

The Impact of Introducing Tourism in Primary Educational Curricula

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of introducing tourism as a subject for young students at the primary school level. Currently, tourism is taught only at undergraduate and higher levels. The current educational system is unable to counter many of the challenges that the Indian tourism sector currently suffers from. These include the perception of India as a dirty, unhygienic, unsafe, crime ridden place that deters many tourists from visiting the country. This is a tragedy as India has the potential of becoming a tourist destination with 'something for everybody'. The researcher interviewed 100 professors of tourism; most of them agreed that tourism ought to be introduced to primary school students. It was found that the most important impact of such education would be to instill a sense of pride in young children about their country, its history, culture and heritage. From this sense of pride would follow a change in attitude and behaviour. Young people will grow up to be agents of change in society and in the country, who act as advocates of responsible behavior towards the cultural monuments of the country and towards tourists. In the long term, there will be sufficient critical mass of more enlightened young men and women in the country which will lead to a solution to many of the problems confronting the tourism industry today.

Keywords: Tourism, Primary Education, Attitude, Responsible behavior

1. Introduction

Despite having enormous potential, India is still not a preferred tourist destination for international visitors. The "India Shining" slogan does not translate into more tourist footfalls into the country. More people visit New York, Bangkok, Venice and Singapore than they do the whole of India (Marcus and Plitt, 2015). While the Indian tourism sector grows at an average of 6.6% annually, those of

Bhutan and Sri Lanka are growing at almost 17% in terms of revenues (Wei, 2015). This is unfortunate given that India has all the right ingredients that should and ought to make it a tourist destination including rich cultural heritage, world famous monuments and a great diversity of cuisines and tourist locales. Jain (2013) points out that despite these advantages, there are several challenges that detract from the 'Adhithi Devo Bhava', 'Incredible India' or the 'India Shining' marketing campaigns initiated by the Indian government. These include inadequate infrastructure, dirty cities/monuments, violent crime, the growing number of negative incidents including exposure to boorish, uncouth behaviour, cheating, racism, exploitation, physical abuse and scant respect for women and the elderly and the perception of India that the country is not only unhealthy and dirty but unsafe as well to visit. It is against this scenario that introducing tourism as a subject at the primary school level assumes significance. The key hypothesis of the researcher is that introducing tourism as a separate and important discipline in the curricula of primary school students is the long term solution to many of the challenges facing Indian tourism.

Aim: To examine the main impact of introducing tourism as a subject in primary schools in India

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To examine the current state of education on tourism in India.
- To analyze whether current education provided on tourism helps solve industry challenges.
- To indicate how introducing study of tourism at the primary school level can help solve many of Indian tourism's problems.

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2. Literature Review

The literature indicates that tourism is one of the most important sectors in the Indian economy. The tourism sector has been growing at an average annual rate of 11% since 2013, contributes 10% to the Indian GDP and employs 9% of the workforce (Sah, 2014). Gupta and Thimmaiah (2015) point out that by 2020, India should become the third most visited tourist destination in the world and accounting for 10.4% of total employment in the country. In order to provide for the requirements of this fast growing sector, several educational institutes offering different courses in tourism have opened up in the country. Some of the most premier educational institutions in India are the National Institute of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Hyderabad; Indian Institute

for Travel and Tourism Management (IITM), Gwalior; Sita Travel and Tourism Academy, New Delhi; Anand Institute of Management Science (AIMS), Gujarat; Amro Tourism Academy, Nasik, (Maharashtra) and the Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism (AITT), Noida (MOI, 2016). An analysis of these courses are these institutes indicated that they include under-graduate, graduate and post-graduate qualifications in Airline Ticketing and Hospitality Management, Destination management, cargo management, conference and convention management, travel and tourism management, guide training, catering, accommodation management and in tourism operations. Apart from history and social sciences, there are no travel and tourism course currently being offered at the primary and secondary school levels.

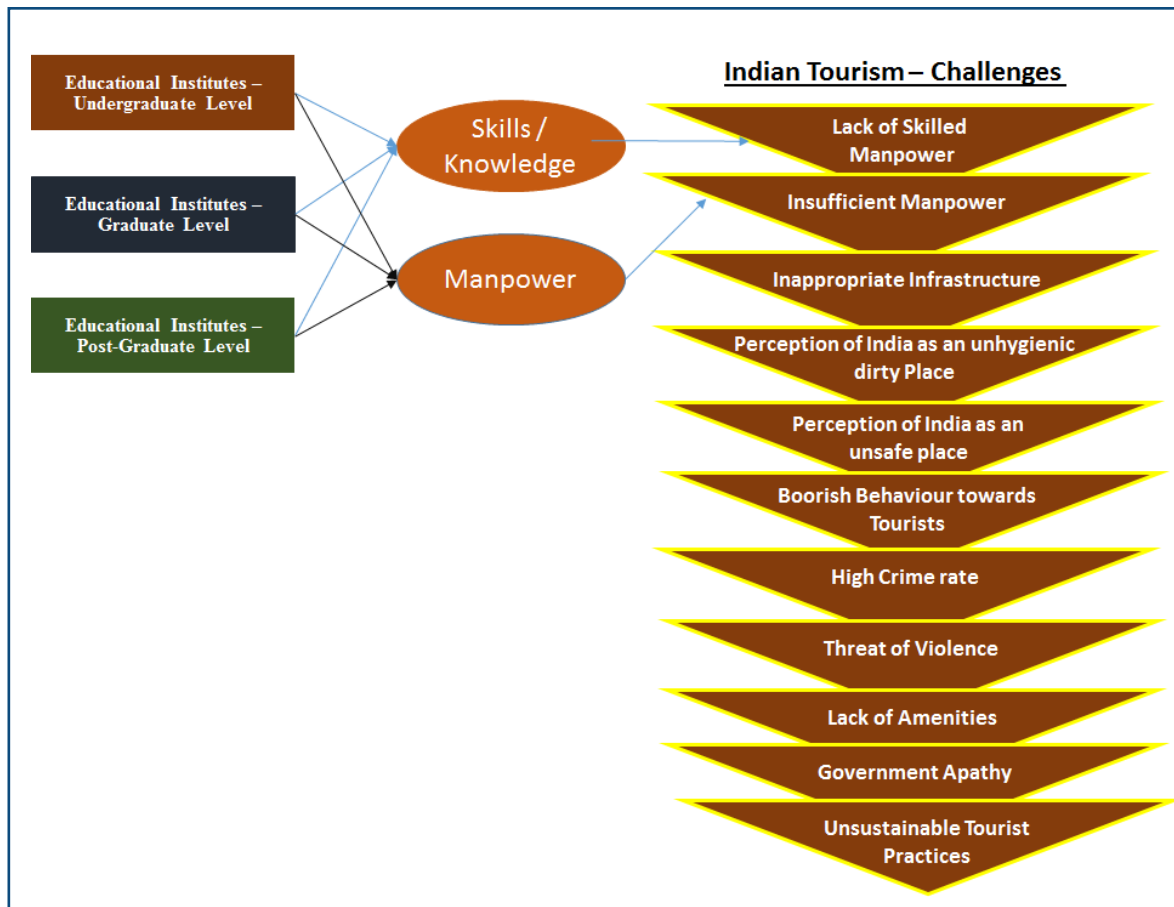


Fig. 1.1. Tourism Education vis-à-vis Challenges

The implication here is that even the most premier of tourism educational institutions in the country are geared towards providing manpower requirements of the tourism industry and on skill / knowledge transfer / up gradation. This is a severely limited comprehension of the totality

of what a well-rounded educational course in tourism must offer students. According to Marsh and Willis (2007), curriculum refers to the sum total of all learning experiences provided to students. Mint (2013) points out that the real purpose of education is not just to provide

skills/knowledge training but also shape attitude, habits, behavior and mould character. The inference that may be made here is that there is overwhelming focus on skills development and too little emphasis on the other, more general aspects of a comprehensive tourism course. Even in the area of manpower provisioning, the travel and tourism colleges in the country fall short of providing for the needs of the industry. As against the demand for almost 200,000 new recruits every year, the total number of students graduating in hospitality management is just 18,000 (Gupta and Thimmaiah, 2015). Only 60% of these graduates consider joining the hospitality sector eventually (Gupta and Thimmaiah, 2015). Of these, it has been found that only 6% to 8% have the skills required to make them directly employable (Bala, 2015).

Figure 1.1 indicates the conceptual model that has been developed on the basis of the literature review. From figure 1.1, it is observed that there are several challenges that confront Indian tourism. The current tourism educational system is only able to provide solutions for the challenges of inadequate manpower and lack of skilled manpower and not for the larger number of challenges. Even here, the literature has indicated that the current tourism educational system is not able to fully satisfy the demand for world class, quality manpower. In addition, there are the other challenges of inappropriate infrastructure, the perception of India as an unsafe, unhygienic place. Research conducted by Bhanj (2015) in several tourist destinations in Delhi indicated that what is required a change in behavior, in attitude in general of the Indian people towards their cultural heritage, tourist locations, monuments and to foreigners.

The same study indicated how foreign tourists treat the monuments and places of historic interest in India with more respect than their Indian counterparts. It is the premise of this paper that such a change in attitude and behaviour can only be brought about by providing right education to young people at their most impressionable age when they are in primary school.

3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was followed in this paper using both primary and secondary data. The secondary data was obtained from books and journals and indicated that there are no tourism subjects being taught at the primary school level. Tourism is only a major subject at the undergraduate and higher levels of education in the country. Hence the education sector is extremely focused on providing only for manpower skilling in the country. The primary data

collection instrument was a questionnaire administered to 100 professors teaching in hospitality management colleges. The focus of the questionnaire was to identify the professor's views of introducing travel and tourism as a subject for study at the primary school level and how this would benefit the Indian tourism sector. The questionnaire comprised of both close and open ended questions. The main focus of the primary data collection and analysis process was to establish links between tourism education to primary school students and the effective solution to many of the problems facing the Indian tourism sector as indicated in the conceptual mode in figure 1.

4. Analysis

The respondents were first queried as to whether they believed tourism must be introduced as a subject at the primary level of schools. Figure 1.2 summarizes their response.

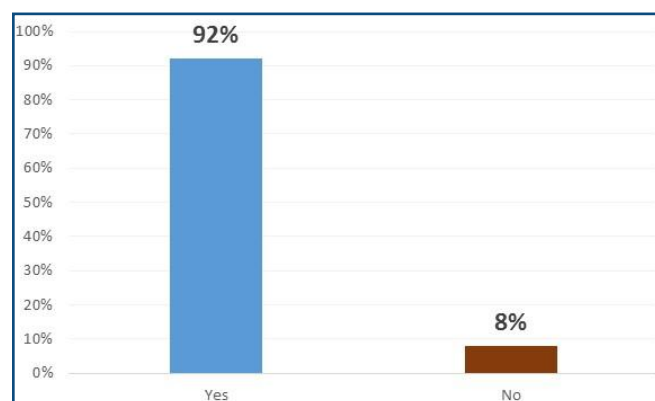


Fig. 1.2. Tourism as a Subject

From figure 1.2, it is evident that 92% of the professor respondents believed that tourism must be introduced as a subject for primary school children. The respondents who answered in the negative stated that 'children may not understand' or that 'it would add to their burden of studies'. However, what is to be noted here is that the larger majority of professors believe it important that tourism is a subject of study for children.

Some of the respondents who answered in the affirmative stated that the biggest challenge for Indian tourism is not lack of infrastructure by 'changing the Indian psyche'. They pointed out the differences in behavior between foreign tourists and domestic tourists in India and that of Indians who travel abroad with respect to such habits as littering, defacing monuments and spitting. It is these

habits that dirty tourist locales and monuments. They indicated that in India ‘there are no methods of policing and enforcement of public standards of cleanliness that exist abroad’ and ‘the police and authorities are not able to enforce what rules there are’. In this scenario, the only way to achieve higher standards of cleanliness is to create ‘awareness and understanding’ at the ‘mass level’. It was their belief that ‘such awareness should and must start at the school level’ so that ‘young children learn why practices such as littering and spitting in public should be discouraged’.

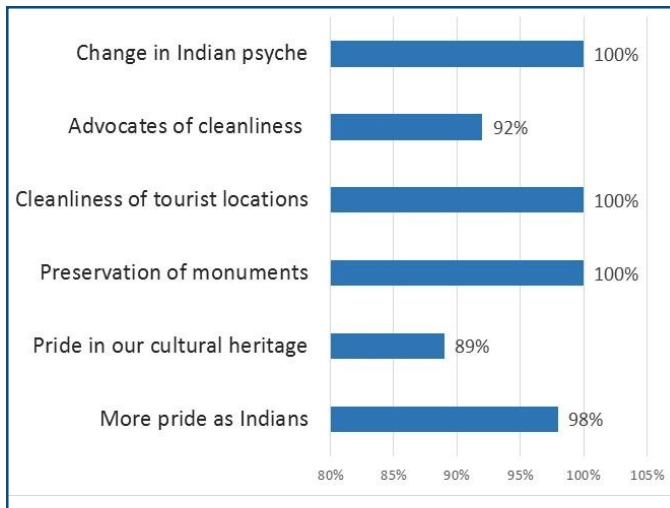


Fig. 1.3. Impact of Education at Primary School Level

Other respondents pointed out that ‘Indians have a very poor sense of history’ and because of this, they ‘give scant respect to places of historical and cultural importance’. It is necessary to create ‘a sense of being pride in being Indian from a very young age’ and it is this that ‘necessitates teaching tourism rather than just history to students’. All the respondents agreed that teaching tourism to primary school students will lead to ‘developing a sense of pride in our country, its culture and history’ to impressionable young minds. They point out the ‘futility of inculcating such a sense of history and culture at the graduate and post graduate level, when it is far less easy to create such impressions amongst older students’. One professor pointed out that ‘thought leads to action’ and that ‘creating mental awareness, followed by change in attitude and then by a change in behaviour’ is the only way in which ‘sufficient critical mass of population who are sensitive

to the needs of the nation and to its tourism industry’ may be created.

Figure 1.4 indicates some of the other reasons cited by the respondents.

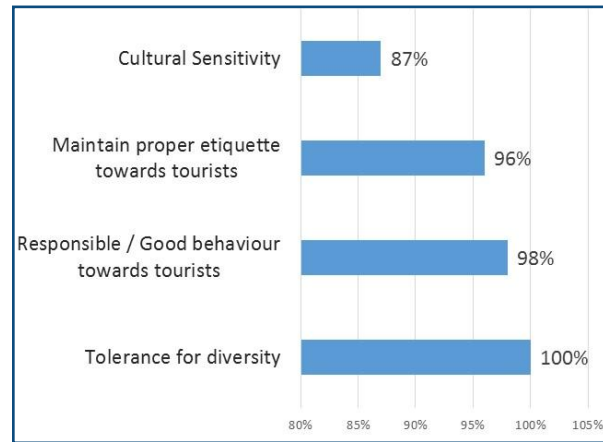


Fig. 1.4. Impact of Education at Primary School Level

According to the respondents a big deterrent for tourists to visit India is the growing numbers of ‘negative incidents’. These primary include incidents of violence against women, robbery, cheating and exploitation. These views corroborate the findings made by Jain (2013) who pointed out that it is the behavior of Indian’s towards tourists that detracts from the image of “Incredible India” that forms the platform of Indian tourism. A curriculum within the overall course on tourism that teaches children about proper etiquette, decorum, polite and responsible behaviour and above all – a tolerance for diversity – will go a long way to create culturally sensitivity from a very young age. The respondents pointed out that what is needed is to show young children how and why such behaviour is reprehensible. Such exposure from a young age will ‘in the long term lead to a nation of better behaved citizens’. Some of the respondents also indicated that young people in whom a greater sensibility has been developed towards their own country and to foreign tourists act as responsible members of society – actively preventing untoward incidents, preventing others from behaving badly and proactively stopping acts of uncleanliness and impolite public behaviour.

This concept of ‘agents of change’ is also indicated in figure 1.5.

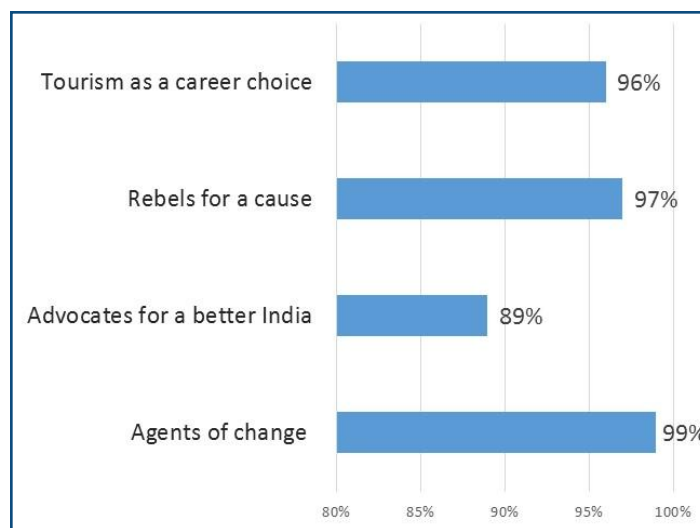


Fig. 1.5. Impact of Education at Primary School Level

Respondents pointed out that many of the current other challenges of tourism in India, namely government apathy, negative perceptions of safety and security, poor planning, unsustainable development of tourist infrastructure and the lack of appropriate tourist experiences can be reversed through education. By inducing a sense of pride in young children about their country, they will become more eager to enhance the image of India in the world. They will grow up to become ambassadors of “Brand India” in terms of advocating for better infrastructure, safety and security

norms and more investment in the tourism sector. By pointing out to them the perils of unsustainable practices that are conducted in the name of tourism, they become advocates of those practices that combine profitability with preservation of the environment. Respondents indicated that providing an early induction to tourism will solve another pressing challenge- that of quality manpower. By educating young students about tourism, this sector will present an alternative career option to them. They pointed out that currently, travel and tourism is not a preferred career choice in India where the focus is on professional courses such as engineering, medicine or law. By introducing young people to the requirement of the tourism sector, those that have the right personality traits can be induced to choose a career where they have the most chances to succeed. An early induction can help dispel ignorance and misconceptions about tourism as a career choice. They stated that education in tourism can sow the seeds of entrepreneurship in young minds and this is important given the ‘Make in India’ impetus given by the government. Young people can also be induced to take up research on tourism related topics to uncover new ways of upgrading the India experience, uncover new tourism opportunities, present innovative tourism offerings and improve training and development programs.

Based on the responses, figure 1.5 has been constructed which indicates the impact of providing education on tourism to primary school students.

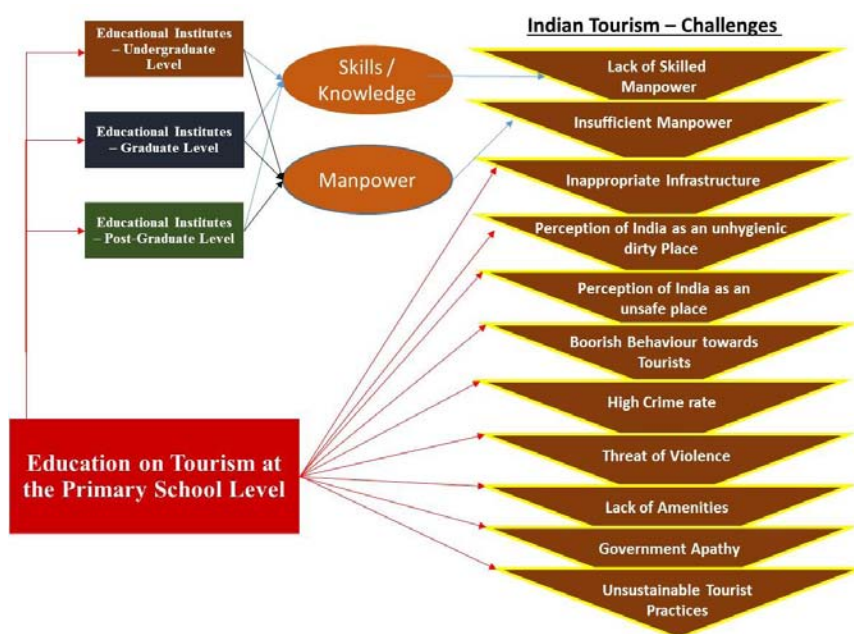


Fig. 1.5. Impact of Providing Education on Tourism to Primary School Students

From figure 1.5, it is evident that the key hypothesis of this paper has been validated. By providing education on tourism to young children, they develop a sense of pride about their country, which in turn leads to a change in attitude and behaviour. They become agents of change as well as advocates of improvement all of which will lead to a resolution of many of the challenges currently being faced by the tourism industry.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper explored the impact of introducing tourism as a subject at the primary school level. It was found that the primary impact of such education is that it will – in the long term- create a group of responsible men and women who will actively work to counter many of the challenges that currently prevent the Indian tourism sector from leveraging its potential. In order for this to happen, the following recommendations may be made:

- Tourism must be made a compulsory subject at the primary school level
- The focus of the education must be not just on history, art, culture and monuments of India but more focused on developing and instilling pride, self-confidence, esteem amongst young children about India, their country, their motherland.
- Instilling a sense of pride about Indian culture and heritage is most important as all subsequent behaviour - including responsible treatment of tourists, willingness to keep the environment clean, agents of change etc. - all flow from ideals and convictions instilled at a young age.
- The curricula on tourism must be a mix of theory and practical exposure. This is necessary not only to keep up interest in the subject but also to create and promote awareness. This awareness is not only of the rich cultural heritage of India but of the Indian people's cursory and cavalier attitude and behavior towards monuments and places of cultural interest. Examples of wrong behaviour must be pointed out to them. It is only against this practical backdrop and exposure will subsequent learning's on the need for cleanliness, proper behaviour etc become relevant.
- Tourism must be introduced as more of a vocational subject, as compared to a skill enhancement subject

at the primary school level. This will lead to a more effective process of knowledge transfer on the one hand and succeed in creating advocates of change amongst young students on the other.

- The subject of tourism must be introduced using teachers with the relevant qualifications, knowledge, experience and skills. Only then can proper transfer of knowledge take place and the appropriate change in attitude secured.

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