

Investigation on internationalization of tourism personnel training mode: A case study

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Abstract: A need for proficient international tourism personnel has been growing for the burgeoning tourism economy all around the world, where as there is a lack of corresponding employees in the global tourism market. Accordingly, this study intends to investigate internationalization of tourism personnel training mode by carrying out a case study of Macao University of Science and Technology. Guarantee system as well as curriculum, extracurricular projects and university management are discussed. In addition, interviews were conducted to evaluate the implementation of this mode from students' perspectives. The results indicate that students' points of view towards this training mode vary to a significant extent regarding levels of satisfaction. Consequently, for the fulfillment of cultivating highly competent and competitive tourism professionals, countermeasures can be taken by university and faculty, alleviating present defects of this mode pointed out by students, guaranteeing the expected outcomes.

1. Introduction

The inevitable trend of economic globalisation has been permeating the world gradually over the past few years. Being an isolated position can hardly meet the requirements of sustainable economic development in the modern society. Whereas the fact that the share taken up by the tourism industry in the global economy is considerable and growing unremittingly, it is conceivable that the tourism economy appears a kind of transnational business. Therefore, a demand for the international high-calibre personnel in the field of tourism will increase simultaneously as the global tourism market expands (Xu & Reed, 2017). However, here comes a problem of that demand and supply of those manpower are never balanced at present Chinese market. More specifically, demand exceeds supply tremendously. So the main concern of this study is the means of cultivating international high-caliber personnel.

Wherein Macao's tourism industry, which started to flourish and boost Macao's economy when the first international hotel Casino Lisboa was completed by Stanley Ho in 1970 during the Macao governor Nobre de Carvalho's term, appears not only a cornerstone industry but a successful model for developing tourism. With a real growth rate of 10.1% compared with 2017, in 2018 Macao's annual total visitor expenditure was 40,551.5 million dollars, which occupied 73.68% of 2018 Gross Domestic Product of Macao. And the annual total arrivals increased by 9.8%, reached 35, 803, 663. (Macao Government Tourism Office, 2019) In other words, Macao is one of the most representative international tourism cities in which tourism plays an important part in the local economy. Thus, this study mainly concerns with what methods does Macao, a mature tourism city, use to cultivate appropriate international high-calibre personnel for their international tourism development as well as what successful experiences of Macao to go by.

2. Methodology

Macao University of Science and Technology (MUST) was chosen as the main case in this study. Firstly, this article introduces the practice of international training mode in the tourism education of MUST in terms of curriculum, extracurricular projects, and guarantee system. Besides, in order to get

a more comprehensive understanding of this mode, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior students at the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism after purposive sampling. The interview guide consisted of questions about students' involvement and satisfaction.

In total, 10 interviewees in the International Tourism Management Program were involved in this research. Three of them were male and seven were female, and the gender ratio is roughly consistent with the male to female ratio in the faculty. Table 1 summarizes the demographic description of the interviewees.

Table 1 Profile of Respondents (N = 10).

	Gender	Hometown	Professional Field
1	F	Guangdong	Hospitality
2	M	Shandong	Cultural Tourism
3	F	Sichuan	Cultural Tourism
4	F	Guangdong	Hospitality
5	F	Sichuan	Hospitality
6	F	Guangdong	Hospitality
7	F	Sichuan	MICE
8	F	Henan	MICE
9	M	Shandong	Hospitality
10	M	Zhejiang	MICE

(MICE: Meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions)

3. Results

3.1 Implementation of international personnel training system

3.1.1 Curriculum system

Courses are generally offered by two institutions (see figure 1). The faculty of hospitality and tourism management(FHTM) ,which is acting as one of twelve academic units of the university, provides the most fundamental courses closely related to different study programs of students, including core courses and elective courses. In terms of their respective professional fields students gain professional knowledge, skills and abilities with which they can involve themselves in future career.

The Department of General Education provides common courses to students to improve their learning ability and composite quality by passing on the very fundamental knowledge in five different aspects, including Chinese, Mathematics, English, Physical Education and General Studies. Students will find these essential in order to accommodate to both educational and professional development in the later stage.



Figure 1 Institutions and course types

Overall, there are four types of courses in the curriculum, including core courses, elective courses, general studies core courses and general studies elective courses. According to table 2, the aforementioned two departments, FHTM and DGE, are working separately while being subordinate to university. The former two types of courses are managed by the faculty while the other two types are under the control of the department of general education.

Core course. The most critical courses for students' study of program in the faculty are separated into Chinese(C) and English(E) in the first two years, which means being taught in either Chinese or

English since it is difficult for some freshmen to catch up with a class with pure English instruction. For the purpose of internationalisation as well as narrowing the gap between C and E classes, both of the two use the same international textbooks and English materials. For example, 'Tourism Geography' 'Tourism Economics' in the first two years were carried out in both languages while 'Passenger Transportation' 'Tourism Law' in the last two years were taught in English only.

Elective course. In addition to the core courses, there are elective courses in four professional fields available, including MICE Management, Gaming Business Management, Hotel Management and Cultural Tourism Management. Therefore, every student should choose from the four professional fields. Accordingly, these courses help students further refine their skills and gain an added advantage in the workplace, including 'MICE Management' 'Applied Casino English' 'Hotel Operations' 'Cultural Policies and Regulations' and so on.

As a matter of fact, all general studies core courses are compulsory for students, including different fields of study, such as 'Applied Mathematics' 'Physical courses' and 'College Language' while there are a many of options within general studies elective courses in preset aspects, like art, language, literature, science and technology, to choose from. And all these aspects must be covered at the end of program.

Furthermore, Guest lectures in international tourism professionals and authorities are also exerting positive influence on students' learning practice. Some industry leading figures have been invited to share experience and deliver a speech, such as Academic Dean of Cesar Ritz Colleges Switzerland Lucerne Campus Sharing Educational Session in 2019, Guest lecture by TUTORTRISTAR Ltd. CEO Mr. Zhang Weihao and a talk by the renowned Dutch Chef Richard Ekkebus of Asian 50 Best Restaurants 2019 to the Food and Beverage Management Major students(MUST, 2019).

3.1.2 Extracurricular practice projects

International exchange programs and research projects. A common recent trend in hospitality and tourism education has been to focus on off-campus hospitality and tourism operations or location-based experiential learning, through fieldtrips, internships, and short study abroad trips (Croy & Hall, 2003; Hawkins & Weiss, 2004; Lyons & Brown, 2003; Xie, 2004). In FHTM, international exchange programs and research projects are provided to students in countries like United States, Japan, Switzerland, South Korea, New Zealand, etc. Among a series of programs, internship in Walt Disney World Resort Orlando, which allows students to participate in an academic training at Florida State University and then work in Disneyland for six months (MUST, 2019). Study abroad programs help students acquire international perspectives (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001; Doyle et al., 2009). The FHTM has been cooperating with Walt Disney Company Ltd. and Florida State University for 12 years and continuously gains support from them to provide better opportunities for students' learning experience. Students can attain unique service experiences, skills in intercultural communication and hospitality, and opportunities to be involved in diverse environments and cultures by working with colleagues and guests from all over the world.

Internship programs in transnational tourism enterprises. It is mandatory for tourism students to participate in internship programs before graduation. Since the fact that gambling tourism is allowed and promoted in Macao, a number of transnational tourism and hospitality corporations which are invariably in need of professional international employees to perform various services and products and serve worldwide guests. Under the circumstance, those prestigious corporations are willing to offer internship opportunities to cultivate their potential personnel. For instance, in 2019 Sands China Ltd. Galaxy Entertainment Group, Macao International Airport and Sheraton Macao, etc accepted quite a few interns, making a win-win situation. (MUST, 2019)

International tourism conferences. In addition to oversea internship programs, faculty also participate in all kinds of international tourism conference, for example, 2017 5th Annual International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality Research in Singapore and 2019 PATA Annual Summit in Cebu, Philippines. In the meantime, cooperation with oversea universities are emphasized, such as 2019 Summer Program with Kyung Hee University, Seoul Korea and 2018 General Agreement for Collaboration with the Association of North America Higher Education International, USA. (MUST,

2019)

3.1.3 Guarantee system

International teaching staff. A team of professional and experienced teaching staff from all around the world, who allow students to be instructed with the medium of English, have greatly contributed to an international learning environment (Li, Hu, He, 2018), including Australia, Canada, South Korea, the Philippines, Ghana, Malaysia, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao. Besides, instructors teach with working experience in tourism and hospitality industry.

Tourism Education Quality certification. The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, which has acquired “TedQual” (Tourism Education Quality) certification from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) since 2007, is working as an highly international university because it thinks globally and strive to be a world-class institution. In addition, the FHTM ranked among top 100 in the Shanghai Ranking’s Global Ranking of Academic Subjects in 2018 and is a proud member of PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) and CHRIE (Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education) (MUST, 2019).

Internationally accepted assessment criteria. The assessment criteria in Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, which focuses on the whole process of learning and takes each individual section into consideration in assessing a student’s general performance (Li, Hu, He, 2018), enhances the level of internationalisation because it is consistent with the universally accepted conventions of international mainstream education. The criteria usually contains five sections, attendance, participation, assignment, midterm exam and final exam. Final exam in this assessment criteria usually accounts for 30 to 50 percents, which will motivate students to work hard not only in the final week but also in usual.

3.2 Student perspectives on the training mode

3.2.1 Students’ gains

Enhancement of international cultural experience

Being competent internationally. A positive connection between international experience and enhanced opportunities for students’ employment after graduation has been established (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001). The demand for those who possess an increased understanding of different cultures and know how to work with diverse groups of people, who speak different languages, who can implement a variety of approaches to problem-solving, who are truly global citizens with global consciousness, is greater than ever before (Manzilla & Gardner, 2007). Regarding the fact that there are a number of international students from all over the world whose mother language is neither Cantonese nor Chinese mandarin studying in the MUST, the campus is full of interaction and communication between students with different cultural background.

Furthermore, one example of a female interviewee who attended the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Annual Summit in 2019 has demonstrated this argument. She commented:

We are young students now, and going to be the next generation hospitality and tourism professionals. I am glad to gather together with worldwide passionate, enthusiastic tourism people and communicate, learn from the industry leaders.

Exposure to foreign languages and different cultures. People who are skilled interculturally need to possess intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Besides, Hofstede (2005) noted that all communication is mediated by culture. As the discussion above already mentioned the multicultural ambience, one of the critical features of both university and of Macao, students being involved in such a kind of environment will confront different languages and cultures. Accordingly, both the internationalised practice of communication and interaction between languages and cultures, and being immersion in a multicultural atmosphere will jointly render students precious opportunities of learning foreign languages, broadening students’ horizon, and helping them foster a global consciousness.

Increase professional knowledge, skills and capabilities

Lecturers have working experience related to hospitality and tourism industry. It is particularly

notorious that tourism works as a service industry which is highly practical, dynamic and should serve the ever changing needs of market and customer. Not surprisingly, it is conceivable that experienced tourism professionals are competent to the role of lecturer in university, effectively giving students updated industry changes, trends and technology that are not included in textbooks. Thus students can benefit from not only the professional knowledge in the textbooks but also skills and capabilities based on lecturers' practical working experience.

In-depth understanding of tourism and service industry. Doubtless, in tourism and hospitality industry, internship programs are be of great help to increase students' knowledge and deepen their understanding, especially programs related to successful international tourism corporations. Another female student, who participated in the six-month international internship program at Walt Disney World Resort Orlando, USA, as well as an academic training at Florida State University, also has given her comment:

This internship program helps me deeply immerse myself in a genuine international service ambience, allowing me to closely observe this legendary tourism icon and ponder what elements literally make Disneyland, one of the greatest theme parks, exceptional and prominent at all.

Develop future career prospect

Professionals' experience sharing. In terms of developing future career, apart from teachers' routine instruction, guest lectures launched by the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management are presented to students now and then. Even though this kind of speech will not last long, students still can seize the chance to familiarise themselves with the latest circumstance of tourism industry, enhance their interest and passion and even develop or revise their future career prospect. Here is a feedback of a female respondent. She said:

I really appreciate our faculty for inviting some professionals regularly to give a speech. Because what we are learning from textbooks are somewhat not complying with the real present situation of the industry. With the assistance of those authorities, we are enabled to learn knowledge in many aspects, understand the industry in a more sensitive and flexible way and make the most appropriate decisions for ourselves. And I have benefited from those lectures enormously, especially the one given by Lawrence Ho, CEO of Melco Limited, talking about hospitality management.

Getting in touch with international tourism programs. Implication of introducing a tourism development program might be significant for university students who have not started their career, and lack corresponding awareness. Getting students in touch with international tourism programs provides themselves a more comprehensive perspective to recognise what is tourism management, their personal interests and ambition.

As a female respondent pointed out that for the reason of her personal interest in South Korean culture, she attended a lecture which introduced a tourism destination in South Korea in detail. She also mentioned:

I am pleased to gain more information of tourism industry in South Korea. A tourism developing program in that area is around the corner now, which exhilarates me most. I will continue to keep an eye on it.

3.2.2 Students' complain

Nevertheless, negative opinions towards this model truly exist and take up a considerable portion among the all the feedback. More than half of the interviewees are not satisfied with the performance of faculty's training mode and holding a relatively negative attitude. Their standpoints go as follows. A lack of short term programs. Some students think that most of the overseas activities are long term programs, like Disneyland internship in the USA, which cost a large amount of payment and a consecutive long time while short term programs are hardly available to students.

High expense and low productivity. Many of those respondents who once participated such long term programs believe that the programs have low performance-price ratios, which implies paying more money but learning less things. As a male respondent reflected:

It is generally acknowledged that long term programs will cost a large amount of money while students have no income themselves and be supported by parents.... I am sorry to admit that my

family can hardly afford such a kind of 'luxury' events. However, this kind of programs are allegedly not worth participating at all"

Neglect of students' willingness. As for guest lectures, some are compulsory for students to attend regardless of students' personal willingness. Although compulsory lectures will allow students to have one ordinary lesson canceled, sometimes because of a lack of interest, students probably get less acquisition than being expected by the organizer or are indifferent to the lecture content at all, which seems a problem for both lecturers and audience.

4. Discussion

This study indicated that the internationalised tourism personnel training mode was definitely supportive to tourism students in not only improving professional competency universally accepted by the international service industry but also sustainable and comprehensive development throughout life, even though defects of the mode and therefore dissatisfaction from students do exist. However, to consummate this mode and maximise the level of student satisfaction, a great deal of work can be put into practice.

5. Conclusion

As a matter of fact, the study disclosed that a number of students were doubting overseas exchange programs for offering high prices but limited gains and knowledge. Therefore, university should not only aim at strengthening cooperation with partners, including other universities, travel agencies, organisations or individuals to lower prices and increase the options of exchange areas, but also enhancing content and quality involved in the programs. In addition, the complain of imbalance of theory learning and hands-on practice can be alleviated if multiplex teaching methods can be applied both in classroom and out. Moreover, some wishes of students includes training in face to face English interview skills and personal statement writing techniques, and attracting more excellent overseas students and teachers to visit, communicate and study.

This study investigated the internationalisation of tourism personnel training mode, taking Macao University of Science and Technology for example to explore effectiveness and productivity of internationalised educational system in the field of tourism management. An interview, which focused on students' personal study experience, was carried out for a goal of gathering comments of this mode from a receiver's perspective. The result indicated that students' opinions towards this mode vary to a great extent, for a clear fact that a considerable amount of respondents showing their dissatisfaction with the practice of this model rendered by their university compared to someone who are in favour or indifferent.

Nevertheless, according to the research, despite of distinct points of view, this model still appears to benefit students in many aspects, such as professional knowledge and capabilities related to tourism, intercultural communication skills, proficient customer service consciousness, etc. Furthermore, with regard to the interview, specialised design of curriculum structure, internationalised assessment criteria, overseas internship and exchange programs, international guest lectures, teachers and professors worldwide with different cultural backgrounds are most agreed by respondents who showed significant approval to a series of activities and programs offered by university.

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