Bridging the Gap between Hospitality Higher Education Graduates and the Market Requirements
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Abstract
Hospitality higher education has basically evolved to supply the industry with competent professionals. Faculties of tourism and hotels in Egypt have tried to provide the market with candidates that match the market requirements and to enhance students by equipping them with adequate competencies that meet the market needs. Many graduates have changed their hospitality careers, others are still working in the tourism sector, sometimes in other areas than what they were specialized in. Some have found jobs that match their education, either locally, or abroad. There has always been this gap between the main three components affecting the hospitality market, represented in (a) academia, and the effectiveness of the taught material, compared to the real jobs in the market, (b) students or graduates, who may have to change their whole career, just to fit in a good job, and (c) stakeholders, fulfilling the criteria they are looking for, in quality candidates for future jobs. The objective of this paper is to explore the causes of this gap via collecting answers from both graduates of FTH in Egypt and experts of the industry. The paper is accomplished through distributing online questionnaires for: (I) graduates of various faculties of tourism and hotels in Egypt, and (II) stakeholders, via gathering responses that reflect their viewpoints of the actual quality of recent graduates. The findings of this paper are important as they represent real answers of graduates of the hospitality career who were grouped years ago on the social network, thus making sure the data collected is related to the issue of the hospitality industry and thus reaching results that help provide the industry with better qualified graduates.

Key words: Hospitality graduates, gap, hospitality stakeholders, academia, quality graduates.

Introduction
According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, hospitality industry is estimated to have a total of 262.6 million jobs which presented the world's workforce by the year 2017 and being one of the most resilient industries in the world" (WTTC 2009). There's a gap between academics and practitioners in all educational institutions and industries (Alhelalat, 2015). The role of academic institutions has always been announced as preparing students for employment and giving them an easy guidance to business and industry, as stated by both Waryszak, (1999) Ogbede, (2006). According to Johnstone (1994) there are large discrepancies between formal training and employer demands in the hospitality industry. In most countries, there is a considerable gap between what is learned in classroom and the world of work in the hospitality industry. (Honnny, 2014). Academic hospitality programs should be addressing the skills that are deemed necessary for graduates to have, yet these programs are leaving some or many of these skills to be taught by the employers. (Honnny, 2014) In hospitality, the topic has been researched before to define the academic-practitioner divide and to discuss the needed skills of graduates to meet the needs of the employers. (Alhelalat, 2015)

Higher Education in Hospitality and Tourism in Egypt
In Egypt, hospitality/tourism higher education faces great challenges in finding places for graduates of the Faculties of Tourism and Hotels all over the country. As for graduates, they feel that they have done their jobs and have graduated to find a decent position in the
hospitality industry. Although many graduates have found jobs and are already working in this career, still some found it difficult to get a job opportunity and still either waiting for a good chance to come along or have already totally changed the hospitality career, in searching for a vacant job. The important skills needed by students to posses to fit into the hospitality industry, differ from one country to another (Sarkodie & Adom, 2015). It is believed that education is a vehicle for social and economic transformation. It brings about progress and economic development. Therefore, the maximum aim of any educational institution is to improve the quality of teaching and learning to achieve its objectives. (Sarkodie & Adom, 2015).

The Importance of the Research Problem
The importance of the study stems from the need of understanding the gap between education programs and industry requirements. According to Solnet, Robinson & Cooper (2007) tourism and hospitality management are applied fields that call for close links between hospitality industry and academics, curriculum development experts and students, but strategies for the industry engagement are often haphazard in many educational institutions, and lack focus, commitment and resources. (Avornyo, 2013) According to Wade's (1999) Groschl & Barrows, (2003) and McGing, (2006) it was found that education does influence management style while also their findings also conforms to the result suggesting that students' attitudes and actions are influenced positively by their learning experience, and that the hospitality curriculum can be a force for change. A graduate of hospitality will have an understanding of the concepts underpinning the consumer experience and a concern for enriching the life experiences of people, both as consumers, participants and providers" (Rees et al., 2006)

Literature Review
Aims of the Hospitality Education
From the point of view of Jenkins (1999) hospitality education aims to:
- Advance knowledge and understanding of the subject; to disseminate knowledge through teaching, research and publications
- To educate public, students and industry
- Wood, (2003) conducted a research to discover the management skills that are seen as important by industry recruiters. The results of the study showed that leadership was the number one skill which employers found important to be possessed by hospitality graduates, followed by employee relations, while problem resolution ranked third.

Major Courses in Hospitality Industry
According to the UK Higher Education Academy, the courses that are given in the hospitality education field are related to: hospitality management, hotel management, restaurant management, catering management, culinary arts, events and conferencing management, cruise management and gaming management (Rees et al., 2006) In Egypt, hospitality education institutions vary from high schools, to high institutions and universities, with degrees from higher diploma to bachelor and postgraduate degrees, providing courses related to hospitality and hotel management, restaurant management, menu planning, culinary arts, Food and Beverage management, and so forth.

Students’ Needs from the Academic Institutions
Institution’s reputation, academic quality, program accreditation, and industry recognition were the answer to a big question related to what students need from their academic institutions and programs. (Alhelalat, 2015).
Maher and Neild (2005) as cited in Alhelalat, (2015) found that employers in the hospitality industry think that around half of hospitality graduates are less prepared for the industry. The main issue was the graduates' communication skills, teamwork skills and time management. There are two different points of view; while students think that their skills are enough to get a job in the industry, executives focus more on the personality and value attitudinal attributes more than skills (Harkison et al., 2011).

According to Connolly and McGing (2006) and Sarkodie and Adom, (2015), they all suggested that hospitality courses should consist of strong practical skills.

Examples of hospitality educational programs worldwide
In Switzerland: There's a focus on preparing students to the industry by increasing their knowledge and skills in different fields which are related to their future career. For example, Less Roches' (a swiss hotel school) has a mission to broaden the students' understanding of the arts, social sciences and to develop students' common skills that enable them to perform effectively in the future and to function confidently as members of the society. (Alhelalat, 2015)
In DeVry University: The course design of the hospitality program focuses on increasing the students' knowledge of the industry, communication skills, human relation skills, morals and ethics, and the hospitality industry's role in the development of local community. (Alhelalat, 2015)
In Canada: The Canadian government has set some standards for skills which hospitality students have to learn. In these standards, the focus is on communication, analysis, technology, teamwork, problem solving, innovation, responsibility and employment skills. (Alhelalat, 2015)
A unique approach that Cornell University School of Administration is taking to meet the demand of students and job market is to apply a "freshman level principles of management" course, in which students are required to create a "real life" business plan and then implement the plan along with laboratory work where they actually research, plan and implement business plans. According to Crockett, (2002) this course actually helps students learn through a "real world" experience. The "real world" environment gives them the opportunity to put their skills and knowledge to a test, to learn from their mistakes and celebrate their accomplishments. (Honny, 2014)

Graduates Gap and the possibility of meeting industry needs
Each industry has its own requirements which must be possessed by its workers. These requirements are needed for the efficiency and productivity of the industry. However, graduates of tourism and hospitality are seen as incapable of working efficiently in the industry in which they have been trained to work.
There are many reasons why graduates are unable to work properly in the industry; some graduates think that its due to inadequate computer training, others think that they face multi-lingual barriers and short period of training, others have difficulty in applying what was learnt in university theoretically to practical life.
Most of graduates think that the best solution to bridge the gap is by the collaboration between the hospitality industry and educational hospitality institutions.
As cited in Bach and Milman (1996) by Shariff, (2013) who developed four clusters of skills which must be possessed by the students of hospitality in order to become part of the industry workplace. These four clusters are:
- Business functional skills
- Hospitality functional skills
- Analytical skills
- Personal skills

Tesone and Ricci (2005) were cited in Shariff, (2013) who suggested that the hospitality industry has unrealistic expectations of the graduates coming from secondary and higher education programs. They think that there is a strong relationship between the hospitality education and industry expectations. The solution for this issue is that educational institutions should offer the students a higher quality of hospitality education in order to meet the needs of the industry.

Table 1: Skill gaps identified among European school leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual aptitudes</th>
<th>Behavioral aptitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning capacity</td>
<td>Initiative, curiosity, creativity and innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery of own language</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical assessment</td>
<td>Commitment to decide, to get things moving and to achieve professionalism, excellence, distinctive competitive edge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and openness with the three cultures:</td>
<td>Communication including languages and team work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maths/sciences/technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Humanities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Economics &amp; Social sciences</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Round Table of Industrialists, 1997

Slee (1989) of the Confederation of the British Industry, as cited in Dunne and Rawlins (2000), set out the employer perspective, as follows: "The common dominator of highly qualified manpower with –the ability to think, learn and adapt personal transferable skills- problem solving, communication, teamwork- rather than technical skills defined with narrow occupational ranges will come to form the stabilizing characteristic of work: if higher education is to meet the needs of economy and the individual it must seek actively to develop these generic core competencies".

Table 2: A possible list of composite skills identified from international frameworks of employability skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skills</th>
<th>Intellectual Abilities</th>
<th>Personal Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation skills</td>
<td>Thinking skills</td>
<td>Continuous learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens and understands and speaks clearly and directly</td>
<td>Able to make decisions</td>
<td>Acknowledges the need to learn in order to accommodate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands written documents and writes clearly</td>
<td>Capable problem-solver</td>
<td>Open to new ideas and techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands tables of figures, able to interpret graphs, able to calculate</td>
<td>Innovative – adapts to new situations</td>
<td>Is prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Information and communications technology skills**
- Is aware of and willing to use a range of technologies
- Uses technology to seek, process, and present information

**Contextual understanding**
- Knows own role in the work situation
- Understands interrelationships among workplace processes and systems
- Can diagnose systems (process) deficiencies
- Can design, implement, and monitor corrective actions*

**Personal attributes**
- Has positive self esteem
- Understands that own actions influence others
- Is self-manager, resourceful, shows initiative and effort
- Displays sense of ethics including integrity and honesty
- Accepts responsibility for own actions
- Seeks and accepts feedback

**Organizational skills**
- Is able to manage own time and to seek needed resources to complete set tasks
- Sets goals and engages others in achieving those goals
- Establishes clear project goals and deliverables
- Allocates people and other resources (e.g., budgets, materials, space) to tasks
- Sets time lines and coordinates sub-tasks
- Is able to adapt resource allocations to cope with contingencies*

**Interpersonal skills**
- Shows cultural sensitivity
- Committed to client service
- Able to negotiate
- Works well with others, individually and in teams*
- Shows leadership
- Can develop a strategic vision, set goals, and monitor performance
- Communicates goals and targets, engages and enthuses subordinates towards a shared vision*

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Note:* Indicates that the attribute is expected of experienced workers, but not of new entrants to the workforce

Source: Employability skills for Australian Industry: Literature Review and Framework Development.

In the study stated by Breiter & Clements in 1998, the top three skills deemed important by hospitality recruiters of new graduates were:
- Leadership skills
- Managerial Communication and
- Employee Relations

According to the same study by Breiter & Clements (1998), they mentioned that as educators plan the program curricula of the future, they must develop ways to prepare students to be innovators of the future while providing key concepts that industry demands. They predict that excellent human and conceptual skills will be very important into the 21st century. (Honny, 2014)
The aim of the study
The main aim of the study was to explore the perception of faculty of tourism and hotels' graduates, on the needed important skills in the hospitality work career and to investigate, via collecting the viewpoints of some specialists in the hospitality, to help graduates know what skills they need to work on, to have better chances of jobs in the hospitality career.

Research Questions
This study was conducted to collect answers to the following questions:
- Are the courses studied at the faculty of tourism and hotels good enough to prepare graduates to meet the market requirements?
- Is there any collaboration between the industry and the academics to make sure graduates skills meet the market requirements?
- And finally, how many of graduates actually work in the hospitality career?

Methodology
The research was conducted using the descriptive analytical approach. The aim of the research was to explore both graduates' perceptions regarding how far was the courses studied related to the real life and working career. The population of the study was made up of graduates of the Faculties of tourism and hotels in Egypt (representing graduates of the various faculties of tourism and hotels since their beginnings). A total sample of 344 answered online questionnaires was collected.
Another online questionnaire form was distributed among owners of travel agencies and hospitality specialists. In search for the reasons why some graduates stayed unemployed, or had to change career, and what skills they need to be able to work in hospitality. The forms were mailed to managers and owners as links, and a total of 84 answers out of 100 were collected.

Field Study
The first online questionnaire was directed to hospitality graduates, of the FTH, covering the different three existing departments (Tour Guiding, Tourism Studies and Hotel Studies).
The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine the reason(s) if anyone had to change from the hospitality career as a whole, and to know, from their points of views, what they were thinking –if found that, there is a gap between academia and the real market, after having been working there. Finally, to know whether they have studied such material that prepared them to face real practical life after graduation.
The second form was directed to owners of travel establishments, experts of hospitality, and managers in various hotels (some of them were already old graduates of the FTH). A sample of their questionnaire form can be found at the end of this paper.

Data Analysis
Data Collected from graduates were 344 answered online questionnaires.
Gender Responses 

Male 84% 
Female 16%
As for graduates who are still working in Egyptian market and those who are working abroad, the respondents gave the following percentage.

It was also found that the majority of respondents working in the career now were mainly graduates of the Hotel Studies Dept. The respondents represented graduates of all three departments of the faculties of Tourism and Hotels, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Studies</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Studies</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The positions they are holding are ranging from Nile cruise guides, managers, revenue managers, HR Managers, Hotel Duty Managers, Owners, flight managers, flight attendants, FO Managers, Sales Managers, Ticketing and reservations, Head Chefs, etc. both in Egypt and abroad (in Dubai, USA, KSA, etc…)
As for answering the question about working in the same career, it was found that 62% are still working in the hospitality career, while only 38% are not.
Some of the reasons they gave for not working in the hospitality career vary, as follows:

Figure 3: Graduates in the same career

- Couldn't find a job in hospitality
- No compatibility between work and what was studied at the faculty.
- Has totally changed the career (diving, shipping, etc)
- Expanded at working in Marketing and PR (in a way that was not included in the studied courses)
- Changed career from hotels dept to guidance.
- Changed career into commercial airline industry
- Started his/her own business after working in the career for a while.
- Worked abroad after a while because of the low salaries.
- Study didn't meet the requirements of career and hospitality industry.
- As for the question regarding the relationship between what was studied at the educational establishment and working in the real life of the hospitality career:

Table 4: Opinions on how close is studied subjects to real-life-hospitality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Related</th>
<th>Somewhat Related</th>
<th>Closely Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the comments they added were:
- Some courses need to be updated to meet work requirements.
- There is a Huge Gap between what was learned and the real jobs.
- Education gained is not relative to the real work life.
- In early years, it was really closely related, unlike today.
- Needed more practical training to face real hospitality career.
As for analyzing the data of Experts' online questionnaire, the following results evolved:
Hospitality career recruits from the different graduates of FTH, as follows:
Hospitality managers look for hiring FTH graduates, followed by those who have worked a while and have some experience in this career. The industry experts are looking for the following qualities in graduates of FTH:
1. Good communication
2. Language perfection
3. Appearance

Figure 4: Qualities required in hiring new candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Hospitality recruits of different departments of FTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion
The main new paradigm in hospitality education calls for preparing future industry leaders who will be able to shape the future of the industry. (Baume, 1999)
This study was set out to explore both opinions of hospitality graduates as well as opinions of hospitality experts and Travel company owners in an approach to explore the reasons causing the existing gap between hospitality higher education and the real requirements of the hospitality career. The field study showed the importance of communication skills, multi lingual and operational skills. Educational institutions should focus on practical training that is very close to real life hospitality. Graduates are mainly unable to deliver because they haven't got the related skills that can help them perform better in the industry. The industry are actually willing to hire more graduates of FTH in Egypt other than other educational establishments, and the reasons they are doing so is because they have some experience, are more flexible to learn and get trained, have better educational content, better foreign language, they can easily be groomed and they are willing to work in a team. It is clearly the role of both Hospitality Educational establishments and the hospitality industry to come to an arrangement that ensures better qualified graduates and better performance in the market.

The main weaknesses found in graduates of FTH were the following:
- Lack of practical training
- Lack of previous experience in hospitality
- Declining of the level of foreign languages
- What is studied is not closely related to real life career.
Some of the suggested solutions to overcome these problems were:
- Developing the teaching system at FTH to meet market needs.
- Studying some courses in foreign language is a must.
- Supervising the practical training and the level of students' performance.
- The use of up-to-date technology in hospitality education to meet market needs.
- Training students on how to use online Applications, and know how to analyze customers' reviews.

Recommendations
Based on the findings, it is recommended that the core skills of higher education continues; graduate recruitment processes tend to focus on key skills, personal transferable skills, generic skills, employment skills within all these terms, aspects of communication problem solving and teamwork in the demands of application forms, interviews and assessment centers: hence to enter the labor market, graduates need to be equipped with such skills.

The perfection of a foreign language is a must, and to overcome this problem, some courses should be taught in a foreign language.
- There should be a close collaboration between the educators and the industry so that students graduate knowing the expectations of the hotel managers and executives.
- Academic should use updated technology in teaching hospitality.
- Practical Training is very important to all students, to prepare them to meet the real life of hospitality.
- Hotel executives have to believe in the skills of hospitality graduates and to give them the adequate training that enables them to do their jobs properly.
- Students need to have lectures in grooming on how to get dressed for certain occasions, and how to communicate.
- There should be seminars, workshops and conferences on a regular basis in order to exchange theoretical and practical knowledge between professors, students and speakers from the field.
- Students should be exposed to fieldtrips to be aware of the current trends and the best practices and there should be development in teaching materials and laboratories to create a better environment for students.
- Students should spend about 12 weeks of internship and they should rotate in different sections to acquire skills in many areas.

Future Recommendations
Training students should be well-focused on mainly leadership skills, managerial communication and employee relation, which will -in turn- prepare students to be creative and innovative. The recommendations for future more qualified graduates begins from the phase of interviewing new students, applying to join High Educational Hospitality Establishments, as it should be clear that they will be chosen according to their language perfection, personality and grooming, personal attitudes, as well as required skills that qualify them to succeed in the hospitality career. Candidates should be interviewed after the announcement of High School results, and after having filled the list of choices of educational establishments, to be sure that those who are applying to join the hospitality industry are really interested to work and continue in this field. Therefore, interviews should be planned and managed differently, and this should be applied in all hospitality educational establishments.
Experts Online Questionnaire Form
The form inquired about the following information:

- Address
- Your Establishment recruits graduates of which of the following departments:
  - Tour Guiding
  - Tourism
  - Hotels Management
- Which graduates of the following do you prefer to hire?
  - Hospitality institutions
  - Graduates with previous job experience
  - Graduates of FTH
- Please give the reasons why you prefer to hire from such educational establishment
- What are the main qualities that you look for when you are looking for new-comers?
- In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses you found in graduates of FTH?
- In your opinion, how can these weaknesses be overcome?
- What do you think students need to be more updated about the business requirements?
- In your opinion, how can the industry and staff members communicate to ensure better quality of graduates?
- Please give us some suggestions to ensure better quality of graduates that meet hospitality job requirements.

References


