

Analyzing the impact of tourism education on the effective resource valorization in Lebanon

By

Gaby Khoury

Lebanese International University

Email: gaby.khoury@liu.edu.lb

Georges Bellos

Lebanese International University

Email: 61610009@students.liu.edu.lb

Abstract

This research seeks to explore whether including tourism curricula in academic educational institutions promote the effective valorization of Lebanon's resources. In terms of type and focus, the study deals with investigating the impact of tourism education on resource valorization. This aims at providing perspectives on educational institutions that encourage local development via tourism education, in order to raise awareness of the importance of valorizing one's resources. While tourism education pertains to guiding and orienting students towards the tourism industry as a potential employer, this definition could be extended to encompass educating the general public, as well as potential tourists. To further carry over this investigation, we conducted a qualitative study in gathering data from interviews, and from comparing the interview responses with previously collected secondary data. The adopted research methodology caters to interpretivist views, using an inductive approach, and action research strategy adapted to collecting and interpreting qualitative survey data. Meanwhile, the cross-sectional time horizons were conveniently chosen, and the judgmental sampling strategies were selected for recruiting specific experts for the interviews. Results validated the existence of a link between tourism education course implementation and the proper valorization of a country's resources. Through studying the relationship at hand, this link exhibited a noticeable positive relationship between tourism education curricula and effective valorization of Lebanon's resources.

Index Terms—Heritage site upkeep, Resource valorization, Tourism education Implementation, Lebanon.

Introduction

The tourism industry has been the backbone of the Lebanese economy for a very long time, and has had its golden era in the sixties and early seventies before the breakout of a 15-year long civil war that destroyed most of the country's infrastructure. Since then, and what was supposed to be a post war recovery period, and as result of corruption and nepotism at the highest levels of government, Lebanon plunged further into political turmoil resulting in massive financial debacle that led to an unprecedented economic collapse. Needless to say, throughout that period the cultural heritage was totally ignored. Now, with the economy in extreme need for jump start, it is only natural to turn back to the tourism industry as a potential savior. To this respect, an economic recovery plan, with tourism at its core, must begin with

the overhaul of the currently outdated tourism education curricula, to prepare students for the very competitive market of today's tourism. Besides preparing students for the job market with the needed professional skills, they should be taught about the importance of preserving their history, culture, and heritage towards their valorization. In this context, valorization means adding touristic value to a site in order to preserve and benefit from it as a sustainable source revenue.

Aims and objectives

This study seeks to find out how tourism education could enhance proper resource management in Lebanon, a largely tourism-dependent country. It intends to do so through the use of multi-qualitative research methods. This is since the study needs to interview expert educators about how tourism

Education courses can be effectively implemented to enhance the valorization of heritage sites, and to see if the students taking such courses will actually get oriented to the tourism sector [14].

While there are many suggestions in the literature, on how to improve the curricula or the delivery of tourism education courses, the selected experts will detail their opinions on this issue. In particular, the study could pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum or tourism education programs and how they can be improved [35, 36, 37]. Meanwhile, in terms of scope, the paper sets to assess the current situation in valorizing Lebanon's natural, cultural and touristic resources, and to see the extent of the willingness of the Lebanese youths in doing this.

Research problem

While the research problem will cover issues about education and resource valorization, the rationale of the study or reasons to carry it out is to propose a solution to a pressing issue. While this could be part of the rationale, it is better to label the problem, which the actual study wishes to resolve, and then discuss reasons why to resolve it. Therefore, by discussing the problem statement (as educators and as citizens, instructors in schools or university professors should encourage students to learn what they need to know in terms of valorization?), the authors seek to identify the best ways in doing so.

In terms of adverse impacts, in the past, it was noticed that poorly educating students, would negatively influence their involvement in the tourism sector or in seeing the importance of valorizing Lebanon's resources (constituting controversies in results). However, anticipated results could indicate a positive relationship between education and valorization. Lebanon's youths should be aware of this, since also, implementing the culture of tourism in theory should entice them to get involved in constructive tourism activities.

As a result, and, as the study seeks to assess what are the best ways that instructors in schools or university professors should follow to encourage students to learn the right way in terms of valorization, the researchers need to be conducting a multi-qualitative study to best answer this question.

Research questions

While the study seeks to undergo action research, the current paper will be using interpretivist methods, and therefore will only seek to answer the research question(s). In terms of action research, it is a research method that stipulates the design of solutions for existing problems [35, 36, 37]. While being qualitative, hypotheses therefore will not be needed. Yet,

postulates (if needed, and designed after the research ends) will be shown in the recommendation section.

By rephrasing the objective or the research problem statements, one asks if there is a need to encourage curricular reforms, implement tourism education or promote resource valorization to better preserve our natural, cultural and touristic heritage sites or not. So, what the relationship between tourism education and resource valorizations, is the main research question to be answered in this study.

Study Context

The current study has taken place in Lebanon and needs to focus on schools and universities and what is being done currently on issues of tourism education and if the current programs adequately address valorization. Although the problems Lebanon currently faces were introduced before, the current hyperinflation, geopolitical tensions, and the pandemic make it harder for the country's economy not to collapse.

As literature found out, and while it is common practice that "students must be exposed to this inconvenient truth about the ignorance of society to valorizing heritage", they need to be better educated about this, stressing that implementing tourism culture will enhance student involvement with tourism education. This point will help in discussing the question about the relationship between tourism education and resource valorization, while some experts believe the link exists and needs investigation [10].

Literature review

This section presents the theoretical framework for the study and develops the topic, by discussing tourism education and resource valorization independently. Some of the aforementioned gaps (discussed in the research problem section), will require more in-depth discussion, in terms of the links between tourism education and resource valorization, through curricula [10]. For this reason, tourism education is our independent variable (IV), while resource valorization is our dependent variable (DV). However, some experts in tourism sciences and education think, they could be either interchanged, or are cyclical in nature [15].

Tourism Education

Tourism Education entails the way that touristic destinations prepare the human resources to be able to work professionally in developing the tourism sector. It also refers to instructing students about the significance of resource valorization but not in educating tourists. While current worldwide trends are on resource valorization, survivability, and sustainability, the programs in Lebanon are still concentrating on mass tourism.

In terms of its beginnings, this domain was simply meant as educating tourists on their behavior, while today, it is a science, as taught in universities or specialized schools. At the same time, educating the general public is possible through tourism awareness campaigns and community outreach programs initiated by schools and universities., and even the tourism industry itself, since it is currently, concerned with restructuring itself post-pandemic, In terms of current trends and outlooks the International Air Transport Association (IATA), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), guide us [40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46].

In some cases, tourism education programs appear adequate in the field, but in others they address obsolete views of the industry [10]. In other instances, related courses following

different syllabi do not tackle the destination's main needs or don't seem to cover valorization issues. Against this background, four sources of tourism education are discussed [46].

Academic Education: is the type of instruction provided by educational institutions and has the shared role of schools, universities, and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). Firstly, in terms of the roles of educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities), they need to ensure students get the skills needed by the industry. Secondly, they should ensure that they are prepared for the professional world by providing learners with the proper training programs [46]. Finally, the MEHE takes the lead in educating students either through academic programs in tourism, or in related fields. Schools and universities must, under the auspices of the MEHE, instruct students following, or planning to follow, a career in the tourism sector, to be properly trained [4].

While the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) takes the lead in educating tourism students through vocational programs, or through courses providing certificates that are under its auspices [46], the Ministry of Culture (MOC) also plays a marginal role in tourism education, about valorizing heritage sites or up keeping a country's cultural aspects, where the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) plays a pivotal role. Thus, both the MOT and the MOC could be in charge of educating professionals on specific types of tourism and could take the lead in professional tourism education, while fully collaborating with the MEHE.

Education of the public: entails the instruction of people, members of a community, through public awareness campaigns, or educating tourists by way of forms of training that fulfills the tourist's needs and motivation to gain knowledge [4]. This type of education could be formal (via the MOC, MEHE and/or MOT), or informal [10]. A question to ask is how and what to educate students and the public about each type of tourism? And, who should be involved in this process?

All students learning about the profession in either vocational or academic backgrounds, are those who consider becoming professionals in the sector [4]. The public at large also needs to be exposed to tourism education, since both students and the public need to be aware of the tourism industry's best practices in terms of site preservation and resource valorization, while taking into account that the sites themselves are resources.

The stakeholders are the schools themselves, the tourism sector, and the communities in which the institutions are hosted, as well as anyone who shows an interest in this industry. This also includes youths who are potentially joining the industry. In theory, they take the courses as given by the schools who teach them since they should be involved in society, as the school's role is to instruct the curricula, accredited by the MEHE, while the instructors are responsible for conveying the courses to the students, who learn the material [4,10]. Lastly, this should be done through multilateral collaborations and full citizen or stakeholder cooperation as it's vital to educate people to valorize heritage sites [15, 21]. An important part of the stakeholders are the "Conseil du Développement et de Reconstruction" (CDR), Directorate General of Urbanism (DGU), SOLIDÈRE and Ministry of Public Works (MOPW), as they represent the developers and potential candidates to benefit from awareness workshops about site and resource valorization.

Types of tourism

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), there are various types of tourism that one must have heard of, while adventure, business, experiential, gastronomic, leisure, sports, sustainable, and wellness tourism are the most well-known types [46].

Some of these were linked to mass tourism. Mass tourism was pervasive pre-COVID and entailed tourism through organized tours and all-inclusive packages [46]. As said by the UNWTO, The industry post-pandemic will promote slow tourism trends instead of mass tourism [46]. The trends of this quickly paced tourism are soon to be abolished with the end of the pandemic.

Cultural tourism encompasses archeological, heritage, historical, and religions tourism types. Based on the UNWTO, cultural tourism is “movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, and include religious and historical tourism types as being subsets of cultural tourism” [46].

According to the UNWTO, historical tourism is also called heritage tourism, or “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes visiting archeological, cultural, historical, and natural sites” [46].

As stated by the UNWTO, religious tourism, spiritual tourism, sacred tourism, or faith tourism, is a type of tourism with two main subtypes: pilgrimage, meaning travel for spiritual or religious purposes, and the viewing of religious monuments and artifacts, a branch of sightseeing [46, 47].

Nature-based tourism is defined as the responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people. It is tourism based on the natural attractions of an area. Based on the UNWTO, examples include bird watching, camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, photography, stargazing, and visiting parks [46].

Following the UNWTO, business tourism or business travel is a more limited and focused subset of regular tourism. During business tourism, individuals are still working and being paid, but are doing so away from both their workplace and home, but aren't digital nomads [46].

Based on the UNWTO, luxury tourism, or luxury travel, is associated with exclusive and unique experiences, as well as more personalized services. When making a purchase, high-level travelers first choose the destination and then the on-site service, preferably exclusive boutique hotels, followed by international hotel chains [46].

According to the UNWTO, health tourism is generally defined as organized travel outside one's local environment for the maintenance, enhancement, or restoration of an individual's wellbeing in mind and body [46].

As stated by the UNWTO, medical tourism is defined as the traveling activities of patients seeking low-cost treatment in third-world countries. Lately, this field of tourism has been growing very fast due to the specialization of medical agencies, hospitals, and medical professionals. .Medical tourism refers to people traveling abroad to obtain medical treatment. In the past, this usually referred to those who traveled from less-developed countries to major medical centers in highly developed countries for treatment unavailable at home [46].

Following the UNWTO, wellness tourists travel to promote health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual activities [46].

The last type is explained hereafter. “Let's say you're thinking about becoming a digital nomad this summer, making the majority of your company's work-from-home policy as borders reopen before the bosses require you back in the office”. A digital nomad is someone who performs her/his occupation entirely over the Internet while traveling. As such, these types of tourists are people who conduct their life in a nomadic manner while engaging in remote work using digital and information and communications technology (ICT) systems [30, 46].

Resource Valorization

The social role valorization (SRV) theory says that to enjoy the good things in life, people need to have valued social roles. While the valorization and management (VAM) theory is a theorem related to valuating the asset itself as much as human capital. Failure to do so could lead to devalorizing the asset [49].

Several other theories can be defined to explain this variable as well. In this case, this variable is defined through its indicators. The more a site is valorized, the better its tourism activities will be and subsequently will have an increased economic value with higher financial returns to the interest of all stakeholders. Also, people can use these sites as examples, through tourism education, to show the importance of valorizing sites, thus showing connectivity between these variables. So, how to valorize touristic sites/types in general? And, what are the requirements?

The general valorization requirements (like things to do to valorize any site) are linked to having access and promoting all supporting resources from human resources, to education, to funding, and above all, the will to valorize.

Tourism resources

This is important because we need to know what we are valorizing. In resources terms, although not all of the assets a country seeks to add value to, invest in, or enhance, directly benefit tourism. Since many of the major resources that any country could possess are just natural and geological resources (like oil and gas reserves, which Lebanon has but is not valuating) they do not directly enhance touristic activities. Yet, the natural resources, if well managed, could positively contribute to sustainability, or in touristic terms enhance green tourism, though directly or indirectly valorizing the resources around the site [15].

While listing all of the main resources Lebanon possesses mainly (natural and cultural tourism), one realizes that there are many heritage sites, in particular, the unavoidable touristic attractions (or sites) the country proposes for tourists to visit. They are firstly the historical, archeological and/or religious sites to target amateurs of cultural tourism. Secondly, sites like Rabbit Island, the various natural cedar reserves, and other natural reserves target amateurs of nature-based tourism. Lastly, the typical touristic sites, offering different concepts of tourism could cater to luxury or business tourism, address people who enjoy luxury or other types of tourism by going to expensive resorts [46]. Thus, such sites are referred to as heritage sites and deserve to be valorized [14, 21]. So, how to valorize each site/tourism type specifically?

Specific valorization requirements include the type or the nature of the sites and whether they are cultural, historical, religious, or natural sites (i.e. heritage sites), as opposed to various types of sustainable, eco-tourism, or touristic sites which require different types of valorization. Yet, who the stakeholders are is a great question to ask. And, in terms of stakeholders, they range from the central government in charge of tourism, the local governments (unions or municipalities), or the local communities themselves, as well as the tourism education students, employees, private firms from the sector, and the tourists themselves.

Noting that for the tourism sector, the human capital is among its most valuable resources, since in terms of valorization, people are also assets too, and as stakeholders, they should be involved in the valorization process as well. Thus, all stakeholders, through the participative approach, should be involved and have their roles labeled [10].

Methodology

While the selected approach requires observation (through assessing tourism sciences courses as taught in a public technical school near Beirut), interpreting secondary survey data, and collecting interview results. The data collection began by observing how tourism sciences courses were given at the selected vocational school for the study. This was followed by a descriptive analysis of secondary data and ended by collecting expert interviews (via purposive and targeted sampling). Thus, inductive methods are the preferred methodological designs to use, since we will need to interpret human opinions.

The judgmental sampling method is used to recruit interviewees, while using the cross-sectional time horizon (one-time study) allows the researchers to see if, in the present times, the current implementation of tourism education courses affects resource valorization in Lebanon, and if so, how. For this purpose, the researchers consider collecting data from multiple sources and used triangulation for comparing and verifying results. While the study was conducted using interpretive philosophies and reliable hypothetico-inductive methods based on interviews, 28 experts from various related fields were recruited.

Findings

This section pertains to the findings of the research. Several themes and important field notes were collected, along with the interview results. All results represented reality, as the sample population on which we based our research already reflected the views of the Lebanese people on the worth of Lebanon's natural, cultural and touristic resources, as well as the one that encouraged updating, integrating, and implementing tourism education in the Lebanese academic curriculum.

Results from Primary Data

A few recurring themes that revolve around the issues of tourism education and resource valorization, were presented. The sample was collected by interpreting the responses collected from the 28 expert interviews. The sampled population were mostly females, with an age range from the mid-20s (youngest respondent) to the early 60s (oldest). Out of all the 28 interviewees, 61% were female, versus, 39% male, but there were no noticeable differences in the responses. Their responses mostly showed agreement to the link between tourism education and resource valorization.

The most important and most recurring topic is that the Lebanese curriculum is outdated, itself affecting the quality of tourism education, which in turn impacts the efficiency of valorizing the country's touristic resources. Thus, (1) practical training courses, (2), bilateral and multilateral collaborations with all involved stakeholders, and (3) the full educational or curricular reform were the analyzed themes.

As proper tourism education and effective resource valorization need to be considered one way to do so is to hire a panel of experts [15]. They should comprise geologists, geographers, archeologists, historians, and tourism experts, among others, as permanent

consultants, for the MOC, the MEHE, and the MOT. Thus, any other institution, ought to work multilaterally and not just the DGA and the DGU. Since archeologists and geologists are the best people to work as tour guides, they can be of great added value to enhance tourism to cultural and natural sites [38].

Argument 1: The given information, about tourism in unspecialized courses, provides sufficient vision to be engaged in this field. It has been proven that, currently, as there is no vision, the insertion of these courses will tremendously increase student involvement in the sector. Furthermore, it was noticed that besides adding information on tourism education to the youth, they are already aware of many of the best practices for preserving and valorizing resources [10, 11].

Argument 2: The insertion of a specialized tourism education course in the curriculum at the secondary stage, is a better way to orient the students toward the tourism industry. This definitely holds true, as students have, de facto more vision, they will be showing more involvement and will be oriented to this sector. It was evidenced that while the youth are exposed to other orientations than just business, engineering, law, and medicine and particularly increased contact with tourism education, will entice them for choosing this sector for a future career [40, 41, 42, 43].

Argument 3: To what extent the touristic education at the secondary stage responds to the youth's needs. These denote that, currently this responds to the youths needs to a very low extent, if not at all. As many experts point out, educational institutions increase the number of the unemployed population instead of guaranteeing them jobs post-graduation. Thus, the results were somewhat unanimous that currently neither of the curricula, public or private, fully respond to the youths' demands and expectations, except for some of the so-called "fancy private" schools, since they follow up-to-date curricula, and as curriculum experts state, provide them with what they need [10]. Besides, these modern programs are also exposing them to alternative solutions for future careers and encouraging them to take part in this trend, just as raising general awareness of the sustainable tourism era, and the era contributing to sustainable development in general [39].

Finally, if the youths get the proper exposure to the tourism sector, get the proper orientation, and encouragement (through endorsement, funds, subsidies, or other means), they will be motivated to valorize their country's heritage and, through this, improve tourism. This will only be effective once the 1997 Lebanese Curricula are updated. Once done, the tourism education programs could be reformed and, by doing so, enhance resource valorization [4, 10, 15, 21].

Other Findings

While analyzing secondary data, it was noticed that tourism education and resource valorization have a link [11, 14, 21]. The question's (Is there a link between implementing tourism education curricula and valorizing heritage sites?) response, from the secondary data, is shown in Figure 1.

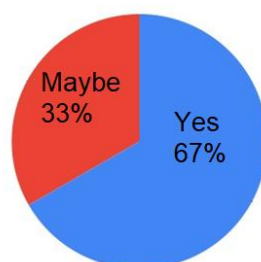


Figure 1: Secondary data results as a response to the research question.

In response to the following statement: “There is a relationship between tourism education and resource valorization, while enhancing tourism education curricula benefits the effective valorization of heritage sites”, all the interviewees agreed. It was evident that tourism education enhancement in Lebanese curricula encourages Lebanon to effectively valorize its resources. This corroborates the former finding and was proven as well.

It was demonstrated that the Lebanese curriculum needs to be updated to fit the students’ needs and interests, since currently, tourism education programs aren’t responding to the youth’s needs, through interview interpretation and observation, as the authors observed how tourism education courses were delivered at a public vocational school near Beirut. This school has exhibited good tourism program delivery with respect to other (vocational or academic) schools and academic standards in par with private institutions.

A critical issue, raised in the research phase, is to assess and evaluate the true efficiency of the Lebanese National Curriculum. Not all the interviewees pinpointed this, but some secondary data interpretation brought about those points. Yet, most interviewees have labeled the official curricula, reformed in 1997 (and have not been updated since then), to be outdated and in urgent need of reform.

There are several ways for a remarkable shift in the curriculum to make students more involved in society. Among others, giving opportunities to students, providing workshops, internships, guest lectures, and scholarships are the most recurring propositions.

It can be said that all propositions, de facto, are to be considered. Since the curriculum has not been touched since 1997, irrespective of the 2005, 2010, and 2014 minor reviews, and by no means comprise reforms. While currently, the secondary and tertiary level curricula don’t necessarily give students clear ideas and opportunities to choose their appropriate careers, reforming or modernizing them is a good step in ensuring that they do so.

Just as the aforementioned point about the curricula showing enough vision, the given information about tourism in unspecialized courses given currently, fails to offer sufficient vision to be engaged in this field.

Collected field and current secondary data confirm that, unfortunately, based on several expert educators’ opinions. While the insertion of a specialized course in the curriculum at the secondary and tertiary levels is a better way to orient students toward the tourism industry, all experts, both in educational and tourism sciences confirm this.

Interpretations

The Lebanese Curriculum is a low-quality program that is not engaging, traditional and provides improper assessment strategies. Experts consider that it is not engaging and teacher-centered. This means that all activities revolve around the instructor teaching skills to students, while student participation is discouraged [5, 16, 45]. It ignores cultural diversity, has a narrow focus, and is not worthwhile. As there is no self-assessment, learning is demonstrated to the teacher and assessment is contrived. This stresses poor quality both in terms of teaching methods and evaluation indicators [45]. The following indicators demonstrate this.

Firstly, since the current tourism education course programs aren’t giving the students clear ideas and opportunities to choose their appropriate career, the proposed solutions would be to get students more involved in society, and, as with the point of dealing, with enhancing their vision in joining this sector, the learners need to be better involved in society, act as

responsible and quality citizens and consider sustainable development [10, 39]. All ways to do so are needed and must be instructed to youths, like environmental protection, responsible tourism, smart cities, and sustainable development, etc. are some of the topics the leading expert on sustainable development, Rebeca Grynspan, addressed in a conference at the UN headquarters in New York, a decade ago [33]. Thus, proper tourism education courses ought to be pragmatist in nature to effectively teach the importance of valorization [12].

Secondly, as the information currently given to students about tourism in unspecialized courses is not providing them with the efficient vision to be engaged in this field, it needs to be updated. Literature and previous studies show that this is not the case. These confirm what relevant studies in the literature have discussed [10]. Hence, indeed, including a specialized tourism education course in the curriculum at the secondary stage is a better way to orient students toward the tourism industry. According to findings, this will be a great assistance, to the industry, and to sustainable tourism [39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44]. Thus, applying this will cater to the students' needs, lead to site valorization, and ultimately to economic development. This gives a sense of urgency for the need to introduce specialized education courses in the curriculum at the secondary and tertiary levels, especially that current tourism education programs don't cater to students' needs or the expectations of the tourism industry [4, 11].

Thirdly, as tourism education at the secondary/tertiary level responds to the current Lebanese youths' needs to a low extent, presently, no alternative solutions for future careers exist. Besides, there are no awareness campaigns to date on the tourism industry as a potential solution for employment in the tourism sector. Future generations expect the programs to be made more up-to-date, since the sustainable tourism era, and the era contributing to sustainable development, in general, is what Lebanon currently needs [39]. As a result, promoting other peripheral means of teaching such as seminars, workshops, and field trips will help in enhancing valorization [10]. Besides, institutions should also help instructors stay up-to-date with advancements in their fields via professional development programs and the use of new instructional technology [10].

The above three points indicate that the Lebanese curriculum is currently not up to date and fails to respond to the youths' needs. As the program still uses the 1997 educational program, the current societal and youth's needs and demands are not met. This is why it needs major reforms so that assessment types can be reviewed [10, 22]. The program also needs to be modernized to present the current industry best practices to the students so that it is up to date, and perhaps henceforth needs yearly updates if it truly desires to meet the ever-changing demands, since the tourism sector is dynamic and needs to have updated programs and taught through progressivist means [10]. This may ultimately trigger the state to valorize its resources [21].

Conclusion

Tourism education courses need to be adapted to address the current youths' needs, and especially implemented in countries dependent on tourism like Lebanon. Until then "students must be exposed to this inconvenient truth about society's ignorance of valorizing heritage".

There is a direct positive relationship between implementing updated tourism education programs and the effective valorization of Lebanon's resources. However, the less the tendency to rely on up-to-date tourism education programs, the less effective the valorization of the country's resources will be.

As implementing tourism education programs has a relationship with resource valorization, links with enhancing tourism activities are also pointed out. Education and tourism science specialists should ensure that such courses encourage not only students, but all citizens as well to want to valorize their resources.

Students are taught about specific phenomena in tourism education using obsolete curricula which don't focus on valorization. Thus, youths are not aware of the best practices for preserving heritage sites and valorizing our resources.

Responses to Research Questions

The authors respond to the research questions and present a summary of the findings. It was found that there is a relationship between tourism education and resource valorization. As such, enhancing tourism education curricula will benefit the effective valorization of sites, since tourism education enhancement in Lebanese curricula will encourage Lebanon to effectively valorize its resources.

While the Lebanese curriculum will need to be updated to fit the students' needs and interests, as currently, tourism education programs in Lebanon are not responding to the youth's needs. This is partly due to the fact that, currently, the secondary and tertiary level curricula aren't giving the students clear ideas and opportunities to choose their appropriate careers. These points explain why the curricula need to be updated such that the overall effectiveness of the programs improves and responds to the youth's current needs and provides them with a better vision in joining the field.

While practical training courses are among the ways for a remarkable shift in the curriculum to make the students more involved in society, among other options instructions could do, like proposing internships, giving scholarship opportunities, and increasing the exposure of students to the tourism sector. This shift will be much needed in times like these, because students today need to consider good careers to consider after graduation, and it will be better to invest in careers that have high employability rates and limited competition.

While the given information about tourism in unspecialized courses doesn't provide sufficient vision to be engaged in this field, the insertion of either an unspecialized or a specialized course in the curriculum at the secondary and college levels is a better way to orient students toward the tourism industry. For youths unsure of their career paths, unspecialized courses could be attractive enough to encourage them to join this sector, while for those who are aware of other paths, or select tourism, they, of course, will prefer the specialized course.

Finally, and as evidenced, it was shown that there is a link between implementing tourism education curricula and valorizing heritage sites, as proven in the study.

Recommendations

After conducting the research, three main themes were observed. Firstly: The increased exposure to practical training courses. Secondly, the increased bilateral and multilateral collaborations with all involved stakeholders, including public involvement as participatory approaches should be welcome. Lastly, the full educational reform. All three main recommendations will be addressed by the following points. While the authors suggest practical training courses indeed will be the answer to some, if not most of the issues about increasing exposure of students to the tourism sector, all of the three main points could be related to this [35, 36].

Providing that practical training courses would best respond to, and take action to resolve the problem that was presented before, the following points about evaluating these courses through discussing their performance while assessing the possible outcome of “reforming” the curriculum: (1) The perception of students towards taking practical training courses are essential because the best way to evaluate a course’s outcomes is to assess it if it measures what it intends to. (2) Equally important, is assessing the perception of the industry towards students engaging in these courses. (3) Evaluating the efficiency of these training courses, among others.

Such courses are essential in entering highly technical fields like tourism sciences, especially if students want to specialize in becoming certified travel agents or experts in ticketing, booking, and reservation, they must have an IATA certificate. While designing package tours, or becoming established tour guides, this requires other specific skill sets that the sector requires. The industry can label what it wants from graduates in terms of building these skills, schools can provide some of the required skills, yet the government needs to provide subsidies, or policies towards assisting potential students.

Other recommendations in terms of collaboration for improving valorization (bilateral, and multilateral) are: (1) The MOT should hire archeologists, geologists, and educators as permanent consultants. (2) The MOC must control erratic destructions of sites through legal or illegal excavations, regardless of who orchestrates them, while the DGA must better supervise and control the sites that maybe or are deemed endangered by the UNESCO world’s heritage list. (3) The MEHE could be interested to collaborate with the MOC and the MOT. (4) The CDR, the DGU, the MOPW and the Syndicate of Engineers, must collaborate on multilateral levels and together with the DGA, the MEHE, the MOC, and MOT.

Tourism Education reforms are the next set of recommendations in line: (1) Proposing secondary schools also get a chance to have tourism education as an imposed curriculum to revamp the sector. (2) All marginal majors, like tourism, geology, and archeology need to gain more impetus and also need to make them more attractive to potentially attract more students to regulate the surplus of graduates in certain majors and shortages in others, especially for future careers. (3) Offer classes in archeology, history, geography, geology, or any subject that schools deem useful to answer this new trend. Plus, these could be the specialized/unspecialized classes referred to before. (4) Educating the state employees (and the general public) about the importance of valorizing to be a high priority in the future. Plus, the private sector programs, to some extent, also need reform.

Future studies

In terms of study constraints, the pandemic and the short time to interpret the interview data are the main limitations. However, despite the high caliber of the interviewees, they were mostly recruited from the local population. Thus, further longitudinal studies with the participation of international experts, are needed to effectively study the relationship between tourism education and valorization in Lebanon.

A posteriori arguments are proposed for a future positivist, realist, or mixed methods study with action research as it is a problem that requires an immediate solution as urgent action is required. Thus, further studies mentioned here will entail a follow-up study with the proposed hypotheses to test. Such future studies are needed to effectively investigate the relationship between tourism education and resource valorization. They should rely on sequential explorative methods, through utilizing the following null and alternative hypotheses:

H0: There is no relationship between tourism education and effective resource valorization.

Ha: There is a relationship between tourism education and effective resource valorization.

The research question, the new study should answer remain the same and both resource valorization and tourism education remain as the dependent and independent variables respectively.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Dr. Gaby Khoury: Dr. Khoury is currently the Academic Director of the Lebanese International University (Mount Lebanon campus). He holds a Ph.D. Degree in higher education administration, a Masters' degree in Mathematics, and a Masters' degree in Telecommunications Engineering. He was an assistant professor in the Avionics department at Saints Louis University, Missouri, USA. He conducted several research studies in the fields of engineering, Mathematics, and education. His current research interests are in the areas of Teaching/Learning Methodologies, Mathematical Modeling, and curriculum design. He founded the IEEE branch at Parks College of Saint Louis University and was the vice president of the Pi Mu Epsilon –

Missouri Gamma Chapter Math honor society, and is a member of the Order of Engineers, Beirut, Lebanon.



Mr. Georges Bellos: Mr. Bellos is currently an Educational Leadership and Management Student at Lebanese International University, Mount Lebanon campus. His educational background is varied. He is currently a Masters' Degree Holder in Geological and Archaeological Sciences and Management, with an emphasis on Economic Development and Tourism Management. Holder of a Teaching Diploma in Entrepreneurial Skills Training. His current aspirations are to join a Ph.D. program and pursue a doctoral degree in a hybrid Ph.D. program combining Geosciences, Archeology, tourism, and education into one Ph.D. research in a multi-disciplinary track to improve the tourism situation in Lebanon, through education.