

REFORMING HOSPITALITY EDUCATION TO FULFILL THE INDUSTRY EXPECTATIONS: A CASE OF UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The study of hospitality is considered important due to the fact that it is a vital industry in the service sector. Malaysia has developed the hospitality education program to fulfill the country vision in expanding human resources particularly in the tourism and hospitality industry. One of the educational institutions in Malaysia which focuses on the hospitality education is Universiti Utara Malaysia. This article describes an in-depth study involving seven experts in the hospitality industry. The purpose of the study was to explore their perceptions regarding the hospitality education program particularly in terms of fulfilling the industry requirements and expectations. The experts found that the curriculum consists of several courses which eventually fulfill the needs of the hospitality industry and suggested several aspects to strengthen the program in order to survive the future challenges.

Keywords: Hospitality Education, Industry Expectations, Hospitality Curriculum, Human Resource Development.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the study of hospitality is considered important due to the fact that it is a vital industry in the service sector. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, hospitality industry is estimated to have a total of 262.6 million jobs which presented the world's workforce by the year 2017 and being one of the most resilient industries in the world (WTTC 2009). Hence there is an increasing need for the hospitality education sector to provide enough manpower to cater to the ever-changing and demanding industry. Despite the growing focus on hospitality programs which offer a wide diversity of courses throughout the world, there is lack of review on whether the current hospitality education curriculum actually comply with industry expectations.

The value of hospitality education eventually runs in line with the expansion of the hospitality industry itself. As a result, the pioneer of hospitality education, Switzerland, started offering the program beginning early 1907. The evolution is followed by Cornell, the first hotel school in the United States which represents hospitality education as a legitimate area since 1922 with the establishment of the School of Hotel Administration (Cornell University 2004). In Taiwan, the first hospitality education was introduced in 1966 under the Six-Year National Development Plan (Wei-Lu 1999). As for Malaysia, hospitality education was introduced in 1967 in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, University Institute of Technology MARA or recently known as UiTM (Goldsmith and Zahari 1994).

Hospitality education in the United Kingdom started in 1970s purposely to meet the needs of the British hospitality industry. Due to the market demand, Brazil started its hospitality education back in 1978 with the first hospitality education developed by the Universidade de Caxias do Sul (Knowles, Teixeira and Egan 2003). Furthermore, China started introducing the hospitality education also in 1978 with the establishment of Nanjing Tourism School (Tao

1997). Meanwhile, the Eastern Caribbean Island of Grenada introduced hospitality education program in 2002 in line with the Educational Enhancement and Development 2002-2010 by the Grenada Ministry of Education (McDonald and Hopkin 2003).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the case of Malaysia, the hospitality education is developed tremendously to fill in the gaps between hospitality education and the industry needs in line with the expanding hospitality industry. With the increasing demand for hospitality graduates, several academic institutions in Malaysia have established the hospitality program to fulfill the industry needs. The hospitality program is being offered by the public higher academic institutions such as Universiti Malaya (UM), UiTM, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). In addition, various private higher academic institutions are also offering the program at the diploma level for instance, Taylor's University College, Begi University College, Damansara Utama College and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. In fact, taken this matter seriously, two hotel sectors in Malaysia are also offering full time and short courses for the hospitality education which are Berjaya University College and Legend International College.

With so many institutions offering the program, the quality of the curriculum structure has become major issue for the hospitality industry. The academic institutions believe that a balance between theory and practice of hospitality education must be enhanced as basic component in hospitality curriculum particularly in higher institutions. Thus, it is high time to conduct a study looking into the standardization of the existing curriculum. Is the curriculum really designed to fulfill the industry expectations? Does it comply with what the industry wants from the graduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ladki (1993), the main purpose of hospitality education is to educate graduates who possess a wide range of transferable and analytical skills. In fact, as stated by Davies (1994), hospitality education must prepare well qualified graduates to fulfill the demand and changes in the hospitality industry. However, it is noted that the hospitality education programs still cannot keep up with the dramatic changes of the hospitality industry (Haywood 1989). This finding is supported by Okeiyi, Finley and Postel (1994) where they found that hospitality students were inadequately prepared in some of the managerial skills needed in order to succeed in hospitality industry. In response, the hospitality education curriculum should be designed to cater the needs of the industry, thus several studies have focused on the importance of hospitality education curriculum (Bach and Milman 1996; Chen 1996).

Many studies have also stressed on the important skills needed by the hospitality students in order for them to be part of the hospitality industry. Connolly and McGing (2006) suggested that hospitality curriculum and courses must consist of strong practical skills and 'soft' people management skills. According to Tesone and Ricci (2005), the high turnover rates in the Florida hospitality industry was due to the unrealistic expectations of employees coming from the secondary and higher education programs. They suggested a strong relationship between the hospitality education and industry expectations. Thus, the educational institutions should be more realistic by offering the students high quality of hospitality education which represents the industry needs.

Advanced study on the issue was consequently raised by Zopiatis and Constanti (2007). They determined the quality relationship between the hospitality education and industry in Cyprus

through the development of a model which enables hospitality educators to measure the degree with which their hospitality programs meet the demand of the hospitality industry. Other study regarding this matter was undertaken by Lam and Xiao (2000). Their study indicated a reform in the hospitality education due to the rapid development of hospitality and tourism industry in China.

Barrows and Walsh (2002) in their study regarding hospitality education programs and private club industry in Canada emphasized that managers indicate strong relationship between professional career in hospitality industry and hospitality education programs. Previously in another study, Umbreit (1992) emphasized the hospitality education programs must consist of various coursework and professional areas which related to finance, accounting, human resource, leadership, communication and marketing. Responding to this matter, Bach and Milman (1996) developed four clusters of skills which the students of hospitality education must possess in order for them to become part of the hospitality industry workplace. They suggested the clusters as business functional skills, hospitality functional skills, analytical skills and personal skills.

A REVIEW OF HOSPITALITY EDUCATION IN UUM

UUM had taken a serious action by offering the Bachelor of Hospitality Management (BHM) with Honors in 2004. The Hospitality Department was initially established as part of the School of Tourism and Hospitality and is now currently offered under UUM COLGIS with 14 academic staffs (Students Prospectus, 2005). With its vision of becoming a world class hospitality education program, the department emphasizes on producing graduates who are conceptual knowledgeable in theory and practical. In addition, it also intends expiring graduates in order to become experts in the specialized area of hospitality. The hospitality program at UUM is designed with competitive structure which comprised of modules and coursework as to be in line with other hospitality education throughout the world. The structure is presented in Table 1.

METHODOLOGY

An in depth non-structured interviews were conducted involving seven experts in the hospitality industry. Six of the experts represented the hospitality organizations in Malaysia whilst the other expert represented a hospitality organization in the United States. The expert from outside Malaysia was selected since the department believes that it will eventually review the program internationally. The study is basically an exploratory study to understand the perceptions of the hospitality industry towards the current hospitality education program at UUM, thus, the identified number of the participants at this level is considered significant. In fact, their perceptions and review are considered highly relevant and representative toward the hospitality industry expectations since there are the experts of the industry.

The experts were given a complete structure of the hospitality education program as the first step in the information gathering process. The process was then followed by a brief explanation from the coordinator regarding the structure of the program. A basic structure was designed and presented to the experts as to indicate courses in the curriculum and the components they presented. Their answers were recorded by the coordinator to assure confirm ability of the information. They were joined together again in the next meeting where their answers given before were discussed in depth. Several key points of new ideas and suggestions were summarized and they were asked again to confirm them. Once confirmed, the information gathered was interpreted immediately and were qualitatively analyzed.

Table 1. Hospitality Management Curriculum

<i>Code</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Credit hour</i>
	<i>UNIVERSITY CORE COURSES</i>	22
SADN1013	Islamic & Asian Civilization I	3
SAGN1033	Malaysia Studies	3
SADN1043	Ethnic Relations	3
SBLE1032	English for Communication I	2
SBLE1042	English for Communication II	2
SBLE2102	Process Writing	2
BPME1013	Entrepreneurship	3
	Co-curriculum	4
	<i>PROGRAM CORE COURSES</i>	96
	<i>Management, Administration & Development</i>	31
SEEB1013	Principles of Economic	3
SGDN1043	Thinking Science & Ethics	3
BKAL1013	Business Accounting	3
BPMN1013	Introduction to Management	3
STID1013	Information System in Organization	3
SQQS1013	Introduction to Statistic	3
BWFF1013	Fundamental of Finance	3
BPMN2023	Organizational Behavior	3
SBLE2052	English for Hospitality Purposes	2
SBLE3012	Business Report Writing	2
SBLE3043	Business and Professional Communication	3
	<i>Technical skills</i>	65
SHOA1013	Introduction to Hospitality	3
SHOC1024	Principles of Food Preparation	4
SHOC2013	Food Sanitation	3
SHOC2024	Food Preparation	4
SHOT2034	Front Office Management	4
SHOP2043	Applied Information System for Hospitality	3
SHOM2053	Hotel Sales and Marketing	3
SHOT2064	Food & Beverage Service	4
SHOP3013	Hotel Operation Management	3
SHOP3023	Restaurant Management	3
SHOP3033	Food & Beverages Cost Control	3
SHZP3033	Human Resource Management in Tourism & Hospitality	3
SHOT3044	Housekeeping	4

SHOU3063	Tourism & Hospitality Law	3
SHZZ3063	Tourism and Hospitality Research	3
SHOP4013	Interpersonal Skills	3
SHOL4023	Hospitality Strategic Management	3
SHOE4033	Hospitality Entrepreneurial Development	3
SHOP4053	Hospitality Seminar	3
SHOP4063	Banquet and Convention Management	3
	<i>FOREIGN LANGUAGE</i>	6
SBLF1XX3	Foreign Language I	3
SBLF2XX3	Foreign Language II	3
HZX3996	<i>PRACTICUM</i>	8
	<i>ELECTIVE</i>	3
	<i>TOTAL</i>	135

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY

Is the Curriculum Fulfills What the Industry Expects?

The findings indicated that in general, the experts find that the hospitality curriculum at UUM represents and fulfill the framework of what the hospitality industry expects from the graduates. All the seven experts agreed that the hospitality curriculum has fulfilled the needs for business functional skills, hospitality functional skills, personal skills and analytical skills as suggested by many researchers. In fact, one of the experts highly reviewed the curriculum as standardized and compactable hospitality education structure. In addition, three experts agreed that the structure reflected the professionalism in preparing hospitality curriculum.

What is the Components Presented the Skills Needed?

The experts also believed that the curriculum consists of several components as recommended by many researchers in order to survive in the real hospitality industry. They also noted that several courses consist of the business functional skills components. They emphasized that these courses involve more business oriented for instance, BPMN1013 Introduction to Management, SEEB1013 Principles of Economic, BKAL1013 Business Accounting, and BWFF1013 Fundamental of Finance. However, five of the experts found that BPME1013 Entrepreneurship course should not be included in the business functional skills component since it is redundant with SHOE4033 Hospitality Entrepreneurial Development course. They suggested the course to be eliminated and the focus should be as the hospitality functional skills component. In addition, all the experts agreed that the BPMN2023 Organizational Behavior course to be specialized in the hospitality industry and also included as the hospitality functional skills component.

On the other hands, five of the experts suggested four courses in the hospitality functional skills to be included as business functional skills component due to the fact that this course is focusing more towards issues in the hospitality industry and does not involve any hospitality skills. The courses identified are SHOP4053 Hospitality Seminar, SHZP3033 Human Resource Management in Tourism & Hospitality, SHOU3063 Tourism & Hospitality Law and SHOL4023 Hospitality Strategic Management.

Furthermore, the experts also agreed that the curriculum consists of the hospitality functional skills components which are presented by courses in hospitality area such as, SHOA1013

Introduction to Hospitality, SHOC1024 Principles of Food Preparation, SHOC2013 Food Sanitation, SHOC2024 Food Preparation, SHOT2034 Front Office Management, SHOP2043 Applied Information System for Hospitality, SHOM2053 Hotel Sales & Marketing, SHOT2064 Food & Beverage Service, SHOP3013 Hotel Operation Management, SHOP3023 Restaurant Management, SHOP3033 Food & Beverages Cost Control, SHOT3044 Housekeeping, and SHOP4063 Banquet and Convention Management. They also reached the same consensus regarding the hours of operating for several technical courses which demand specific skills. These courses are presented with 4 hours at the end of the code which accumulated to 7 hours of class operation. One of the experts recommend the SHOP3033 Food & Beverages Cost Control to be implemented as 4 hours lecture due to the fact that students may need extra hours to perform the calculation methods consist in the syllabus.

In addition they also indicated several courses as personal skills components in the curriculum. However, most of the experts did not agree with the courses in this component. They believed that the courses should be included as personal skills since it involves more toward individual capabilities such as interpersonal skills, communication skills, written skills, negotiation skills and conflict resolution skills. Based on the structure given, the experts only noticed few relevant courses in this component. They suggested other courses which should be included such as BLE3012 Business Report Writing and SHOP4013 Interpersonal Skills. In fact, the experts believed that the English for Hospitality Purposes course plays important role as a personal skills component since the course involves specific English skills in dealing and managing with people in the hospitality industry.

Finally, the last component which was considered critical by the experts is the analytical skills. The skills as suggested by them are required by the students in order to have abilities to analyze specific situations in the hospitality industry. They noted that the courses involve in this component should be related to research, thinking skills and computer literacy.

Are the Courses In Line With What the Industry Wants and Relevant To the Future?

The findings also indicated that all the experts have identified several courses which in line with the industry's wants and needs. Such courses are SHOE4033 Hospitality Entrepreneurial Development, SHZP3033 Human Resource Management in Tourism and Hospitality, SHOP 2043 Applied Information System for Hospitality, SHOP4013 Interpersonal Skills, and almost all courses under the hospitality skills component. In addition, they also named several courses in the curriculum which may survive in future challenges of the hospitality industry. Such courses are SHZZ3063 Tourism and Hospitality Research, SHOU3063 Tourism and Hospitality Law, and SHOL4023 Hospitality Strategic Management. In fact, they suggested the SADN1013 Islamic and Civilization course to be included in the analytical skills component due to the fact that the course may present an Islamic culture of the Malaysian community. Practicum internship was considered by the experts as an excellent approach to balance between the theory and practice. As hospitality experts, they also emphasized practicum internship as major course which plays vital role in valuing the interpersonal and analytical skills components in the curriculum.

What Courses Should Be Add In And Eliminate From The Curriculum?

Overall, the experts agreed that all the courses consist in the curriculum are significant and relevant to what the industry wants from future graduates. Thus, there were no major suggestions regarding the courses which need to be added and eliminated from the structure. Nonetheless, they recommend that the Foreign Language courses to be specific and specialized to certain foreign languages suitable within the context of Malaysian hospitality such as Arabic and Japanese. They also agreed that the basic of tourism course to be included

in the curriculum as business functional skills due to the fact that the course covers both aspects of theory and practical which eventually represent one industry – Tourism and Hospitality. The revised structure of the components is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Revised Structure of Hospitality Education Components and UUM Hospitality Courses

<i>Components</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Courses</i>
Business Functional Skills	SEEB1013	Principles of Economic
	BKAL1013	Business Accounting
	BPMN1013	Introduction to Management
	BWFF1013	Fundamental of Finance
	SHOP4053	<i>Hospitality Seminar</i>
	SHZP3033	<i>Human Resource Management in Tourism & Hospitality</i>
	SHOU3063	<i>Tourism & Hospitality Law</i>
	SHOL4023	<i>Hospitality Strategic Management</i>
Hospitality Functional Skills	SHZXXX3	<i>Introduction to Tourism</i>
	BPMN2023	<i>Organizational Behavior in Hospitality</i>
	SHOA1013	Introduction to Hospitality
	SHOC1024	Principles of Food Preparation
	SHOC2013	Food Sanitation
	SHOC2024	Food Preparation
	SHOT2034	Front Office Management
	SHOP2043	Applied Information System for Hospitality
	SHOM2053	Hotel Sales & Marketing
	SHOT2064	Food & Beverage Service
	SHOP3013	Hotel Operation Management
	SHOP3023	Restaurant Management
	SHOP3034	<i>Food & Beverages Cost Control</i>
	SHOT3044	Housekeeping
SHOE4033	Hospitality Entrepreneurial Development	
Personal Skills	SHOP4063	Banquet and Convention Management
	SBLE1032	English for Communication I
	SBLE1042	English for Communication II
	SBLE2102	Process Writing
	BLE2052	English for Hospitality Purposes
	BBLE3043	Business & Professional Communication
	SBLF1XX3	<i>Foreign Language I (Arabic /Japanese)</i>
	SBLF2XX3	<i>Foreign Language II (Arabic / Japanese)</i>
Analytical Skills	BLE3012	<i>Business Report Writing</i>
	SHOP4013	<i>Interpersonal Skills</i>
	SGDN1043	Thinking Science & Ethics
	QQS1013	Introduction to Statistic
	TID1013	Information System in Organization
	SHZZ3063	Tourism and Hospitality Research
SADN1013	<i>Islamic & Asian Civilization I</i>	

CONCLUSION

In order to fulfill industry expectations of hospitality graduates, the Hospitality Department of UUM COLGIS has successfully developed a hospitality curriculum which comprises of several courses in compliance to the hospitality education and industry expectations. The findings from the study indicate that theoretically, the structure is seen by the hospitality experts as fulfilling the gaps in understanding what the industry wants from the hospitality students. However, the satisfaction among the customers and the clients of the academic institutions should be looked into. The experts also find four major skills components in the curriculum as suggested by many studies regarding hospitality education (Bach and Miman 1996; Ladki 1993; Umbreit 1992). The skills components of the curriculum are business functional skills, hospitality functional skills, personal skills and analytical skills.

In addition, the study also notes two suggestions by the experts. Firstly, the experts suggest to add in the Islamic and Civilization course into the analytical skills component. This is due to the fact that this course represents the Islamic culture of Malaysian hospitality. At present this course is categorized into the University Core Course where it is compulsory taken by all students. Students must possess intelligent thinking skills in order for them to further analyze the conceptualization of the Islamic culture. Thus, it should be taken into account as major hospitality course which reflects the Malaysian hospitality and to be added into the analytical skills component.

The second suggestion is to specifically state the Foreign Language courses which should be taken by the students according to the basic needs of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. Such important and relevant languages are Arabic and Japanese. Arabic tourists are major international tourists in Malaysia nowadays. In fact, it is believed that Malaysia being a Muslim country represents the Islamic hospitality for Muslim tourists. Thus, the Arabic language should be considered as specialize course for the hospitality students.

Looking at what the UUM hospitality curriculum is offering internationally, it would be a challenge to see the program survive in the hospitality industry worldwide for a very long period of time. Practicum internship is one of the practical courses which the experts believe to play important role in determining the real value of the curriculum. This is the only course which balances the needs for theory and practical. Eventually, all the four components are summarized by the experts as important aspects in determining the quality of the hospitality education curriculum in order to fulfill the industry needs. Each component highly depends on each other and lacking any one of the components will eventually lead to a gap in the customers satisfying process. Nonetheless, the experts agree that the program itself emphasizes in the professional planning of the curriculum basically with the intention to meet the hospitality industry needs.

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