# ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: CASE OF INDONESIA

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**Abstract**

Tourism and hospitality industry in Indonesia proves its significant growth year by year. To be competitive, the industry strives for qualified human resources who are not only knowledgeable and skillful but also to be creative in both functional and behavioral level as the labor will always engage in the consumer contact. This triggers the gap between industry's expectation and tourism and hospitality education providers since most of vocational education organizations in Indonesia deliver irrelevant curriculum which does not suit to the real world. A number of papers highlighted the issue of close collaboration between both parties in attempt to reduce this curriculum gap however, little has been reported successful. The study aims to reveal the importance of higher education to be more service-minded, flexible, adaptable, and relevant in the curriculum development to provide a qualified and creative industrial talent while at the same time preparing more professional and qualified educators. Recommendation and further studies are discussed as well.

**Keywords**: tourism and hospitality education, curriculum development, challenge, issues

## 1. Introduction

The constant changing environment has affected most on tourism and hospitality industry, where the human resources element plays an important role. Consumers are more demanding, smarter, and more sensitive to value for money. Additionally, the competition is more intense and information technology is growing rapidly. All these factors call for quick and proper response from tourism and hospitality industry in order to take part in the market share. Consequently, more demanded labor force who are knowledgeable, skillful, and competencies is highly required by the industry. Therefore, tourism and hospitality educators need to facilitate their students with the curriculum program which suits to industry expectation. However, the tourism and hospitality institution failed to equip the students with the required knowledge, skills, and competencies as most of tourism-related programs are not relevant to the industry's requirements [8].

Quisumbing (2005) as cited in [7] states that if the education is the key to the economic and work field development over the changing environment, thus vocational education is the vital key to improve the quality of life. In other words, vocational education brings hope to overall nation's development, especially in Asia Pacific region where the most world population and the developing countries situated on. Therefore, high quality of vocational education is not simply an option but an obligation.

In Indonesia, education aims to achieve the national goals of economic development, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity [5]. Firman & Tola also argue that the main priorities of education in Indonesia are improving equity and access, enhancing quality and relevance, and strengthening management and accountability [4]. However, unsuitable curriculum content to cognitive development is one of the issues (Thomas, 1991 cited in [5]). To demonstrate, traditional lectures and question-and-answer methods are still dominant [5] rather than preparing the students to the real work world. This may help explain the gap between vocational educational institution and industry's perspective on labor force quality preparedness.

## 2. Discussion

Indonesia's official unemployment rate is low however, underemployed rate, that is the proportion of those who work less than 35 hours per week, are estimated of more than 30 percent of the work force [10]. As the fourth largest population country in the world [2], Indonesia has taken some population policy implementations since 1970s which affect gradually on increased larger population of young adults at the age of 15-29 years old [1]. These productive ages are expected could be effectively played a key role through the development of vocational education. Furthermore, the Indonesian government aims to expand the proportion of vocational education school into 70% and lessen the proportion general education into 30% in 2015, it is also expected to be a good opportunity to fulfill the industry's demand of labor force.

In terms of tourism and hospitality industry, Indonesia enjoyed the growing rate of tourist arrival in spite of the sharp fluctuation due to the numerous natural disasters i.e. earth quake and volcano

eruption years ago. To illustrate, the international arrivals in 2011 reached 9.24% growth over 2010 [12], while in the first quarter of 2012, the country experienced 11% arrival growth [11]. Trade, hotel, and restaurant sector tended to be the potential sectors in Bengkulu, Java (except Banten), Bali, West Kalimantan, Maluku, and North Maluku [1]. Obviously, more labor forces in this industry are needed. Nevertheless, the issue of lack of skills employability becomes an urgency rather than labor force quantity itself [13]. Therefore, the tourism and hospitality vocational education should keep up with those of industry's need.

### 2.1 Tourism and Hospitality Education Issues and Challenges

The tourism and hospitality industry nowadays faces several future trends that impact much in tourism in general and hospitality in particular [8]. These issues, which also brought the challenge for both industry and educators, derived from each industry' stakeholder especially consumers. The table below presents the future trends.

Table 1.

| No | Future trends in tourism and hospitality industry |
|---|---|
| 1. | Rapid change of information technology |
| 2. | Increased competition and globalization |
| 3. | More demanding customers |
| 4. | Value for money sensitivity |
| 5. | Increased demands for quality |
| 6. | Lack of professional manpower |
| 7. | Pressure from tour operators |
| 8. | Increased responsibility for managers |
| 9. | Cost pressures in hotel operation |
| 10. | Increased demands for safety and security |
| 11. | Increased sensitivity for environment responsibility |

As can be seen on the table above, the changing environment as a whole calls for the quick respond and proper action in terms of industry policy, human resource development, and marketing strategy. Labor force is the fundamental element in the tourism and hospitality industry, thus it indeed relies on the human resources' capabilities to tackle the action. That is, to recognize the necessity to change and hence to act properly. Consequently, the need of knowledgeable, skillful, and employable human resources in the industry became much demanded. The tourism and hospitality education institution should take a different point of view of how to prepare their graduates to be ready dealing with the real world of work.

The objective of the study is to address the importance of higher education to be more service-minded, flexible, adaptable, and relevant in the curriculum development to provide a qualified and creative industrial talent while at the same time preparing more professional and qualified educators. In order to do so, closely collaboration between education institutions and industry is urgent.

Prinianaki listed several skills and abilities needed in graduates that match to industry's requirement [8]. The development of personality traits is considered as the most important competency required by the industry. That is, the human relations associated competencies or soft skills (Tas, 1988; Baum, 1991; and Eaton and Christou, 1997 cited in [8]). Further, Okeiyi, Finley, and Postel, 1994 cited in [8] also emphasize that human relations and managerial skills were the most crucial rather than technical skills.

On that list, the managerial skills as a reflection of soft skills is placed at the most required skill. It is then followed by experience, technical skills including communication, technological, and strategic planning skills, and knowledge application at last. However, as the employment standards have risen, the industry expects that the graduates could keep up with the current and future need.

Numerous researches have reported the effort from both tourism and hospitality institution and industry to engage in close partnership in order to fulfill the needs of the industry. Nevertheless, the gap between supply and demand is still unanswered. That is, the quality inadequacy is the most current issue which should be concerned by vocational education institution. The condition is worsening as the educational institution and the industry have different point of view of why the educational institution failed to prepare their students [8]. Industry views that the education institution does not prepare their graduates with the required knowledge, skills, and competencies. As the problem goes further rather than closer to the solution, the need to foster links with industry requirement [8] should be taken into reality and in a proper action. The investigation of the industry's current needs and the assessment of the tourism and hospitality programs might be the starting point of this issue.

Simply say, tourism and hospitality management education that resist to change over the time will come to an end unless it realizes the need for reassessment and adapt effectively with the change (Lewis, 1993; Powers and Riegel, 1993 cited in [8]). The outcome of program assessment and industry need's investigation is expected to facilitate in some ways. It provides the congruency between industry needs with the graduates'

knowledge, skills, and competencies, while at the same time encourage educators to redesigning the curriculum based on the industry requirements.

### 2.2 Vocational Education Issues in Indonesia

Education system and curriculum in Indonesia as well as in other countries, is based social historical perspective [9], colonial and geographic size, cultural diversity, economic and political factors [5]. Permendiknas No. 22/2006 declares that the vocational education is aimed to enhance the intelligence, knowledge, skills, as well as students' moral in order to live independently and continue the study in accordance with the program. Vocational education is offered through secondary, post-secondary, and higher education levels [10]. The educators must be technically prepared to teach based on their special interest.

The vocational education in Indonesia has been changed radically many times in order to fit the political and other environment changes [5]. Indonesian government also did some programs to enhance teachers' knowledge, skill, and professionalism such as massive education trainings. The training program used the same training materials and methods year by year, which made the education institution concern only on supply-driven instead of demand-driven [7]. It impacts on teachers' quality improvement but not the learning process [4] including the curriculum development. In fact, educators did the same way of teaching in the old version curriculum after the training.

This phenomenon might be occurred due to the centralization of government policy which allows the government takes a dominant part in designing the curriculum as well as learning process [9] [7]. In the other hand, the industry which is supposed to give their significant contribution to the curriculum development could not show their roles. The condition is worsening when the tourism and hospitality education institutions are under the state or government authority when centralized top down method is employed, whereas the innovative educational system and curriculum need to be seriously taken into account. As a result, the curriculum planning and implementation indeed found several difficulties as the education institution tends to highly resistance to change [9].

This condition might help explain the gap occurrence between graduates' capabilities with industry's expectation. The curriculum development which involves industry's perspective is seen as an obstacle instead of motivation to move ahead. The education institution tends to stick on previous and traditional rule of game, as the changes will cost on the changes on education system, teaching materials, learning process, infrastructure, etc. Unfortunately, if the industry's involvement in the curriculum development is neglected, the education institution is threatened to fail to educate the students with the required and relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies. In fact, the programs offered redundant and too broad theoretical substance but lack in theory and practice integration. Consequently, the graduates do not get the realistic expectation of the industry and irrelevant skills which lead to uncompetitive labor force.

### 2.3 The curriculum development: Some considerations

As the environment changes rapidly and unexpectedly, the graduates, as the main player in the tourism and hospitality industry, should keep pace by improving their knowledge, skills, and competencies. The government indeed plays determinant role in designing the vocational education system as well as the curriculum however, the educators themselves are expected to enrich their professional teaching qualification and innovativeness to support the learning process. Open-minded and adaptable educators instead of a resistance to change will be a significant move towards a better curriculum development.

Accordingly, the educators must have a better perspective of preparing the graduates to be competitive in the real work field. Required and relevant skills such as managerial skills, technical skills, information technology skills, and up dated knowledge need to be well-mastered by the graduates. A well-integrated theory and its application are also should be taken into action to train the graduates with realistic and up to date work practice. Therefore, some old and irrelevant courses might be taken out while new and improved courses could be added in to stay ahead with the real work requirement.

To achieve this, close collaboration between educators and industry has to be well-maintained time to time. By allowing the industry to participate in the curriculum development, the educators could design the more relevant, effective and efficient curriculum that suits to industry's requirements [6]. More effective curriculum is expected to be dependent to stakeholders' interests in order to suit the proposed curriculum. Close cooperation between industry and education institution can be acquired by performing on the job training. This kind of program must benefit both parties. It should enable the industry to screen out the suitable candidates to be employed in the future and also to help the assessment of the students' while in the other hand, challenge the educators to prepare the graduates well and enhance the graduates' professional capability. In fact, the some industries do not allow the students to handle professional

responsibilities on the job training program. Rather, the industry gives unskilled job responsibilities as they underestimate on students' capabilities.

Curriculum effectiveness and efficiency's evaluation is the other important step to ensure the outcome quality improvement and to satisfy the stakeholders [3]. Focus group discussion involving the educators, industries, and government should bring an objective and more accurate evaluation measurement of the program. The graduates might take part as well to confirm and to share ideas to the program implementation.

## 3. Conclusion

The constant changing and demanding environment in the tourism and hospitality industry requires high adaptability and flexibility to respond in a proper and better action. It is founded that the graduates' knowledge, skills, and competencies do not match and cannot keep up with those of the industry's expectation. The industry claims that the education institutions do not equip their students with the up dated and relevant curriculum that suits to real work field. In the other hand, the education institutions are resistant to change their perspective on learning goals, the teaching method, and the curriculum design. In fact, Hence, several parties including tourism and hospitality education institutions, the industries, the government, as well the scholars need to work and cooperate together to achieve the competitiveness that benefit each of them.

## 4. Limitations of the study

The study proposes the urgency as well as the obstacles of curriculum development to stay ahead with the demanding requirements of the industry. Nevertheless, it focuses only on two parties including tourism and hospitality education institutions and the industries. In reality, several more parties including the government who set up the policy, the financial point of view which reveals the cost of operating vocational education in Indonesia. Above all, the study presents the literature reviews or secondary data instead of performs the research. Thus, the findings should need the primary data's clarification and confirmation.

## 5. Further researches

Further researches are expected to conduct the exploratory study regarding to the plan, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum development that has to be more flexible, open, and adaptable might be helpful to investigate the issues. A quantitative and qualitative study to investigate a better and proper format of a close collaboration between industries and educators could also facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of the curriculum evaluation.

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