitality industry, including students, government, colleges, and the industry (Zagonari, 2009). The investigation in this study involved colleges and the industry, and focused on two objectives: the characteristics of teaching methodology in tourism & hospitality programs and the most important skills and knowledge required by the industry, in hopes of steering the direction of hospitality and tourism curricula towards development and improvement.

Tourism education and employer`s need

Significant changes in the competitiveness of the tourism and hospitality industry environment necessitate curriculum reforms in hospitality management education. Policymakers within the tourism and hospitality colleges and industry are aware of the need for change in hospitality curriculum and course subject offerings (Kusumawardhana, 2020; Mengistu & Mahesh, 2019). The tourism and hospitality industry requires employees with good skills. Tourism colleges need to adopt a new approach to find answers to questions that might appear and be open to many diverse viewpoints in the workplace (Deborah and Barnett, 2011; Kusumawardhana, 2020). The tourism and hospitality industry should play a major role in the improvement and development of tourism and hospitality curricula, and instructors should act as the link between the industry and students (Dale & Robinson, 2001). Colleges in tourism and hospitality worldwide today should provide students with the necessary theoretical knowledge that they would apply practically in the workplace in various hospitality and tourism sub-sectors (Deborah & Barnett, 2011; Biloslavo & Trnavcevic, 2011; Okolie et al., 2019). This kind of knowledge should mean that courses and subjects in hospitality & tourism offered by these colleges should reflect the hospitality and tourism employers' expectations and needs. Therefore, it becomes essential for colleges to find out the type of skills and knowledge needed to to meet the marketplace requirements (Huang et al., 2013; Lung, 2017; Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Okolie et al., 2019).

Several studies have investigated the major skills that tourism students should gain (Bassam et al., 2020; Cho, et al., 2006; Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Lung, 2017; Okolie et al., 2019; Shariff, 2013; Swanger & Gursoy, 2016). A study by Shariff (2013) provided a review

structure of tourism and hospitality education elements based on the different skills. Other researchers have presented that the tourism and hospitality curriculum should contain not only crucial practical skills but also personal qualities and managerial skills (Swanger & Gursoy, 2016). Swanger and Gursoy (2016), ranked the most important course subjects, these are leadership, preparation for industry, internship/industry experience, employment, hospitality management and organization, and ethics (Swanger & Gursoy, 2016). Hind et al. (2007) pointed out that personal qualities are more essential to the individual than practical knowledge and practical skills, which are related to attitude toward customers. Cho et al. (2006) found that there was a gap between the tourism and hospitality employers and that gap may not correspond to the demands of the tourism and hospitality industry (Cho, et al., 2006). Ritalahti (2015) stated that colleges need to make integration between worklife skills and personal qualities, at the same time employers in the tourism and hospitality industry need to make sure that graduated college students have better education and skills needed at work place (Ritalahti, 2015). Khuong (2016) has shown that the lack of integration of educational plans and the market needs would increase this gap. Researchers also have recognized this need and have presented a challenge to public colleges and universities to develop a plan of response to workforce needs in the tourism & hospitality industry (Brown et al., 2020; Tracey, 2014). Colleges, therefore, will be in a position to make a significant impact in producing a highly-skilled workforce if they are aware of these workforce trends and adjust curriculum accordingly (Baum, 2015; Juan, 2017).

Curriculum theory

It is important to note that curriculum practices and approaches have a major impact, negative and positive, on the students learning process (Swanger & Gursoy, 2016). There were many definitions of the term "curriculum" in the education literature. The old term was used to describe the classics taught at schools during the classical period of Greek civilization. Many researchers define the term "curriculum" as those content, actions, interactions, and communications of the teacher with his/her students that are associated with positive student achievement and effective outcomes (Wattanacharoensil, 2014; Yorke & Knight, 2006) Recently, the term "curriculum" has extended to include more meanings with the massive progress in skill and social thought. It remains significant for any definition of the curriculum to reflect the nature of students and provide the needed skills (Kusumawardhana, 2020; Mengistu & Mahesh, 2019).

One of the advantages of the development in the curriculum can cause improved student performance in the marketplace. All higher education curricula should play a significant role through solid and positive relationships with the marketplace. The curriculum role in creating an environment and building relationships encouraging learning goes beyond the regular academic duties to incorporate the supply of additional support, help, and care (Foskett, 2005). The curriculum in higher education has both a direct and an indirect influence on students. It contributes to the learning environment of these students. For example, academic experience and knowledge, behaviors, teaching styles, and student perceptions of the learning environment have been studied and found to be related to student learning. The curriculum aims to create a foundation for both the content and methodology. The curriculum aims to transfer skills, knowledge, and techniques to students (Kusumawardhana, 2020; Mengistu & Mahesh, 2019; Swanger & Gursoy, 2016; Yorke & Knight, 2006). Tourism colleges are required today to transfer skills, knowledge, and techniques to students based on the industry need to integrate these skills, knowledge, and techniques with trends of the tourism & hospitality industry. Curricula should be updated regularly with the most recent developments in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Tourism and hospitality education in Jordan

In Jordan, the absence of educational plan modifications and updates over time as per market needs expands the gap between colleges and businesses in the tourism industry (JSF, 2019). Students who graduate today from colleges face many problems and challenges in the marketplace. These problems and challenges appear when graduates start to apply their theoretical knowledge practically (JSF, 2019). The loss of integration of the curriculum with the tourism and hospitality employers will minimize the fresh graduates' opportunity to secure proper jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector. The gap between the instruction of the tourism industry organizations and employers can be gotten through the reconciliation of the educational plan and the tourism and hospitality employers through shared arrangements that can be planned between the two mainstays of this interaction (Khuong, 2016; Mustafa, 2018; Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018). Tourism colleges graduates lack the knowledge to meet the employer's needs. The introduced service quality is still under question in the tourism sector (Mustafa, 2018). Building a professional partnership between academic institutions and employers in the tourism and hospitality industry has become essential for Jordan and its economy. The partnership will improve the program and educational development and enhance learning and knowledge in the future in order to achieve the intended goals of colleges and employers in the industry, and most importantly get the academic staff engaged with the employers.

Jordan has many centers specialized in higher education tourism and hospitality. Hence, this study is concerned with examining tourism and hospitality programs which award Diploma Certificates in tourism and hospitality. According to the active database of Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan has eight tourism and hospitality colleges awarding the Diploma Certificate, all teaching the same curricula approved by Al-Balqa Applied University. These are Al Quds College, the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts, Karak University College, Jordan Applied University/College of Hospitality and Tourism, Aqaba University College, Ajloun University College, Arab Community College, and Khawarizmi College. Typically, a student in tourism and hospitality programs has to complete 72 credit hours in order to meet the degree requirements. (BAU, 2021). In the requirements of the first and second programs by colleges, no differences exist between both programs (Table 1). Courses required in the first stage, for example, include Arabic Language, English Language, Islamic, Culture, and Computer Skills. As for the second stage requirements, both programs include courses such as Principles of Hotel Management, Principles of Tourism, Principles of Hospitality, Tourism Marketing, Principles of HR Management in Hospitality, Touristic Facilities, and Principles of Accounting in Hospitality. However, in the third requirments program, attention is focused upon specialized hospitality: Food and Beverage, Food Safety Management, Food Production, the Contemporary Hospitality Industry, and so on. In the tourism specialized requirements, the programs consisted of courses such as English in Tourism, Language Communication Skills, Protocol and Customer Service, Principles of Tourist Guidance, and so on (BAU, 2021).

Table 1: The curriculum of the associate degree in tourism & hospitality management consists of (72 credit hours).

Serial No.	Requirements	Credit Hours
First	College Requirements	12
Second	Tourism and Hospitality Program Requirements	15
Third	Specialization Requirements	45
	Total	72

Materials and methods

This study is conducted to examine the acceptance levels of the tourism and hospitality industry employers regarding the curriculum offered by tourism and hospitality colleges in the Diploma Programs. The examination involves two objectives: 1) the characteristics of teaching methodology in tourism and hospitality programs, and 2) the essential skills and knowledge required by the industry. To achieve these objectives, a random sample of 58 Jordanian tourism and hospitality establishments was used in the questionnaire of this study. The participants included businesses in the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants, event management) and tour operators/ travel agents or both. This was done for two months (October & November 2021, See Table 2 for demographic information). A quantitative technique, based on a descriptive survey was selected. Questionnaires were distributed to employers listed within the Jordanian Minstriy of Tourism and Antiquates business active database (N = 386). A total of 58 (n=58) clean and fully completed questionnires were received (a reply rate of 15%). The target sample was connected via email and respectively invited to complete the questionnaire. An example of the curriculum was also sent to the target sample. A telephone call and follow-up note were sent to the target employers after one week. A web-based questionnaire system named Survey Monkey was used to upload the questionnaire. Some of the study questionnaires were completed through field visits by the researcher. The questionnaires were automatically stored by the Survey Monkey electronic study database, while hardcopy collected questionnaires were entered using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. According to Podsakoff et al., (2003), the use of a questionnaire could contribute to mutual method prejudice (Podsakoff et al., 2003). On the other hand, Spector (2006) stated that the reality of common method bias in self-reported surveys is unfounded. To avoid this concern, the researcher ensured a rigorous methodology. A pilot study was used to address the concern. A pre-analysis was also used to ensure the validity and reliability of the factors investigated. Moreover, the researcher ensured the balanced rating scales to reduce the effect of bias. Descriptive analysis was then used to analyze the data. Data analysis included frequencies, percentages, means, and ranking of the results.

The research instrument was designed to include the following sections: 1) owners or managers outline (which comprised open and closed questions linked to the subsector of operation in the Jordanian hospitality and tourism sector, months or years in operation companies, number of employees; 2) Using Likert scale, the survey identifies the characteristics of teaching methodology of hospitality and tourism programs and the required graduate skills according to employers' point of view. In the characteristics of teaching methodology section, employers were asked to evaluate the characteristics of the teaching methodology of tourism hospitality and programs. This involved theoretical and practical, such as: problem-solving, case study, group work, and field study. In the required graduate skills, employers were asked to evaluate and rank the most important skills that students should gain from the curriculum content regarding practical knowledge, practical skills and personal qualities. In addition, employers were asked to add comments if they had any after filling out the questionnaire.

Data analysis and presentation
Enterprise's characteristics

The studied sample included different tourism activities. The dominant activity was for the tourism and hospitality sector (56%), followed by the travel sector (44%). About (70%) of these companies have experience of more than 11 years (Table 2). These companies could consequently suggest reliable data about the knowledge expected from new college graduates. Small, medium and large companies were all included in the target sample. Employers were

thus equipped with information about the level of students prepared for entering the marketplace, which, of course, might give valuable insight (Table 2).

Table 2: Enterprise's characteristics

Table A: Summarizing the target sample who participated in the survey		
Category	**Group**	**Results**
A sector of operations in the study	Hotels	40%
	Restaurants	8%
	Event management	8%
	Travel Agency	22%
	Tour operators	14%
	Both (travel & tour)	8%
Number of years in business	Less than 1 year	0%
	One to three years	5%
	Four to six years	10%
	Seven to ten years	15%
	More than 11 years	70%
Number of employees	Small (0-49 employees)	48%
	Medium (50-250 employees)	28%
	Large (250+ employees)	24%

Characteristics of teaching methodology
Since the curriculum is applied to all colleges by Al-Balqa Applied University, the researcher used Al Quds College`s curriculum as a sample to evaluate and examine the characteristics of teaching methodology and evaluate curricula used in all colleges. Employers were asked to evaluate the characteristics of the teaching methodology of hospitality programs. The employers stated that the practical application is considered the core of hospitality programs (85%), followed by theory (70%) then the lectures with only (16%). The results showed that case studies, problem-solving, and group work (87.5% for each) should be of the activities widely practiced in hospitality programs. In tourism programs, the trend of teaching methodology changed compared to hospitality programs according to the employers. The theory and lecture methods increased to reach almost (83%) while the practical part dropped to (60%). The activities include case studies, problem-solving, and group work (84%, 80%, 80% respectively) should be also practiced in tourism programs, field trip method was only recorded with (4%) according to the employers.

Curriculum`s examination and evaluation
Courses contained in the third requirements of the specialized programs in both programs mentioned above were classified into three major skills: practical skills, practical knowledge, and personal qualities. The employers were asked to evaluate and classify the important skills needed from their own perspective.. Their answers are presented in the following sections:

Practical skills, knowledge, and personal qualities in the hospitality program
Concerning the practical skills, different skills have been shown by employers as necessary for graduate students to practice their jobs practically. The first and most essential is business communication followed by skills in food and beverage service. The least skills required were those related to selling and sales techniques and writing accurate reports according to the

employers. Under the practical knowledge, the English language skill was deemed the most important , as it was considered very important in the hospitality industry. The second knowledge skill was knowledge about food and safety practices. The least important skills were the knowledge of human resources practices, knowledge of data analysis, and forecasting according to employers. With regard to personal qualities, the results showed that many personal qualities have been given the same importance level for a graduate student to practice hospitality industry. The first rank was given for demonstrating strong team management, solving guest/customer, demonstrating teamwork skills, and creating positive employee relationships. The least rank was given for demonstrating leadership abilities, acceptance of opposite gender, tolerance to a culturally diverse work environment.

Practical skills, knowledge, and personal qualities in the tourism program
The practical skills rank was different from the hospitality program. The first rank was given for demonstrating oral communication skills, skills in essential business communication, and skills in selling and sale techniques with the same importance. The last rank was given for being skilled in basic 'front office practices'. Under the practical knowledge, the first skill was given to the English Language similar to hospitality, the second knowledge was given for environmental protection and practices, the least knowledge was recorded for tourism law. The first personal qualities were given for demonstrating a guest service personality and then for the creation of positive employee relationships, while the least ranks were given for the ability to work in a multi-task environment and demonstrating professional appearance.

Comparison of knowledge, practical skills, and personal qualities categories
In the analysis of the three categories, one significant difference exists (see Table 3).

Table 3- Comparison of knowledge, operation skills, and personal qualities categories

	Operation Knowledge Mean	Operation Skills Mean	Personal Qualities Mean
Hospitality	3.34	3.6	4.15
Travel & Tourism	3.21	3.44	3.92

In this case, the expectations of employers were higher for personal qualities than for practical knowledge or practical skills. Employers from the hospitality industry attached higher levels of importance to personal qualities (M = 4.15) than for both practical skills (M = 3.6) and practical knowledge (3.34). Employers from the travel & tourism industry also attached higher levels of importance to personal qualities (M= 3.92), while the employers ranked the practical knowledge and practical skills with (M = 3.21) and (M 3.44) respectively.

Discussion
The purpose of this study is to examine the acceptance levels of the Jordanian`s tourism & hospitality industry employers regarding the curriculum offered in the Diploma Degree Programs by tourism and hospitality colleges. The examination involves two objectives: the characteristics of teaching methodology in tourism and hospitality programs, and the most important skills and knowledge required by the industry. By evaluating each program to consider the important factors impacting the future potential of tourism and hospitality education in Jordan, the study identified the gap between the tourism industry employers and tourism and hospitality colleges. The study ranked the most important skills that the new graduates should gain from their colleges through the curriculum based on the employer's need. The study identified all colleges offering Diploma and Degree level programs in tourism and

hospitality in Jordan and included a general data profile of the employers who participated in the study. Descriptive research, following a quantitative approach, was chosen, whereby a questionnaire was conducted with the target sample. Since the results reveal that about (70%) of businesses have had experience for more than 11 years, the researcher believes that the results are reliable to clarify the knowledge and skills expected from new colleges graduates entering the job market.

The first objective is to evaluate the characteristics of the teaching methodology of hospitality and tourism programs. The employers stated that the practical application is considered the core of hospitality programs, followed by theory then the lectures. The results showed that case studies, problem-solving, and group work should be of the activities widely practiced in hospitality programs. On the other hand, the employers reported that the theory part should be the first in terms of the tourism & travel program. This should also include activities, such as case studies, problem-solving, and group work practicing according to the employers. By including skills of such kind in the characteristics of teaching methodology for both programs, students might be able to avoid weakness in the marketplace, which was mentioned by Mustafa (2017), as the author states that students are compromised due to their different poor skills related to the workplace, including leadership, creativity, and communication skills (Mustafa, 2017).

The second objective is to obtain and analyze data from tourism and hospitality industry employers and to view their expectations of the skills that should be gained through hospitality and tourism-related programs offered at Jordanian tourism colleges, including practical knowledge, practical skills, and personal qualities. Besides, the importance of certain knowledge and skills have been highlighted above. The study revealed that there were consistent high expectations. from the hospitality, travel, and tourism industry related to the personal qualities category. It was significant that the personal qualities set are of great importance to hospitality and tourism employers. This could be a source of input to colleges curricula for future improvements. Swanger and Gursoy (2016) stated that the tourism and hospitality curriculum should contain not only crucial practical or knowledge skills, but also personal qualities. Hind et al. (2007) points out that personal qualities are more essential to the individual than practical knowledge and practical skills, which are related to attitude toward customers. Ritalahti, (2015) stateed that tourism and hospitality academic institutions need to integrate working life to get better personal skills qualities, at the same time employers in the tourism and hospitality industry need to make sure that university or college graduates have better education and skills required to meet their business needs.

When comparing both programs, the largest differences were found in practical skills, customer service skills is a priority in the hospitality industry. Also, 'solving guest and customer problems' was ranked the highest among all the skills expected in all the categories. These results are different from Swanger and Gursoy (2016), as the authors ranked the most important course subjects, which were: leadership, preparation for industry, internship/industry experience, employment, hospitality management and organization, and ethics. On the other hand, the major similarity in the level of importance was found relating to speaking and writing the English Language under the practical knowledge category. English speaking was of high priority for the hospitality industry, at the same time both speaking and writing English were of high priority for the tourism and travel industry. The analysis of courses showed that skills, knowledge, and personal qualities can be improved for the students and still there are other skills, knowledge, and personal qualities which were not covered in the curriculum. These three core pillars should be planned through the curriculum and the activities used in colleges. The study revealed that the curriculum used does not take into consideration these three major cores to be accomplished through the teaching courses. Finally, most employers agreed that college

students upon graduation need intensive industry training in general, and the education they had received in the courses requires industry to provide practical skills in order to qualify graduates for employment.

Practical implication and recommendations

The study showed that the trend of teaching methodology should be improved and modified; the content and outcomes of the tourism and hospitality curriculum used in the hospitality and tourism colleges are not satisfactory to meet the employer's needs. The high importance of personal qualities among the three sets of categories was an essential factor for working in the Jordanian tourism and hospitality sector. Colleges in hospitality and tourism should make sure that students are adequately prepared to be team players, have strong time management, and to show leadership skills. Colleges of the tourism and hospitality sector should emphasize personal skills in college curriculum in both programs. This is essential to any hospitality and tourism sector, and if colleges do not overcome this essential problem and bridge this significant gap, it might influence the success of the business. Several recommendations can be suggested from the above evaluation and examination. The study recommends that the partnership between Jordanian colleges and business employers should be promoted. The curriculum used in Jordanian tourism and hospitality colleges should be modified and developed to meet the industry needs, as the study found that the curriculum in most colleges lacks the annual revision to follow up the updates in the industry. The study suggests that more research should be undertaken in other businesses so as to identify the specific skills and knowledge and personal qualities needed in certain sectors.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The survey was undertaken during the circumstance of (COVID, 19) pandemic, specifically between October and November 2021, this situation led the researcher mostly not to meet the participants face to face to obtain more insight information from the employers. As a result of the pandemic, the researcher believes that such a situation has affected the total number of the responded participants. However, as a larger business in the industry participated in this survey it is considered that they have provided reliable data and insight opinion to achieve the survey aims and objectives. The study suggested that more research should be undertaken in other businesses of the industry to identify the particular skills and knowledge needed by certain sectors. Moreover, the analysis of offered course outlines by the academic institutions can be analyzed to find the shortages of these outlines and how they can be updated and modified to meet the employer`s expectations.

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