

Accreditation in Tourism and Hospitality Undergraduate Education in the ASEAN context: the Case of Thailand from the Ted Qual Perspective

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Abstract

One of the most important developments in tourism and hospitality education in the last decades has been the implementation of institutional and programmatic international accreditation systems to support and ensure the competitiveness and excellence levels of the education centres and the study paths they offer. Institutions in the ASEAN region can (and should) opt for these international accreditations if they aim to take profit of the various advantages they offer, but how prepared are its centres nowadays to obtain these types of certifications? In order to answer this question, the aim of this paper is to examine and critically analyse the present situation of tourism and hospitality undergraduate programs in Thailand, as an example of the ASEAN context. To carry out this evaluation, a questionnaire was directed to executive staff at the institutions offering undergraduate international programs in Thailand, and to the alumni of those institutions, based on the guidelines of the UNWTO TedQual certification. The findings of this research show that despite the overall positive result (from the perspective of both the alumni and the university staff) there are some aspects which are subject to improvements in order to enhance the performance of the programs and their possibilities of being certified with international accreditations in tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: Tourism and hospitality; Education; Accreditation; Tedqual, ASEAN.



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1. Introduction and Literature Review

No one can deny the relevance of the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide, as an ever-growing sector since the 20th century. However, despite the important role played by this industry within the global economy, academic research and education in this sector are relatively new (Aras *et al.*, 2018; Bernik *et al.*, 2015; Chang *et al.*, 2017; Chia-Yun *et al.*, 2018; Chou *et al.*, 2017; Dewi *et al.*, 2017; Humaidi *et al.*, 2018; Phungphol *et al.*, 2018; Ring *et al.*, 2009; Syaifoelida *et al.*, 2016a). The significance of the tourism and hospitality industry has casted the light on the needs of education related to the sector. As Airey (2015) pointed out, tourism has developed as a field of study and research within the context of the rather continuous development of the industry and the expansion of higher education. In our times, there are numerous educational programs offered worldwide in the field of tourism – the world's biggest industry – and they are contending to attract the best students (Bandmir and Mehrpouyan, 2015; Bariscil, 2017; Hansen and Salim, 2015; Piyachat, 2017; Ring *et al.*, 2009; Schuh *et al.*, 2018; Suhaili *et al.*, 2015; Treshani and Waidyasekara, 2015).

1.1. Tourism and Hospitality Education

Previous to the “boom” of tourism and hospitality education the situation was fairly different. According to Airey *et al.* (2014) even if some residual cases can be found earlier, it can be stated that tourism and hospitality education did actually emerge during the 1960s. Ring *et al.* (2009) added that tourism and hospitality education commenced in the form of training courses for employees in particular sectors within the industry. These courses were successively followed by the institution of technical and vocational schools, which eventually evolved into undergraduate and graduate programs. An overlook of the present and future of tourism and hospitality education presents new difficulties. In relation with the industry, there is now a need for internationalisation of the education programs and curricula aiming to prepare and provide students with the skills and tools needed for facing the challenges of globalisation (Owusu, 2016; Piyachat, 2017; Sangpikul, 2009; Syaifoelida *et al.*, 2016b)

The characteristics of tourism and hospitality institutions are similar to business schools, since both their programs place the stress on applied skill development. Therefore, they should as well focus on associating with industry professionals (Barrows and Bosselman, 1999; Luekveerawattana, 2016). Students of these programs are expected by the industry to have the ability to deal with international visitors from several cultural backgrounds and, therefore, intercultural communication should be an important component in the curricula (Sangpikul, 2009; Taher *et al.*, 2016). As it has been mentioned before, vocational and professional abilities have been traditionally seen by the industry as something essential if a “good” tourism and hospitality education is to be delivered (Prebezac *et al.*, 2014; Yang and Lu, 2017). Nevertheless, Sripun and Ladkin (2001) pointed out that despite this vocational

methodology, tourism and hospitality programs have frequently been criticised for failing to offer the expected results meeting the requirements of the industry, since numerous graduates have shown a lack of practical skills.

1.2. Tourism and Hospitality Education in ASEAN: The case of Thailand

Talking about the ASEAN context, it is undeniable that Thailand is the leading country in the region in terms of tourism. According to the statistics by the UNWTO (2016) Thailand is the top tourism destination in South East Asia, with almost 30 million international tourist arrivals in 2015. Furthermore, it is the second destination in the whole Asia Pacific region, only bettered by China. Adding to the numbers of international visitors, another factor that proves its relevance as a top tourism destination is the fact that also in 2015 Thailand ranked as the 6th country with the highest tourism receipts in the world, with over 44 billion US dollars (UNWTO, 2016). Therefore it would make a perfect case within the ASEAN context.

The characteristics of tourism and hospitality higher education in Thailand, and particularly the approach related to its curricula have developed parallel to other Asian nations. As stated by Dredge *et al.* (2015) the tourism and hospitality programs in Asia have progressed from being practically a copy of the Western curricula to a more customised design, or at least a localised version of the imported programs. Subsequently, after the blooming of tourism and hospitality programs in Thailand, the amount of graduates was enough to cover the demands of the industry but there were concerns in terms of quality since their qualifications did not match the required standards (Chaisawat, 2005). In like manner, this fact was supported by Sangpikul (2009) who underlined that the quality and skills of Thai graduates in tourism and hospitality programs did not meet the criteria required by the employers. In particular, Chaisawat (2005) outlined the unacceptable English skills, the unfavourable manners, and the lack of problem-solving capabilities, service mind, applied abilities and flexibility as the main factors of concern. Moreover, according to this author, all of these problems stemmed from the excessive emphasis on theoretical contents rather than practice.

1.3. Accreditation in Tourism and Hospitality Education

Similarly to other fields of tertiary education, quality assurance and accreditation have become a fundamental subject for the tourism and hospitality higher education in the last decades. Liu *et al.* (2010) highlighted that, following the advice of the UNWTO, it is crucial to offer an appropriate assessment model that includes clear and comprehensive standards to improve the excellence levels and competitiveness of the increasing numbers of tourism and hospitality programs. Moreover, Prebezac *et al.* (2014) added that observing educational quality standards would allow for evaluation of the suitability of the degree in tourism and hospitality, the achievement of the programmatic objectives, and the efficiency of the educational services. Subsequently, these outcomes would make it possible to review and improve the institutions and programs. Besides, academic assessment is a vital process to institutions based on both unbiased precise methods and subjective assessments, which evaluate the academic contents and policies in a sensible way to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the system (Liu *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding the different types of accreditation tourism and hospitality institutions can opt for, Barrows and Bosselman (1999) affirmed that there are two different ranks. The first one would be institutional accreditation, which ensures at national levels that a university meets some minimum academic quality standards. The second, programmatic accreditation consists of the revision and evaluation of a specific program by an experts' organisation within the particular industry field. In like manner, Airey *et al.* (2014) agreed that there are various ways of measuring the quality of tertiary education, which might function at an institutional, national or even international level. Apart from the external evaluations, an alternative method for quality assurance would be by using inside resources from the tourism and hospitality department in the institution, such as the head of the program, staff in the unit or even the students (Barrows and Bosselman, 1999). Conclusively, Tanke (1986) added that whichever the type of accreditation used by the tourism and hospitality in higher education, it will certainly bring similar advantages to those produced previously in other fields of education having implemented specialised accreditation systems.

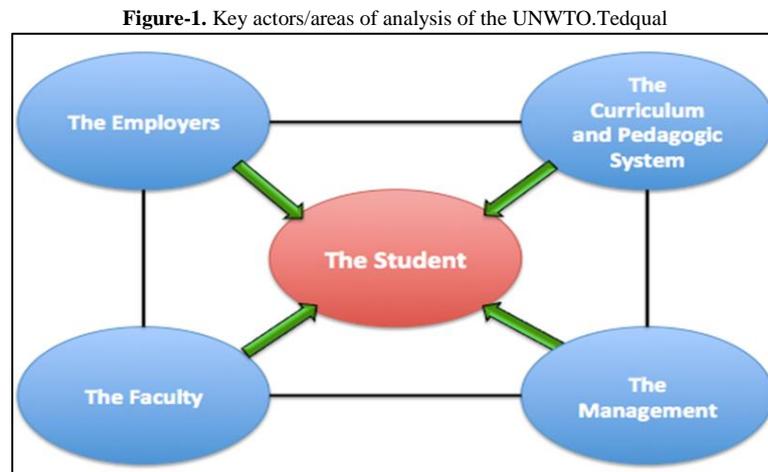
The last few decades have seen an increase in the interest on quality assurance and accreditation within tourism and hospitality institutions, especially at international levels. In particular, within the tourism and hospitality industry, the UNWTO plays the major role in assisting and increasing the quality of the industry-related education (Barbini, 2010). Consequently, the quest for worldwide acknowledgement and accreditation in the tourism and hospitality higher education, to improve the reliability of the field in the current competitive framework, has led to the creation of several international certifications, such as the TedQual (Dredge *et al.*, 2015).

1.4. The UNWTO Tedqual Certification

A few people would disagree that a good way to monitoring which businesses or institutions offer the minimum quality standards would be to consult with the main international organisation within the specific industry. In the case of tourism and hospitality higher education, a good start would therefore be to take into account the quality scheme for education institutions created by the UNWTO (Airey *et al.*, 2014). The Tourism Education Quality (TedQual) program is a quality accreditation scheme in the tourism and hospitality industry, accessible to all academic institutions worldwide, and based on voluntary solicitation (Barbini, 2010). This program was established in the 1990s as a service of the UNWTO to implement total quality management to tourism and hospitality education (Ring *et al.*, 2009). Besides, Liu *et al.* (2010) defined the aim of TedQual as detecting the educational needs of the tourism and hospitality sector by using the total quality method to reduce the existing and potential gap between education demand and supply, and to prioritise the necessary actions for this purpose. Hence, to attain this goal the

TedQual scheme is organised upon three fundamental factors: quality standards, quality audit and quality certification. Subsequently, as stated by the UNWTO Themis Foundation (2016) the organisation issues the TedQual certification for a period of one to four years, and it can be renewed after that time.

In this certification, the inspection is conducted using the information supplied by the institutions about 5 major areas: public and private sectors employers, students, the curriculum and pedagogical system, the faculty, and the management (Airey *et al.*, 2014). The following figure presents the evaluation framework of the TedQual certification:



Source; Adapted from the UNWTO Themis Foundation (2016)

Finally, the UNWTO Themis Foundation (2016) indicated that the assessment of institutions and programs is made by identifying the activities that can assist ensuring the employability of the students and their involvement in the tourism industry and the community, employing the values presented in the Global Code of Ethics for tourism as a framework (see table in the next page).

Table-1. The Global Code of Ethics for tourism and its contribution to tourism education

Art. 1: Tourism’s contribution to mutual understanding and respect between people and societies
Art. 2: Tourism as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfilment
Art.3: Tourism, a factor of sustainable development
Art. 4: Tourism, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and a contributor to its enhancement
Art. 5: Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities
Art. 6: Obligations of stakeholders in tourism development
Art. 7: Right to Tourism
Art. 8: Liberty of tourist movements
Art. 9: Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry
Art. 10: Implementation of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

Source: Adapted from the UNWTO Themis Foundation (2016)

2. Methodology

The aim of this article is to examine and critically analyse the present situation of tourism and hospitality undergraduate education in Thailand, as an example of the ASEAN context, from the perspective of the UNWTO TedQual Certification. In order to reach this aim, the researcher conducted a survey questionnaire, which was directed to representatives from the 27 institutions offering international programs in these fields and to alumni from these universities. The questionnaire was originally designed in English, since all the individuals in the sample either work in or have graduated from international programs in which English is the main language. Most of the questions in the questionnaire are close-ended using a 5 Likert scale (being the options: very poor, poor, average, good, excellent) which allows the results to be more quantifiable. As stated by Creswell (2014), researchers are increasingly using online survey products for the design of their research tools, since they allow them to put together their own questionnaires from custom templates, post links to the survey on their websites or by e-mail so that the respondents can access easily, and download the results into spread sheets or databases to be analysed later. The questionnaire in this research was designed using Google Forms, which allows the researcher to easily share the survey among the sample groups, collect the responses in real time and tools for analysing the results.

The questions included can be divided in the following 13 categories, based on the Global Code of Ethics for tourism and the five areas of analysis of the TedQual Certification, as explained in the literature review:

1. Characteristics of the respondents: Category (Alumni/University Staff), Type of university (Public/Private), Year of graduation (only for alumni).
2. Availability and level of internationalisation of the program.
3. Intercultural exchanges, languages and teamwork.
4. Sustainability, culture and local benefits.

5. Implications in tourism development and right to tourism.
6. Communication and formalities.
7. Rights of workers.
8. Code of Ethics and the employers.
9. The student.
10. The curriculum and pedagogic system.
11. The faculty.
12. The management.
13. Perceptions of Tourism and Hospitality Undergraduate programs in Thailand, in comparison to other systems.

2.1. Pilot Test and Data Analysis

Clark *et al.* (2010), outlined that when judging how a questionnaire survey will work in practice and to recognise any possible trouble, pre-testing must be done in advance. This is what is known as a “pilot test”. Babbie (2010), agreed that pre-testing a questionnaire would be the safest tool to be protected against the possible errors and mistakes that should arise, such as unclear questions, questions with no suitable answer or questions violating the rules. After the questionnaire was designed the researcher pre-tested it, previously to the conduction of the survey, by using a small group of relevant people, in order to prove their understanding of the questions and to provide useful suggestions for improvement of the survey.

The pilot test was directed to 5 staff at the universities in Thailand offering international undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality and to 10 alumni graduated from those programs. After receiving the suggestions from these individuals and after considering the content of their advices, concerns and comments the researcher made the following modifications on the questionnaire:

- The main concern of most of the participants was the language. Since some of the vocabulary used in the questionnaire was somehow technical and most of them were Thai nationals they found it difficult to understand all the information. The researcher considered that this concern would be a major limitation for the research and, therefore, he redesigned the questionnaire, this time both in English and Thai.
- Several participants suggested that the part of the “Characteristics of the respondents” might be quite short and that the researcher should collect further information from the informants in this category. The researcher added three new closed-ended questions to this category: Gender, Age, and Education level.
- Finally, a majority of the participants in the pilot test agreed that the researcher should add a question at the end in which the respondents could write their opinions about the abovementioned programs without the limitations of the pre-set answers. The researcher considered this as a useful addition to the questionnaire and he included an open-ended question at the end regarding the participants’ suggestions for improving these programs. Adding this open-ended question allowed the researcher to gain a more in-detail information sourcing from the respondents’ own thoughts, not limited to a series of pre-designed answers.

3. Results and Discussion

This section will present an in-depth analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the survey questionnaire for an evaluation of the undergraduate education in tourism and hospitality in Thailand. The final number of respondents to the questionnaire was 115 people. Regarding the characteristics of the respondents, these are the **data of the participants**:

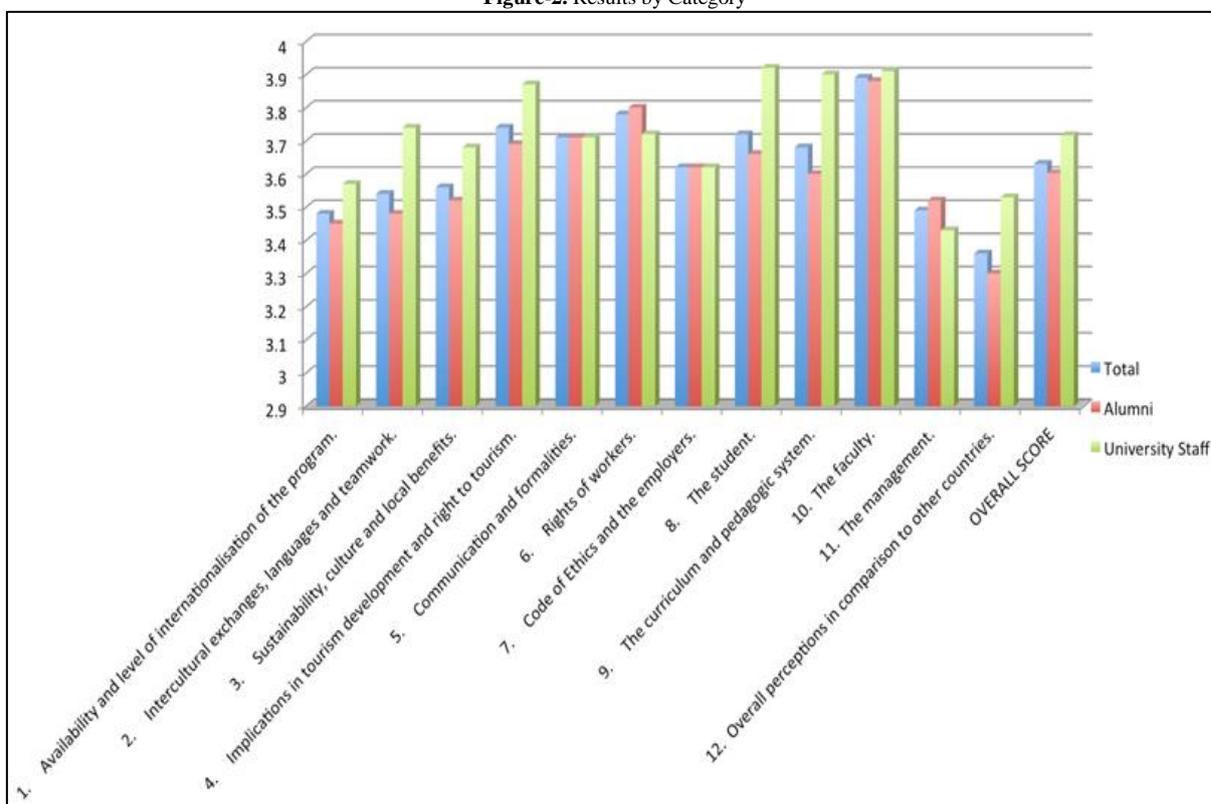
- Category of respondents: 86 of the respondents were alumni (75%) and 29 of them university staff (25%).
- Type of university: 35 respondents were from a public institution (30%) while 80 of them were from a private institution (70%).
- Gender: 76 of the respondents were female (66%) and the remaining 39 were male (34%).
- Age: 70 of the respondents were aged 30 or less (61%), 38 of them were between 31 and 40 years old (33%) and 7 of them were between 41 and 50 years old (6%). There were no participants in the other two age options: 51 to 60 years old and over 60 years old.
- Level of studies: 73 of the respondents held a Bachelor degree (63%), 40 of them held a Master degree (35%) and only 2 of them held a Ph.D. (2%).
- Year of graduation: From the 86 participating alumni, 15 of them graduated between 2001 and 2005 (17%), 11 of them between 2006 and 2010 (13%) and 57 of them between 2011 and 2015 (66%). The remaining 3 alumni (4%) left this section in blank.

The main results of this questionnaire are those related to the evaluation of the tourism and hospitality undergraduate programs in Thailand. To give a numerical value to the evaluation, the five options in the Likert scale (very poor, poor, average, good, excellent) were replaced by the numbers 1 to 5, respectively. After accounting the responses of the 115 participants, the overall average score of the programs was of 3.63 out of 5. This number reflects that the participants consider the overall level of tourism and hospitality programs in Thailand as slightly above average. However, in order to get a more detailed analysis of this result we will now study the differences between the data from the university staff and the data from the alumni. The first thing that needs to be considered is the level of understanding of the programs by the different types of respondents. The university staff certainly presents a deeper understanding (both for the teaching and learning, and organisational sides) of the programs and more updated information, since they are still working within the tourism and hospitality institutions. On the other

hand, the alumni, depending on the year they graduated, will have less updated information on the program and a more shallow knowledge limited to their learning experience. However, these alumni are now part of the industry, and their perspective would be a less biased and more practical (in terms of the utilitarian objectives of higher education) than the one coming from the university staffs. Therefore, both sides present some advantages and disadvantages in terms of their evaluation, but the combined results of both groups will result in a comprehensive assessment of the programs.

The overall average result from the perspective of the university staff was of 3.72 out of 5, while the alumni valued the programs in 3.60 out of 5 as an average. This shows that those participants with a deeper understanding of the different aspects of the tourism and hospitality programs valued them more positively. This can be considered as a constructive valuation for the programs assessment if we take into account that generally, when people have a deeper knowledge on a system, they tend to see all its positive and negative aspects. Even if these university staff are well aware of all the strengths and, especially, the weaknesses, that maybe cannot be perceived from the outside, of the system, they still valued the programs in a more positive way than the alumni. From the other perspective, the fact that the alumni (now professionals in the industry) gave a lower overall score to the tourism and hospitality programs, can show that maybe the system is not that up to the industry standards as perceived by the university staffs. Since the alumni are more “in touch” with the actual industry, the lower score given by them can be considered as a negative result in terms of the practical side of education. However, to understand these results, it is necessary to see the different areas of analysis into detail. The following figure shows the results of the different categories of the questionnaire:

Figure-2. Results by Category



Source: Researcher’s Own

First of all, looking at the total results by category (Figure 2 and Table 2), it can be seen that the range of the results is quite concentrated. The lowest score looking at the total sample is 3.36 out of 5 and the maximum is 3.89 out of 5. It means that there is a quite small range between the bottom and top scorers (just 0.5 points difference). The top categories when considering both populations (alumni and university staff) as a whole are: Faculty, with an average score of 3.89; Right of workers, with an average of 3.78; and Implications in tourism development and Right to tourism, with a score of 3.74. A more in-depth analysis show the different questions included in each of these three categories and their individual average score.

- Faculty members: This category included three subsections to be evaluated. The first one was “Adequacy of the overall standards of the faculty for the provided educational level” and it got an average score of 3.90. The second one was “Balance between the industry experience and the academic expertise of the faculty” and its score was also 3.90. Finally, the last subsection was “Adaptation of teaching styles, tools and contents to the new trends and technologies by faculty members” with a score of 3.87. While there is a balance in the evaluation of these three aspects of the faculty, it can be stated that the participants were slightly less convinced about the use of new trends and technologies by the lecturers.
- Right of workers: This category was evaluated by focusing on two aspects. The first one was “Perceptions on the institutions educational jobs (faculty and staff) as respectable/dignified positions” and it got an

average score of 3.86. The second part was “Perceptions on the institutions educational jobs (faculty and staff) as well-remunerated positions” and here the score was 3.70. This big difference between both subsections shows that while educational jobs are highly perceived as respectable positions, they are not observed as highly well paid jobs by the participants.

- Implications in tourism development and Right to tourism: This category is composed by three subsections. The first one is “Offer of clear information about program objectives and systems of control” and it got an average score of 3.74. The second one, “Institutions act as "role models" within the tourism and hospitality industry” was the least valued of the three, with a score of 3.60. The last one is “Level of pro-diversity and no-discrimination encouraged in these programs” with an average score of 3.88. These scores show that the participants highly satisfied with the diversity and no-discrimination levels in the programs and with the objectives and systems of control. However, there is a big difference with their view on the institutions acting as role models within the industry, which is not as satisfactory.

Regarding the categories at the bottom, when looking at the results of the total sample, they will be as follows: Management, with an average score of 3.49; Availability and level of internationalisation of the program, with a score of 3.48; and, finally, Overall perceptions in comparison with other countries, with an average of 3.36. Again, these three categories contain different levels of analysis, which are explained below.

- Management: This category was evaluated by focusing on three different aspects. The first one “Existence of a clear and understandable management system of the institutions” got an average score of 3.48. The second one was “Focus by the management on covering the needs of students, faculty, government and other stakeholders” with a score of 3.45. The last subsection, “Inclusion of people with broad knowledge on the academic sector and the tourism and hospitality industry as members of the management” got a better score than the previous aspects, 3.55. It can be stated that the respondents did not value the focus of the management in covering the needs of the stakeholders or the clarity of the management system as positively as they did with the knowledge (academic and on the industry) of the management members. Therefore, there is a more negative perception regarding the operations of the management, rather than the people involved with these functions.
- Availability and level of internationalisation of the program: This category is very straightforward, as it was evaluated by focusing on the two aspects of its title. The first one was “Availability of international undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality in Thailand”, which go an average score of 3.46. The second one, “Level of internationalisation of the above-mentioned programs” got an average of 3.50. While the results are quite similar, it can be pointed out that the respondents have a slightly more negative view on the availability of these programs in Thailand (it can be stated that in their opinion there should be more available) than on the actual level of internationalisation of the existing programs.
- Overall perceptions in comparison with other countries: This last category was evaluated by considering geographical aspects. The first one “Overall perception of international undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality in Thailand in comparison with other regional systems (ASEAN countries)” got an average score of 3.46. The second subsection was “Overall perception of international undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality in Thailand in comparison with other systems in the whole Asia” with an average of 3.34. Lastly, the third geographical consideration “Overall perception of international undergraduate programs in tourism and hospitality in Thailand in comparison with other Western systems (Europe, North America, Australia, etc.)” obtained a score of 3.27. These results show that the participants consider that the abovementioned programs in Thailand could be levelled with those in other countries in the ASEAN region, but they lose points when compared with the whole of Asia and, especially with Western systems.

The second level of analysis would be done with a study of the results by dividing the sample into two big groups: alumni and university staff. From the perspective of the alumni, the top category was the Faculty members, as well, with a score of 3.88, followed again by the Rights of workers, with an average of 3.80. However, this group has a different category as the third highest scorer, which is Communication and formalities (3.71). This new category was evaluated by focusing on two aspects. The first one was “Availability of forms of communication and access formalities on the programs” with an average score of 3.72, while the second aspect “Clarity and accessibility of forms of communication and access formalities on the programs” got a score of 3.70. This shows that despite the positive evaluation of this category by alumni, they are a bit less generous when assessing the clarity and accessibility of the forms.

Regarding the bottom three list for the alumni, there is another new category which has obtained some of the lowest scores by this particular sample. Intercultural exchanges, languages, and teamwork got an average score of 3.48 out of 5. This category was evaluated by assessing three aspects. The first one, “Promotion and evaluation of teamwork activities in these programs” got a score of 3.58. The second one was “Promotion and evaluation of cultural exchanges in these programs” with an average of 3.36. The last aspect “Offer of relevant language courses in these programs” had an average score of 3.49. This is a particularly interesting category, to which alumni have paid special attention, since they are actually the individuals experiencing these kind of activities: they were directed to them while they were students. Here, it seems they were relatively satisfied with the language courses and, especially, with the teamwork activities. However, there is a more negative evaluation on the offer of cultural exchanges, at least during the time the respondents were students in the programs. The other two categories at the bottom for alumni are the Availability and level of internationalisation of the program, with an average score of 3.45 and the Overall perceptions in comparison with other countries, with the lowest category score of the whole evaluation: 3.30. By looking at this category in detail, it can be observed that the perceptions in comparison with the

rest of ASEAN are valued as 3.36, while when comparing to the rest of Asia and Western systems, the score goes down to 3.27 (in both cases). From the perspective of the alumni, while Thai programs could still hold in comparison with other ASEAN nations, they are perceived more negatively when compared with the rest of Asia and the Western nations (at the exact same level).

From the perspective of the university staff some differences can be observed in the highest scoring categories. The top scorer for this sample would be the Student, with an average score of 3.92 (highest scoring category of the whole survey). This category was evaluated by assessing 3 subsections. The first one was “Level of preparation of students graduating from these programs (in terms of knowledge)” with a score of 3.86. The second aspect was “Level of preparation of students graduating from these programs (in terms of practical skills)” with an average of 3.93. For the last part “Offer of industry related jobs after graduating, without the need of supplementary training or further formal education” the average score was 3.97. These results show that the university staff consider the programs in tourism and hospitality as highly positive for the students, since their level after graduating (both in knowledge and practical skills) and the offer of jobs available are valued as satisfactory. The second category from the top was the Faculty members, which got an average score of 3.91. Finally, the last of the top scoring categories for the university staff is the Curriculum and pedagogic system, with a score of 3.90. This category is divided into three levels of evaluation. The first one “Alignment of the curriculum with the specific characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industry in Thailand” received an average score of 3.86. The second level is “Balance between theoretical knowledge, industry's trends and patterns, and practical skills in the curriculum” which got an average of 3.79. Lastly, the third aspect “Inclusion on the 21st Century skills and competencies in Teaching and Learning, and Evaluation” obtained a score of 4.03. While there is a positive assessment on the balance and design of the curriculum among university staff, this result is not as optimistic as the ones on the alignment of the curriculum with the industry and, especially, the use of contemporary skills and competencies by the lecturers, which got an outstanding score.

About the bottom scoring three for the university staff, the evaluation presents two of the common categories which received negative scores in the previous levels of analysis: Availability and level of internationalisation of the program got a score of 3.57 while the Overall perceptions in comparison with other countries got 3.53. Regarding the latter, it can be stated that university staff have a rather more positive view than the alumni about the Thai programs, when comparing them with the other ASEAN countries (3.76) and even the rest of Asia (3.55). However, the scores are very similar (in a negative way) to those from the alumni when the comparison is with the Western systems (3.28). Nevertheless, this is not the lowest scoring category from the university staff. This sample gave the Management their lowest score, 3.43 out of 5. All the three aspects evaluated within this category obtained a somehow low score, which can be considered as rather symptomatic: university staff are the individuals who work most closely to the Management. Therefore, if Management has become the biggest concern in this evaluation to the people that work with them in a daily basis, it can definitely be seen as one of the factors limiting these programs.

The last level of analysis studies the answers given by the respondents to the last (open-ended) question regarding the participants' suggestions for improving these programs. Out of the total 115 respondents, 15 of them responded to this question. After conducting a content analysis, the following results were drawn:

- A majority of the respondents (10 of them) agreed that the institutions offering this programs should emphasise the practical/industry-focused approach to teaching and learning in order to improve their overall quality. They centred their suggestions in the teaching methods including more industry-related activities, the period of the internships, which is considered by them as too short, and the levels of cooperation with relevant institutions. These suggestions can be related to the categories of the survey on the Student, the Faculty and the Curriculum and pedagogic system. These suggestions, made mainly by alumni, reflect the fact which was mentioned above when analysing the total score given by this particular group: alumni, which are now part of the industry, evaluated the programs in a more negatively way than the university staff, and one of the reasons seems to be that they do not reflect the reality of the industry and they lack of a more practical approach to teaching and learning.
- Other common comments are those concerned with the level of English in the programs (3 suggestions regarding this topic). These suggestions ask universities to pay more attention on the level of English and the communication skills that will be useful for the students when they start working in the industry. This relates directly with the categories of Availability and level of internationalisation of the program and Intercultural exchanges, languages, and teamwork. These two categories obtained quite negative results when compared to most of the remaining categories, and then the suggestions go in the same line as the survey results.
- The last two suggestions focused on the level of the faculty members (which is not considered as appropriate by this particular respondent) and the necessity of programs paying attention to ethics and morality. Regarding the first, it seems it is an isolated perspective based on the experience of this particular respondent, since the category of Faculty members is one of the top scorers for all the groups. For the latter, this relates directly with two categories (Implications in tourism development and Right to tourism and Code of Ethics and the employers) which obtained average to positive results when compared to the other categories in the survey).

4. Conclusion

The results of this evaluation of the tourism and hospitality undergraduate programs in Thailand can be considered as satisfactory overall. The average results, both when analysing the total sample and when studying the

two main groups individually, were slightly above average. Still, there is quite a significant room for improvement, especially if the goal is to attempt to get these programs certified by TedQual or other international accreditations. One aspect that needs to be taken into account is the fact that this survey has been responded by mainly Thai nationals or individuals with a good knowledge of Thai education and culture (there is a degree of subjectivity). Therefore, these results cannot be generalised since people with no attachments to Thailand, responding to this evaluation in a more objective way, could give different scores which would alter the overall results (either positively or negatively).

The main fields which should be improved in these programs would be their Availability and level of internationalisation, the Intercultural exchanges, languages and teamwork, and the Management. The two first are very important categories which need to be addressed if the aim is to opt for international accreditations. Apart from the less than positive results they got in the survey, several respondents have suggested some topics related to them which should be improved, from their experience. The last one needs to be studied in detail. The Management is one of the main actors in the institutions, from the strategic and operational perspectives and also when applying for international accreditations. The fact that their negative evaluation came principally from the university staff, people who work with them in a daily basis, shows that this is one of the categories to focus the improvements on, to enhance the overall performance of the institutions and programs and to increase the possibilities of obtaining the international accreditations. If institutions put their efforts in improving these three categories, the other negative field (Overall perceptions in comparison with other countries) will subsequently improve.

On the bright side, there are two main categories which obtained very positive evaluations and that could be the centre of the institutions' efforts to address their limitations and enhance their overall performance. These would be the Faculty members, and the Implications in tourism development and Right to tourism. The first ones received some of the highest scores of the evaluation, both by alumni and university staff. Having faculty members which are so well regarded is a competitive advantage for any system or institution, since they are the main actors of the teaching and researching functions of the universities. Also, if (as it seems) the institutions and programs are involved in tourism development and promote the right to tourism among the locals, they will have a better understanding on the actual situation and trends within the industry and the society, which will can be used as an effective source and tool for the development and improvement of the programs.

Regarding the suggestions for future research on this topic, the researcher recommend authors who might explore this topic further to conduct a more in-depth survey directed not just to the relevant international programs in Thailand, but to all the tourism and hospitality institutions in the country. This will provide a wider framework and a better understanding on the overall situation. Following this detailed evaluation, the researcher recommends to conduct a qualitative research among the deans of these institutions to enquiry about the driving forces (pull and push factors) for these programs to apply for TedQual and other international accreditations. Finally, a case study in one or several institutions already accredited with TedQual would be recommendable as an example of best practices which can be used for developing a model for Thai undergraduate institutions to obtain the TedQual certification.

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