

The Contribution of The Educational Process to The Development Of Vocational Training Qualifications And Skills Of Human Resources In The Tourism Sector

Case Study: Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) Specialization: Tourism & Hospitality Specialist

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Abstract

Education and training are important parameters required to face economic and social challenges especially in the tourism business. In order for them to remain competitive they need high quality human resources. Quality in tourism is defined by two factors. The first one is infrastructure and the second one lies in the services that are provided. The primary role and the most competitive advantage for tourism, a labor-intensive sector, is the services offered, since they involve face to face interaction and will either satisfy or dissatisfy tourists (domestic or foreign). Depending on the quality of the services offered, tourists will both become loyal customers and attract other tourists, or they will leave from the tourist establishment and even from the tourist destination. The questions that emerge are whether modern education programs provide education that reflects the qualitative dimension of services offered to the tourist and whether the learning outcome makes it easier for the trainees to work in the tourist sector.

This article aims to identify the level of learners' satisfaction as a whole, as well as by the "categories" of education services received, at highlighting the weaknesses and strengths of the specialized syllabus, so that by recording the perceptions of graduates, to identify directions and future goals - proposals to improve the syllabus of VTI (IEK) for Tourism and Hospitality Specialist.

Keywords: *vocation, training, qualification, hospitality, tourism sector, skills human resources.*

JEL Classification: Z310 Tourism: Industry Studies

1. Research Objective

The research objectives of this study include the exploration of the perceptions of IEK graduates specialized in Hotel Management as Tourist & Hospitality Specialist, the degree of relevance of their study program (syllabus/curriculum) to the needs of the market, and the degree of satisfaction from the educational process, which in their opinion contributed to the development of their qualifications during their employment in the tourism sector. In particular, they were asked to evaluate (a) the quality of the services they received

during their studies in terms of their study program, the Teachers and the Support services offered to them and b) their vocational internship in the tourism sector as a continuation of their theoretical training, in order to determine the levels of satisfaction of the trainees both as a whole and by the "categories" of education services received, to highlight the weaknesses and strengths of the specialized syllabus so that by recording the perceptions of graduates, to identify directions and future goals - proposals to improve the syllabus of IEK in the field of Hotel Management expertise.

2. Tourist Education Training as a Component of the Tourist policy

The study of politics is the study of the management of power. "Politics is about power, who gets what, where, how and why" (Laswell, H.D., 1936, Hall, C., M., 1994, p. 2). Jaensch's attempt to standardize (1992) the decision-making process in terms of political power management marks five key elements (Hall, C., M., 1994, p. 2). The first element is associated with the decision-making process of a group and, as a group we can describe a small number of people, a community, an organization or even a nation. The second refers to decisions and various politics and ideologies that help reinforce the arguments of various choices that influence decisions. The third is linked to who makes the decisions. That can be a person or elite, while the extent to which they are representative should be taken into account. The fourth refers to the political interest in the process through which decisions are made especially by the bodies that make those decisions. Finally, the fifth element of politics is linked to how decisions are implemented and executed in the community. Especially, in the case of tourism, the mentioned approach outlines, the framework for practicing the necessary tourism intervention by the state, that is, the tourism policy as implemented by those bodies that have historically been designated as National Tourism Organizations - E.O.T. (National Tourism Organization - NTO).

Decisions that affect tourism policy, the nature of government intervention in tourism, the structure of tourism organizations and the nature of tourism development arise from a process that balances the values of individuals, interest groups and public and private organizations with completely different goals and functions. Therefore, in order to understand tourism and its effects, we must understand its inherent political character (Hall, C.M., 1994, p. 3). The need to approach the real economic nature and the role of tourism in a goal-oriented economy becomes imperative and a prerequisite for its response to politics and for its implementation of the necessary politics whenever it is needed.

The growing importance of tourism, as income and source of employment and as the main factor in the balance of payments, for many countries, has attracted the interest and attention of governments, regional and local authorities and of those who are interested in economic development. This requires the implementation of a policy that depends on the conditions prevailing in each country and acts as a regulatory factor in the production process of almost all sectors of the economy as well as a significant part of its institutional functions.

Addressing the tourist phenomenon, as a quantitative and qualitative private consumption, imposes and activates all the state policies that contribute to its development. The clear identification of the tourist product and the knowledge of the way it is measured, are the main elements for its rational treatment and for the formulation and implementation of the relevant policy for its promotion and development.

3. Introduction

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and the knowledge of the way it is measured, are the main elements for its rational treatment and for the formulation and implementation of the relevant policy for its promotion and development.

6. Objectives of the Education Policy in the Field of Tourism

The objectives of tourism policies and strategies require that socially acceptable goals are set. For the development of a policy plan in tourism education it is necessary to consider the general national policies designed for tourism. It should also follow the trends in global tourism organizations so that, through the creation of appropriate conditions, the improvement of tourism education and training (Owen, 1991: 358-362) can be achieved.

According to Baum (1995: 184-186), tourism education and training syllabus should pursue the objectives of improving the quality of tourism services, of the adequately trained staff to meet the needs at all levels of the hierarchy of tourism-related businesses, the effective cooperation between tourism businesses and educational institutions, the preparation of trainees for occupational mobility in other countries, by improving language skills. Also, they should implement new technologies and trends in the tourism sector and finally they should support policies that recognize the role of human resource development by linking and promoting graduates in the tourist market.

It is obvious that the ultimate goal of the political power bodies is to provide domestic and foreign tourists with high quality tourist products and services. It is therefore necessary to adapt the syllabus of tourism education and training to the foreseeable medium and long-term needs of the tourist market. Proper coordination of tourism education and training providers is essential to ensure the employment and the absorption of trainees in the market. Consequently, tourism education is a tool for development policy at a national level that contributes to improving business competitiveness and the tourism economy in general. The strategy for a tourism development policy must be in line with a corresponding strategy for the development of tourism education and training. The importance of education, training and mainly internship has been recognized by all actors at a national and European level as the most successful method of training and acquiring professional qualifications because it directly links vocational education and training to the real market conditions while ensuring a successful transition from the educational environment to a professional setting. It has also contributed to a significant extent and has given remarkable results in the absorption of graduates in the tourism industry.

Based on the above, it is concluded that educational reforms that have been taking place historically in Vocational Education and Training, have as a main goal and purpose to serve the policies of a state and to create competent professionals who will have the necessary qualifications that will support the productive sectors of the national economy alongside with their personal and social well-being.

7. Role of Tourism Education

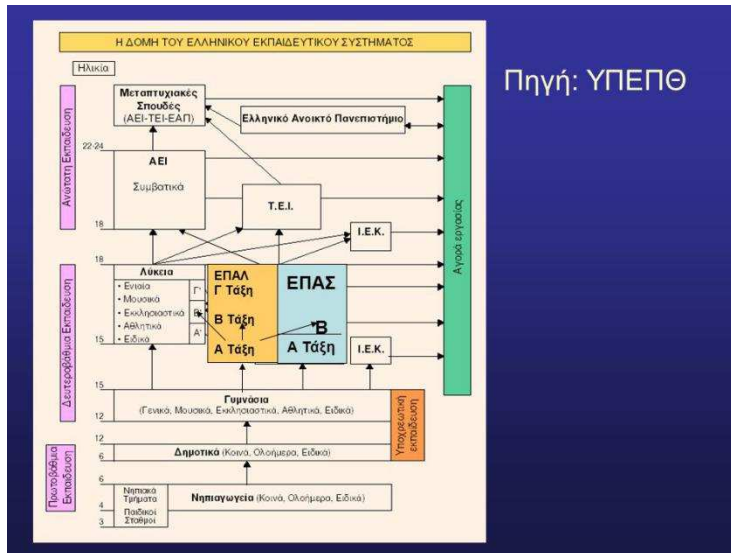
In Greece, tourism has evolved to a competitive international sector since 2014, and as a result, employment has been rising steadily in recent years, at an annual rate of 2.8%. Unlike other sectors, in 2016 tourism recorded the highest number of employees (341.2 thousands). Along with a decrease in other sectors' employment, tourism's employment rose from 3.1% in 1983 to 9.3% in 2016. Therefore, proper training and education in the tourism sector is of particular significance. Improving quality does not only depend on infrastructure, but also on human resources, to a large extent. Although our country is facing an economic crisis, tourism has become one of the most important economic activities (Aris Ikkos, 2017).

In part-time work, a rise in tourism's percentage share is monitored after 2009, reaching 20.8% in 2016, compared with 8.5% in 2008. The seasonality of tourism in our country increases the number of people employed and also raises the total number of tourist businesses during summer months by 20% (Aris Ikkos, 2017). Continual improvement of the quality of tourism services and products, as well as support for the productivity of tourism enterprises, are essential parameters of staff training. The lack of qualified and well-trained staff is one of the main problems encountered by a developing country in its attempt to create a functional tourism industry. It is therefore important to provide efficient tourism education and continuous vocational training to the ever-developing tourism sector.

8. Current Situation of Tourism Education in Greece

Before presenting the current situation in the tourism sector, it is important to present the educational system of Greece.

Table 1. Presentation of Greek Educational System



Source: Ministry of Education

As it can be seen in Table 1, the levels of the Greek education system, that lead graduates to the market are: Secondary education (EPAS and EPAL) and intermediate, post-secondary education with Vocational Training Institutes IEK, Higher /Tertiary Education with Universities and TEI (Technological Educational Institutes) and postgraduate studies.

The system of tourism education and training in Greece is supervised by different bodies (Ministries of Education, Tourism, Shipping and Labor, OAED, EOPPEP), that develop parallel and/or different educational programmes/courses, depending on the responsibility they have taken by the state and the aims and objectives set by the education system. Nowadays, there is a separation of supervisory responsibilities between different bodies. The delegation of responsibilities to different bodies is not necessarily a disadvantage for the efficiency of the system. The system meets the qualitative and quantitative needs of the tourism market, as long as the roles between the bodies are not involved and no overlaps are created, that may result in disagreements, claims and of economic resources waste.

Higher tourism education is provided by the ATEIs which are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Higher Schools of Tourism Professions, which operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism. (Koutoulas - Katsiki 2003: 5-15).

9. Vocational Training Institutes (IEK)

Law 4118/2013 (Government Gazette 193/A/17-09-2013), Restructuring of Secondary Education and other provisions, in Chapter D defines the organization and operation of non-formal education institutions, and in particular Article 23 refers to the Vocational Training Institutes and specifies their concept and

foundation. The purpose of a Vocational Training Institute is to provide initial vocational training services to secondary school graduates and Vocational Training School (ΣΕΚ) graduates.

The students of Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) who have received at least 150 wages in their field of expertise, can be exempt, if they wish, according to Article 8 of Law 1599/1996, from the obligation to attend the semester of practical training and are awarded the Certificate of Vocational Training with the completion of four semesters of theoretical and laboratory training. Students of VTI (IEK) can practice with the terms and conditions that apply to VTS (SEK) students, beyond its duration, under the responsibility of the private VTI (IEK) they attend- to persons, tourism businesses or a Legal Entity of Public Law (ΝΠΙΔΔ). The internship period must be continuous or even part-time without exceeding the period of one (1) calendar year.

Supervision, co-ordination, quality assurance, and evaluation of interns are carried out under the responsibility of the Director of VTI (IEK), or by another person designated by the Director as an External Coordinator, whose responsibility is to monitor the presence of the trainee (intern), to ensure the quality of the trainee's working environment, on-the-spot control of the business and to keep an individual internship file with monthly progress reports.

Attendance at VTI (IEK) is completed in five (5) semesters, divided into four (4) semesters of theoretical and laboratory training of a total duration of up to 1,200 academic hours of specialization, according to the approved curricula and into one (1) semester of 1050 hours of practice or internship. Attendance may begin during winter or spring semester, to graduates of secondary non-compulsory formal education or to graduates above this level. The fifth semester of practical training (internship) can take place during the second, third and fourth semester of study. The maximum number per trainer is thirty (30) trainees, in laboratory or theoretical or mixed classes. Article 24 (f) defines occupational groups and refers in particular to Tourist Enterprises and Hospitality Industry Guidelines with the following specialties: 1. Tourism and Hospitality Specialist (Reception Service, Floor Manager Service, Commodity Service) 2. Pastry Bakery (Pastry Chef) 3. Culinary Art (Chef)

10. Tourism and Hospitality Specialist (Reception Service, Floor Manager Service, Commodity Service)

This major has replaced "Hotel and Catering Sector Specialist" major. It consists of 300 hours of theoretical training within 4 semesters. The weekly program consists of 20 hours of theoretical and laboratory lessons. It also includes 960 hours of practice in the tourism sector.

The graduate of such a course acquires certified knowledge, skills and professional qualifications which enable him/her to work in any kind of hotel business (hotels, camping, motels, pensions, vacation centers etc) and especially in their various departments, such as: reception, concierge, restaurant, bar, internal control, food and beverage department.

According to the curriculum, he/she also has the ability to work in all kinds of food businesses (restaurants, bars, catering, fast food etc.). After acquiring some level of experience, he/she can be a senior executive in the businesses mentioned above or take charge of small enterprises of the above type. He/she can also work in pleasure ships and cruise ships. Finally, the tourism and hospitality specialists are entitled to work for an employer or even privately. The Vocational Training Certification is based on final examinations of both Theoretical and Practical Parts (FEK B 1098/30-04-2014, K.A.A. 2944/2014, "Certification of Initial Vocational Training for Graduates of Vocational Training Institutes and Vocational Schools Training", conducted at a national level, based on the current Training Standard for each major. Students that have failed the exams can participate again in the Vocational Qualification Examinations without any restrictions, whenever they are conducted. Examinees who have passed the Theoretical or the Practical Part of the exam, have the right to secure the part they have completed successfully for three (3) consecutive years, during which they participate only in the exams of the part that they have failed. The three-year period commences on the day of the announcement of the test results and ends on the date of completion of three (3) consecutive calendar years. If during these three (3) years they do not succeed in the second test, then they are obliged to resit both two (2) parts of the Vocational Training Examinations (Theoretical and Practical) according to the current Training Standards.

11. Research Methodology

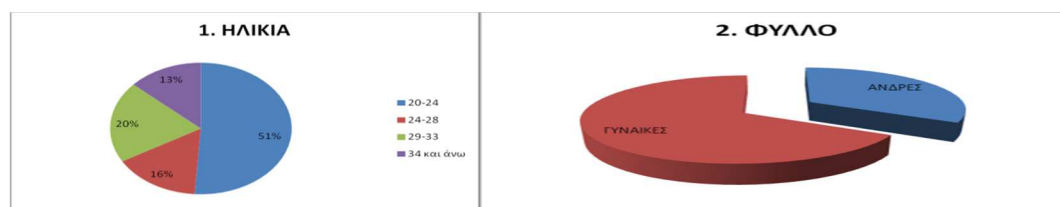
The present field research was based and focused on the tourism major of VTI (IEK) "Tourism and Hospitality Specialist". It was completed during the period of one semester of training from February to June 2017. The sample of this survey includes N = 90 VTI (IEK) graduates. The research findings obtained from the analysis of the questionnaires have the following characteristics.

Regarding the age of the graduates, the majority (51.11%) is in the 20-24 age group. There are also percentages corresponding to higher age groups, such as from 29 to 33 years (20%) and over 34 years old (13.33%). This fact highlights the tendency to seek employment in tourism, probably due to the growth of the tourism sector in Greece that increases also the demand for tourism education.

Figure 1.

Age Distribution

Gender Distribution



Regarding the gender of the graduates surveyed, 36.57% were men and 64.44% were women. The high percentage of women emphasizes the increased interest of women in hospitality businesses compared to men.

The basic criterion for graduates to select this type of education was the easy employment opportunities (40%). 23.33% were influenced by friends or family members, while 20% of the respondents chose this course because VTI was close to their place of residence.

Table 2. Criteria for Selecting Hotel Management

CRITERIA	N	%
CLOSE TO THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE	18	20,00
DUE TO FAMILY TOURIST BUSINESS	5	5,56
INFLUENCED BY FRIENDS OR FAMILY MEMBERS	21	23,33
EASY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	36	40,00
RANDOM/ BY CHANCE	4	4,44
OTHER	6	6,67
		100,0
TOTAL	90	0

It is worth noting that in the category "OTHER" the respondents wrote criteria such as: my place of origin is a tourist destination, interest in the tourism sector, and experience in the tourism sector.

Regarding the employment status of the graduates, that is whether they are working or not, and if they are working, whether they are in the tourism sector or not, 57% of graduates replied that they are working in the tourism sector, 19% of respondents are permanently unemployed, while the percentage of those seasonally unemployed reaches 10%. The percentage of graduates who continue to study at higher level schools is 4%. It should be noted that a small percentage of graduates (9%) work in sectors that are not related to tourism whatsoever. In regard to the post-graduate occupational field, 43% were employed in a catering facility (Restaurant), 25% in Hotel Reception and Reservations area, 12% in bar and 8% in floor management-accommodation. Consequently, the main occupational fields are restaurants and hotel reception-reservations areas.

Following is an evaluation of the knowledge that graduates acquired in terms of tourism, as a general context. The evaluation was performed by the Likert scale and for each criterion the average of the relative score was calculated, and the degree of correlation was examined. It was measured in a 5-point scale from absolute negative to absolute positive. 54% of the graduates said they had a positive or totally positive attitude towards the knowledge provided, indicating that the syllabus corresponds to the tourism sector, 29% had a neutral attitude, while 17% of graduates were found to evaluate negatively the knowledge provided through this syllabus. It is worthwhile to note, that no graduate has stated that his/her experience was absolutely negative.

The program study in general was also evaluated with a number of criteria, such as the quality of the teaching staff, the facilities, laboratories and equipment, the secretarial support, library services, online services, job opportunities and the theoretical and practical framework of the syllabus.

Secretarial support and job opportunities were evaluated with the highest positive attitude, close to the value of '5' (Average = 4.43 and 4.37 respectively). The library, the practical and the theoretical framework of the program, as well as the teaching staff were assessed positively, as their average score was well above the '3' value, which represents the neutral attitude. These areas are therefore rather well-assessed.

Laboratory and building facilities are rated neutral by graduates as their average mark was very close to the relative value of '3' (average = 2.93 and 2.92 respectively), implying that graduates are not so satisfied. Finally, online services were evaluated rather negatively by graduates, as they received a fairly low score well below the value of '3' (average= 2.17).

The participation of graduates in the EOIИIEИ (National Agency for Certification of Acquired Competence and Skills) certification exams was also examined. It must also be noted that the graduates in the sample have not participated in the EOIИIEИ (National Agency for Certification of Acquired Competence and Skills) certification exams after their graduation and the reason that has led the graduates not to participate in these exams (72.22%) is that they have not been able to do so yet, a rather reasonable answer, since the survey was conducted close to their graduation. It is also worth noting that some of the graduates stated that they had not been informed about this type of certification (14.44%), while a small percentage (7.78%) said they were not prepared. It is worth pointing out that no graduate has stated that he/she does not need such certification.

It is noted that most of the courses are highly evaluated, as the scoring averages are above the '4' value, implying a tendency for a positive to a totally positive attitude. More specifically, the courses "Restaurant Organization and Operation" as well as "Foreign Languages" reached the highest averages. Knowledge and skills acquired by the curriculum for professional fields including floor management (rooms-accommodation), catering, cleaning, bar, restaurant and reception were also evaluated. For each lesson, the average of the relative score was calculated both on a high to low scale and on how much it tends towards '1' or '5'. More than half of graduates (62.22%) stated that internship is absolutely important within an integrated curriculum. In total almost 83% of graduates stated that internship is important or very important, while only about 17% of graduates simply expressed a neutral attitude.

The majority of graduates (63.33%) believe that internship should be implemented after the training course has been completed, since students have acquired knowledge and skills and can complete their training through practical experience. The rest of the graduates believe that practice should be implemented either in the middle or at the end of the studies, while no one wishes to be implemented in the middle of the studies because the knowledge acquired is not sufficient yet. The vast majority of graduates (72.22%) believe that

internship should last for 6 months, while smaller percentages indicate shorter or longer duration. 84% of the graduates stated that they would encourage others to pursue studies in tourism, while the remaining percentage of graduates simply said they did not know. It is worth noting that no graduate student had a negative attitude towards the course he/she attended. 68.89% of graduates wish to continue their studies while about 13% of graduates do not consider continuing them. The vast majority of graduates (72.22%) stated that the importance of a tourism diploma for finding a job is very high, while almost the entire sample stated that this is rather important or very important. In fact, almost all the graduates believed, more or less, that the degree in tourism science gives them the knowledge and qualifications needed for them to be competitive in the tourism sector.

Conclusion

The High Absorption Level of Graduates in the Tourism Market Indicates the Great Preference of Graduates for Easy Professional Placement.

The rate demonstrates a shift towards a professional orientation relevant to tourism, probably due to the crisis in other sectors of the economy. Of great importance is also the high level of satisfaction of the graduates from their education, the job prospects, as well as the theoretical and practical framework of the program study. In the market, graduates were mainly employed in the food sector. However, the study program for the major in question, should have a clearer orientation with courses related to Reception and Reservation. The perception of graduates for studies in the tourism sector is positive as they believe that the acquisition of a diploma in the tourism industry is an important comparative advantage for seeking employment.

Human resources are also a competitive advantage in the Hospitality industry. Employees with vocational training, a clear role description and high motivation can increase productivity and can effectively contribute to customer satisfaction. For an educational system to work efficiently at an economic and social level, it must be based on two main ideas: The first is expressed through the link between development policy and education policy and the strategy implemented by the education system and those providing it, with the necessary skills that will support national priorities in the productive sectors and will lead to development and growth. It is also expressed through acquiring qualifications for graduates, in order to provide high level services in the respective fields, enhancing in this way the competitiveness of their professional sector. The second idea is expressed through the structure and quality of curricula (program studies) with the development of learning outcomes and, in particular, through the way skills and competencies are developed in connection to the market, as long as internship and apprenticeship are integrated into the structure of the training program.

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