

The Non-Consonance between Tourism Universities' Programs and the Needs of Tourism Employment in Jordan

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the reasons behind the contradiction between the outputs of tourism educational programs in Jordanian universities and expectations of tourism employers from the perception of tourism private businesses (travel agents and hotels), also to make an evaluation of universities' educational outcomes. Seventy-nine tourism establishments filled a questionnaire that focused on evaluating the level of students graduating from universities; this was concerning their skills and knowledge besides the degree of communication between educational bodies and the industry. The results indicate a general weakness in these aspects; based on this, the paper presented suggested implications to improve the quality of educational programs in tourism departments at Jordanian universities.

Keywords: Tourism universities' programs, Tourism business, Employment, Tourism curricula, Jordan

1. Introduction

Tourism has been growing around the world as a major source of income and employment to many countries, and Jordan is one of them. Tourism has generated 2066.9 millions JD in 2009 as an income, 40 092 jobs were offered as a direct employment by tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities [MOTA] 2009, http://www.locateme.jo/stat2009_4/stat.htm). Yet despite its advantage and its importance to the economy, Jordan's tourism sector is performing at a level far below its potential. To achieve reasonable growth in the tourism sector that will in turn contribute to economic development and job creation, Jordan needs to make a significant investment of funds and efforts, there should be a focus on attracting high-yield visitors, developing niche products, enhancing the visitor experience, increasing international marketing, and improving the infrastructure besides regulatory environment.

Jordan's National Tourism Strategy 2004-2010 outlined the steps for doubling the Kingdom's tourism economy by 2010 using an integrated value-chain approach involving government facilitation and investment in partnership with the private sector. When it was published in 2003, the strategy stated the following objectives as to be achieved by the year 2010: increasing tourism receipts from JD570 million in 2003 to 1.3 billion (which is already achieved), increasing tourism-supported jobs from 40 791 in 2003 to 91 719, thus creating over 51 000 jobs, and achieving taxation yield to the government of more than JD 455 millions. In order to achieve such objectives, the Jordanian government considered the allocation of 4% of the national tourism receipts to enhance the promotion for its tourist destinations, developing them and integrating more human forces in tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities [MOTA] 2003, <http://www.tourism.jo/inside/Strategy.asp>). There has been a great effort to increase the cooperation between both government and private sectors to strengthen the industry's institutional and regulatory framework. All these implications will help achieving the above-mentioned objectives set out in the National Tourism Strategy.

Another important implication required is enhancing the standards of training and education to meet the requirements of the current investments in the sector. According to a tourism professional in Jordan: "the rapid development of hospitality facilities in the capital, coupled with major tourism development projects in other parts

of the Kingdom, is already paving the way for thousands of new employment opportunities for Jordanians. Jobs are becoming increasingly available in new upscale hotels, malls, restaurants, cafés and major beach resorts at the Dead Sea and Aqaba, which require skilled staff and service providers. Industry professionals say that 12 000 additional hotel bedrooms being built over the next five years will require an additional 29 000 skilled workers. Aqaba alone will need 10 000 new workers at hotels and restaurants over the next five years. The restaurant sector in Jordan will require an additional 2 300 new employees annually over the next four years, with at least 1000 of these new employees absorbed by the fast food sector each year” (Dajani 2007, <http://www.jordantimes.com/?news=3088>). Such indicators show the necessity to consider the issue of tourism education and training given by universities and vocational schools in Jordan.

The hospitality and tourism industry is a significant contributor to the economies of many countries; consequently, they need an educated, skilled and committed workforce to be successful. Colleges and universities have developed programs of study to improve the quality of human resources working in this industry (Koyuncu, Burke, Fiksenbaum, & Demirer 2008). These establishments offer education and training programs of various lengths offered at several levels of the educational system as vocational training courses and university-level programs (Koyuncu et al 2008). There is a big number of educational institutes around the world to teach such profession. As stated by Berger (2008), more than 3 000 universities, scattered all over the world that offer courses on tourism and hospitality, that is in addition to more than 70 tourism and hospitality journals in English language. Between January 2000 and December 2004, more than 3 200 scholars wrote or co-authored articles on tourism that were published in refereed journals. Though, Peacock & Ladkin (2002) stated that empirical studies concerning quality of tourism and hospitality education and their ability to cope with employment needs are limited.

For Jordan, tourism and hospitality as educational disciplines are included as academic programs in fourteen public and private universities, as well as nine community colleges; that is in addition to seventeen tourism and hospitality training centers and twenty-seven public and private schools. Unfortunately, Jordan, as many other countries is facing the problem of non-consonance between the expectations of tourism employers and the educational outcomes of universities teaching the professions of tourism and hospitality. This paper aims at exploring the reasons behind such phenomena from the perception of tourism private businesses (travel agents and hotels), also to make an evaluation of educational outcomes. It would appropriate first to see factors causing this problem as apply to different countries in general.

2. The Educational Outcomes and Employment Requirements

Several factors in different stages of tourism education are causing such non-consonance; in the first place, tourism is often tagged to unrelated departments and unconnected courses, and in many institutions tourism studies are usually housed in diverse fields including geography, sociology, forestry and wildlife management, leisure and recreation studies, environmental studies, development studies (Mayaka & Akama 2009). In some cases, many of the courses in hospitality and tourism programs are found in other professions and specializations within university programs (such as business and management), which may explain why professors in other disciplines are not aware of the scope of scholarship and teaching involving tourism (Berger 2008). Moreover, because of the perceived low status of tourism as an academic discipline, many institutes and universities currently perceive the introduction of new tourism training programmes and education courses as a mean of increasing students enrolment and enhancing capitation. Some other factors are related to the content and method of tourism education and training; there is a lack of proper academic understanding and focused theoretical framework of most tourism studies, this engenders a lack of provision of clear directions in the teaching of tourism courses (Mayaka & Akama 2007).

Although tourism and hospitality fields are applied subject areas that require the situation where academics, students and curricula development all need to have close links with tourism industry; strategies for industry engagement in many education institutions are often haphazard and lack focus, commitment and resources (Solnet, Robinson, & Cooper 2007). Moreover, tourism is a highly fragmented and multi-faceted industry; thus it is not impossible to grasp all aspects of this industry, and to put them in a systematic curriculum that will satisfy the needs of tourism employment markets, and that will cover the scope and breadth of the industry (Zagonari 2009). Although there has been much research on the interface between education and industry, few empirical studies test the extent and nature of such relationship (Peacock & Ladkin 2002).

Contacts by the academics with industry personnel is at relatively low levels of the organization, especially at the human resource administration or operational level. Moreover, the staff responsible for these matters are often not from academics, and lack the industry background to fully develop these relationships (Solnet et al 2007). Moreover, many executives in the hospitality industry have not developed programs that help students move ahead in an orderly way; so many tourism students (after they graduate) find themselves in tedious dead-end jobs, which do not

require the education and training that they have received, and they do not see any prospects for advancement (Berger 2008). Many tourism employers do not recognize the importance of education; they have a complete lack of appreciation of tourism education and underlying theories, framework and concepts that should guide tourism as a major social and economic global phenomenon (Zagonari 2009). There is also a lack of well-established forums, which should encourage academic and practical based debates and discussions between educators and other concerned parties regarding tourism education and training programs (Mayaka & Akama 2007).

Some of the factors are related to the way students perceive tourism study. The particular experiences that students have in their university tourism program is likely to have an effect on forming realistic expectations of careers in tourism, which is not the case on which to base their choice of studying tourism (Koyuncu et al 2008). In some cases, students consider the tourism industry as a first step or a temporary occupation, the tourist industry is a refuge when job opportunities in other sectors are scarce. Small and large firms are strategically driven by these facts to choose tourism non-graduated or differently-from-tourism graduated employees (Zagonari 2009). On the other hand, tourism industry is often seeking cheap labor, while the educational institution is seeking a structured training experience for the student. These situations make partnerships founded on these outcomes lack strategic direction and do not fully reconcile the interests of the educator, the industry and the student (Solnet et al 2007). Tourism education in Jordan is facing all these problems (as will be explained more in the next sections of this research), consequently, employing tourism programs' graduates by the industry is far below its expected level. Such non-accordance between tourism industry and tourism education makes it important to consider the enhancement of tourism and hospitality education to cope with the needs of tourism employment. Such enhancement indicates the necessity to have an efficient process of coordination and communication among concerned different stakeholders.

The four main stakeholders involved in the design, development and implementation of education and training programs are: enterprises, students, educational institutions and governmental institutions (Zagonari 2009). Industry is a primary stakeholder group for tourism education, which could be enhanced significantly if employers had a key role in the design and delivery of the tourism curricula. On the other hand, students will achieve a better representation in the industry for which they are being prepared; they will also through this educational experience develop contacts with the industry. Educators, often the conduit between industry and students, should put providing quality education in the first place, an education that prepares students for working life, and furnishes employment opportunities appropriate to their level of qualification (Dale and Robinson 2001).

A relationship clearly exists between the providers of education (institutions), and the end-users of this process (students, industry). This has two key implications: relationships between education and industry must be managed, developed and nurtured; and, such management of relationship demands a strategic decision and commitment on the part of education (Solnet et al 2007). Another important fact is that students need to be informed about the importance of the external environment and internal contingencies; there should be coherence between the organization and the external environment (Okumus & Wong 2005).

In their research, Goodenough and Page (1993) focused on the need for a closer contact between the industry and the educational provider. Tourism programs currently offered by educational institutes usually target the work-placement and industry-based project as the main mechanism for assessing employers' and students' level of satisfaction with this industrial element. There is an urgent need to apply course modules that are developed to provide an opportunity to evaluate the value of the course within a work environment. Such demand requires a closer partnership between education and industry to develop the training requirements of individual course participants, an involvement which is both time consuming and demanding for academics, unfortunately, this group is not used to frequent contact with the tourism industry as in the case of Jordan.

For this study, questionnaires were distributed to employers in the industry and semi-structured interviews were conducted with heads of universities' departments that offer tourism educational programs, such methodology helped in understanding factors behind the contradiction between universities educational outcomes and expectations of tourism employees in Jordan, especially for what is related to communication between them to develop educational programs in different stages (only the results of questionnaires filled by tourism employers are presented in this paper).

3. Tourism Programs in Jordan

Universities in Jordan have developed several tourism educational programs to increase the supply of employees in tourism and hospitality sectors. In addition to vocational schools and community colleges, fourteen public and private universities have various tourism undergraduate programs under different profession titles. Table 1 shows these universities and their programs' attributes.

These programs vary in many aspects, such as the discipline according to which curricula of these programs were

planned, the distribution of credits among university and profession requirements, the concentration on some important skills as information technology, languages and communication skills, moreover, these programs are different in terms of practical training credits and techniques.

Few of these programs have a full tourism or hospitality discipline that dominates the courses' topics; most of these programs have few tourism and hospitality courses if compared to other ones of archaeology, accounting and management, as well as other topics. Usually, these courses are taught in both Arabic and English, some additional languages' courses are provided through levels (as French, German, Italian...etc), some programs give one or two courses for these foreign languages, while others reach 6 or 7 levels. For the practical training, most of these programs have devoted 6 credits of training to be given in different tourism facilities as hotels, restaurants or tour operating offices, or in tourism sites. Some of these programs include a graduation project of one credit hour. Unfortunately, there is no coordination between some of these departments and the establishments in which training is taking place; that is concerning the skills and knowledge to be acquainted by students during the training, the evaluation of students is to be given in this case by the trainers in the form of a report of completion.

4. Methodology

In order to evaluate the educational outcomes of tourism programs in Jordanian universities, as well as the degree of communication and coordination between tourism educational bodies and business owners in tourism sector; an instrument of research was designed in the form of a questionnaire that was distributed to travel agents and hoteliers (since these two are the major employers of students after their graduation), the questionnaire included four sections: the first section took the form of open questions regarding the attributes of the establishment as its type, rate, year of establishment, location, number of employees, position of the respondent and some demographics (age, sex and education). The second section included two questions; one of them is concerning number of tourism university graduates employed by the establishment, the other question was about their preferences in employing different groups in the establishment (university graduates, community college graduates, vocational centers trainee and high school degree holders/Tourism and Hospitality Branch). The third section was an evaluation by tourism employers of students' level concerning some skills and theoretical knowledge that are needed in tourism jobs; these included: acquaintance of tourism theoretical knowledge, English language usage, clerical work, computer skills, interacting with other workers in the establishment, interacting with clients, acquaintance of knowledge about Jordan, acquaintance of general knowledge, etiquettes, acquaintance of work ethics, ability to work under pressure, and ability to prepare correspondences and formal documents. These items were measured on a 4-point scale (excellent, good, average, and weak). The last section evaluated the communication of tourism educational programs with business to develop and enhance study plans, to employ students, to participate in events held by educational establishments, and to participate in students' training. These were measured on a 3 point scale (1: Continuously, 2: Rarely, and 3: Never). The distribution of questionnaires took place during May-June 2010. The validity of the research instrument was tested by interviewing some managers of tour operating offices and hotels, who gave their comments and reported what skills and knowledge to be evaluated. For the reliability of the questionnaire; Cronbach's Alpha was measured to test the internal consistency between the items in the two scales used. Overall, the Cronbach's Alpha was .877 for the set of variables evaluating students' level in skills and theoretical knowledge that are needed in tourism jobs, for the group of variables evaluating the communication of tourism educational programs with business, Cronbach's Alpha gave a value of .654; it was indicated in some studies that 0.7 is to be an acceptable reliability coefficient, but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature (Santos, 1999).

5. Results and Conclusions

The study targeted a random sample of 55 travel agents and 30 hotels, of which 48 tour operators/travel agents and 30 hotels responded (a response rate of 87% & 100% respectively). Also, one tour transport company responded to the questionnaire. The sample included two 3 star-hotels, twelve 4 star-hotels, sixteen 5 star-hotels, sixteen travel agencies type A, twenty five travel agencies type B, and 3 travel agencies type C. (Note: According to the Jordanian Law of Tour Operators/Travel Agents; these are to be classified as follows: A for Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Tours, B for Inbound Tours and C for Outbound Tours, and selling trips organized by Group (A) Offices). For the location of these establishments, 67 were located in Amman, 1 in Zarqa, 5 in Petra, 3 in Aqaba, and 3 in the Dead Sea area. Table 2 shows the different attributes of these establishments, while the demographic characteristics of the sample respondents are shown in Table 3. The respondents of the questionnaire are filling the following occupations in their establishments: ticketing (4), general managers (19), sales managers (4), human resources managers (31), financial managers (4), supervisors (2), Trainers (4), public relations manager (3), and manager assistants (2).

There is a high willingness among these establishments to hire public and private universities' graduates; most of these establishments tend to hire 1 or 2 graduates every year, Table 4 shows the numbers of students hired annually

by the establishments in the sample.

For the evaluation of different skills and knowledge required tourism work, it is noticed that all the means for the measured items ranged from 2 (Good) to 4 (Weak), reflecting then a general weakness in the level of skills and knowledge acquainted by the students, the descriptives of these items are shown in Table 5.

It is noticed that there is a clear weakness particularly in: English language usage ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.78$), usage of other languages ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.46$), working under pressure ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.78$), and preparing correspondences ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.77$). This can be also said concerning theoretical knowledge about tourism ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .82$), and about Jordan ($M = 3.16$, $SD = .76$). Tables 6a & b give the frequencies of responses given on the 4-point scale used to make the evaluation. For the level of communication with educational establishments to: develop and enhance study plans, employ students and to be involved in different events, it is noticed that these reflected a weak communication and coordination, the means for these items ranged between 2 (Rarely) and 3 (Never). Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of these items.

Such results initiate the need to make critical changes in the study plans of Jordanian universities to enhance the level of students; moreover, there should be more coordination with workers in tourism businesses to understand their needs and expectations regarding students' abilities and skills.

By referring to a report prepared by the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2007); also the Official UK's Websites for Graduate Careers (http://www.prospects.ac.uk/p/types_of_job/leisure_sport_and_tourism.jsp 2010); it can be said that creating a plan that aims at guiding students properly toward tourism and hospitality education should focus on:

- (a) Developing a curriculum in each university that has a specific profession or skill, thus being oriented coursewise toward fulfilling the requirement for such profession (most of curricula in universities now are covering different professions without making students completely capable of running a specific tourism or hospitality job); main professions can be: tour guiding, tourism management, tour operating, hotel management, hotel front desk operations, hotel housekeeping, food and beverage services...etc.
- (b) Such curriculum must make students achieve the following:
 - Acquainting the specific and generic skills, including language, effective communication skills, customer service skills, information-processing skills, and problem-solving skills; as well as being able to apply appropriate skills in a wide range of tourism and hospitality industry services and situations.
 - Being capable and proud to introduce local tourism resources to tourists;
 - Understanding tourist-host relationships and develop an appreciation of other cultures, customs and beliefs;
 - Respect of integrity and ethical behavior in the tourism and hospitality industry, and apply this to daily life situations;
 - Acquiring and adapting the personal qualities required for successful work in the tourism and hospitality industry.
 - Appreciating and understanding sustainability in both the tourism and hospitality industry; also being able to demonstrate quality customer service.

Guiding students can also play a significant role in enhancing outputs of universities' educational programs; this can take the form of lectures, sessions during career days at schools, or even in the form of brochures or any written media. The content of the guiding material must cover the importance of tourism and travel in fulfilling human needs, the diverse nature of the tourism and hospitality industry including: tourist destinations, infrastructure and superstructures; a general idea about local and international tourism and hospitality trends and issues. Most important, there should be a focus on the major functional areas or sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry, and the career opportunities available, as well as contact details of employers and careers in tourism and hospitality.

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Notes for Table 1

1. This information was compiled by USAID/Jordan Tourism Development Project, it was submitted to Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Jordan on Nov 9th 2008 .
2. The department of tourism started in University of Jordan in 2008.
3. The department of tourism started in Middle East University in 2009.
4. Not available .

Table 1. Public and Private Jordanian Universities offering tourism programs for Bachelor Degree (USAID 2007)

University	Program Title	Total Credits	Number Graduates /Year2007	of	Market Share of Students %
1. Jordan University	Tour Guiding and Tourism Development	132	NA(2)		-
2. Yarmouk University	Tour Guiding	132	12		2
3. Mutah University	Archaeology and Tourism	133	71		12
4. Hashemite University	Tour Guiding	134	236		39
5. Al-Hussein bin Talal University	-Tourism Management -Tour Guiding	126	23		4
6. Amman Private University	Hospitality and Tourism Management	135	36		6
7. Aqaba University College	Hotel Management		14		2
8. Philadelphia Private University	Hospitality Management	126	34		6
9. Jordan Applied University	-Tourism Management -Hotel Management	132	99		16
10. Al-Zaytoneh Private University	Tourism and Hotel Management	132	41		7
11. Irbid Private University	Hotel and Tourism Management		30		5
12. Applied Sciences University	Hospitality Management	132	8		1
13. Middle East University	Tourism Management	132	NA (3)		-
14. Jordan Applied University	Hospitality Management Tourism Management and other diplomas	132	NA (4)		NA

Table 2. The attributes of different establishments that responded to the questionnaire in the study

Characteristics	Number of Cases	Percentage
Rate		
3 star Hotel	2	2.5
4 star Hotel	12	15.2
5 star Hotel	16	20.3
Tour Operator A	16	20.3
Tour Operator B	25	31.6
Tour Operator C	3	3.8
Total of Valid Cases	74	93.7
Year of Establishment		
1940's	1	1.3
1950's	1	1.3
1960's	2	2.5
1970's	5	6.3
1980's	11	13.9
1990's	35	47
2000's	20	27
Total of Valid Cases	75	94.9
Total Number of Employees		
Less than 10	21	28
10-49	26	34.6
50-89	7	9.3
90-129	4	5.3
130 or more	17	22.7
Total of Valid Cases	75	94.9

Table 3. The demographics of travel agents and hotels group

Characteristics	Number of Cases	Percentage
Sex		
Male	63	79.7
Female	16	20.3
Age		
20-30	20	25.3
31-40	41	51.9
41 and above	18	22.8
Educational Level		
Below BA	8	10.1
BA	64	81.0
Above BA	7	8.9
Total Number of Valid Cases	79	100

Table 4. Number of universities' students employed in the establishment annual

Number of Students	Frequency	Percent
0	9	11.4
1	24	30.4
2	18	22.8
3	1	1.3
4	2	2.5
10	4	5.1
20	5	6.3
25	1	1.3
40	3	3.8
50	6	7.6
Total Valid Cases	73	92.4

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of evaluation items of knowledge and skills acquainted by students*

Items	N	Mean	SD
Evaluation of Theoretical Knowledge about Tourism	78	2.92	0.82
Evaluation of English Language Usage	79	3.42	0.78
Evaluation of Other Languages Usage	79	3.87	0.46
Evaluation of Clerical Work ability	79	2.87	0.77
Evaluation of Computer Skills	79	2.29	0.64
Evaluation of Dealing with Colleagues at work	79	2.25	0.79
Evaluation of Dealing with workers in Tourism Sector	79	2.44	0.84
Evaluation of Dealing with Clients	79	2.79	0.89
Evaluation of Knowledge about Jordan	79	3.17	0.76
Evaluation of Acquaintance with General Knowledge	77	2.86	0.64
Evaluation of Acquaintance with Etiquette	79	2.65	0.82
Evaluation of Work Ethics	79	2.54	0.86
Evaluation of Ability to Work Under Pressure	79	3.41	0.78
Evaluation of Ability to Prepare Correspondences and Formal Docs	79	3.37	0.78

*These items were measured on a 4-point scale (1:excellent, 2:good, 3:average, and 4:weak).

Table 6.

a. Frequencies of evaluation items of knowledge acquainted by students

Evaluation Levels	Knowledge*													
	Theoretical Knowledge		General Knowledge		Etiquette		Work Ethics		Knowledge about Jordan		English Language Usage		Other Languages Usage	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Excellent	3	3.8	0	0	6	7.6	7	8.9	1	1.3	1	1.3	0	0
Good	20	25.3	22	27.8	27	34.2	34	43.0	14	17.7	11	13.9	4	5.1
Average	35	44.3	44	55.7	35	44.3	26	32.9	35	44.3	21	26.6	2	2.5
Weak	20	25.3	11	13.9	11	13.9	12	15.2	29	36.7	46	58.2	73	92.4
Total/ Valid N	78	98.7	77	97.5	79	100	79	100	79	100	79	100.0	79	100

*These items were measured on a 4-point scale (1:excellent, 2:good, 3:average, and 4:weak).

b. Frequencies of evaluation items of skills acquainted by students

Evaluation Levels	Skills*													
	Dealing with office mates		Dealing with workers in tourism sector		Dealing with clients		Ability to work under pressure		Preparing correspondences and formal docs		Clerical work ability		Computer skills	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Excellent	10	12.7	8	10.1	8	10.1	1	1.3	0	0	2	2.5	6	7.6
Good	46	58.2	38	48.1	17	21.5	11	13.9	14	17.7	23	29.1	46	58.2
Average	16	20.3	23	29.1	38	48.1	22	27.8	22	27.8	37	46.8	25	31.6
Weak	7	8.9	10	12.7	16	20.3	45	57.0	43	54.4	17	21.5	2	2.5
Total/ Valid N	79	100	79	100	79	100	79	100	79	100	79	100	79	100

*These items were measured on a 4-point scale (1:excellent, 2:good, 3:average, and 4:weak).

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of evaluation items of communication between educational bodies and tourism businesses

Items*	N	Mean	SD
Degree of Communication with Business to put and enhance study plans	79	2.89	0.32
Degree of Communication with Business to employ students	79	2.80	0.54
Degree of Communication with Business to participate in events held by depts.	79	2.77	0.51
Degree of Communication with Business to participate in training of students	79	2.32	0.74

*These items were measured on a 3-point scale (1: Continuously, 2: Rarely, and 3: Never).