

The Divergent Behavior Of University-Industry In Tourism And Hospitality Education In Pakistan

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Abstract:

This study considered the existence of a gap between academia and hospitality practitioners as one of the grave concern in producing the desired workforce in hospitality sector¹ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, Pakistan. The presumed gap was investigated through examining the academia and practitioners' personal attributes and their perception regarding graduates' employability skills and abilities and curriculum.

Employing different tools and techniques for data collection and analysis, this study found that: at present hospitality sector of the country is dominated with irrelevant and comparatively less qualified individuals. The value of skills and abilities in graduates' employability is well realized. However, the requisite infrastructure, facilities and capabilities for the development of desired skills and abilities are either lacking or poorly existed in the academic institutes. With respect to the role of model curriculum in employability, the academia prioritized a mix of courses having both vocational and liberal aspects, whilst, the practitioners prioritized subjects of practical and commercial importance. Likewise, the academia is in agreement with the generic relevancy of curriculum to the tourism industry's needs. In contrary, the hospitality practitioners are found least concerned and less knowledgeable about the curriculum. Though, this study accepted that tourism and hospitality education is at its infancy stages of development in Pakistan, however, the gaps identified between academia and hospitality practitioners needs to be bridged for sustainable tourism industry in the country.

Key Words: *University; Hospitality; behavior; Industry; Gap; Pakistan.*

1. Introductions:

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. It is significantly contributing to the economic and social development of many nations around the globe. One of the major benefits of tourism to the host country is employment creation (Liu and Wall, 2005). It provides a variety of jobs across the employment spectrum. However, due to mobility

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¹Tourism is a multidisciplinary industry, with many different sectors. The "hospitality" sector encompassing accommodation and Food & Beverages (F&B) services, specifically in the framework of hotel operation represents 50-75% of all tourism-related jobs within the industry (OECD, 2012), will be used as a proxy for discussion within this report.

restrictions during the COVID pandemic, in 2020, job loss of 18.5% was recorded in this industry i.e. 272 million employer left as compared to 334 million in 2019 across the globe. Though, it is estimated that one in eleven jobs in the world is still related to tourism industry (WTTC, 2016; 2020). In 2020, the total contribution of tourism industry to Pakistan's GDP was PKR 1,874.4BN, which accounted for 4.4% of the total economy, as compared to PKR 2,438.7BN (5.7 of total GDP) in 2019. Likewise, in 2020, the tourism employment contribution was approximately 3.5 million, accounted for 5.5% of the total employment (WTTC, 2020).

Though, the tourism industry is well established for its employment creation and economic contribution, however, the World Travel & Tourism Council report 'Global Talent Trends and Issues' published in 2015, attracted the attention to a critical human resource (HR) challenge in the tourism industry. According to this report the tourism industry will face a serious human capital challenges over the next 10 years and beyond (Becton and Graetz, 2001; Chan and Kuok, 2011). While this talent problem will occur across industries and economies, however, Tourism & Hospitality (T & H) industry will be more seriously affected. This severe impact can be attributed to the labor-intensive nature of the T & H industry (Nzonzo and Chipfuva, 2013). In this regard tourism industry of Pakistan would not be an exceptional.

Though, at present the tourism sector of the country can be considered at its infancy stages of development, however, the prevailing circumstance portray that the country is expected to see an expansion of both domestic and international tourism in the coming years (World Bank Report, 2019). Therefore, tourism can be presumed as a potential venue for maximum employment creation and subsequent economic growth of the country.

The tourism industry of Pakistan in general and hospitality sector in particular has the potential for significant contribution to the economic development of the country. However, the country has been facing a number of challenges in order to fully exploit the potential of this industry. Some of these challenges are cross-cutting, whilst, some are sector-specific which collectively affecting the overall economic benefit from the sector. Amongst the sector's specific issues the most important is the lack of desired number of quality and professional workforce in the industry. In view of the background knowledge of the author, supplemented with secondary information collected through an extensive trawl of relevant literature, depicts the existence of a gap between academia and hospitality sector practitioners in Pakistan. Regrettably, this gap between the supply and demand sides of the sector can be reasonably considered as one of the grave concern in producing the desired workforce.

With a vision to overcome the scarcity of the desired number of well rounded T & H graduates, This study is conducted to investigate the presumed gap between academia and hospitality sector through examining academia and practitioners' personal attributes and their perception regarding graduates' employability skills and abilities and tourism management subjects/curriculum.

2. Review of relevant literature:

Education can only accomplish its purpose when it produces graduates with competencies the industry demands. However, the existence of gap between academics and practitioners has also been a well established fact in almost all educational fields and industries. The tourism industry has not been exceptional in this regard (Sheldon et al., 2008; Tribe, 2002a; Busby, 2003 and Airey, 2005).

Research studies have shown that in tourism industry the key stakeholders i.e. educators and practitioners have different viewpoints and sometimes do not understand each other's perceptions (Petrova and Mason, 2004). For example, tourism and hospitality educators have been criticized for not equipping students effectively for employment in the industry (Kang et al. 2005; Petrova and Mason, 2004; Asirifi et. al., 2013; Airey, 2005 and Dale & Robinson, 2001). The research studies advocating industry perspectives further claimed that there is a mismatch between skills and knowledge required by industry and those provided by universities (Cooper, 1993; Evans, 1993; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Churchward & Riley, 2002; Airey, 2005).

The academia attempted to rationalize the tourism and hospitality courses in accordance to the diverse nature of tourism industry (for example, Airey, 2005; Tribe 2002a; Raybould and Wilkins, 2005; Ring et al., 2009; Inui and Lankford, 2006; Acolla, 2006; Pearce, 2005; Barron & Arcodia, 2002; Craig-Smith & Peiyi, 2007; Jordan, 2008; UNWTO, 2015; Kusumawardhana, 2020). In this connection, Goodman and Sprague (1991) argued that the needs of hospitality industries are not fully met by competing general business programs as they do not focus on service and other unique elements of tourism and hospitality industries. However, it will be important to increase the breadth and quality of tourism and hospitality curricula to maintain the loyalty of students, faculty and industry recruiters.

Batra (2016) mentioned that tourism curricula is often not in congruent with the tourism industry's dynamism due to five key issues i.e. first, insufficient hands-on experience opportunities for students; second, inadequate language training; third, there is an inability to apply theory courses in workplace environment; fourth, the teaching materials are not updated regularly; fifth, prescribed textbooks are either very expensive (international publishers) or written by international instructors which rarely considered the developing countries' scenarios.

Barrows and John (2008) stated that tourism and hospitality management curriculum should deliver the skills and competencies needed in the workplace and at same time they demanded for an academic rigor. An array of research has been conducted into the skills and competencies required by the tourism industry (for example, Airey & Johnson, 1999; Amoah, & Baum, 1997; European Commission, 2015; Stahl et al., 2013; Mayaka and Akama, 2015; Daniel et al. 2017; Jaber and Marzuki, 2019; Christou; 2000; Malone; 2007; O'Connor; 2002; Velo and Mittaz, 2006; Pring, 1993; Koh, 1995; Kunwar, 2018; Renfors, 2017; Dredge et al. 2013). A number of other studies looked at various aspects of the curricula including the rationale for competency based education and the inclusion of work based training (Inui et al., 2006; Acolla, 2006; Pearce, 2005). Some others focused on industry expectations of graduate skills and the actual skills held by graduates, (Perdue et al., 2000; Kay and Russette, 2000; Raybould and Wilkins, 2006).

However, as stated by Cooper (2002) that tourism is comparatively a new discipline of study and hence its curriculum development is still a challenging job for academicians. He further argued that the demands of diversified stakeholders also creating a constant tension for developing a balanced curriculum. In fact, the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism creating conflict among the stakeholders for the development of undergraduate tourism program (Acolla, 2006; Cooper, 2002; Makaya and King, 2002).

In conclusion, the extensive search of the relevant literature in this section highlighted two major issues: first, the lack of alignment of tourism curriculum with tourism industry need and second, the educators rarely considered practitioners' viewpoint in curriculum development and review. These two issues ultimately creating obstacles in skills development of graduates

with respect to the expectations of the industry (WTTC, 2015; Chapman & Lovell, 2006; Jauhari, 2006; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Baum, 1991; Daniel, 2017; Jackson et al., 2017 and Kabii et al., 2018). Therefore, this study has specifically attempted to investigate the gap between academia and hospitality practitioners through examining their perception regarding the role of curriculum including the components of skills and abilities in graduates' employability in the sector.

3. Research Methodology:

Methods Used for Data Collection:

The field level data was collected through a formal questionnaires survey and semi-structure interview schedules. The data collected was further supplemented by personal observation and secondary source information.

In fact, designing a good and statistically robust questionnaire is a complex and time consuming task, however, inspired from Jang et al (2013) and an extensive review of relevant literature, enabled in formulating a comparatively more standardized and valid questionnaires for investigating the existence of gap between hospitality sector and educational institutes.

The questionnaire designed encompassed of four major sections i.e. personal information about the interviewee; perception of the participants about tourism education; perception of skills and abilities and viewpoint about BS undergraduate Tourism & Hospitality Curriculum, as proposed by Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan for Undergraduate- BS Program in Tourism & Hospitality in 2017. Each section served specific objective of the study.

To provide an overview on the opportunities and issues related to the employment of employees (graduates) in the hospitality sector in KP, the requisite data was collected from representative hotels of star ranking (Table 1). Furthermore, efforts were also made to include maximum number of registered hotels from tourism destinations of the province. A total of 87 hotels of different categories were thus investigated through structured questionnaire and informal interviews with the managerial staff/administrators of the hotels (Table 1).

Table1: LOCALITY WISE RANKED HOTELS INVESTIGATED

No	Locality	Registered Hotel (No.)	Classification				
			5 star	4 star	3 star	2 star	1 star
1	Haripur	02			01		1
2	Mansehra City	30				01	29
3	Naran	45			02	13	30
4	Balakot	06				01	05
5	Abbotabad (Nathiagali&Ayubia)	46			05	05	36
6	Shogran	13			01	04	8
7	Swat	02			01		01
8	Peshawar	164		01	03	06	154

9	Islamabad Capital City	119 ²	02	02	10	5	-
Ranked-Wise Hotels Investigated			02	03	23	35	24
Total Ranked Hotels Investigated		63 (100%)					24 (Approx. 10% of the total)
GRAND TOTAL		87					

At the time of the investigation period of this research project, a total of six (06) Universities in KP were offering Undergraduate/BS Program in Tourism & Hospitality (T&H). These are: Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan; Hazara University, Mansehra; Malakand University, Chakdara; Sawabi University, Sawabi; Swat University, Mingora and University of Chitral, Chitral. A total of 38 individuals, accounting for 78% of the total full time faculty, were investigated. For the sake of comparison and in-depth understanding of the issue concern, viewpoints of 06 individuals from two educational institutes in Punjab province (Air University and Foundation University) were also collected.

Methods Used for Data Analysis:

The data collected both from hospitality sector and educational institute through questionnaire survey were analysed through statistical analysis software –SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 21.0.

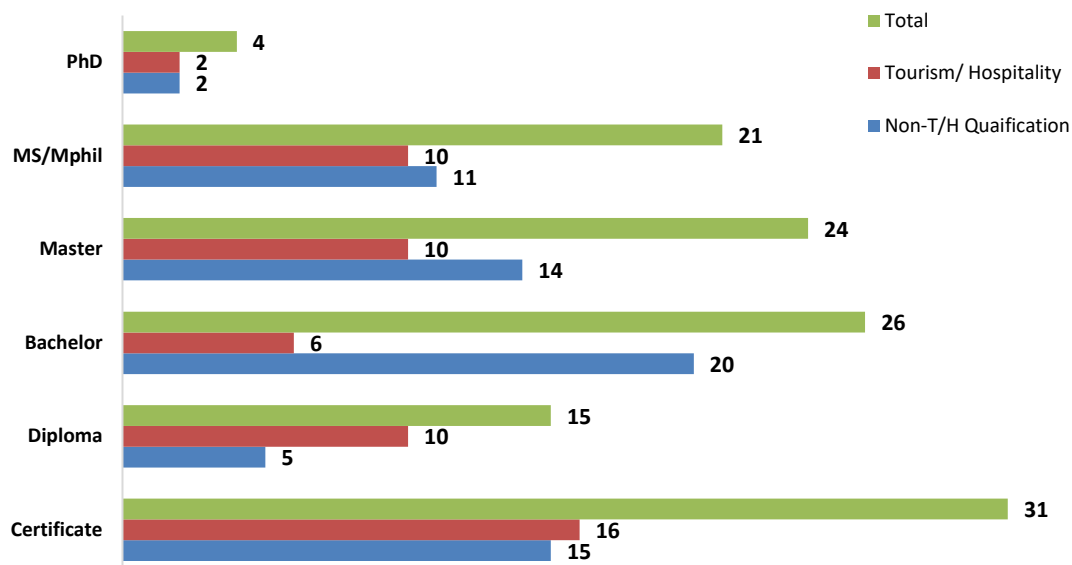
4. Results & Discussion:

Personal Attributes:

Figure 1 depicts the cumulative qualification of the investigated academia. Of all, only four individuals have terminal PhD level of academic qualification. Interestingly, only 02 of them have comparatively relevant degree in tourism & hospitality. Likewise, 21 individuals are recorded with MS/MPhil qualification, with less than a half with the relevant degree. Twenty four (24) individuals are recorded with Master Degrees (MA), however, 14 of them have non-Tourism & Hospitality (T & H) degree. In addition, most of the faculty members (Fig. 1) are also recorded with certificates and diploma qualification.

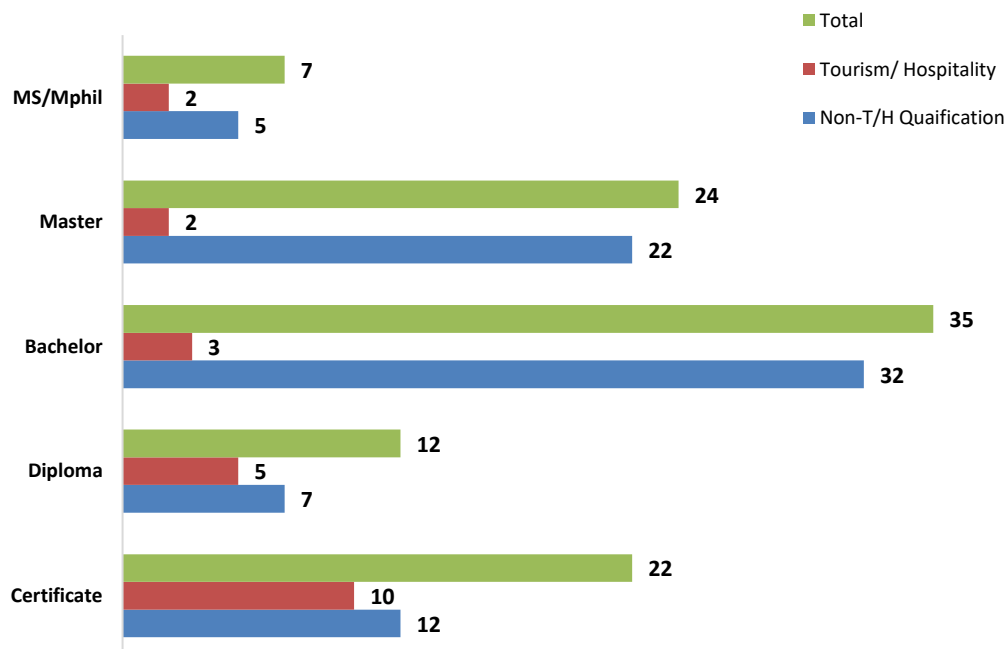
² Department of Tourists Services (DTS) Ministry of Interpersonal Coordination. www.dts.gov.pk (accessed Jan 12, 2022)

Fig. 1: Cumulative Qualification of Academia



However, the cumulative qualification of the hospitality practitioners delineates (Fig. 2) that only 22% of the overall individuals having tourism related qualification. Out of which, certificate and diploma courses are accounted for 10% and 5% respectively. Individuals with Bachelor degree in T & H are 3%, while, MA & MS in T&H are recorded only 2% each.

Fig. 2: Cumulative Qualification of Hospitality Practitioners



Though, it is well documented that the educational background, beliefs, and level of expertise in the relevant discipline are some the essential attributes of individuals which affect their planning and operational capabilities (Stark and Lattuca, 1997). However, the data collected from academic institutes and hospitality practitioners delineate that at present more than half of the faculty in T & H educational institutes have irrelevant qualification. Likewise academic qualification and theoretical knowledge of practitioners is noticed much below the average standards required. It is also noticed that the academic institutes have negligible number of individuals with higher academics positions i.e. Associate Professors and Professors. The recorded attributes can mainly be due to the comparatively infancy stages of tourism education coupled with the lack of opportunities for higher studies (MS/MPhil or PhD) in this discipline within the country. Regardless of the fact, the prevailing situation is adversely affecting the academic rigor of the program.

Perception about Graduates’ Skills & Abilities in Employability:

The academia and practitioners’ views are collected on 27 skills and abilities with respect to its importance in employability of graduates in hospitality sector. The enlisted skills and abilities are gleaned from extensive trawl of relevant literature and international good practices in hospitality sector. The enlisted skills and abilities are variably prioritized by academia and industry. Comparative assessment of the top ten skills & abilities by academia and industry practitioners with respect to tourism graduates’ employability is shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Academia & Practitioners’ Views on Skills and Abilities



The difference of opinion between the academia and practitioners regarding skills and abilities required by the industry and those delivered by universities has been well documented in the

literature (Cooper, 1993; Evans, 1993; Dale & Robinson, 2001; Churchward & Riley, 2002; Airey, 2005). Almost a similar perception is also recorded during the course of this study (Figure 5).

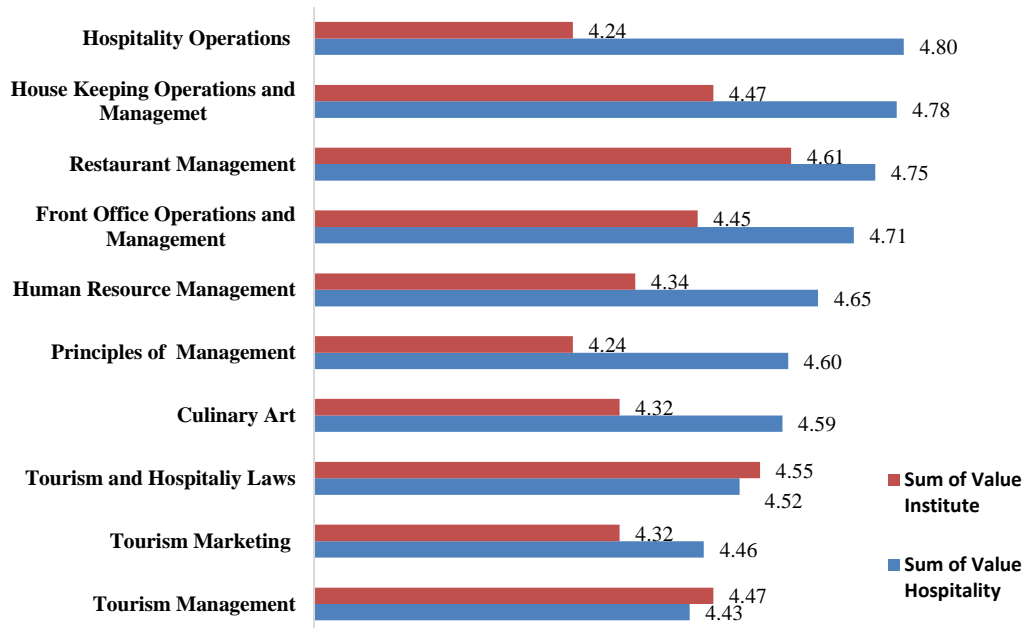
The inclusion of practical training in hospitality degree program has been a debatable issue since long (Ren & McKercher, 2021). The ones who argued against have the opinion that the degree program should focus on theory (DiMicelli, 1998), whilst, those in favor of the idea hold the viewpoint of “learning by doing” (DiMicelli, 1998; Ruhanen, 2006). However, this debate has almost resolved in principal over the last 20 years, as the universities value the need to ensure their graduates have some real world skills to balance the more theoretical aspects of their education (DiMicelli 1998). Indeed, in many ways, hospitality education has been at the forefront of the move to integrate training and education with the recognition that a practical learning component is an undividable aspect of inclusive hospitality education curriculum (Zopiatas and Constanti, 2012; Stansbie et al., 2016; Spowart, 2011; Lin, et., 2017; Gruman, et al., 2009 and Ren & McKercher, 2021). International good practices and an extensive review of literature by Ren & McKercher (2021), delineate different models for imparting practical skills at graduate level in hospitality, for example, learning in on-campus commercial hotels; learning in on-campus training hotels; learning in on campus training units; off campus practicums and internships etc.

With the above discussion it is well established that the T&H degree essentially demands work integrated learning for transferring classrooms activities to workplace. Therefore, educational institutes offering such programs should have desired infrastructure and facilities for graduates’ skills and abilities development (Crebert et al., 2004; Fleming & Eames, 2005). Though, in the present study the value of skills and abilities in employability of graduates is well identified by both the academia and practitioners. Furthermore, on campus training units and internships are regarded as major venues for graduates’ skills development. However, during personal visits to educational institutes of the province, it is observed with great concern that two of the institutes are virtually lacking basic labs/training units required for practical skills development of graduates in hospitality, whilst, the remaining institutes are found with unacceptable and poor infrastructure and facilities. In addition, none of the institutes are recorded with skillful and qualified demonstrators for imparting practical skills.

Perception about the Importance of Tourism Management Subjects in Graduates’ Employability:

A list of 36 courses has variably prioritized by the academia and industry practitioners. These courses are drawn from BS-Tourism & Hospitality model curriculum devised by Higher Education Commission- National Curriculum Review Committee (HEC-NCRC) in 2017. Comparative assessment of the top ten subjects by academia and industry with respect to graduates’ employability is shown in Figure 4.

Fig. 4: Academia & Practitioners Views on Tourism & Hospitality Subjects



In order to fill the university- industry gap, research efforts have been made to balance the vocational and liberal aspects in the curricula (Sheldon et al., 2008; Tribe, 2002; Morrison and O'Mahony, 2003; Inui et al., 2006; Busby, 2001). This issue has become a noteworthy topic of discussion since Tribe (2002a) has introduced the term 'philosophic practitioner'. It requires a curriculum that is composed of vocational, professional, social science and humanities knowledge and skills that promote a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those required to operate within the wider tourism world. However, challenges in practicality of the concept are also not exceptional (e.g. see Baum, 2005; Inui & Lankford, 2006; Lashley, 1999; McKercher, 2002 and Tribe, 2000). However, it is not in the scope of this study, to tackle the issue of balancing the liberal & vocational aspects or standardized the existing courses, though; it attempted to find the gap between the academia and hospitality practitioners in the perception of T & H undergraduate courses recommended by HEC- National Curriculum Review Committee. In the top ten list, the academia identified a mix of subjects (Fig. 4) having both vocational and liberal values (Restaurant Management, Tourism & Hospitality Law, Tourism Management, Housekeeping Operation & Management and Front Office Operation & Management, however, the practitioners customarily prioritized subjects of practical and commercial importance (Fig. 4). These are: Hospitality Operation, Housekeeping Operation & Management, Restaurant Management, Front Office Operation & Management and Human Resources Management etc.

It is concluded from this section that the practitioners have their own wish list of subjects which are of comparatively more commercial and practical nature. In contrary, the academia is bound to teach subjects according to the recommendations of HEC guidelines. Therefore, collaboration between industry, government and educational institutions would be of critical importance for devising a comparatively balanced and mutually acceptable T & H curriculum.

Such collaboration has also been well documented in the literature for sustainable hospitality sector (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015; Doniņa, 2015 and Lam and Ching, 2007).

5. Conclusion:

It is well established that in hospitality sector quality services can be ensured to a greater extent by skilled and qualified workforce. This study identified gap in the perceptions between academia and hospitality practitioners in: personal traits; differences in the perception of skills & abilities and tourism subject/curriculum in employability of graduates. The existence of this gap is hindering the production of the desired workforce. Strategic interventions like: establishment of standardized hospitality labs at universities; coordination between stakeholders; industry investment in tourism education; induction of tourism and hospitality subjects at school and college level; balancing liberal and vocational aspects in undergraduate curriculum; accreditation of undergraduate degree program etc are some of the propositions forwarded for bridging the gap between academic institutes and hospitality sector in country.

6. Limitation & Future Research:

During the course of this study rational selection of both academia and practitioners for investigations was not possible. In addition, minimum number of registered hotels in the province may not represent statistical robustness of the study.

With respect to future research, it is essential that a similar project needs to be conducted at country level. For entry level positions in hotel sector, the relative value of certificates & diplomas in tourism & hospitality is confirmed during the course of this study. Therefore, similar studies need be conducted in organizations offering diplomas or certificates courses. Likewise, studies on international benchmarking of the existing undergraduate tourism & hospitality program would be of immense value.

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