IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM EDUCATION FUTURES INITIATIVE (TEFI) VALUES IN PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT INTERNSHIP TRAINERS IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to examine how important Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) values are to be embodied in hospitality and/or tourism degree programs in Thailand from perspectives of student internship trainers. This present study used a mixed methods design. The purposive sampling was used. For quantitative approach, the sample consisted of 205 student internship trainers in hotels, airlines, tour operators, travel agencies, service-related associations, MICE business, food services, and tourism-related government agencies. In addition, 21 industry directors and managers were interviewed in order to gain more in-depth information. The results showed that all five principles were very important for higher education in tourism and hospitality studies. Ethics was rated the most significant values-based principle, followed by professionalism, mutuality, knowledge, and stewardship, respectively. Specifically, the most important values were teamwork, responsibility, collaboration, honesty, and authenticity. Among 24 values, the least important value was service to community as the only value found important while the others were graded as very important. The interviewed information supported the quantitative findings.
Keywords: TEFI Values, Internship Trainers, Tourism Education, Hospitality Education, Hospitality and Tourism Industry

INTRODUCTION

Future of tourism and hospitality industry is challenging for educational systems. It has been apparent that the world's tourism and hospitality industry is vulnerable to drastic change, especially from the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely affected the tourism and related businesses.

There is a particular question in literature of whether tourism and hospitality educations supply qualified personnel to the industry jobs (Goodenough & Page, 1993, as cited in Padurean & Maggi, 2011). Nevertheless, it has been reported that only 43% of industry and academic leaders believe that higher education equips students with necessary workforce skills (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2015: 2). The sole academic eligibility is no longer a competitive advantage for graduates when searching for a job (Helyer & Lee, 2014, as cited in Irwin et al., 2019). Traditional styles and methods of teaching and facilitating students to learn are not any more dependable in this fast-moving world of changing and innovations (Beard & Wilson, 2018).

The concerns for students in hospitality and tourism (HTM) programs in changing environments have not just recently emerged. Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) network was established by tourism educators and industry professionals (Sheldon et al., 2008) to identify the definite values that students of tourism (and hospitality) programs should be trained. According to Liburd et al. (2018: 101), the proposed values are "values of tourism-related behaviors and practices". TEFI elucidates a mutual cornerstone presumption that good values shape good graduates who will afterwards contribute to the industry (Flaherty et al., 2019).

Internship programs have played an important role as resolutions to enhance students' employment opportunity with up-to-date knowledge and development of professional skills and qualifications that industry favors. Particularly for tourism and hospitality bachelor degree programs, an internship is the most common form of experiential learning (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013, as cited in Stansbie & Nash, 2016). The internship trainers accordingly are respectfully involved in developing future human resources since they know what qualifications are best suit. The internship trainers are, therefore, key persons whose opinions are very important for academic institutions to develop study programs that help shape graduates with preferred qualifications and attitudes.

Understanding how considerable the preferable values are to employers is helpful for higher education in designing learning activities to deliver favorable workforce to industries. However, the research concerning TEFI values of key internship stakeholders who are internship trainers (employers) (Canziani, 2014; Irwin et al., 2019; Simpson et al., 2017; Stansbie & Nash, 2016) is limited. Performing the duties of influential on-site coaches, internship supervisors have great opportunities for observation of future industry personnel. This research hence aimed to assess internship trainers' perspectives on importance of TEFI values in the context of tourism and hospitality industry. Besides, the most preferred values in their perspectives among different organization types were discussed. In addition, the qualitative approach was employed in order to understand more in-depth opinions of the industry supervisors on selective TEFI values.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI)

The network of tourism educators and industry employers titled Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) was organized to address the core values to tourism learning systems in imprecise world (Sheldon et al., 2011). The significant yield of TEFI process is "a set of five values-based principles that tourism students should embody upon graduation to become responsible leaders and stewards for the destinations where they work or live." (Padurean &

Maggi, 2011: 26). There are altogether 24 items of the five TEFI main elements which are summarized as follow:
- Ethics: honesty, transparency, authenticity, and authentic self;
- Knowledge: critical thinking, innovation, creativity, and networking;
- Stewardship: sustainability, responsibility, and service to the community;
- Mutuality: diversity, inclusion, equity, humility, and collaboration; and
- Professionalism: leadership, practicality, timeliness, teamwork, concern for relevance, reflexivity, attention to services, and pro-activity (adopted from Padurean & Maggi, 2011: 26; Sheldon et al., 2011: 8).

In details, the meaning of each value set can be elaborated (TEFI, 2020) as follow:

Ethics

This principle includes a set of beliefs of what actions are right and what are wrong (Sheldon et al., 2011). The proposed values of this principle are:
- Honesty (fairness and straightforwardness of conduct)
- Transparency (quality of being done in an open way without secrets)
- Authenticity (quality of being authentic of truth and correctness)
- Authentic self (an honest representation of oneself)

Knowledge

According to Sheldon et al. (2011), knowledge can be understood as "expertise and skill required by a person through experience or education" (p. 11). The major difference between creative and innovation values is that later item means applying creative ideas to develop new things in a specific context.

Stewardship

The values of stewardship indicate caring for someone or something through responsibilities (Sheldon et al., 2011).

Mutuality

This TEFI element implies developing respectful human relationships through sharing and understanding attitudes and values (Sheldon et al., 2011).

Professionalism

This term includes more values than the other suggestive four principles. Sheldon et al. (2011) explain professionalism as competencies, skills and abilities to align personal and organization conducts with professional standards and present them through attitude and behaviors.

In summary, these qualities are urged as universal desired (Sheldon, 2011; Edelheim, 2020) to be instilled in students of tourism and hospitality in higher education. Some TEFI values may seem overlapping to each other. However, each value has its own meaning and must be evaluated by their independent senses.

Tourism and Hospitality Curriculum

According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), a curriculum comprises "all courses given in a school, college, etc. or a particular course of study in one subject". Likewise, the meaning of curriculum displayed on Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) is "the subjects that are included in a course of study or taught in a school, college, etc.". Outstandingly, employability of graduates has been one of key topics for discussion in higher education, thereby having faced challenges in designing their degree programs for strengthening their students to ensure that the proffered graduates correspond to industry demands. Since hospitality and tourism industry is unique in its way, curriculum design must be well designed to stir the transformative experiences help shape the learners.

Internship

For accomplished interns, on the one hand, the internship program raises chances to go in the industry at a higher position (Coco, 2000, as cited in Stansbie & Nash, 2016; Kinash et al., 2016, as cited in Irwin et al., 2019). Besides, together with their academic achievement,

graduates with work experience mentioned in their profile convince potential employers to believe that they are competent to accomplish assigned tasks more productively (Stansbie & Nash, 2016). Industry internship trainers are liable as the key stakeholders in tourism and hospitality learning structures (Canziani, 2014; Irwin et al., 2019; Simpson et al., 2017; Stansbie & Nash, 2016).

In Thailand, there is a requirement of programs offering a degree in tourism, hospitality, or hotel management to assign the students a work-experience practicum in their curriculum, either in the form of cooperative education or in an internship with at least consecutive 400 hours (Thailand Office of the Higher Education Commission [OHEC], n.d.).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods research design. For quantitative approach, the researcher received 205 valid responses from internship trainers in supervisory levels in hotels, airlines, tour operators, travel agencies, MICE organizations, hospitality and tourism government agencies or policy makers, food service operations, service-related associations and personalized services in Thailand. The purposive sampling was used in this study. The 5-point Likert scale was used to investigate importance level in participants' perspectives (1 = not important at all, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neither important nor unimportant, 4 = important, 5 = very important) towards the 24 TEFI values in five main principles (ethics, knowledge, stewardship, mutuality and professionalism). Also, gender, age and organization type were asked in the questionnaires.

For qualitative approach, 21 internship trainers working at managerial levels were interviewed with a purpose to use the information received to support the quantitative findings. The key informants were four supervisors from hotels, four from airlines, five from tour operators, two from travel agencies, two from tourism government agencies, two from service-related associations, one from a MICE organization and one from food service operation business. The semi-structured interview was employed to request more in-depth opinions about TEFI values they perceived important with reasons provided.

The reliability of the items was tested by Cronbach's Alpha. In this study, the TEFI Values scale showed high reliability of 0.929. The researcher used descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations to explain the findings.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results showed that all TEFI five principles were very important to be embodied in hospitality and/or tourism bachelor programs in Thailand. To be more specific, teamwork (4.78, .358), responsibility (4.77, .486), collaboration (4.72, .520), honesty (4.71, .577) and authenticity (4.62, .643) were rated the five most important values among all. The interviewed information was supportive to the findings.

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation and Interpretation of Related Variables

TEFI Main Principles	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Ethics	4.56	.538	Very important
Professionalism	4.55	.465	Very important
Mutuality	4.54	.496	Very important
Knowledge	4.43	.581	Very important
Stewardship	4.41	.565	Very important

The key informants have elaborated their opinions that working in the service industry indicates dealing with diverse people throughout the service process. Goals are shared while tasks are divided. Every staff must realize that each and every employee is crucial to the success of the

team, therewith their organization. A one-man show working style cannot get job done well. The smallest unit of organization is individual workers. Every person must be responsible for their assigned tasks. Missing planned work can cause problems to oneself and others in the team.

On the other side, service to the community (4.18, 0.817), sustainability (4.28, 0.852), authentic self (4.30, 0.846), networking (4.33, 0.842), inclusion (4.40, 0.719) and leadership (4.40, 0.838) were the least important of total 24 values. In the key informants' perspective, service to community could be something distant from students or (new) graduates. The rational given is that there is a load of limitations in crystallizing a project to perform unpaid work for benefit and betterment of community. Further, giving precedence to sustainability needs time to develop and prove. Sustainability is important nowadays, however, how much sustainability is valued and what actions to be taken to exhibit sustainability depend on several factors. Nevertheless, the comments given by interviewees imply that the employers understand sustainability as environmental concern instead of the combination of the 3 pillars (society, economy and environment).

With regard to the organization type specifically, 98 internship trainers from hotels voted teamwork (4.82, .439), honesty (4.80, .517), responsibility (4.80, .453), collaboration (4.76, .478) and practicality (4.68, .510) the most five significant qualities that HTM students should be equipped. The structure of hotel comprises various divisions and departments that all work to service guests (and visitors) either directly or indirectly. A case, whether positive or negative, that occurs can impact the property, the brand and the chain as a whole. Teamwork is what all hotel staff should value. Not only professional working with associates in the same department, but also are effective interdepartmental communications and collaborations meaningful towards smooth operations to achieve property's shared goals.

Likewise, 39 airlines supervisors value teamwork (4.85, .432), responsibility (4.82, .389), attention to services (4.72, .456), collaboration (4.69, .521) and critical thinking (4.67, .621) greatly. Similar to aforementioned organizations, 17 supervisors working in travel agencies scored teamwork (4.71, .470) and responsibility (4.71, .470) the highest of all; followed by reflexivity (4.65, .493) and attention to services (4.65, .493); and collaboration (4.53, .514), inclusion (4.53, .717) and humility (4.53, .800). Analogously, teamwork (5.00, .000), collaboration (5.00, .000), attention to services (5.00, .000) were prioritized by nine tour operators together with transparency (5.00, .000), honesty (4.89, .333) and responsibility (4.89, .333).

Distinctively, the average score from 10 government agencies and policy makers' shows that they perceive that authenticity (4.90, .316) should be the most important value for students as future generation to work in tourism field. Responsibility (4.80, .422), practicality (4.80, .422), honesty (4.70, .483) and collaboration (4.70, .483) were ranked next. The two interviewees have provided their opinions with supportive explanations that responsibility means individuals realize what they should be responsible for, and the assigned tasks must be handled and treated well. In addition, being responsible at work brings about the good image to the person, showing that the person is liable and benevolent. Also, the informants revealed that honesty means to honor oneself and other people in knowing what actions should and should not be taken.

Honesty (4.73, .799), equity (4.73, .799), teamwork (4.67, 1.047), responsibility (4.53, .834) and transparency (4.53, .834) are most significant in food service operators' views. On the other side, authentic self (3.93, 1.223) was rated the last rank. A division director of this business type has delineated that working environment (in this industry) is influential that individuals are strictly controlled to open their mind for new things and align themselves to the changing environment.

Five internship supervisors from MICE businesses extremely appraised teamwork (5.00, .000), collaboration (5.00, .000), concern for relevance (5.00, .000), pro-activity (4.80, .447),

diversity (4.80, .447) and innovation (4.80, .447). It does not matter what event type it is or how big the event size is, MICE businesses demand diversified assembled units in all respects for completion and success.

Particularly, a few executives from personalized services businesses voted responsibility and sustainability as unquestionable important (5.00, .000). Come next were honesty, transparency, authenticity, authentic self, diversity, equity, collaboration, timeliness, concern for relevance, reflexivity, and attention to services as the same important level (4.67, .577). Nine supervisors working at service-related associations in Thailand scored the values of collaboration (4.89, .333) and critical thinking (4.89, .333) the highest of all, followed by teamwork, honesty, attention to services and concern for relevance with equal means and standard deviations (4.78, .441). The president of a service-related association commented that tourism jobs particularly concern about servicing and taking care of people. It is a requirement that service providers in the study understand all other persons involved.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study has explored that the five TEFI value principles are all important to nurture students of tourism, hospitality and related degree programs in the mindsets of internship supervisors in Thailand. Teamwork, responsibility, collaboration, honesty and authenticity are agreed as top required values that educators should underpin in the tourism and hospitality curricula. Differences in priorities of values occur when consideration is made separately in each organization category probably with regard to character and culture of particular firm type. Nevertheless, these values are accounted favorable in perspectives of internship supervisors who are also possible future employers.

Supportive behaviors are preferable when performers understand that they are working towards common achievement. Paying respect to colleagues is essential. Honesty is a fundamental qualification required for service industry. They must know what they should do and what action they should not perform. Being honest to oneself is mandatory and it will help affirm one's dependability in the team and in customers' vistas. Furthermore, the important characteristic of (most) products in service industry is intangibility. Service providers literally create experiences to customers. They should realize of an action they take whether it has a great advantage over clients or exploit any co-worker.

Being true self is not bad as you can show off your competencies to accomplish team cooperation as doing a jigsaw puzzle. Nonetheless, an open mind helps students learn and grow. Besides, each organization has own cultures, rules and expectations. Students and (new) graduates should be able to adjust themselves to where they work in order to flourish. The clarified explanations given by industry managers have expressed that networks will be built at a certain of time and will expand along with increasing work tenure and higher working status. In the industry supervisors' points of view, leadership skill is very important that students should develop the competence from activities and assignments in their study programs. However, it is placed among the lowest ranks with the argument that undergraduate studying phase of life, including the internship training period, is the considerable stage of learning to observe from experienced people and sharpen problem-solving skill. Leading skill is not required to shine yet. The opinions from interviewees pointed that the supervisors consider leadership as being able to lead, they however do not contemplate all skills (e.g., being a good follower, encouraging others to reach full potential) attached in leadership.

Furthermore, honesty means you must be honest to what you have made your decision to do. You firstly must take care of tasks assigned well and it is suggested that you may offer yourself to take ownership of someone else's task with your ability. This helpful support displays that you are competent and value others. When a problem at work occurs, talking directly to each other in the team will help solve it as soon as possible. Furthermore, obeying the seniors and

older people is probably what has been planted in Thai culture. When young adults, especially during an internship, are admonished, they would too fear to accept or confess their mistake that it might cause problems to them. Together with theming environments and property design, probably a prominent image of hotel works is its professionalism in smooth servicing and operations. All staff should carry out tasks efficiently and provide responses appropriate to situations in proper manners.

Working in an airline means dealing with a people throughout a service process, including ground services, pilots, aircrews, cargos and many more. The airline supervisors have their comments that being responsible on one's duties is a good contribution to other people in team because it reduces work-partners' burdens. Student's ability to think carefully for true understanding of the information received and/or assignment appointed should be well trained as it is classified as a problem-solving skill.

Besides, personnel in MICE businesses should always understand that their work must be relevant to ever-changing environments and influential factors in the industry. Furthermore, event or program participants can be diverse in their speaking languages and nationalities. Also, event or program organizing staff can be different in cultures, races, beliefs (such as religious), political attitudes, etc. A management in this sector has pointed that innovation value may be similar to creativity. Students, however, should be perceptive to circumstances.

Curriculum plays an essential role in development process of each and every student's journey of learning. Universities as "important sources of innovative thinking and change" (Sheldon et al., 2011) are responsible for training and grooming students to become preferable qualified personnel and as well global populations. Moving towards development of learners, the proposed TEFI values are praised as part of systematic process to values-based education. Appropriate approaches should be designed to foster students' learning.

Certain limitations were encountered. Sampling is a limitation. Except the 98 responses of hotel supervisors, the researcher could receive smaller sizes of valid responses from other organizations. In the first place, the research expected to use a statistical analysis technique to determine whether there were significant differences in supervisors' opinions among different organization types. Because the data collected did not meet the rules, the researcher consequently could not execute it. More respondents would help secured a stronger statistical potential. For possible future research, it is suggested that other key stakeholders in tourism educational system should be studied about their perspectives towards TEFI values. Viewpoints of tourism and hospitality educators and students should be examined. Potentially, alternative needful qualifications should be investigated in their importance in order to ameliorate tourism and hospitality curricula.

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