

**THE TOURISM EDUCATION AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY  
IMBALANCES: A REVIEW OF SKILLS, CURRICULUM PROPONENTS  
AND THE WAY FORWARD**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The tourism sector is a complex industry, encompassing a wide range of labour needs from nonqualified to high-qualified personnel. However, it appears that tourism education society has evolved in a heterogeneous and ad hoc manner and does not necessarily meet the tourism industry's skills-set needs. Tourism education confronts daunting problems in practice and curriculum development that call for innovative approaches and alliances, intended to enhance the graduates' knowledge and skills. Therefore, this paper aims to ascertain the existence of gaps in tourism curricula development and skills sets required by the tourism industry. The paper findings emphasize stakeholders' collaboration framework; tourism educators, students, parents, and government(s) to address the mismatch. In addition, the findings point to the importance of vocational and liberal approaches in tourism teachings, using a systematic approach. This study's ideologies help the tourism curriculum developers, and tourism stakeholders harmonize their persuasions for satisfaction on both ends.*

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism education, tourism curriculum, skills, stakeholders, tourism industry.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism education is one of the main sub-sectors of the multi-faceted tourism phenomenon. Its manifestation could directly or indirectly impact the tourism sector, opportunities, and resilience towards an economic crisis (Romanova et al., 2016). Tourism as an industry has the fastest-growing importance in today's globalized world. It is a shy industry that requires the ability to adapt to customers' changing needs and desires continually. Moreover, it is one of the few and largest industries that adamantly promotes sustainable development's key aims; promotion of education.

The tourism industry is a high labour-intensive service industry that relies on qualified personnel to operate and manage it. As a result, private and public universities and training colleges have seen this as an opportunity to invest in tourism education by providing students with skills and knowledge. Tourism education is a money mint investment in itself, not only to the graduates but to the double-fold stakeholders. However, to achieve development in the national economy, it is not enough to provide professional education; the quality is also crucial to meet different market actors' skill demand needs.

The exponential and continuing growth in tourism reveal demand for competent personnel. Consequently, the number of tourism education courses has grown significantly in the last decades to meet the qualified workforce's demands (Daniel *et al.*, 2017). With the apparent advancement in tourism training and education growth, there are still significant gaps in several areas in the industry (Airey and Tribe, 2014). Among the most notable are the changes in tourist tastes and preferences, service quality issues, environmental concerns, advanced use of technology, uncoordinated tourism education, and inadequately qualified staffs (Choi *et al.*, 2013). This scenario leads to the polarisation of the job market, which renders a shortage of personnel in the tourism job market. The already available ones are costly-requiring on-job re-training to adapt to changing trends and customer preferences. Though the training institutions aim to equip students with quality skills to meet the industry's needs, they cannot articulate the skills instilled in them to work (Avornyo, 2013).

The tourism industry has criticized tourism training for inadequately preparing graduates for the industry and lack of involvement in curricula development. If the tourism curriculum neglects the tourism industry needs, tourism education will not be sustainable and ultimately not benefit the tourism industry's development. Therefore, the gap between tourism educators and the tourism industry needs a refill to ensure sustainable development (Noble and Kwame, 2015). Thus, this study addresses the industry expectations in terms of skills set and the imbalances in industry-educators nexus in curriculum expectations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There appears to be a considerable gap between what educational institutions offer as management-level tourism education and the tourism industry's needs. According to Daniel *et al.* (2017), efforts to close the gap between industry expectations and academic studies are ongoing.

### **Tourism Industry Skills and Knowledge**

The European Commission report (2015) posits that skill means applying knowledge and know-how to complete tasks and solve defined tasks. Thus, tourism industry skills are the graduates' abilities to apply knowledge when working in the tourism industry to meet their profession's challenges and lessons (Kunwar, 2018; Renfors, 2017).

Exponents of a more vocational approach to curriculum design stress acquiring skills, qualities, attitudes, and knowledge essential for work Pring (1993). Koh (1995) found that the tourism industry has valued practical and general transferable skills, including

computer literacy, human resource management, managerial accounting, and managing service quality. Dredge *et al.* (2015) build upon the philosophic angle, arguing that tourism skills are not a static concept achievable in a single study program. Instead, there is a balance of skills and knowledge needed, with the possibility of varied outcomes and of tourism professionals. Moreover, this balance is interpreted only within the context of its application (Mayaka and Akama, 2015).

The tourism industry requires knowledge and skills that are dynamic. The Tourism Education Future Initiative (TEFI) has identified four categories of skills that every graduate should possess. They include destination stewardship, politics and ethics, emotional business skills, and enhanced human resources (Jaber and Marzuki, 2019). Thus, students entering the tourism sector, with its high levels of rapid globalization and volatility, need different skills and understanding to achieve meaningful and successful professional lives. In this case, entrepreneurial skills and innovation are crucial for dealing with current consumer, technological, and environmental trends Daniel *et al.* (2015 ). An interesting aspect is that soft competencies such as communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and reasoning are essential than companies' hard skills (technical and administrative) (Stahl *et al.*, 2013).

Since most tourism schools deliver a holistic industry-oriented education, both the employability and the training of the future professionals, intended for them to acquire the necessary skills, have become vital elements in higher education institutions. However, Lewis (2015) posits that tourism industry-linkage strategies in education institutions are haphazard and lack focus, commitment, and resources. A relationship exists between education providers (institutions) and the end-users (students and industry). This is essential for educators to enhance their links with industry, community, and government as a subsequent symbiotic relationship occurs that might indefinitely serve all stakeholders.

### **Tourism Curriculum**

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has singled out tourism education as holding the potential to achieve customer satisfaction and improve the tourism business's competitiveness if specific training is guaranteed. According to UNWTO (2017), the tourism education curriculum is about measuring tourism education, from the study plan's coherence to the studies' relevance to the industry's needs; filled with knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Kusumawardhana, 2020). Therefore, a tourism curriculum is a set of tourism generic, managerial knowledge, and skills imparted to a learner, using a systematic approach to produce a graduate that can manage and operate the tourism business into the foreseeable future, with a sustainable competitive advantage in mind (Liu, 2015).

Tribe (2002) argue the merits and highlight the pitfalls of adopting various philosophical approaches to curriculum design. While Tribe claims to favour balancing vocational and liberal aims, He concluded that there is neither nor should there be any overriding principles for ordering the tourism curriculum. As such, curriculum planners find it difficult to assess the relative balance of academic and work-related skills (Paul, 2011). The difficulty is due to curriculum development processes that are reconstituted

as socially constructed institutions, deeply embedded, with boundaries between the institutions as social systems, and their contexts are blurred (Priestley (2011). Mondok (2015) notes that the national attributes of tourism curricula differed country by country and contemplated learning outcomes (Sheldon *et al.*, 2011). More developed countries with longer-established tertiary education usually describe more abstract competencies as critical thinking in their tourism curriculum. At the same time, emerging markets require a tourism curriculum to have more practical skills.

More academic approaches to the tourism curriculum stress the open acquisition of knowledge and understanding from all aspects of the discipline Lewis (2015). Typically, curriculum planning characterizes adopting a multidisciplinary approach drawing upon subjects as diverse as geography, sociology, and politics. However, just as vocational can imply the closure of the curriculum to certain concepts, a tourism curriculum framed solely for liberal ends receives criticism as one which has turned its back to the world of work. Programs with little emphasis on skills and limited practical application or preparation for course-related employment can risk a 'detachment' of the individual from any realistic perception of what is practically meaningful (Tzortzaki *et al.*, 2011). Birch's (1998) reference to academic enclaves and ivory towers is pertinent here since more liberal approaches to the tourism curriculum are always at risk of being criticized as divorced from, and unconnected to, the world of business.

In respect of the tourism curriculum development approach, Inui (2006) believes balancing the vocational and liberal aspects in tourism education is vital to producing a fully-fledged graduate, a graduate with a philosophical and sociological foundation. Tourism scholars suggested implementing the intellectual and vocational ends to face the future educational system by emphasizing the tourism transfer knowledge towards a liberal social science that aimed to develop the understanding, wisdom, and criticality creates a space for philosophical and sociological questions within the curriculum space. The same sentiments are echoed by Tribe, who recommended that the tourism curriculum aim to educate Philosophic Practitioners (PP), which provide both liberal and vocational education while developing students' ability to reflect and act. Thus, a decade later, Dredge *et al.* (2015) synchronized the PP model to Philosophic Practitioner Education (PPE) for actualizing the possible future of the tourism curriculum. The principles underpinning the development of a curriculum for PPE are firmly rooted in the world of day-to-day vocational actions, aiming to be competent and efficient. Elsewhere, the epistemological key to the curriculum for PPEs is that knowledge is used from the whole field of tourism studies and not just business studies, albeit that it might be the dominant contributor.

Other scholars believed that a significant portion of the curriculum space should incorporate an applied, skills-based education that prepares a learner for job-ready graduates. The model introduced by Caton (2015) confronted the curriculum against the traditional tourism paradigm and management practices towards liberation from the traditional mindset to rejuvenate and discover the future alternative vision of tourism management. Thus, Mcclarty and Gaertner (2015) proposed to rediscover these liberal humanistic values incorporated in the curriculum to produce a successful tourism business' manager, such as self-awareness, imagination, and creativity. Likewise, liberal aims, including a holistic understanding of tourism embracing social science and

business concerns reflects in the curriculum space. For almost three decades, the tourism curriculum-related studies support and identify the curriculum developer's challenges and gaps to focus on such issues, as shown in Table 1.0.

**Table 1.0: The challenges and gaps in tourism curriculum**

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Challenges	Ayikoru (2015); Dredge <i>et al.</i> (2015); Dredge <i>et al.</i> , (2013); Laws and Scott, (2015); Wilson and Heidt (2013)	<i>Quality Education</i>  -Effective and efficient teaching and learning techniques.  -Thorough and significant research
Gaps	Hudson (2013); Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2015); Penfold <i>et al.</i> (2012); Wangenge and Nafukho (2011)	
		<i>Curriculum content</i>
Challenges	Min et al. (2016); Gursoy et al. (2012); Oktadiana and Chon (2017)	-Knowledge and skill formulation that align with industry and expectations (Vocational Vs Academic approach debate)
Gaps	Hidayat (2012); Tribe (2015)	
		<i>Human Resource issues</i>
Challenges	Burke, 2018; Liu (2015); Riley (2011); Sheldon <i>et al.</i> (2011)	-Graduates' competency  -Jobs and career aspirations
Gaps	Liu (2015)	Information Communication Technology needs
Challenges	Sigala and Christou (2014); Ali <i>et al.</i> (2014)	

## METHODOLOGY

The author established an explicit method to select and critically appraise the written tourism curriculum and skills-related publication included in the study. Bernard *et al.* (2010) informed the relevant research's systematic approaches for data collection and analysis. In practice, a Boolean logic search engine was utilized on Google scholar and collected in the University's library repositories to provide the reviewed articles (Hammer and Rudeanu, 2012). The EndNote X9 software tool was utilized to store and manage the results. At the first stage, altogether, the two search engines produced more than 650 published articles. The selection of full paper availability and competent group

examination through EndNote X9 features activated the second stage. The third stage reviewed an article's title, abstract, and keywords to determine whether the full-length research discussion was relevant to the current research. The stage yielded 44 papers on tourism curriculum ranging from 1990 to 2019. The final stage followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to generate the study's two critical themes; tourism curriculum development and tourism Knowledge-skills sets.

## DISCUSSIONS

From the pieces of literature, the vital takeaway argument has been on the need to have University-industry collaborations tourism skills and curriculum are to adapt timely with modern tourism needs (Abbasnejad *et al.*, 2011; Schofield, 2013). Such collaborations are deemed critical in developing a knowledge-based economy and creating sustainable competitive advantage (Elnasr and Jones, 2015). The partnership could help universities use sophisticated and expensive industrial facilities to broaden their staff's and students' experience through supporting industrial links. For industry, research collaboration with universities could help: access expertise lacking in corporate laboratories, use universities to expand the network of external contacts for industrial laboratories, leverage internal research capabilities, and aid in the renewal and expansion of a company's technology. This mutual relationship also facilitates the shift to a knowledge-based economy, innovation, and national growth.

Certain issues relating to University-Industry collaboration around tourism curriculum discussion have emerged. First, tourism is not perceived as a knowledge-based industry, and thus, few knowledge-related problems are likely to drive tourism organizations to seek collaborations. In Egypt, for example, tourism research does not feature amongst the Egyptian government's research priorities despite its critical contribution to the Egyptian economy (Aboul *et al.*, 2014). Second, the relative infancy of tourism research globally compared to more generic social science research where the first PhD in tourism in the United States appeared in 1951 (Jafari, 1997). Third, the USA owns predominantly international hotel, restaurant, and leisure chains, such as Hilton, Marriott, McDonald, KFC, and Pizza Hut. With their US-based head offices, universities in developing countries are unlikely to be considered potential partners for University-Industry collaboration.

Fourth, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) dominate the tourism industry. Their numbers are growing due to governmental emphasis globally on SMEs due to their potential contribution to gross domestic product growth. However, SMEs are less likely to invest in Research and Development due to their lack of infrastructure, and financial resources (Eom and Lee, 2010). Fifth, unlike other industries, there is no entry barrier as the tourism business can happen anywhere without particular qualifications. Most current industry leaders have no tourism qualifications, neither idea nor interest in tourism degrees, nor what happens inside universities. Many have come up through ranks but do not understand the academic contents and value the research collaboration with universities. Thus, there is an assumption that the tourism business can be run without expertise or collaboration with universities. Sixth, tourism is a 24/7 entity, which implies that it has little research time. When industry leaders seek collaboration with universities, they demand things instantly. They expect education to change and

respond very quickly, which often does not happen due to universities' procedures and routines.

Tourism programs currently offered by HEIs only target work placement and industry-based project as the primary mechanism for assessing employers' and students' level of satisfaction. Therefore, institutions need to offer tourism education that evaluates the course's value within a work environment. Moreover, tourism being a highly multi-faceted industry, it may be impossible to grasp all aspects of the curriculum's industry that satisfy employment markets' needs (Zagonari, 2009). Such demand requires a closer relationship between education and industry to develop the training requirement of individual course participants, an involvement that is both times consuming and demanding for academics.

Developing countries continue to suffer from a lack of adequate attention to tourism, seen as civilization's luxury (Jaber and Marzuki, 2019). In developed countries, universities are increasingly shifting from an ivory tower to a more entrepreneurial mindset to forge increasingly strong links with industry based on an innovative Triple Helix model of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Viale, 2010). Flohr (2001, p.512) recommends that the education sector incorporate sustainable core units into the broad range of all courses on offer, rather than confining the sustainability debate to specially designed tourism courses. Other tourism programs include practical vocational experiences such as internships, student work experiences, or sandwich placement, and practicums.

In conclusion, Batra (2016) notes that existing tourism curricula do not keep track of the tourism industry's dynamism due to five key issues. First, the courses taught in tourism institutions lack focus; there is an insufficient hands-on experience opportunity for students. Second, there is inadequate language training other than in the mother tongue. Third, there is an inability to apply theory courses taught in the classes to the actual tourism industry's workplace environment. Fourth, the teaching materials are focused on the instructor to cover their interests and understanding that are not updated regularly. Fifth, prescribed textbooks are either very expensive (international publishers) or written by international instructors who focus primarily on issues different from developing countries' tourism perspectives.

## **WAY FORWARD FOR THE TOURISM EDUCATION**

What can the tourism education sector learn from the discussions mentioned earlier on tourism skills and curriculum design? As Kabii *et al.* (2018) advocated, training institutions need to research, innovate, and equip graduates with skills and competence to work in the industry with the future in mind. The results from the previous discussions have indicated that the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the delivery, and the value attributed to the qualification can vary significantly based on the stakeholders' perceptions and expectations. It then leads to a recommendation to develop and implement a competency framework that spells out expected graduate competencies by both employers and academics. A stronger tripartite relationship among the stakeholder is vital for positive outcomes that add value to the curriculum. Changes in the tourism degree structure and content should be a continual modification

and revitalization process. Continuity in producing competent graduates for the tourism industry is an ongoing challenge for both educationists and industrialists.

Another argument is the importance of students' exposure to the industry in the cause of their training. Students should take at least three internships for twelve weeks in each internship to acquire cross-cultural skills, interpersonal skills, and technological skills. With such skills, they will be prepared to effectively handle global challenges bearing in mind the multicultural environment within which tourism operates. Work placements can provide the bridge necessary for recent graduates even before they have completed their degree course while making a significant contribution to the employing organization. Work-based learning also provides graduates with comprehensive skills desired by potential employers, in particular, the development of behavioural people skills such as communication, work ethics, and understanding work culture, and developing a sense of professionalism (Martin *et al.*, 2010).

Of critical importance is the availability of programs that facilitate teaching staff in acquiring desired practical skills to experience the changing working and technological environment that affects the graduates. Likewise, the industry employees should have refresher programs where employees attend classes to learn from the scholars on new research findings and trends. Exchange programs for lectures and students between institutions should be encouraged, including joint research between faculty members and students, joint publication and seminars involving local and international training institutions, study abroad programs for students and faculty members, and reciprocate scholarship programs.

The most crucial issue regarding the nature and purpose of tourism management degrees is the curriculum's relevance to meet both the students' expectations and needs of the tourism industry. Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2015) believe that given the increasing overemphasis on accountability, resource scarcity, and the general inadequacy of funds in developing countries, tourism education providers should keep their programs responsive to the industry's needs and students' expectations. Therefore, the tourism curriculum needs to develop a society for all stakeholders and not just a community. Involving employers (Sood and Chougle, 2016) and labour market institutions to design and deliver programs can help attune curricula to the current and emerging labour market needs and foster employability and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2015).

Lastly, there should be increased awareness of tourism education among young generations. This will be a step towards the vision 2030, one of the strategic directions considered by the Kenyan government to envision and harmonize the tourism sector into the economy. There is an inherent need to know tourism education dimensions important for the intermediate and secondary schools in Kenya, develop a process of the curricula, and improve the tourism awareness among the students; for their career choice before joining colleges or universities. Concurrently, this will be in line with the newly established curriculum-based learning among learners in Kenya.



## CONCLUSION

The constructivist thinking to curriculum development focuses on teaching and learning activities to nurture a practical learner approach and encourage a learner to be active and aware of social engagement of learning interest. Biggs' (1996) work in creating the meaning of learning combined with instructional design theories has resulted in a constructive alignment approach to guide teaching and to learn strategic decisions. At the same time, align with the objective of learning outcomes to assess a learner's performance. Therefore, tourism educators and managers in the industry are determined for breakthroughs. Thus, it is no longer appropriate to conduct the program's studies as business tools or produce job-ready graduates only. Tourism educators need to deliver a literate learner and a learner who possesses a combination of knowledge, skills, and thinking to solve problems and continue to learn to answer economic challenges, develop employment prospects, and social responsibility.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

This study focused on the implication behind skills, knowledge and curriculum development in tourism education. Although it proposes the need for stakeholder's collaboration with HEIs, these stakeholders' exact role is not articulated. Further studies can explore the role of government(s), employers, students, educators, parents, and sponsors in tourism curriculum making. Further, future studies can conduct longitudinal and comparative studies to ascertain how other nations have enhanced tourism education.

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