



HOSPITALITY AND NON-HOSPITALITY GRADUATE SKILLS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

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Abstract

As the integration between education and industry is required for better education outcomes and better industry inputs, this study was carried out to examine the skills needed for hospitality graduates in the hotel industry and whether they are evaluated better than the skills of non-hospitality graduates. Through a quantitative research, applying a questionnaire directed to top and mid level managers in the four and five star hotels in Jordan, the results support that there is a difference in a number of skills; hotel executives believe that hospitality graduates have better communication, teamwork, situation analysis, operational skills, information search, critical thinking, initiative, organizing, and self development skills than the non-hospitality graduate employees. Specifically, operations, information search, knowledge demonstration, and teamwork are considered by hotel executives the best performed skills that distinguish hospitality from non-hospitality graduates at work. Hotel executives stress that more attention to the employability skills has to be given by hospitality educators, mainly the skills of problem solving, technology, languages and culture knowledge, and leadership skills.

Keywords: *hospitality education, employment, skills, hospitality graduates*

1. Introduction

It is a fact that there is a gap between academics and practitioners in almost all educational fields and industries (Lilien, 2011; Belli, 2010; Brownlie et al., 2008; Anderson, 2007; Stanton, 2006; Jenkins, 1999). The role of academic institutions has been always announced as preparing students for employment and giving them an easy guidance to business and industry (Ogbeide, 2006; Waryszak, 1999). Some ideas about getting the educators and industry practitioners together suggest that research, publications, meetings and conferences can offer a space for both to exchange knowledge and to listen to each other (Jenkins, 1999).

Having considered the role of education at this point, students and practitioners in the industry are considered the evaluators of this role and the degree to which the aims of education, learning and assessment are being enough to satisfy both students and practitioners (Wright and O'Neill, 2002). Different studies have discussed the relationship between educational institutions

and industries in different forms; including partnerships, integration, as well as divergence (Harkison et al., 2011; Alhelalat et al., 2009; O'Connor and Baum, 2008; Solnet et al., 2007; Breen, 2002).

In hospitality, the topic has been researched before to define the academic-practitioner divide and to discuss the needed employability skills for hospitality graduates (Kim, 2008; Ogbeide, 2006; Jenkins, 1999). Such topics normally discuss the different points where students, educators and practitioners evaluate the outcomes of hospitality academic programs in relation to course content from educators' viewpoint, the degree to which it is used in the real job life by students, and the evaluation of the degree and its skills from industry executives' view point. This paper seeks to answer the question whether the hospitality graduates' skills are better than the skills of their colleagues who do not hold a hospitality degree. The study also sums up the skills needed for hospitality graduates through a literature review, a field study, and a conclusion that matches the requirements with the desired status by the industry. The importance of the study stems from the need for understanding the gap between education programs and industry requirements from the education outcomes side as an input to the industry. The significance of studying the gap of skills between hospitality and non-hospitality graduates is summarized through the importance of having better quality inputs to the hotel industry and to support the hospitality education institutions in qualifying better human resources with an easy guidance to the industry.

2. Hospitality Education

"A graduate of hospitality will have an understanding of the concepts underpinning the consumer experience and a concern for enriching the life experiences of people, both as consumers, participants and providers" (Rees et al., 2006). This statement summarizes what hospitality education institutions have to provide students with to help them achieving the overall aim of understanding the requirements of the industry in relation to people and operations.

In different countries, hospitality education institutions vary from high school, to colleges and universities, with degrees from higher diploma to bachelor and postgraduate degrees. The courses that are given in the hospitality education field, according to the UK Higher Education Academy, are related to: hospitality management, hotel management, restaurant management, catering management, culinary arts, events and conferencing management, cruise management and gaming management (Rees et al., 2006).

There is a huge interest in research and publication regarding the analysis of hotel education services in relation to content, structure, aims and outcomes. The main concern here is the fact that hospitality education institutions are the main sources of labor for the hospitality industry (Duncan, Scott and Baum, 2010; Richardson, 2009).

Jenkins (1999) concluded that hospitality education aims to: advance knowledge and understanding of the subject; to disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, and publications; and to educate public, students and industry. The new paradigm in hospitality education calls for considering preparing future industry leaders as the main aim of education; there is a role, therefore, of hospitality education in shaping the future of the hospitality industry (Baume, 1999).

According to the standards and mission statements of few hospitality academic institutions worldwide, there is a focus on preparing students to the industry by increasing their knowledge and skills in different related fields to their future career. For example, Les Roches' (a Swiss hotel school) mission statement summarized that the mission is to "broaden students' understanding of the arts, sciences, and social sciences and to support the development of individual common skills that enable students to perform effectively in their future careers and function confidently as members of contemporary society". Another example was found in the course design of a hospitality program in DeVry University; it focuses on increasing the students' knowledge of the industry, career paths in the industry, communication and human relation skills, morals and ethics, and the hospitality industry's role in local community development. Accordingly, hospitality education institutions, in theory, are the way for students to get to the industry and being prepared and qualified to be a quality input for the hospitality industry.

In the same context, the Canadian government has set standards for skills that hospitality students have to learn in their studies; there is a focus on communication, analysis, technology, teamwork, problem solving, innovation, responsibility, and employment skills, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Employability Skills Learning Outcomes: Hotel Management Programs

<p>Synopsis of the Generic Employability Skills Learning Outcomes Hotel and Restaurant Management Programs</p> <p>The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate clearly, concisely, and correctly in the written, spoken, and visual form that fulfills the purpose and meets the needs of the audiences. 2. Reframe information, ideas, and concepts using the narrative, visual, numerical, and symbolic representations which demonstrate understanding. 3. Apply a wide variety of mathematical techniques with the degree of accuracy required to solve problems and make decisions. 4. Use a variety of computer hardware and software and other technological tools appropriate and necessary to the performance of tasks. 5. Interact with others in groups or teams in ways that contribute to effective working relationships and the achievement of goals. 6. Evaluate her or his own thinking throughout the steps and processes used in problem solving and decision making. 7. collect, analyze, and organize relevant and necessary information from a variety of sources. 8. Evaluate the validity of arguments based on qualitative and quantitative information in order to accept or challenge the findings of others. 9. Create innovative strategies and/or products that meet identified needs. 10. Manage the use of time and other resources to attain personal and/or project related goals. 11. Take responsibility for her or his own actions and decisions. 12. Adapt to new situations and demands by applying and/or updating her or his knowledge and skills. 13. Represent her or his skills, knowledge, and experience realistically for personal and employment purposes.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2005, p. 17).

3. Employability skills for hospitality graduates

Hospitality education seeks to provide students with the required skills for good employment opportunity and for better future job. From the students' perception surveys about their selection and satisfaction with their hospitality programs and institutions, future career prospects and easy guidance to the industry rank high in the student selection (Alhelalat et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2003). Moreover, institution's reputation, academic quality, program accreditation, and industry recognition were an answer to a big question related to what students need from their academic intuitions and programs (Crisp, 2010; Spake et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2003).

Having considered students' needs, there are also a set of standards the industry requires from future employees. The UK Higher Education Academy proposed that knowledge, intellectual skills, operation and management skills, and transferable skills are required by the industry (Rees et al., 2006). Furthermore, Ogbeide (2006) studied the level of competences needed for the hospitality industry. These competencies are related to communication skills, self development skills, planning, teamwork, decision making, information search and analysis, and being initiative and innovative. In a similar view, Kim (2008) listed some of what he called "career expectations and requirements" from both students and the industry; communication skills, management and operation related skills, languages and self management skills were listed. Jameson (2008) argued that these skills need to be integrated with self appraisal, self management, creativity and personal interactive skills to be more effective in the industry. Chang (2009) also stressed on the need for ethics and moral (mainly responsibility), knowledge recall and demonstration, cognitive skills (mainly critical thinking, problem solving, and situation analysis), interpersonal skills (leadership and teamwork), communication skills, technology and mathematical statistical techniques.

A summary of the employability skills that students have to gain after graduation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Employability skills: graduates and industry requirements

Reference	Skills
Rees et al. (2006)	Knowledge demonstration, increase and application; intellectual skills (data collection, situation analysis, and decision making); subject-specific skills (management and operation); transferable skills (communication, teamwork, and leadership).
Ogbeide (2006)	Communication and presentation skills; self-development and self-management skills; planning and organization skills; decision making skills; teamwork; problem solving skills; information search, data collection and analysis skills; initiative and innovation; time management; business and personal ethics; leadership and motivation techniques.
Australian Department of Education, Science	Communication skills; teamwork; problem solving; initiative and enterprise; planning and organizing; self-management; learning;

and Training (2006)	technology
Kim (2008)	Communication skills; using initiative skills; human relations skills; operational skills; problem solving skills; self-management skills; multi-lingual skills.
Jameson (2008)	Operational; planning and management of learning; communication and presentation; interactive and group skills; managing tasks and problem solving; self-appraisal and reflection on practice; synthesis and creativity.
Chang (2009)	Ethics and Moral; knowledge; cognitive Skills; inter-personal Skills and responsibility; communication skills; information technology; numerical skill.

In a related topic, Maher and Neild (2005) highlighted that employers in the hospitality industry think that almost half of hospitality graduates are less prepared for the industry; the main problem was found in the graduates' communication skills, teamwork and time management. In another view, Leon (2002) surveyed graduates about the same topic and found that less effective communication skills were taught during university studies. Harkison et al. (2011) stated that there is a divergence in view between hospitality graduates and industry executives; while students think that their knowledge and skills are sufficient to get a job in the industry, executives focus on personality and initiative. Industry executives' views suggest that managers value attitudinal attributes more than skills.

In conclusion, a list of 20 common skills was prepared for the field study: communication skills; teamwork; problem solving; initiative and innovation; planning; organizing; self-management; learning skills; time management; knowledge demonstration, increase and application; critical thinking; technology; information search; data collection and analysis; personal and business ethics; language and culture; leadership; management; operations; and customer service. They are to be evaluated by industry executives to assess whether they are taught effectively by hospitality educators and used at work successfully by hospitality graduates.

4. Methods

In order to study the importance of graduates' employment skills as the hospitality education outcomes and the view of the industry in relation to this issue in a precise data, and to provide numerical noteworthy results, a quantitative study was conducted, employing a questionnaire. A sample of 41 hotel executives was asked about the previously mentioned 20 skills and whether the graduates apply them effectively.

The hotel executives' sample was defined as all top and middle management members of staff in the four and five star hotels in the top three tourism sites in Jordan (Petra, Amman, and Aqaba). A total number of 41 respondents were reached through convenience and self choosing techniques, based on information about hotel management degree holders in their departments. Then, a questionnaire targeted hotel executives to ask them whether these skills are used effectively by the graduates at their work in a way that is better than graduates from other fields, and the level of evaluation to these skills by hospitality graduates.

Data was analyzed using SPSS software to generate frequencies, percentages, and means of the answers to the questionnaire items.

5. Results and discussion

The demographic profile of hotel executives shows that the majority is males, aged between 25-45, the majority of them have a degree (not necessary in hospitality), and with experience in the industry varies from 4 to more than 10 years.

Table 2: The demographic profile of the hotel executives

Demographics		Executives (n=41)	
		n	%
Gender	Male	40	98
	Female	1	2
Age	18-25	4	10
	26-35	19	46
	36-45	15	37
	More than 45	3	7
Education	High school or less	6	15
	UG Diploma	14	34
	Bachelor	21	51
	Post Graduate	0	0
Experience	3 years or less	3	7
	4-6	13	32
	7-10	10	24
	More than 10	15	37

It is noticeable here that the executives recorded 98 per cent males; this is believed to be due to the fact that females have less interest in working in hotels than males in Jordan. In addition, the statistics from the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism (2014) supports that only 0.08 per cent of hotel employees are females.

In relation to the main research question, the frequencies of the industry executives, based on the definition of majority (more than half of the total), were grouped over the half and under the half of the total respondents. Hence, the results show that the majority of executives see that hospitality graduates perform a group of skills more than their non-hospitality graduate peers. These skills are communication skills (78%), teamwork (73%), information search and situation analysis (74%), critical thinking (68%), operation (68%), time management (59%), initiative and innovation (59 per cent), organizing (54%), self-development and management (54%), and knowledge demonstration, increase and application (54%).

These results indicate that the above mentioned skills are taught in a satisfactory manner in the hospitality education institutes and graduates use them effectively at work. The difference between hospitality graduates and non hospitality graduates is salient here; hence, there is a clear effort by hospitality educators regarding placing these skills in the minds of graduates and growing them in their personality.

However, below 50 per cent of executives answered yes to the research question in relation to learning, problem solving, data collection and analysis, ethics, customer service, technology, language and culture, and leadership skills. This means that there is less demonstration of these skills among hospitality graduates. This may relate to low focus on these skills in education or low application from the graduates' side. Accordingly, there is a need for more attention to the modules and practical courses related to this set of skills. The percentages are shown in table (3).

Table 3: Hotel executives' view of graduates' skills

Skills	Yes, hospitality graduates' skills are better than non-hospitality		If yes, the degree they evaluate graduates' skills (1-10)
	n	%	Mean
Communication skills	32	78	7.2
Teamwork	30	73	7.7
Problem solving	18	44	6.9
Initiative and innovation	24	59	7.2
Planning	22	54	7.5
Organizing	22	54	7.2
Self development and management	22	54	7.3
Time management	24	59	7.7
Learning skills	14	34	6.3
Critical thinking	28	68	7.2
Technology	16	39	7.6
Data collection and Analysis	18	44	7.1
Information search and situation analysis	31	76	8.2
Personal and business ethics	19	46	7.5
Language and Culture	17	39	8.0
Management	16	34	6.8
Operation	28	68	8.5

Customer service	19	46	7.4
Leadership	14	34	5.9
Knowledge demonstration, increase and application	23	54	7.9

Table (3) also shows that the level of graduates application of the skills according to the hotel executives. The results are shown in means considering a scale of (1-10). Among the previously mentioned skills of which hospitality graduates are better than their colleagues, operation (8.5), information search (8.2), knowledge demonstration (7.9), teamwork (7.7), and time management (7.7) ranked high with the highest levels of evaluation by executives. Moreover, it was noticed that the although 17 graduates gave good language skills; they recorded a mean of 8 in executives' evaluation of their skills, which indicates the importance of students' personal development of their skills to match the requirements of the industry and the executives. The same note can describe technology, personal ethics, and customer service.

6. Conclusion and implications

The literature in the area of hospitality graduates' employment supports that there is a match, in theory, between education standards and industry requirement (the Canadian Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities standards as an example). However, there is a gap between education outcomes and industry requirements in relation to what skills should graduates have and the degree to which they match what the industry needs. In fact, this gap is found in other sectors, and the personal and organizational skills are common as requirements for employment in several industries according to the literature. The academic outcomes and employment requisites are not identical in reality in the hospitality industry as the current field study concludes.

The results of the field study support that some of the hospitality graduates' skills are not sufficient to the industry needs, as non-hospitality graduates can perform them better. Hotel executives require that students should have more problem solving skills, learning skills, technology, data collection and analysis, languages, management and leadership skills in order to match the standards of the industry for hospitality graduates' skills. However, the executives have positive view of the hospitality graduates' operation, information search, knowledge demonstration, teamwork, and time management skills.

The implications of the findings can benefit educators to raise the standards of their education process and outcomes in relation to the specific skills needed by the industry; specially problem solving skills, learning skills, data collection and analysis, technology, languages, leadership and management skills. In addition, there is a need for serious efforts for academic-industry partnership in deciding the course content and ways to maximize the graduates' employment skills.

As for hotel executives, it is recommended that they believe in the skills and knowledge of hospitality graduates and to give them the adequate training to handle their jobs in the industry. Education cannot achieve the mission of qualifying graduates for the industry without the industry cooperation in giving the graduates the guidance for the industry before graduation.

Although there is a geographical limitation of the study within Jordan, because of the sample selection, the list of 20 skills are believed to be common internationally according to the literature review. Furthermore, further research is to be carried out to define and argue ways the hospitality educators and practitioners can share ideas and exchange techniques of teaching to improve the outputs of the hospitality education institutes to match the hospitality industry requirements. In addition, deeper analysis is recommended to highpoint the actual gap in courses, methods and assessment that causes insufficient graduate skills.

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