

The Current Situation and Future Development of Hospitality and Tourism Higher Education in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the study are to analyze the current situation of hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam, to investigate problems and obstacles in producing graduates in the hospitality and tourism field of study, and to identify the future development of hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam. This study adopted a questionnaire survey of all institutions offering hospitality and tourism programs in Vietnam. The findings showed that 101 institutions offered the programs in 2007 and 13 other institutions will offer the programs by 2010. The recommendations from the study are: teaching staff needs to be improved in terms of qualifications, academic works, and teaching methods; the curriculum needs to be evaluated, revised, and adjusted to the changing needs of the industry for manpower; and the institutions should add internships to the curriculum and let the industry become involved in hospitality and tourism education.

Keywords: *hospitality and tourism, higher education, human resource requirement, Vietnam.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is now an economic pillar for a large number of developing economies and Vietnam is no exception. The country has certain advantages as an international tourism destination through its central geographical location in Southeast Asia and its catering to tourists all year around. The number of international tourist arrivals to Vietnam increased from 2,330,800 in 2001 to

2,628,200 in 2002 and up to 3,583,486 in 2006. Revenue received from the industry in terms of VND was estimated at 5,689.4 billion; 7,855.9 billion; and 15,397.6 billion in the same period (VNAT, 2006a).

In the period 2006-2010, the approved National Tourism Action Plans under the Decision No. 121/2006/QĐ-TTg dated May 29, 2006 of the government of Vietnam (VNAT, 2006b) were set to achieve:

1. International tourists' growth rate increases of 10-20% per year, domestic tourist increases of 15-20% per year with the receipts from the industry reaching US\$ 4-5 billion by 2010.
2. Improvement of service quality, diversification of tourism goods and services.
3. Enhancement of Vietnam's position worldwide.
4. Sustainable tourism development.

To gain these ambitious targets, any tourism development strategy will be determined to a large extent by human resources, which can deliver efficient, high quality service. Human resources play a critical role in both daily and long-term decision making (R.H. Woods, 1999). This, in turn, allows the industry to gain a competitive edge and added value, create jobs, and significantly contribute to socio-economic development in general.

In 2005, there were 234,096 employees directly working in Vietnam's tourism industry. The number is forecast to reach 333,396 by 2010 and 503,202 by 2015 (VNAT, 2006a). However, according to Thu Huyen (2007), the number of students graduating from the institutions only meets half the demand, not mentioning the training quality. In addition, the distribution of the workforce among regions and provinces is inappropriate, many areas lack a workforce while many others have too many. These have negatively affected the sustainable development of local tourism sectors. It is therefore a big task for Vietnam's education sector to open more professional tourism human resource training, socialize tourism training, and widely promote the activities of the industry as well as its demand, so that local people are more aware of the issue.

Meanwhile, to the knowledge of the researcher, there is no official document on hospitality and tourism higher education in Vietnam. Therefore, this study will discover the problems/obstacles in producing graduates in the hospitality and tourism (hereinafter "tourism") field and propose recommendations suitable for producing qualified graduates for the industry. This will also be the source of data for Vietnam's tourism industry in planning and developing human resources, especially in the period of a changing environment.

BACKGROUND OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Before 1990, there were only three universities offering the programs: the Public Food and Beverage faculty, Hanoi University of Commerce (established in 1977); the Tourism Department of the Price of Goods Faculty, Hanoi National Economics University (established in 1989); and the Tourism faculty, Economics University in Ho Chi Minh City (established in 1989) (VNAT, 2006a). Since then, the tourism field has been established as a specialized field of tourism economics at university level and after that, at college level, under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and other agencies in charge.

In 2004, there were 38 universities and colleges offering the programs (VANT, 2004). Mostly, institutions are located in the north and south of the country and the big cities of each of the above areas: Ho Chi Minh City (Southern), Hanoi (Northern).

From 2003, the institutions began to offer masters degrees; however, the training scale is still limited. To date, tourism higher education in Vietnam has developed three levels, namely, a diploma program, an undergraduate program, and a postgraduate program (including master and doctorate programs).

In the world of globalization, the institutions have boosted international cooperation (e.g. attending the regional tourism education networks, offering English/international programs, etc). Recently, sending teaching staff/staff abroad to countries where tourism education is developed such as: Germany, Sweden, Luxembourg, Australia, Thailand, etc. has become popular.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data was collected through a questionnaire survey covering a total of 341 institutions at a higher level in Vietnam, including universities and colleges, in the period of December 2007 - January 2008.

The researcher called all the above institutions and found that there were 114 institutions which offered or might offer the programs in 2007. Of these, two institutions offered the programs, but no student applied and they will continue to offer them in the future, eleven institutions are going to offer the programs by 2010. The rest of the 101 institutions that already offer the programs were surveyed by interviewing questionnaires (at three institutions in Thainguuyen province and 17 in Hanoi) and mailing questionnaires to 81 institutions in the whole country.

RESULTS

In total, 55 out of 101 questionnaires were returned.

Types of Institutions

Table 1 shows that 21 public universities offered the programs, followed by 17 public junior colleges and 13 private universities. The rest are one private junior college, one public educational institute, and others comprising one People-founded university and one semi-public junior college. People-founded institutions are owned and managed by non-government organizations or private associations such as trade unions, cooperatives, youth organizations, and women's associations. In semi-public institutions, the facility is owned by the state and managed by a public authority at the central, provincial, district, or commune level, but all operating costs are covered by student fees.

Table 1 also shows that, there were 39 public institutions accounting for 73.6% of the total institutions offering the programs and private institutions shared at 26.4%.

Table 1: Types of institutions

| Types of institutions | Number | Percent |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Public university | 21 | 38.2 |
| Private university | 13 | 23.6 |
| Public junior college | 17 | 30.9 |
| Private junior college | 1 | 1.8 |
| Public educational institute | 1 | 1.8 |
| Others | 2 | 3.6 |
| Total | 55 | 100.0 |

Majors and Degrees Offered by the Institutions

In Vietnam's education system, colleges can offer college programs and other lower level programs; universities can offer college, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs. Therefore, the number of college degree programs represents the highest percentage (41.4%) while there were only six masters programs and two doctorate programs. Also, the institutions offered certificates in Tour Guiding, Reception, Accounting in Hospitality, etc. over one month, two months, etc. However, this study only mentions the college diploma degree and above as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: The relationship between major and degree

| Major | Diploma | BA | BBA | MA | MSc | MBA | PhD | Total |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Tourism | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Tourism management | 4 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| Hospitality management | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Travel management | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Tourism and hospitality management or vice versa | 6 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 17 |
| Tour guide | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Cultural tourism | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Tourism geography | 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| English in tourism | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Other majors* | 13 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 27 |
| Total | 49 | 22 | 32 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 111 |

Note: Other majors consist of:

- 13 College diploma degrees: 1 Food Processing Management, 1 Restaurant Management, 3 Tourism and Travel Management, 1 F&B Service Management, 1 Tourism and Travel Service Management, 2 French in Tourism, 1 Russian in Tourism, 1 Travel and Tour Guide Management, 1 F&B Serving Management, and 1 Chinese in Tourism.
- 5 BA degrees: 1 Southeast Asian Tourism, 1 Tourism study, 1 Economics of Tourism and Service, and 2 Tourism Economics.
- 4 BBA degrees: 1 Tourism and Service Management, 1 Tourism and Travel Management, 1 Tour Guide and Travel Management, and 1 Tourism and Travel Service Management.
- 1 MA in Tourism Study.
- 2 MSc degrees: 1 Tourism Economics and 1 Economics, Commerce, and Technical Management.
- 2 PhD degrees: 1 Economics and Commerce Management and 1 Tourism Economics.

Students' Information

Table 3 shows that the number of yearly entrants into the programs is 7,134. Owing to the characteristics of the industry, the proportion of male to female students was 0.29/0.71. The number of yearly graduates was 5,722 and the graduation percentage accounted for 80.2%.

Table 3: Students' information

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Number of yearly entrants | 7,134 |
| Number of male students | 1,331 |
| Number of female students | 3,258 |
| Proportion of male to female students | 0.29/0.71 |
| The number of yearly graduations | 5,722 |
| Graduate percentage | 80.2% |
| Total number of graduations up to 2007 | 33,170 |

Note: The number is based on 45 institutions owing to 10 institutions having been newly opened with no graduates by 2007.

Activities Provided by the Institutions

Table 4 shows that almost institutions have applied new technologies in teaching and learning, renewed and used modern equipment serving for teaching and learning, updated the curriculum, evaluated teaching performance by students, and provided training for teaching staff.

Besides, the institutions have conducted workshops/seminars with other domestic and overseas institutions, and provided other activities (e.g. organizing competitions relating to tourism, establishing clubs, conducting meetings on tourism and picnics, etc.).

Table 4: Activities provided by the institutions

| Activities | Yes | No | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Provide training for teaching staff | 49 | 6 | 89.1 |
| Conduct workshops with other universities/institutions | 45 | 10 | 81.8 |
| Organize mutual seminars between your university/ institutions and other universities/institutions | 23 | 32 | 41.8 |
| Evaluating teaching performance by students | 53 | 2 | 96.4 |
| Update curriculum | 53 | 2 | 96.4 |
| Apply new technologies in teaching and learning | 54 | 1 | 98.2 |
| Renew and use modern equipment serving for teaching and learning | 53 | 2 | 96.4 |
| Others | 28 | 27 | 50.1 |

Problems and Constraints in Producing Graduates in the Hospitality and Tourism Field

The main problems/constraints presented in Table 5 are: shortage of qualified and experienced teaching staff, improper curricula, insufficiency of financial support from the government, poor material facilities, and limitation of existing mechanism.

Besides, the institutions are faced with other problems such as the gap between training/education institutes' training capacity and the industry's actual needs, lack of books and reference documents or out-of-date documents, high investment for this program, low quality of students, and others (such as the difficulty in organizing hotel visits owing to limited resources, the government seeming to ignore "private institutions", etc.).

Future Development

There are 18 institutions that are going to offer the programs by 2010, including 11 new institutions, two institutions continue to offer the programs as mentioned, and five institutions already offer the programs and will offer other degrees. Of

Table 5: Problems/constraints in running tourism programs

| Problems/constraints | Number | | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----|---------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Insufficiency of financial support from the government | 29 | 26 | 52.7 |
| Limitation of existing mechanisms | 19 | 36 | 34.5 |
| Shortage of qualified and experienced teaching staff | 37 | 18 | 67.3 |
| Poor material facilities | 19 | 36 | 34.5 |
| Lack of books and reference documents or out-of-date documents | 15 | 40 | 27.3 |
| Low quality of students | 11 | 44 | 20.0 |
| Unsuitable curriculum | 32 | 23 | 58.2 |
| High investment in this program | 12 | 43 | 21.8 |
| Gap between the training/education institute's training capacity and the industry's actual needs | 16 | 39 | 29.1 |
| Others | 9 | 46 | 16.4 |

which, there are 14 universities (consisting of 12 public universities and two private universities) and four public junior colleges.

Eighteen of the above institutions will offer 19 programs, all are Vietnamese programs mainly majoring in Tourism, Tourism Management, and Hospitality and Tourism.

DISCUSSION

Tourism higher education has really grown in Vietnam over the 10 last years. The number of institutions increased (+35 = 38-3) between 1989 and 2004, and increased (+63 = 101-38) between 2004 and 2007. However, up to now, there has been no doctorate program with its own training code as well as no university in tourism (the tourism field is offered at faculties, namely, the Business Administration faculty, the Economics faculty, etc. or departments belonging to those faculties). As planned, a Tourism Management Institute will be opened.

According to VNAT (2006a), the demand for the number of graduates with college diploma degrees and above is forecast to be 30,326 in 2005; 46,784 in 2010; and 74,374 in 2015. The average growth rate is 8.5% per year from 2005 to 2010. It is therefore estimated that the demand for manpower in 2007 is 35,701. From the study, the number of student outputs is 33,170 (based on 45 institutions) and estimated to be 62,654 from 85 institutions (assuming that there are 16 institutions that have newly offered the programs, with no graduates up to 2007). Therefore, it can be said that in 2007, the institutions can produce graduates to meet the industry's human resource requirement in terms of quantity.

However, the problem is that whether the graduates can meet the industry's demand in terms of quality or not. The result from the survey of Vietnam human resources in tourism projects (VNAT, 2007) showed that, the current tourism education and training cannot meet the industry's requirements and 60-70% of newly graduating students had to be retrained when entering the industry. The main reasons are an unsuitable and unprofessional curriculum, poor English, too many in management with a lack of skilled employees and the training does not originate from the industry's needs.

The requirements for developing a tourism education institution system by 2015 (VNAT, 2006a) are as follows:

- Open more institutions in remote areas or areas with tourism potential, such as: Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, Nghe An, Da Nang, etc. However, the findings showed that the institutions that are going to offer the programs are in big cities (three in Ho Chi Minh City, two in Hanoi) and other provinces (Bac Ninh, Hung Yen, etc.).
- Offer more postgraduate programs. Only four programs are to be offered.
- Increase the number of private institutions: The findings showed that there are only two private universities that will offer courses.

These reflect the development of institutions as being spontaneous, *ad hoc* or unplanned.

Vietnam has carried out "privatization" of institutions, and, at the same time, new private institutions are to be opened. In particular, now that Vietnam has joined the World Trade Organization and actively implemented commitments on General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS) in the education area, the number of private institutions will increase in the future. According to Vietnamese experts, basically, the number of institutions will slightly increase and there will be a change in education quality which will happen strongly in private institutions.

Vietnam's tourism industry has developed rapidly. The reform of higher education has been carried out in institutions and the institutions have provided activities as mentioned. These show a promising future for tourism higher education in Vietnam. However, Vietnam's tourism education is faced with challenges such as: the development of tourism higher education in Asean countries or the enlargement of tourism education at vocational and professional training levels. Therefore, it is necessary to improve education quality and enhance competitiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve Teaching Staff Quality

As aforementioned, sending teaching staff abroad to study has become popular recently and this is one of the ways to improve tourism educator quality in Vietnam. However, this costs money. It is therefore suggested that the institutions should offer more postgraduate programs and give priority to encouraging teaching staff to attend these programs to improve their knowledge and teaching methods.

Paying more attention to research activities in order to develop new knowledge of the local tourism industry as well as to increase income for teaching staff are the first priority to develop Vietnamese tourism knowledge. Setting up and implementing projects/programs on tourism educator quality improvement are needed to update knowledge and improve both professional and foreign language skills.

Government agencies should financially support the institutions in organizing training courses or seminars to sustain teaching and learning quality and position the image of the industry. Teaching staff need to have increased compensation in both salary and projects/research.

Government agencies should collaborate with the institutions to construct standards and standardize teaching staff in terms of qualifications, academic work, and teaching methods.

Develop the Curriculum

Firstly, the MOET should separate the tourism field from other fields (e.g. Business Administration, Vietnamese Studies, etc.) and review, evaluate, and develop the new curriculum for the tourism field.

The curriculum will be based on common standards in the “Common Asean Tourism Curriculum” (AADCP, 2007) and combined with Vietnam’s standards. These common standards are considered the framework to construct the curriculum that will be acknowledged in the whole country as well as in the Asean region in terms of knowledge, skills, and qualifications. This process of taking part in the regional labor market means that employees trained in tourism in Vietnam can move easily to work for tourism-related enterprises in the region and beyond that, in the world.

The curriculum has to reflect the industry’s needs. Owing to the characteristics of the industry, the institutions should add more foreign language courses, especially communication skills courses. As Vietnam’s tourism has attracted tourists from China, Japan, Korea, and Germany, widening training in these languages as well as English, is really necessary.

The institutions should add internships to the curriculum. This is considered a compulsory section where students are exposed to working life in an industry segment.

The content of postgraduate programs for teaching staff and management teams in both the state sector and the enterprise sector should be focused on leadership skills, presentation skills, finance and human resource management skills, problem solving skills, etc.

Owing to development requirements, the industry's structure will change leading to the appearance of new jobs such as: entertainment, sport, conferences, event servicing and management; tourism marketing; camping servicing and management; tourism area management; tour guiding etc. Thus, the subjects relating to these jobs should be added to the curriculum.

Applying advanced information technology is, on the one hand, necessary in order to improve computer skills for both teaching staff and students and assist students in understanding the applications of the internet in the industry. On the other hand, this assists the institutions to open distance education courses, a recent effective education form. Using images in tourism education should be considered as well.

Internationalization of the curriculum should be taken into consideration, firstly, in Asean countries through the common Asean tourism curriculum stated above. International education helps students develop interpersonal skills that are important when dealing with an international workforce and consumers, especially as international tourists to Vietnam have recently increased. By having an understanding of ethnic and cultural differences and respective mentalities, students can better understand and serve the needs of international travelers.

Also, "greening" (integration of environmental topics) or a sustainable tourism development issue should be considered in designing the tourism/hospitality curriculum.

There is a Need To Boost the Relationship Between the Industry and the Institutions

Through this relationship, the problems/constraints of each side will be stated and solved. Moreover, the industry should provide the necessary information on job requirements and counsel the institutions to develop the subject contents to both ensure knowledge and formulate skills and attitudes relevant to the requirements of the job description and work evaluation standards in the companies. Therefore, the graduates can be employed and meet the industry's requirements. On the other hand, with a good relationship with the industry, the institutions can easily organize visits to help students understand the industry's environment. Additionally, the institutions can invite industry leaders to talk and share their experience with the students. Hence, communication between the industry and the institutions should be carried out regularly.

The government should also pay more attention to urgent investment in both the soft and hardware infrastructure of education at university level in order to raise enrolment and to improve the quality of graduates.

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