

Evaluating Industry Expectations from Tourism Students: Mapping the (Generic, Vocational, Applied) Competencies

Amit Gangotia*

Abstract

The tourism education has undergone a paradigm shift in last few years. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has started some of the most desired restructuring in the education system. This includes initiatives like skill development and integrating employability education into school education and under graduate education. National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) has established a system of clear educational path ways qualification packs (QP's) from school to higher education by providing certification (Level 1 to Level 7 and above) to vocational skills with options of multiple level entry and multiple level exit programs. The importance of this has also been reflected in the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020. The present paper, which is a part of ICSSR sponsored major research project, is based on exploring expectations from the tourism students who have joined the industry after the completion of course in tourism (either at senior secondary level or at undergraduate level). The method of tool preparation based on the results obtained, has been discussed in the present study. The industry expectations have been collected via Google forms in the month of March-April, 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown period and responses are collected from the eminent industry experts which were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The various expectations thus obtained based on majority responses can be mapped with the curriculum of the course in focus which is being run at various educational institutes of Himachal Pradesh. The results can be highly beneficial not only for improvement in curriculum but in preparing better candidates for the tourism industry. The results are further utilized to probe both teachers and students associated with the course to ascertain the level upto which the curriculum fulfills the expectations laid by the industry experts. Two tools have thus been prepared and they were validated by experts from education, research and tourism. The tools prepared could prove to be fruitful for evaluating any curriculum associated with the course which is the focal point of the research.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Skill Development, Qualification Packs, Tourism Education, Skill Mapping etc.

Introduction

If we look back at our history, it could be discovered that traditionally we Indians were very good in the technical and vocational skills during the Vedic period and medieval period. Our historical monuments stand today as testimony of those exquisite technical skill sets. Indian education system has also struggled to strike a balance between the general education and the vocational education. Since the time of pre independence era, we had reforms recommended by Wood's Dispatch (1854), Hunter commission (1882), Hartog Committee (1929), the Abbot-Wood Report (1936-37) which suggested major reforms in the educational system by making a complete hierarchy of vocational and technical institutions parallel to that of institutions imparting general education. On the basis of these recommendations, a new type of technical institutes called Polytechnics came into existence for training of middle level technical personnel. After that some of the provinces started technical education courses. In the post independence era many more committees were formed in order to bring change in the education system of India. These included Working Group on Technical Education and Vocational Training (1959) under the chairmanship of Prof. M.S. Thacker, The Apprentices Act (1961), Education Commission (1964) popularly known as Kothari Commission, National Policy on Education (1968) and Kelkar Committee (1974). Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India

* Assistant Professor, School of Business Studies, Department of Tourism & Travel Management, Central University of Jammu (CUJ), Jammu, J&K, India. Email: amitgangotia@gmail.com

established a Working Group on Technical Education (1977) and published a new draft of National Policy on Education (1979) (“Historical Development of Technical Education in India”, n.d.; “Development of Vocational Education in India”, n.d.). Like these, there have been numerous efforts and policies which were framed to make vocational education a part of main stream education. Somehow all these efforts were unable to attract good number of the youth towards vocational education. Students are still prefer to opt for general education rather than vocational education primarily because they consider general education as a source to attain white collar jobs while blue collar jobs are still looked down by our society.

The present government has made some phenomenal changes to bring out meaning, relevance and significance related to vocational education. It lays emphasis on dignity of labor and sense of pride and joy while attaining the requisite skills by starting the vocational programmes in HEI’s all over the country. The present government has realized the scope and power of the vocational education and skilling the youth in order to make the country self-sustainable and self-reliant. Therefore, there have been consistent and systematic efforts post 2014 to empower youth by nurturing them with various skill sets which make them employable and create a better skill eco-system in the nation. Skill India mission was started in 2015 which offers courses across 40 sectors in the country which are aligned to the standards recognized by both, the industry and the government under the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). Various multiple entry and multiple exit certificate, diploma, degree vocational programmes have thus been started. The government has formed a dedicated Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) to focus on enhancing employability of the youth through skill development. Under the flagship programme of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) various opportunities are being given to the people to get skilled, up-skilled and re-skilled. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been initiated by MSDE. The government has also made many reforms in the Apprentices Act 1961 which will bring out the youth with the trained manpower as per the demand and requirement from the specific sector. MSDE has also introduced a scheme called National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) in August 2016 to promote most sustainable model of skill development and industry connect. Under this scheme,

the Government of India provides financial benefits for apprenticeship. MSDE has also understood the need to support the young entrepreneurs and creating conducive eco-system to support their dreams and innovations. It has therefore introduced a scheme like Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana (PM-YUVA) which aims to support, educate and equip potential and early stage entrepreneurs. This will provide a cultural shift of supporting the aspiring entrepreneurs. The MUDRA scheme has also been started for the assistance in initial business funding or seed funding to the entrepreneurs in order to give them a holding hand to start their business (<https://www.msde.gov.in/background.html>). The new National Education Policy 2020 also focuses on strengthening the vocational education in the country. A sector like tourism and hospitality can contribute a lot towards generating employment opportunities. Poverty alleviation is one of the thrust areas in the Skill India Mission of India and if it is complemented with the supply of vocationally trained manpower in tourism industry, the mission can prove to be really win-win situation for the nation’s development.

The Present study is the first phase of the ICSSR sponsored major research project which aims to understand how far the industry expectations have been met in the curriculum of vocational courses in tourism currently running in various institutes of four districts of Himachal Pradesh. The present study is the first phase of this research which was conducted with the help of an online survey using Google form about expectations of the tourism industry. The study will further seek to gather the desired information from the students and teachers whenever educational institutes reopen in the state. The data collected will then be analyzed and curriculum of the tourism based vocational courses and industry expectations would be matched and mapped in order to attain mutual benefit.

Review of the Related Literature

Since their beginning during early 90s in India (Kuruville, Moira, Mylonopoulos, Kuruville & Weng, 2011), the courses of tourism have come a long way and are being conducted in various forms at different educational institutes all over the country. Certificate, diploma, undergraduate, post graduate and doctoral programs in tourism are being run in colleges, universities and also in institutes which are dedicated exclusively to Hospitality

and Tourism management. As a result, the importance and focus on tourism education also got highlighted.

Initiatives have been taken to design better future of tourism education, wherein best suited skills for learners in tourism and set of values on which tourism education should be based, are listed (Dale & Robinson, 2001; Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper & Antonioli, 2008).

Tourism students also have expectations from these courses and their career based attitudes were probed. It was found that the work experience gained by the students during the internship offered while pursuing these programs, shape the students' interest in joining the industry after the completion of the course (Richardson, 2008). The considerations of students cannot be the sole determining factor as stakeholders of the tourism industry also includes industry experts and tourism academicians.

Implications emerging as a result of relationship between tourism education and tourism industry have been explored (Cooper & Shepherd, 1997), many studies on whether or not tourism education is at par with the expectations of the industry have been conducted (Nagarjuna, 2016; Nagarjuna, 2018; Millar, Mao & Moreo, 2010). Thus, assessing curriculum for mapping industry expectations in developing competencies amongst tourism students became inevitable and many case studies have been done in this regard (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2010; Inui, Wheeler & Lankford, 2006; Cooper, 2002; Desere, & Hattingh, 2019; Tribe, 2002). The present study elaborates the first phase of another such case study to be conducted in four districts of Himachal Pradesh (India). The research undertaken is a part of a ICSSR sponsored major project where industry expectations and curriculum of vocational courses in tourism which are being run at schools and colleges located at the shortlisted districts, have been matched and assessed by taking the views of various stakeholders i.e. industry experts, students and teachers of the vocational courses.

Methodology

The first phase of the study began with an online survey using Google form about expectations of the tourism industry. 50 industry experts from various eminent tourism and hospitality based companies were probed about the skills they seek from the fresher's they hire. The survey comprised of a total of 8 questions, of which

first four questions were multiple choice questions. These questions sought answers about various types of competencies (generic, vocational and applied) listed by Akatieva, Batalova, Merzlyakova and Okonnikova, (2015) while proposing a graduate competency model for undergraduate course of tourism. The questions asked the opinion about the skills which industry experts feel are required to be possessed by the fresher's they wish to hire. Rests of the questions were descriptive and asked the individual views of the experts about their expectations from the fresher's.

The purpose of the survey was to collect a comprehensive opinion from the experts regarding the expectations of industry from fresh graduates or interns from the field of tourism. The data thus collected was analyzed both quantitatively using percentage of responses and qualitatively using Taguette, which is a free open source software. The results obtained were used to prepare tools for data collection from various stakeholders associated with the research. These tools were sent to various language, research and subject experts for validity. The reliability of the tools could not be calculated and ascertained due to the lack of respondents during COVID-19 lockdown in the educational institutes of the state.

Designing the Tools: Likert Scale based Opinionnaire

Based on the responses given by the experts in the first four questions, a Likert scale based opinionnaire has been prepared. Amongst 50 experts, 46 filled the complete responses which was sent to them as Google form and which were considered for understanding the industry expectations. The skills which got more than 30% of the respondents' votes got selected for the Likert scale based opinionnaire for further study. The responses of MCQs led to the creation of the opinionnaire for collecting information from teachers and students. They are to be probed about whether sufficient emphasis has been laid on the skills listed in the opinionnaire (as per the industry expectations) in the curriculum of the course of vocational education in tourism which they are studying or teaching. The opinionnaire responses range from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Table 1 shows the skills and the percentage of supporting responses each skill attained from the industry experts.

Designing the Tools: Questionnaire based on Learning Objectives

The last four descriptive questions were qualitatively analyzed where experts were asked to list the skills which they personally feel should be acquired by the fresh graduates of tourism while entering the industry. The analysis was done using Taguette software, and based on it questions for teachers of vocational course in

tourism were framed. The questions are in the form of learning objectives associated with the skills listed in the descriptive replies of the industry experts. The teachers would be asked to mention :

- Part of the Syllabus associated with the LO.
- Number of credits and hours and/or classes devoted for the part of the curriculum.
- Teaching Strategy/Activity Used to teach this part of the curriculum.

Table 1: Skills Expected from Fresh Graduates in Tourism (Listed in the Survey) and Number and Percentage of Responses Supporting them (Based on the Skills Given by Akatieva, Batalova, Merzlyakova & Okonnikova, 2015 in their Purposed Model)

Sr. No.	Expected Skills	Number of Supporting Responses	Percentage of Supporting Responses
1	Ability for analysis and synthesis	18	39.1
2	Ability to assess the effectiveness of work results in various fields	14	30.9
3	Ability to communicate effectively in a native language	19	41.3
4	Ability to communicate effectively in a second language	19	41.3
5	Ability to search for, process and analyze information from a variety of sources, including information technology	17	37
6	Ability to search for, process and analyze information from a variety of sources, including information technology	19	41.3
7	Ability to use basic methods of protection of personnel and the public from the possible consequences of accidents and natural disaster	7	15.2
8	Ability to adapt to and act in new situations	25	54.3
9	Ability to show a high level of legal culture, awareness of international and Indian law, to prevent racial, gender and other discrimination	10	21.7
10	Ability to work in a team	36	78.3
11	Ability to show awareness of individual peculiarities (social, ethnic, religious, and cultural) of another person	13	28.3
12	Leadership skills	23	50
13	Commitment to safety	15	32.6
14	Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning	28	60.9
15	Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken	25	54.3
16	Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced	15	32.6
17	Ability to develop tourist product	22	47.8
18	Ability to organize customer service and (or) tourist service	30	65.2
19	Ability to communicate effectively with tourist service consumers	23	50
20	Ability to work with tourist documents	22	47.8
21	Ability to calculate costs on tourist product in accordance with a consumer's requirements	22	47.8
22	Ability to arrange a sale of tourist product and tourist services	11	23.9
23	Ability to apply in practice the basics of tourism legislation	26	56.5

Sr. No.	Expected Skills	Number of Supporting Responses	Percentage of Supporting Responses
24	Ability to interact with travel agencies / tour operators, ticket offices and other organizations	22	47.8
25	Ability to design tourist services tailored to the individual characteristics of target groups, using basic design techniques in tourism	8	17.4
26	Ability to manage a tourist enterprise (travel agency) and its departments	12	26.1
27	Ability to make managerial decisions in a tourist enterprise (travel agency) with respect to the state social policy	18	39.1
28	Ability to carry out marketing research in the field of tourism	19	41.3
29	Ability to use applied research in tourism	13	28.3
30	Ability to assess recreation resources, development of tourism and its prospects in various regions	14	30.4
31	Ability to promote and sell tour projects, tour packages and tour operations	23	50.0
32	Ability to implement innovative technology in various activities of a tourist enterprise	28	60.9
33	Ability to develop tourist product based on modern technology	26	56.5
34	Ability to use regulations on quality, standardization and certification in the tourist industry	17	37.0
35	Ability to calculate costs of a tour package tailored to the needs of a consumer	26	56.5
36	Ability to issue a tour package (vouchers, insurance policies) and accountable documents	21	45.7
37	Ability to promote and sell tourist product using information and communication technology	30	65.2
38	Ability to consult, select and agree on tourist services (their form, type, volume, price), tailored to the needs of the consumer	24	52.2

Tool Preparation: Validity and Reliability of the Data Collection Tools

Both tools, after preparation were sent to language expert, education research experts, and subject expert (i.e. from the field of tourism) for their content validity and language clarity. The suggestions given by these experts were incorporated to finalize the tools for data collection.

The reliability of the tools prepared could not be calculated as amidst lockdown due to the outbreak of COVID-19 disease, all educational institutes which were to be covered in the research remained closed. Hence due to the absence of both teachers and students, reliability could not be determined.

Conclusion and Future Work

Present study is the first phase of the ICSSR sponsored major research project which aims to understand how far

the industry expectations have been met in the curriculum of vocational course in tourism in various institutes of four districts of Himachal Pradesh. In this study, views of industry experts regarding their expectations from the newcomers in tourism industry are collected using Google form. Their responses have been utilized to prepare two data collection tools. The first one being Likert scale based opinionnaire for both teachers and students of vocational course in tourism and the second one is learning objectives based questionnaire for the teachers of the course. Both the tools were validated by the language, subject and research experts but the reliability of the tools could not be calculated due to the closing of all educational institutes throughout the country and the state. The next phase will include calculating reliability of these data collection tools and conducting pilot study and final phase will comprise of collection and analysis of data.

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