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THEORY AND PRACTICE: ESSENTIAL BALANCE IN THE EDUCATION OF STAFF IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Abstract: *The development of tourism as the most promising sector in Montenegro requires a higher proportion of high-quality, highly educated staff. This is particularly true if we bear in mind that tourism, and predominantly the hospitality industry, is a generator of new jobs. For the sustainable development of human resources in the hotel industry, it is necessary to harmonise the higher education system with the needs of the hotel sector.*

For the purpose of this paper, interviews were conducted and the obtained results analysed using statistical and descriptive methods. We analysed the attitudes of two key groups: managers in the hotel industry, as those consid-

ered responsible for the implementation of the services and students as future employees. The objective was to examine whether the provision of quality service in hospitality requires the introduction of practical knowledge and skills as a compulsory part of education in tourism and hotel industry studies. The results obtained may serve as a basis for the establishment of modern study programmes in higher education in the field of tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: *practical training, cooperation between faculties and hoteliers, improvement of curriculum, higher education staff*

Introduction

Tourism today is big business, and is believed to be one of the fastest-growing industries globally. In 2014 tourism and travel generated revenues of US\$7,580 billion and contributed around 10% to global gross domestic product (GDP) (WTTC, 2015). According to the projections of the UNWTO's Tourism 2020 Vision, international tourist arrivals are expected to grow to nearly 1.6 billion by the year 2020. Tourism and travel have been recognised as generators of employment. According to the *International Labour Organization (2011)*, in 2010 more than 235 million people were employed in tourism around the world, comprising 8% of global employment, while the estimates

of the WTTC (2013) for 2023 suggest almost 338 million people will be employed in positions directly or indirectly related to tourism and hospitality, which will comprise 9.9% of global employment.

Tourism has been recognised as a priority development area of the Montenegrin economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2011) predicts that tourism's contribution to GDP will grow at a rate of 7.7% over the next ten years. Employment directly or indirectly generated by tourism will grow at an average rate of 4.9%. Montenegro is the country with the third-highest projected long-term growth rate for the coming ten-year period.

To ensure quality and consumer satisfaction, the tourism industry needs skilled hu-



man resources. Education and employment go hand-in-hand contributing to a better quality of life and better business performance. The system is designed to utilise its organisational resources to transform individuals, through the educational process, into graduates who are able to contribute to both the organisation and society (Frank, 2002). Tourism education is of great significance for success in the tourism sector and for increased competitiveness in today's extremely sophisticated market. Therefore, meeting the industry's requirements and expectations is still the basic aim in developing tourism curricula (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). The task of universities is to ensure opportunities for enhancing these skills and competencies (Donina & Luka, 2014). This is important both for the employment and future careers of university graduates and for the hospitality sector, which is in need of educated and qualified staff. In order to achieve this, partnership is needed between the education and hospitality sectors regarding the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills, allowing students to develop the necessary competencies for employment in the hotel industry.

Literature review

Many researchers agree that there is a lack of congruence between education curricula and the expertise and competencies needed by graduates in hospitality. Although the hotel industry goes back to the distant past, tourism education and training as a distinct area of study is a recent phenomenon (Airy, 1988). Jasper (1988) notes that in many countries this research has been conducted ad hoc and without planning, and curriculum relevance and skills development have been questioned (Airey & Tribe, 2005). Further, Baum (2002) says that these debates have been dynamic and controversial and have provided a rich agenda for researchers.

A large number of studies carried out globally suggest that educators and the industry have differing perspectives and do not understand one another. The problem of their differing understandings has indeed been widely recognised (Collins, 2002; Harkison, 2004b; Li & Kivela, 1989; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005 as cited in Kim, 2008).

Students who are going to enter the tourism industry need different skills, aptitudes and knowledge to face the challenges of the industry and this requires the tourism education system to change to meet this need (Sheldon *et al.* 2008). Many educational institutions, in order to compete, are improving their curricula and introducing suitable skill sets in order to develop and enhance management competencies (Nurhazani *et al.*, 2014).

Most authors agree that competencies, abilities and skills need to integrate education and training, bringing them in line with the needs of the labour market and so promoting individual mobility. Kearns (2001), Connolly & McGing (2006) and Kamau & Waudu (2012) think along similar lines when they say that the industry and training providers need to be connected and to implement updated management competencies in order to be globally competitive. Further, researchers emphasise that employee skills are a special ability which is acquired through learning and through practice (Noble & Kwame, 2015).

Others have conducted deeper research in order to determine the most important competencies for hospitality graduates (Van der Klink & Boon, 2002; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006), listing learning skills, informing information, customer service skill, etc. This is backed up by Agut *et al.* (2003) who suggest that for effective management an entire set of competencies is required. In line with this, Mayo (2003) believes that it is necessary to ensure that students acquire relevant competencies in order to serve as productive employees. Hence, it can be concluded

that tourism and hospitality graduates must prepare themselves in advance with specific abilities and skills before entering the industry (Nurhazani *et al.*, 2014)

Thus, regardless of their differing perspectives most agree on one thing: that the key task is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to firstly meet industry needs and secondly to be able to survive within the industry environment. There are also opposing views – that there is still a lack of fertile ground for the introduction of practical knowledge and skills as a compulsory element of tourism and hospitality studies. Thus Seom (2000) notes that there is no network with the education institutions having no linkage in terms of their hospitality curriculum.

In the effort to link required knowledge with quality of service provided, many have studied the connection between adequate quality in the provision of services in the hotel industry with the lack of standards stipulating them. They have uncovered a chronic lack of chef's skills, skills in the kitchen, in housekeeping, management, sales, enterprise and in customer service, and they talk of a lack of quality service that is indisputably hurting the industry (Burgess & Aitken, 2004; Gilmore & Gregoire, 2001). This indicates that the hospitality industry needs to offer quality service, where employees need to have competence in a whole range of skills. Hence, a competent employee should have a cluster of skills and attitudes that affect a major part of one's job (Nwenre, 2005). In regard to this state of affairs the hospitality industry has criticised tourism education for not adequately preparing people for employment in the industry (Airey, 1988). Hence we will attempt here to investigate the need for the introduction of practical knowledge and skills into the curricula for education in tourism and hospitality studies.

Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods, with the objective of providing researchers with key data on the need for practical knowledge as a compulsory element of education in tourism and hospitality studies and on the skills to be considered of importance for students. The aims of the research were communicated to the respondents as comprehensively as possible, as were the anticipated consequences (Brynard & Hanekom, 2008). Two key groups were included in the study: a group of managers responsible for providing training and students who had been on work experience in hotels.

Subject profiles: The research was conducted among second-year students of the Faculty of Tourism who attended practical training in the subject of Hotel Management – in the 2014/2015 academic year in the town of Bar (18 students) and 2015/2016 in Podgorica and Bar (38 students). A total of 56 students were interviewed, or 86.15% of all students who attended practical training. The students attended work experience in hotels of the same category – four-star – in the Princess Hotel in Bar and the Ramada Hotel in Podgorica. Brophy & Kiely (2002) recommend that competence research be conducted in four- and five-star hotels. In this research study this is important for analysis, to ensure that the responses of subjects can be compared.

Eight managers were interviewed in total, four from each hotel, a 100% sample since the students were undergoing training in four sectors, each with a manager responsible for their training. In the Ramada Hotel these were: the F&B Manager, the HR Manager, the Head Receptionist and the Housekeeping Manager; in the Princess Hotel these were: the F&B Manager, the Head Receptionist, the Housekeeping Manager and the Sales Manager;



The main instrument used was the interview, which took a semi-structured form. Respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate on their views.

Two types of interview were used for this study, one for the managers and one for the students, with 15 questions on each. During the interviews notes were taken which were coded into categories according to the respective question. The research was conducted in early January 2015 and 2016, immediately after the completion of practical training.

The data collected in this way were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0. The responses from the interviews were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages. The results have been presented in table and graph form. Since the interview was semi-structured the additional responses of the participants are useful for discussion, for comparison with the findings of the literature review and for drawing conclusions.

Results and discussion

Since the research involved a broad analysis of 30 questions put to respondents, the results have been summarised and grouped in accordance with the objectives of the research. Graphical and tabular presentation has for the purposes of this paper been given

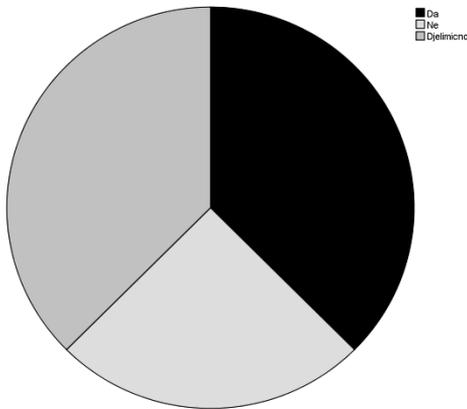
only for certain key questions, as well as for certain findings that went contrary to expectations; the other results obtained have been descriptively compared and commented on.

Results of the interviews with managers

Human resources managers in hotels have great difficulty in finding suitable employees for specific positions in the hotel. The industry requires skilled and job-ready youth to meet the growing demands of the organisation and to face global competition; but in reality it is not happening (*Nagarjuna & Kallarakal, 2014*). Thus the conclusion can be drawn that managers see practical training at the degree level as a good way of developing and selecting quality staff. This conclusion comes from the opinion expressed by 100% of the managers, that they saw future employees among the students attending practical training at their hotel. The reasons they gave for this were that the students were familiar with the way things worked in the hotel and with the operation of more than one sector in the hotel, and their satisfaction at the knowledge they demonstrated.

It is interesting to look at the opinions of the managers on the competencies of the students and their preparedness to tackle service processes in the hotel. The pie chart in Figure 1 shows the responses to this key question.

Figure 1. Are the students ready for work in the practical situation as regards their theoretical knowledge?



Source: author analysis

In answer to this question, 37.5% of managers said that they thought students had sufficient theoretical knowledge for the job in practice, the same percentage of managers thought that students with their current knowledge were partially prepared for the job, and 25% thought that students did not have sufficient theoretical knowledge to work in the hotel industry.

The fact that 62.5% of respondents who worked with students believed that they did not have sufficient theoretical knowledge to work in a hotel is an indicator that merits further investigation in order to assess what knowledge the labour market needs to be added to curricula. This is in accord with *Kamau & Waudu (2012)*, who say that such a survey in the hospitality industry may reveal the gap in education and training and hence be used to identify the competencies required in the industry for quality service.

By way of explanation of this opinion, the managers most often said that students had general theoretical knowledge of the hotel industry but that they lacked specific knowledge from this area. This finding is similar

to that in the study by *Avornyo (2013)*, that hospitality education places much emphasis on theory, with less practical training. This also supports the theory that there is a practical lack of harmony between course curricula and the expectations of the industry. Therefore, it is crucial that tourism curricula meet industry requirements and expectations (*Donina & Luka, 2014*). The managers also stated that each hotel had its own rules and ways of doing thing and that it was impossible for theoretical knowledge to cover everything, another fact supporting the need for practical training in the hotel industry. The managers thought that the dynamics of change in the hotel business were such that theory could scarcely keep pace and that this was another reason, in their view, why practical training in the hotel business was crucial for students and their level of knowledge. These views tally with those in the literature review, where many authors note that the hospitality curriculum must comprise strong practical skills and 'soft' people management skills (*Connolly & Mc Ging, 2006; Kearns, 2001; Ladkin, 2005 as cited in Goh, 2011*).

100% of the managers responded that practical training was of great significance for their hotel and that they were willing to invest in students and pass their knowledge on to them. This response partly accorded with the fact that these hotels were very willing to take part in the programme of practical training and had advance notice of what was expected of them. Conversely, when preparations were being made for on-the-job training, most hotels in Podgorica had not been willing to become involved in the student training programme. This attitude fits the findings of a number of authors, who note that the importance of training as part of course curricula is still not being taken seriously (*Kamau & Waudu, 2012; Seom, 2000*). For this problem to be overcome, and the number of hotels wanting to get involved in providing practical training increased, the



level of awareness among hoteliers needs to be raised.

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the statistical analysis of the responses of the

managers regarding interest on the part of students in practical training and in the job for which they are being trained itself.

Table 1: *Are students interested in practical training?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	5	62.5	62.5	62.5
	Partially	3	37.5	37.5	100.0
	Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: *Are students ready in practice to take on the tasks you are training them for?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	5	62.5	62.5	62.5
	Partially	3	37.5	37.5	100.0
	Total	8	100.0	100.0	

Source for Tables 1 and 2: author analysis

Table 1 shows that 100% of students attending practical training were interested or partially interested in acquiring knowledge and skills during the course of this programme. The managers said that students most commonly lost motivation to work when they realised that day-to-day tasks in a particular position were not as they had imagined them. They also said that carrying out job-related tasks created resistance in some students towards a particular position. The managers stated that this resistance seen in some students in the programme was considerably lower than expected, and so it could be concluded that the awareness of students of hospitality studies is changing and that they are increasingly aware that they can only become good managers in the industry if they go through training for all levels of management. This conclusion tallies fully with the opinion of many authors who agree that successful graduates will need to have greater ownership of their em-

ployability skills and the confidence to cope with economic upheavals and capitalise on career opportunities over a lifetime (McNair, 2003; Wood, 2003).

Table 2 shows a very important item of information, that almost all students are committed to carrying out their tasks on the job. This dedication on the part of students contributes to the successful realisation of the practical training programme to the mutual benefit of the students and the hotel. This is borne out by the statistic that 75% of managers thought that the students had helped them in getting everyday tasks done, while 15% thought that they had been of partial assistance.

The managers cited the students' dedication, diligence, readiness to act on instructions and openness and readiness for teamwork and to acquire new knowledge. This is in line with the notion of some authors, that punctuality, cautiousness, reliability and trustworthiness are considered profes-

sional behaviours (Kamau & Waudu, 2012; Gilmore & Gregoire, 2001). Their work with the students led 100% of the managers to respond positively to the question of whether they, had it been their decision, would have taken in the students for work experience. This speaks of the awareness of managers of the need to transfer skills and competencies to students, as future potential employees. Accordingly, they elected to provide key information and skills which they considered important for students (Noble & Kwame, 2015).

Results of the interviews with students

100% of students said that they believed practical training to be of great significance for their future professional employment, which corresponded with the opinion of Donina & Luka (2014) that the acquisition of skills is of great importance for the employment and career of university graduates. The reasons they cited for this belief were most commonly that in the process they had acquired essential skills for employment in this industry, and also that practical training had enabled them to acquire specific knowledge in the hotel industry which would distinguish them from other candidates in the labour market. These findings are in line with the popular notion of Kim (2008), which considers people skills to be a key need in the industry. They further stated that on-the-job training had enabled them to better understand and absorb the material from the curriculum. The reason for this view is that they may have actually experienced what was taught in class and what was useful in the workplace (Noble & Kwame, 2015).

During practical training, students spent time in the following sectors: F&B sector (72%), reception (84%), housekeeping (76%), wellness and spa reception (44%). The option to attend practical training on

the wellness and spa reception was only available to students attending work experience at the Princess Hotel, and that is why the percentage here was lower. The Ramada Hotel does not have its own wellness and spa facility.

A rotation system was used to implement this plan. The students cited the advantages of this system as being the knowledge gained from different areas and familiarisation with different work processes specific to each sector. These findings are in line with multiple studies that indicate that effective management requires the mastering of a whole range of skills and competencies (Agut et al, 2003; Mayo, 2003). Students saw shortcomings in the rotations system in the short time they spent in each sector and in the time it took to adapt, orientate and socialise in the new sector.

Student opinion was divided when it came to the duration of the on-the-job training, with 57.1% saying that the current duration of practical training was quite sufficient and 42.9% saying that it could have lasted longer. If we compare this response to the recommendation of the management, who felt that the work experience could be extended, we arrive at the possibility that this should be further investigated and that the duration of on-the-job training could be lengthened for the next cycle of the programme. This finding is in accord with the opinion of a number of authors, who believe that bringing fresh, dynamic executives into the tourism industry requires ongoing training and refreshment of knowledge of the innovative approaches that are essential for effective problem-solving in our increasingly complex global business environment (Thomas, 2007; Qiumei, 2007).

Table 3 gives a statistical overview of the level of student satisfaction with the knowledge they acquired during their work experience, while the histogram in Figure 2 gives a graphical representation of the values obtained.

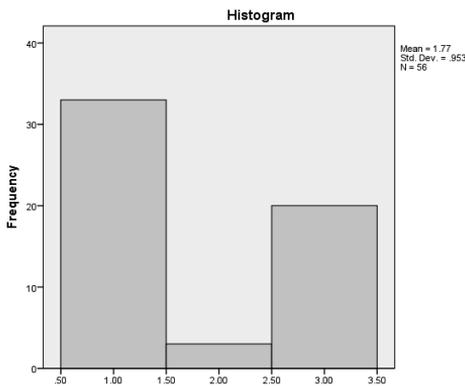


Table 3: Are you satisfied with the knowledge you gained during practical training?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	33	58.9	58.9	58.9
	No	3	5.4	5.4	64.3
	I expected more	20	35.7	35.7	100.0
	Total	56	100.0	100.0	

Source: author analysis

Figure 2: Are you satisfied with the knowledge you gained during practical training?



Source: author analysis

The histogram clearly shows the opinions of the students, of whom 58.9% said they were satisfied with the knowledge they had acquired during work experience, while 41.1% of students said they were partially dissatisfied with the amount of knowledge they had acquired during practical training. The students expressed dissatisfaction at being delegated by the manager to other employees in the sector they were assigned to train in, and only sometimes working with the manager; as a result they felt deprived of answers to some questions. These complaints did not concern all sectors, only the F&B sector in the Ramada Hotel. This response may indicate that even employers are

not aware of the importance of some skills (Kamau & Waudo, 2012).

The students had a positive opinion on the overall process of practical training and stated that they were happy with the level of knowledge acquired but wished they had had more time to learn more. They especially emphasised the significance of a holistic approach to working in a hotel, specifically the coordinated functioning of all the different sectors, the importance of which they could not have appreciated if they had not been part of the system. The students also said that during the process they had learned to communicate better amongst themselves and to lose their fear of communicating with strangers. This finding is in line with (Wang, 2008; Kay and Russette, 2000), who emphasise communication skills, positive customer relations and understanding and sensitivity in resolving the problems of guests, as the keys to graduate employment. In a sense the findings also confirm the assertions of Tesone & Ricci (2005), that the most desired competencies include teamwork, communication skills, guest service skills, professional appearance and pride in self.

Based on the research conducted, one can conclude that both groups of respondents – students and managers – agreed that practical training was of great importance for the employment and future careers of students.

Conclusion

In today's internationalisation of the hotel industry there is a pressing need for high quality staff. This is particularly true given that tourism is a labour-intensive sector, employing large numbers of human resources. One of the key factors in the development of human capital is bridging the gap between hospitality education and the hospitality industry. In order to overcome this discrepancy, that is the differing perspectives of educators and the hospitality industry regarding the need to harmonise the knowledge, competencies and skills of graduates in tourism and hospitality, the research we conducted has shown that students and management share the same views when it comes to the importance of practical training for the future professional employment of students. All respondents agreed that practical training was of great importance for the further professional development and employment of students, and practical training needs to be included as a compulsory part of the course curriculum in hospitality education. The research further showed that the gap that exists in education and training can be used to identify the competencies sought in the hotel industry for the provision of quality service. Quality of service also means establishing suitable quality standards.

The answer to the key question of how best to educate and develop human capital in order to benefit the tourism industry (Landkin, 2005) should be sought in the understanding of educators and the tourism industry of how to meet each other needs. Educators need to display a complete ability to produce qualified graduates who will be able to thrive in the hospitality environment. Hospitality managers need to learn to articulate the needs of the industry and support the training of students in acquiring the best possible competencies and skills, in support of the theory that quality provision of service requires the introduction of prac-

tical knowledge and skills as a compulsory aspect of education in tourism and hospitality studies.

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