



Tourism and Hospitality Management Education in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main objective of this study is to identify the problems and prospects of tourism and hospitality higher education in Bangladesh.

Methodology: The study conducted an in-depth interview with 40 stakeholders including general education specialists, subject educators, alumni students, practitioners, and policymakers. It also conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with eight experts in this field. Respondents for in-depth interviews and the FGD were selected from the stakeholders by using convenient and judgmental sampling techniques. Narrative analysis method is used to analyze the interview data of individual respondents.

Findings: The study found that seven public universities, nine private universities, and nine colleges under the National University offered degrees in tourism and hospitality management in this country. About eighty-five faculty members teach in this sector, yet less than 20 percent possess graduate and post-graduate degrees in tourism and hotel management. The analysis of the study revealed some significant problems including: less industry focused curricula and teaching-learning methods, no uniform national guidelines, poor infrastructure, and teaching staff with a predominantly non-tourism background. In addition, lack of foreign-trained faculty, entry of reluctant students, and a negative social perception of tourism occupations all pose difficulties for the industry.

Practical Implications: This study helps the stakeholders to understand the problems and prospects of tourism and hospitality education in Bangladesh and empower themselves to overcome these problems.

Originality: This study reveals the underlying problems and some strategic solutions for tourism and hospitality education in Bangladesh.

Research Limitations: If the study can use different quantitative measures then it will be more specific.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is blessed with natural beauty that ranges from mountains to rivers to beaches and from ancient archaeological sites to medieval monasteries, temples, pagodas, mosques, and churches set in a natural environment of great diversity. It has the world's longest and unbroken natural sea beach in Cox's Bazaar and the largest mangrove forest at Sundarbans in

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Khulna (7th Five Years Plan, 2015). Tourism has already been identified as one of the most important parts of six broad areas formed by twenty-six blue economic functions. As the inflow of remittances, earnings from the tourism and hotel industry can be an important source of foreign currency. Consequently, it can be an important source of growth and jobs in the developing economy. Today, Bangladesh's position ranks 165th in the world in terms of GDP contribution of the tourism and hotel industry whereas Thailand and Malaysia occupy 35th and 41st positions respectively. But the sad story is that, a few years ago, Bangladesh was ranked at 178th while Thailand and Malaysia were at 71st and 62nd respectively. The current government has developed several guidelines and laws for this sector, including the Bangladesh Tourism Board Act and Tourism Policy 2010. In addition, the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the Bangladesh Tourism Board, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Civil Aviation Administration have taken tremendous initiatives for the expansion of this sector (7th Five Years Plan, 2015).

Tourism has been identified as a key priority sector for the development of the economy in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Delta Plan-2100). The emerging demand for coastal tourism and what has been termed the "blue economy" has opened a new window for this industry. The development of eco-tourism and marine cruise tourism is recognized as the high priority sectors in the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2021, the short-, medium- and long-term implementation periods of which will be 2016-30, 2031-50, and 2051-2100 respectively. In the Delta Plan's qualitative assessment of various sectors of the blue economy, coastal tourism is given high importance, future potential, and strategic priority (Bangladesh Delta Plan-2100). This confirmed running government recognition of tourism development due to its natural sights and social and cultural events (Bangladesh: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 2013). In addition, like many Least Developed Countries (LDCs) tourism is one of the main pillars of their economic development (Parveen, 2013). Tuhin and Majumder (2011) suggested that tourism can add value to the economy of Bangladesh if a proper marketing plan and strategy can be built and implemented. Nonetheless, strategies for tourism industry engagement in many educational institutions are often haphazard and have lacked focus, commitment, and resources (Solnet et al., 2007).

Review of literature of this study confirms that tourism and hospitality have a high potential for the socio-economic context of Bangladesh (Sultana, 2016; Hossain & Wadood, 2020). For the further development of this sector, it is essential to develop qualified and strategically sound workforce capable of seizing existing opportunities and also able to identify next-level opportunities through their research. As a prioritized sector, the Government of Bangladesh and Bangladesh University Grant Commission (UGC)-a governmental organization to controls the country's higher education, were undertaking an initiative to introduce tourism and hospitality subjects at the university level. As a result, some public and private universities have introduced four-year bachelor's degree programs in the field of tourism and hospitality management. However, some institutes and specialist bodies had been offering different diplomas and short course programs for a long time and

are not fully integrated into the plan, while fundamental problems in its planning, execution process, and resource allocation have bedeviled the framework. With this circumstances, this study takes the initiative to uncover the problems of higher education in tourism and hospitality management in Bangladesh and to assess its prospects.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Definition of Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM) education

Tourism education is how a tourism authority prepares human resources to work professionally in the development of tourism sectors (Malihah & Setiyorini, 2014, October). It is a significant part of the entire tourism industry and is also devoted to providing a well-educated, dedicated, and appropriately trained workforce in the tourism industry (Atef, 2018). It is known that management education has taught people to plan, organize, execute, manage and evaluate any task effectively and efficiently. So, tourism and hospitality management education can be defined as an education that develops quality manpower, continuously innovates customer-oriented tourism products and services, plan and organize tourism development, and manage tourism and hospitality workers to achieve organizational goals.

2.2 Area of THM education in Bangladesh

The area of THM education covers all levels of this education, including diploma, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.) programs in tourism and hospitality as well as various short-term and long courses offered by various institutions. It also extends to curriculum development and design, the skills of teachers and trainers, teaching-learning mechanisms, research and development activities, infrastructural facilities, and the environmental impact of THM education.

3. Methodology

The nature of this study is descriptive but critical. Both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources were used for this study. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 40 different stakeholders, including 5 general education specialists who are university professors and acting members of the higher education curriculum development committee, 10 specialist educators who are faculty members and researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality, 5 existing students of the THM department, 5 alumnae, 10 practitioners who are the entrepreneurs or working in various hotels and resorts at the managerial level, and 5 policymakers who have been playing a significant role for the development of the tourism industry and having an influence on tourism and hospitality education. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with 8 members (1 general education specialist who is a university professor, 2 specialist educators who are

faculty members and researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality, 1 alumni student, 2 practitioners who are the entrepreneurs or working in various hotels and resorts at the managerial level, 1 policymaker (a government official) under the moderation of the author of this paper. Respondents for in-depth interviews and the FGD were selected from the stakeholders by using convenient and judgmental sampling techniques. Narrative analysis method is used to analyze the interview data of individual respondents. Secondary data were collected from different publications, research articles, university curriculum books, websites, and other necessary papers. After completing the necessary analysis of the collected data, a report was prepared for the Bangladesh tourism authorities. This study avoids naming specific respondents and institutions for reasons of preserving confidentiality issues.

4. Findings of the Study

This section discusses about the present status, problems and prospects of THM higher education in Bangladesh.

4.1 Present status of the THM higher education in Bangladesh

The study found that seven public universities and nine private universities, and nine colleges under National University offered graduate degrees in tourism and hospitality management. In 2007, Dhaka University opened the Department of Tourism and Hotel Management (currently known as the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management) to meet the growing demand for skilled workers in the field. After that two private universities came forward to offer graduate degrees in this field. Then in 2015 the Bangladesh University Grant Commission (UGC) vigorously took the initiative to introduce undergraduate degrees in this field at university levels. Subsequently, some public and private universities have opened tourism and hospitality management departments at their universities since 2016. It is seen that students from three to four universities are just completing their graduate degrees. Other students are between their first and third year of the four-year bachelor's degree. Almost 85 teachers (45 from public universities and 40 from private universities) teach in this sector. Of these, 21 are from the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department of Dhaka University. Most of the THM departments were established after 2015 and possess only three to five faculty members. After analyzing the educational background of these faculty members, it is found that less than 20 percent of them have completed their graduation and doctoral degrees in tourism and/or hospitality management. The remaining faculty members come from management, marketing, finance, and accounting fields. Most universities in Bangladesh award their bachelor's degree programs at THM within programs of 120 to 147 credits and their master's degree within 39 to 60 credits. They also offer theoretical and practical courses. The majority of the THM curriculum is currently filled with non-tourism courses. Less than 3,000 students study this sector. About a thousand have graduated and the rest are continuing their studies. This sector is struggling with very poor infrastructure including a lack of modern multimedia classrooms, labs, faculty chambers and others.

The study found that different universities in Bangladesh offer BBA in Tourism and Hospitality Management degree within 120 to 147 credits. Where the 114 to 126 credits were theory courses. It also found that out of the nine universities, 07 universities offered a 03 credits internship program and exceptionally Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University, Gopalganj offered a 15 credits internship program and no internship program offered by the colleges under the National University. There were 94 different courses offered for BBA in Tourism and Hospitality Management in different universities. Otherwise, the same course was offered with various course titles. For example, Consumer Behavior course was offered with different titles including Consumer Behavior, Hospitality Consumer Behavior, Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality, Tourism and Hospitality Consumer and Tourists Behavior. It also found that a course with the same or similar titles or contents was offered in different semesters at different universities. For example, First Aid, Safety and Security/Tourism Safety and Security course was offered at different universities in the first year second semester, second year first semester, third-year second semester and fourth year first semester.

4.2 Problems of THM higher education in Bangladesh

The focus group discussion and in-depth interviews of this study identified nine major problems in THM higher education in Bangladesh. These are discussed below:

4.2.1 Existing curriculum is less focused on industry-changing demand

Gerstein and Friedman (2016) mentioned that students who focus on delivering skills and competencies can be successful in both life and work. In the age of information and communication technology, employers in the tourism industry demand more from their employees. Analysis of the study found that hotel and tourism practitioners share their view that more than 40% of hotel managers at five-star hotels in Bangladesh are foreigners. The UK's National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) has developed six generally accepted key qualification requirements for higher education where effective communication, the use of numbers, and the use of information technology were highly prioritized (Murphy, 2001). It also found that employers are always searching for technologically sound graduates from domestic sources who can smartly manage their hotels and resorts. But the current graduates are not performing to the level expected by employers. In most cases, it can be seen that the existing curriculum of THM higher education has ignored this issue in its curriculum design. All universities offer a theoretical course, namely: Introduction to the Computer or similar titles, but the course content is almost the same in all cases. Recently three universities have taken initiatives to introduce computerized reservation and resource management systems or similar courses for the development of their students.

4.2.2 Problems in curriculum design

The curriculum must be responsive to changing values and expectations in education reflecting wider business and societal needs (Prideaux, 2003). Analysis of the study found

that most of the THM curriculum for the graduate level is not research-based. It seems simulation is increasingly seen as an effective learning environment for specialized formal courses, although the necessary expertise, knowledge, and preparation of educators may be lacking (Navedo & Simon, 2013). The study also revealed that the teaching-learning method followed by these Bangladeshi institutions is assessed as insufficient to produce high-quality workers in this sector. The ratio of theoretical and practical courses is thought to be unbalanced. The people who are involved in this curriculum development process mostly come from management, marketing and accounting backgrounds. Although the ultimate goal of THM higher education is to produce top and middle managers, many universities emphasize developing a technical workforce. Similarly, inadequately defined teaching-learning methods were also found to be problematic when implementing the THM curriculum in Bangladesh.

4.2.3 Problems in maintaining the sequential order of courses

The study found that total 94 different courses are offered for BBA in Tourism and Hospitality Management in different universities. The analysis of the study also found some problems in maintaining the sequential order of courses i.e. a same course was offered with various course titles and a course with same or similar titles or contents was offered in different semesters at different universities. For example: Consumer Behavior course was offered with different titles including Consumer Behavior, Hospitality Consumer Behavior, Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality, Tourism and Hospitality Consumer and Tourists Behavior. And another example: First Aid, Safety and Security/Tourism Safety and Security course was offered at different universities in first year second semester, second year first semester, third year second semester and fourth year first semester. It should be structured by a national committee.

4.2.4 No uniform national guidelines

Analysis of the study found that the tourism and hospitality management is a specialized education but there is no national-level guideline regarding a nationally recognized core curriculum. That is why different institutes design their curriculum and determine their teaching-learning methods on their assumption of what they believe the industry will demand. If there is no national guideline for tourism and hospitality personnel development shortly, then there may be no consensus on future strategies and gaps will appear akin to the country's garments sector with its formerly inadequate manpower policies.

4.2.5 Poor infrastructural facilities

Study revealed that different world-class institutes facilitate different laboratories for their students. It was identified that the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Chandigarh University has established fifteen labs including a front office lab, housekeeping lab, linen and laundry lab, model guest room, PMS lab, basic training restaurant, advance training restaurant, basic training kitchen, advance training kitchen, bakery, quantity food

kitchen, soft skill and communication lab, hospitality professional essentials lab, grooming lab and computer lab for the development of their students (Chandigarh University, 2021). While one or two universities in Bangladesh have established two or three labs, including food production and food service management, housekeeping and front desk management, etc. In other cases, no modern class and seminar room facilities existed.

4.2.6 Faculty members with non-tourism background

As noted above, an analysis of the educational background of the faculty members involved in the THM higher education shows that about 80 percent of the faculty members come from the areas of management, marketing, finance, and accounting. It is therefore suggested that faculty members should be involved in research for the development of both themselves and the industry.

4.2.7 Lack of foreign-trained higher educated teachers

The process of a doctoral degree program helps create foundational knowledge from which all people can benefit, while the results help increase the productivity of those they work with. Doctoral students can also draw on this pool of knowledge and transfer it to product development and services (Casey, 2009). But this study discovered that less than 10 percent of the faculty members had completed Ph.D. degrees in the field of tourism and hospitality.

4.2.8 Entry of reluctant students into THM higher education

It was also found that about 75% of the students who were admitted to the THM department did not make tourism and hospitality management to their first choice. As a result, they are reluctant to build their careers in this industry. So, this is one of the main obstacles to producing needs-based industry graduates from these existing reluctant students.

4.2.9 Negative social perception towards the carrier in hotel and tourism industry

The study revealed that a negative perception is prevailing in many parts of society towards career development in hotel and tourism sectors. Many students are interested in tourism and hospitality occupations as simply a starting point for career development, and searching opportunity to a change toward other careers. In short, their long-term career plans are not committed to the industry.

4.3 Prospect of THM higher education in Bangladesh

The prospects for increasing earnings from tourism are especially large, which will also help create new jobs (General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission, March 2020). According to Global Economic Impact and Trends-2021, over the last decade travel and tourism have played an important role in job creation. In 2018 and 2019, worldwide this sector supported 319 million jobs (10% of all jobs) and 334 million jobs (10.6% of all jobs), respectively (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021). In 2018 and 2019, the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment in Bangladesh is 2.482 million and 2.414

million jobs, respectively (Knoema, 2021). Fig 1 shows the consistent increase in revenue over the years and provides evidence that the tourism sector is thriving in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2020). Huq and Alam (2016) also found that sustainable tourism development has a significant positive impact on job creation, entrepreneurship development, community development, and economic development in Bangladesh.



Figure:1. Contribution of travel and tourism in the employment of Bangladesh

Source: Knoema (2021)

In addition, Bangladesh will receive developing country status from 2026 (The Daily Star, July 14, 2021). It has also crossed the threshold of a lower-middle-income country and met all the criteria to exit LDC status by 2024. Bangladesh is now aiming to achieve Upper Middle-Income Country status by 2031 and to be a high-income country by 2041 with a per capita income of over US\$12,500 at today's prices and fully in line with the digital world (General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission, March 2020). Behind these statistics, people's standard of living is increasing day by day. Bangladesh has 147,570 square kilometers in area with enormous natural beauty. Cox's Bazar (the unbroken longest sea

beach in the world), Sundarban (mangrove forest) St. Martin Island, and three hill districts with their ancient sites are known all over the world. It also developed a plan based on its blue economy. All of these things create a tremendous opportunity in marine tourism, cruise tourism, coastal tourism, hotel and tourism management, and other linkage industries. This industry needs a huge number of capable human resources to properly manage and utilize these resources in the present and upcoming days.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of this study has proposed some of the key recommendations for this sector. These are: i) formation of a uniform national guideline for tourism and hospitality education in Bangladesh; ii) develop a uniform needs-based higher education curriculum for all institutions; iii) launching a project to set up various tourism and hospitality labs at each institution; iv) launching a project to create foreign-trained teachers in this sector by signing the memorandum of understanding with various foreign educational institutions and v) organize a uniform admission test to select interested students in this field. Higher education in tourism and hospitality has good prospects in Bangladesh, although it has faced various problems. If its stakeholders take the necessary action against these identified issues, it will be a prominent sector in this country.

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