

# The Experiential Learning Theory as Base for Tourism and Hospitality Courses and Internship Programs

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study is to measure the tourism students' preference of training using the Internship Programs (ISP) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) methods. A course of tourism students and hospitality were selected to participate in this study. The group received direct training connected to the ELT. The same group join ISP using the traditional procedures applied at the college. Each students' searcher for a tourism enterprise to receive his/her practical course and training. After the completion of the ISP, the tourism and hospitality students were asked to fill the prepared questionnaire to measure the difference of knowledge gained through the ELT theory application and the ISP. The tourism and hospitality students showed that the direct training within courses using the ELT theory was more successful in building the students' knowledge and improving their experience to meet the market needs. The directed training through ELT procedures was very useful for the students, at the same time the students did not object to joining the internship programs as the previous training through a course made the ISP benefits more. The study recommended that mix method of training will ensure the ability of students to gain enough experience that improves their opportunities to join the tourism market.

**Keywords:** Internship Programs, Experiential Learning Theory, Tourism and Hospitality Students, Tourism Colleges and Jordan.

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## Introduction

The student's experience in the tourism and hospitality industry is very crucial to improve the student's chance to meet the market requirements. Hospitality and tourism concentrated on the quality of services introduced to be able to compete in the marketplace which depends mainly on using a skilled workforce (Brown et al., 2020). The sufficient experience in hospitality and tourism workforces enable this sector to contribute higher to the national economy (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, 2017). The integration of experience among hospitality and tourism students should depend mainly on the integration between theoretical and vocational training. The students' trust depends mainly on the integration of both vocational and theoretical courses as well as their ability to improve employment (Wakelin-Theron et al.,

2018). At the same time, in order to keep up with workforce demands in the future, it will be crucial for the academic tourism & hospitality institutions to keep their finger on the pulse of the skills and education needed for employees. This is not only to fill anticipated jobs, but to adequately prepare workers to compete in an educationally progressive world (Brown et al., 2020).

The traditionalism of the tourism curriculum to meet business requirements was raised as a major issue in different countries (Khuong, 2016; Luka, 2012; Policy Paper, 2019; Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018). The design of the tourism curriculum did not meet the developments in the tourism sector and its needs in harmony with technology and inputs development (Sihabutr, 2012). Different researchers justified that to the shortages in tourism training programs. Diplari (2010) for example reported that satisfactory training of tourism students to learn a foreign language is very necessary to improve the students' capabilities to meet the market needs.

Tourism and hospitality students' complained of the low efficiency of internship programs to qualify them to enter the tourism markets and meet the qualification required to improve their employability (Bilsland et al., 2020; Kwame & Kwaku, 2021; Simicevic & Stetic, 2017). In Jordan, the introduced internship programs are not pre-planned to satisfy the theoretical teaching curriculum and the students' needs (Magableh, 2009; Mekawy & Abu Bakr, 2014). These difficulties facing the productivity of the internship programs require finding new approaches to training in tourism hospitality. Jack (2011) has shown that one of the problems associated with the internship programs is finding the proper organization for the internship program and the time needed to accomplish a comprehensive internship program. The integration between the ELT and the internship program would find a solution for these problems.

According to Mustafa (2018), Jordan, similar to many countries as the link between tourism academic institutions and tourism' employers is missing. This missing link has been called into question by key stakeholders in light of ongoing changes in the complex tourism & hospitality industry (Mustafa, 2018). Researchers also have recognized this need and have presented a challenge to public colleges and universities to develop a plan of response to workforce needs in the tourism & hospitality industry (Hyasat et al.,). Higher education institutions, therefore, will be in a position to make a significant impact in producing a highly skilled workforce if they are aware of these workforce trends and adjust curriculum and instruction accordingly.

In Jordan, intermediate colleges introduce the hospitality and tourism disciplines to graduate diploma students. The training is considered one of the original requirements for graduation and in most cases introduced in the last semester of the program. The availability of training programs depends on the business owners offering internship programs or the ability of the students to join any hospitality and tourism enterprise to receive training. In most cases, most of the internship programs are not previously planned to integrate the theoretical courses. The deficiency of students' knowledge creates educational outcome shortages that did not meet the requirements of hospitality and tourism professionals (M. H. Mustafa, 2012). The tourism and hospitality courses introduced are concentrated on theoretical sides, while the vocational experience they gain does not meet the market needs which forms an obstacle for them to receive the required jobs (M. Mustafa, 2017). The students according to Mustafa (2017) are suffering from different skills related to the working place including leadership, creativity, and communication skills. They contributed these problems to the lack of technology and laboratories needed at these colleges to improve

the students' achievements. Khuong (2016) has shown that the lack of integration of educational plans and the market needs would increase this gap.

In Jordan, the absence of educational plan modifications and updates over time as per market needs expands the gap between the educational tourism institutions and businesses in the tourism industry (Khuong, 2016). Students who graduate today from academic institutions are facing many problems and challenges in the marketplace. These problems and challenges appear when graduates start to apply their theoretical knowledge practically. According to many studies, there is a gap between what graduates gain from their academic institutions and the employer's expectations (Khuong, 2016; Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018). The internship programs (ISP) were introduced as a solution to treat the gap between theoretical and vocational skills. On the other hand, the rehabilitation of fresh graduates through internship programs forms additional costs and time for employers in the tourism industry. Moreover, the loss of integration of the curriculum with the internship programs will minimize the fresh graduates' opportunity to secure proper jobs in the tourism sector (Chertkovskaya, 2013; Hanekom, 2015; Yorke & Knight, 2004). The gap between the instructive of the tourism industry organizations and bosses can be gotten through the reconciliation of the educational plan and internship programs through shared arrangements that can be planned between the two mainstays of this interaction.

### **Application of ELT theory in tourism and hospitality education**

The experiential learning theory (ELT) was introduced in 1984 based on the linkage between the theory and practice (D. A. Kolb, 1984). The theory concentrates on three aspects including learning, knowing, and doing. Different research discussed the gap between the curriculum and business in the tourism industry (Luka, 2012). This calls the need to find a new style of teaching tourism in different schools. The ELT theory is based on knowledge gained through experience and its transformation in different fields. Maier and Thomas (2008) reported that through the ELT theory the students were able to understand the style of organizations function, being able to recognize the career expectations, improve their leadership skills, and enhance their financial management skills (Maier & Thomas, 2013). According to ELT theory, the knowledge and practice in the tourism industrial sector can be achieved through theoretical learning from curriculum courses and practical learning through the internship program, project-based programs, and field trips within the tourism sector. On the other hand, the ELT theory was under concern through its effect on the tourism schools graduates mainly the employability and the satisfaction of the sector needs. According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), the ELT is based on six pillars. The first pillar is that learning is a continuous process. This aspect has been considered in this study to be through the application of the academic courses and the follow up through the ISP. The second one is based on the evaluation of the situation and reacting accordingly. The third pillar is concentrating on learning through finding resolutions of different conditions, the fourth pillar is based on continuous adoption through the learning process, the fifth is based on the interaction between the person and the environment and the last one is the creation of knowledge based on the previous pillars.

### **Curriculum integration and students' quality**

Graduates' quality is associated with the introduced educational plan in any science stream. Educational plan configuration relies fundamentally upon the perspective of instructive organizations to give any strength to graduate understudies. The primary imperative that decides the reasonableness of

educational programs to address the alumni's issues relies upon the degree of the dynamicity of educational plan advancement and changes over time (Jugmohan, 2010; Kusumawardhana, 2020; Wattanacharoensil, 2014). Then again, the turn of events and alteration of the tourism industry educational plan ought to rely upon solid criticism of the area and worldwide improvements in this field (Wattanacharoensil, 2014).

Walanchalee(2014)has shown that the tourism industry educational plan adjustment is dynamic and changing after some time particularly in the past two decades. The educational plan improvement is subject to various components remembering the advancements for the tourism industry around the world, the advancement of the tourism industry area locally, and the alumni's necessities to meet the market capabilities needs (Luka, 2012). Diverse overviews of the tourism industry graduate understudies' have shown that the educational plan of showing them isn't sufficient to assemble their coordinated information (Cooper, 2002; Luka, 2012).

The commonsense methodology was utilized as a technique to foster the tourism industry educational plan (Bodewes, 1981). The sober-minded methodology in the tourism industry connects the educational plan content with the genuine necessities of the tourism industry areas. The consequences of the logical methodology should improve the alumni's encounters as per market needs. The accomplishment of this methodology relies upon executing practical examination in the tourism industry (Pansiri, 2006). The logical methodology overviews will give data about the area through the various partners of this industry which will enhance the gathered data about the various aspects(Hyasat et al.,).

One more methodology used to plan and alter the tourism industry educational program is configuration thinking (Sándorová et al., 2020). This strategy was utilized to address the present issues concerning inventiveness and development (Li & Liu, 2016). Configuration thinking can frame a decent methodology for the tourism industry training as it relies upon further developing abilities, taking care of issues, and shutting the understudies to this present reality (Ray, 2012). This strategy for instructing was presented in various instructive regions and works on its prosperity (Beaird et al., 2018; Tan & Wong, 2012). Configuration instructing is subject to fourth phases including: "relate, ideate, model, and test" (Plattner, 2013).

Each phase of the plan thinking approach explicitly affects understudies' encounters. The principal stage is focusing on understanding the clients' requirements through the perception or talking, while the subsequent stage focuses on discovering issues, the third stage assists the understudies with discovering arrangements, and the last two phases are utilized to choose the right arrangement and its testing for common sense (Henriksen et al., 2017).Sandorova et al. (2020) tried this strategy in English tourism courses. The outcomes showed that this methodology left numerous constructive outcomes on the understudies. The fundamental effect was identified with collaboration consolation, self-acknowledgment, participation, taking care of issues, and making novel thoughts.

Mustafa, (2018), asked the following questions: "Is there a gap between the curricula taught in tourism educational faculties and the knowledge and skills required in the tourism marketplace?" "Do the students' knowledge and skills acquired during their study in tourism educational faculties qualify them to join the tourism marketplace?" (Mustafa, 2019; pp 376). The author used a random sample of 120 students in 3 Jordanian universities to answer these questions. The author found that there is a need to put more efforts by Jordanian universities to train and introduce students to employment market. The author also found

that “more coordination with employers in tourism and hospitality business should take place, where their needs and expectations are considered during the stages of curricula design, training and job selection. Not less important is improving the quality of the programs to acquaint students with necessary skills needed for tourism careers” (Mustafa, 2018. pp 381).

In this research, the evaluation of internship programs' success if the tourism students receive direct training through the tourism hospitality courses (Figure 1). The students' that form the population of this study received direct training using (ELT theory) and they joined internship program training. The study seeks to investigate the effect of direct training using ELT theory through academic courses on the success of internship programs.

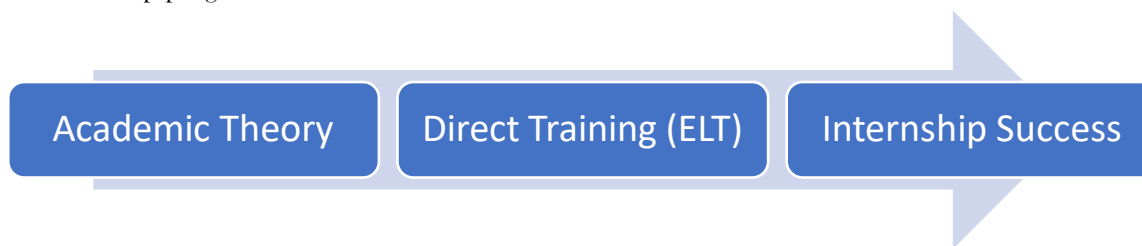


Figure 1: The route for internship program success

### Materials and Methods

The objective of this study is to investigate the ability of direct training to integrate the knowledge gained by students through theoretical courses and its role to enrich the experience they gain through the internship programs. The study was a cross-sectional study based on the students that receive direct training through the teaching courses and joined internship programs in different tourism and hospitality enterprises. A random sample composed of 221 students was selected to participate in this research. The selected sample size relied on the total number of graduates from tourism colleges in Jordan. A simple random sample calculator was used to estimate the size of the random sample. The confidence level used was 95% and the error tolerance was 5%. The sample was asked about the importance of direct training using ELT application in the tourism curriculum and its role to improve the experience gained through traditional internship programs. The response rate reached 97.7% (n=216). The questionnaires were collected through the internship programs students at the hotels, restaurants, and tourism agencies. All students of the sample were passing their fourth semester which is devoted to training through internship programs according to the colleges' academic plans. The age of the students ranged from 19-21 years knowing that the college study is two years only. The sample was composed of 75.5% males and 24.5% females. All the students were in their second college year. The majority of the sample (68.5%) have shown that they did not select the internship program that they joined and only 12.3% of the students reported that they receive incentives while they were joining the internship program.

The questionnaire was used to collect data and reach the objectives of this research. The questionnaire included the following sections: The first section was designed to collect information about the students including the age, gender, studying year, and the recipient of the incentive in the internship program. The second section of the questionnaire is concerned with the evaluation of the internship programs. The assessment of the internship program included the timing of the internship program, the ability of the internship program to cover the theory courses, the time given through the internship

program enough to gain good experience, the sufficiency of time devoted for real training compared to total time and the availability of specialists for training. The third second was designed to measure the importance of direct training through tourism courses to enrich the students' capabilities through the internship programs. The third part included: The distribution of training according to academic courses, the availability of training places inside the colleges, the merge of the training semester with the other academic courses through the two years study, the contribution of the experience gained through direct training in the internship program, and the financial overburden. Five Likert scales were used: 5: Highly Agree, 4: Agree, 3: To some extent agree, 2: Disagree, and 1: Highly disagree. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The results of the first part (ISP) showed that Cronbach's alpha was (0.780) and a mean (2.95) and standard deviation (0.556), while the Cronbach's alpha for the third section (ELT) was (0.857), the mean (4.055) and standard deviation was (0.559).

### Results and Discussions

The ELT represented through direct training according to the needs of the academic course was introduced through the academic semesters according to the academic courses plan and the academic training needs. Maier and Thomas (2013) have shown that the experiential learning theory will strengthen the experience, improve intelligent perception, theoretical conceptualization, and strengthen dynamic experimentation. The results showed that the students highly agreed that the introduction of training through the academic course was helpful for them ( $m=3.72$ ,  $SD=1.068$ ). The benefits gained were higher when the experiential training was introduced directly to support the academic courses ( $m=4.09$ ,  $SD=0.813$ ). This is might associated with the direct experience the students gained based on trial and error that helped them to build good experience. Also, the commitment to ELT was very high by students as the process was supervised by the college directly ( $m=3.71$ ,  $SD=0.965$ ). These results raised the importance of introducing experiential training according to academic course's needs. The training using this model should increase the integration between the academic and training needs (Table 1). Maier and Thomas (2013) have shown that experiential learning will improve the understanding of the expectations of the career realistically.

A high evaluation was given for the comprehensiveness of direct experiential training using ELT. This high evaluation can be accomplished through the direct service of training for the academic courses ( $m=3.89$ ,  $SD=1.037$ ). The students' agreed that direct training was a good method to gain experience and transfer knowledge ( $m=4.48$ ,  $SD=0.654$ ). The academic supervision was considered integrating procedures of ELT success according to the students' evaluation ( $m=4.31$ ,  $SD=0.734$ ) (Table 1). The participation of students with the academic staff increased their capabilities to learn and use the eternal experiences to solve their problems and improve their reaction to the different sessions.

The evaluation of training periods was very efficient. The results showed that the direct training and experience exchange provides them a chance to get the needed training ( $m=4.33$ ,  $SD=0.766$ ). The time usage of direct training was very effective ( $m=4.02$ ,  $SD=0.962$ ). Also, the collaboration between the trainer and the students was very high of direct training ( $m=4.19$ ,  $SD=0.939$ ) (Table 1).

The direct training using ELT theory was directly derived from the academic courses to enrich the knowledge of the students. The results showed high evaluation the training programs were designed to serve the academic courses ( $m=4.05$ ,  $SD=0.939$ ). Moreover, the evaluation of training directly by the academic

staff was provided a chance to improve the training ( $m=4.16$ ,  $SD=0.809$ ). Direct training has improved the connection of students to the academic courses ( $m=3.70$ ,  $SD=0.991$ ) (Table 1).

Table 1: The evaluation of ELT application through hospitality and tourism courses

Item	N	Mean	SD
<b>Time of ELT</b>			
The introduction of training connected to academic courses directly is a timing process	216	3.72	1.068
Training after academic sessions directly increased the benefits from training	216	4.09	0.813
The commitment to the attendance of direct training is high	216	3.71	0.965
<b>Comprehensiveness</b>			
Direct training is serving all academic courses equally	216	3.89	1.037
Direct training is another way to transfer knowledge	216	4.48	0.654
The training provides academic supervision which is necessary to integrate the training	216	4.31	0.734
<b>Training period</b>			
In direct training, the time given is enough to satisfy the students' needs	216	4.33	0.766
The use of time is effective by trainers and academics	216	4.02	0.962
The collaboration is higher inside the training places	216	4.19	0.930
<b>Link to academic courses</b>			
Training programs are designed according to academic material	216	4.05	0.939
The evaluation of training is supported the continuous improvement	216	4.16	0.809
The training improves the student's connection to academic courses	216	3.70	0.991

The results showed that a good assessment of the internship programs in tourism and hospitality colleges when being introduced after the direct training through the academic courses. The results showed that the time of internship programs is suitable for the students when introduced as enrichment of the previous direct training ( $m=3.81$ ,  $SD=1.033$ ). This increased the students' commitment the attendance for these programs ( $m=3.64$ ,  $SD=0.987$ ). The results showed that the students were contributed to measuring the suitability of ISP in tourism and hospitality colleges ( $m=3.91$ ,  $SD=1.105$ ). These results emphasized the rolling of students in these programs as a graduation requirement of the tourism and hospitality graduates. The ISP programs' suitability was very moderate and this improved the students' enthusiasm to attend these programs (Table 2).

The results showed that the coverage of the ISP for the academic courses when it is planned to integrate the direct training received through the academic courses. The students have shown that the ISP covers the training needed for the academic courses ( $m=3.92$ ,  $SD=1.093$ ). The distribution of the training time in the ISP considered the needs of the students and their importance in the academic courses ( $m=3.81$ ,  $SD=1.054$ ). A higher evaluation was given for the care of ISP for the students' specialty needs ( $m=3.96$ ,  $SD=1.114$ ).

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A moderate evaluation was given for the ISP period. The schedule time for the ISP was intermediately evaluated by the students ( $m=3.25$ ,  $SD=1.072$ ). Also, intermediate evaluation was given for enough period of ISP to cover different materials ( $m=3.45$ ,  $SD=1.010$ ). The availability of trainers through ISP was intermediately evaluated ( $m=3.44$ ,  $SD=1.050$ ) (Table 2).

The moderate assessment was given for the output evaluation of ISP and its relationship to academic courses direct training ( $m=3.51$ ,  $SD=1.032$ ), while moderate evaluation was given for the planning of ISP according to the academic courses training ( $m=3.52$ ,  $SD=0.950$ ) and the planning of ISP according to academic staff and business owners ( $m=3.63$ ,  $SD=1.044$ ) (Table 2).

Table 2: The student's evaluation of the internship program when received after the direct training in the academic courses

Item	N	Mean	SD
<b>Timing of internship program</b>			
The internship scheduled time is suitable for students to integrate the direct training through the academic courses	216	3.81	1.033
The time of internship increases my attendance commitment based on the received direct training	216	3.64	0.987
The college consults the students for the suitability of internship program time.	216	3.91	1.105
<b>Comprehensiveness</b>			
The internship program covers the required training that integrates the direct training through the academic courses	216	3.92	1.093
The internship program is designed to integrate the direct training received by the students	216	3.81	1.054
The internship program cares for all specialty needs	216	3.96	1.114
<b>Internship period</b>			
The time of the internship program is enough to gain the required experience in tourism and hospitality	216	3.25	1.072
The internship program period is enough to cover different training subjects	216	3.45	1.010
Trainers are available through the period of an internship program	216	3.44	1.050
<b>Link with academic courses</b>			
The internship program is planned according to the academic courses training needs	216	3.52	0.950
The internship program enriched the direct training received through the academic courses	216	3.63	1.044
The output of internship programs is added to academic courses outcomes	216	3.51	1.032

The results showed a high correlation between the students' satisfaction with the ELT and the outputs of the internship program (Table 3). The Person correlation test showed that the evaluation of correlation is



very high (0.813) with significant results ( $p < 0.05$ ). This is might associated with the integration of the knowledge introduced by experiential training through the courses and the self-confidence created by the students to attend and participate in the internship programs. The ELT improve the students' expectation of what they will find within the internship programs and improve their interaction within the problem through their improved capabilities to solve the problems and build their knowledge and experience.

Tale 3: The correlation between the satisfaction of ELT and the internship program according to the hospitality students.

	ELT evaluation
Internship programs evaluation	0.813
N	216
Prop	0.021

### Conclusions

The students' success in tourism and hospitality depends on the experiences the students gain to join the tourism market. The traditional training procedure offered by the tourism and hospitality colleges in Jordan is through ISP, which depends mainly on the business owners' agreement to allow these programs in their organizes and in most cases this ISP is executed according to the business owners' arrangements without the interference of the academic staff of different tourism colleges. Mustafa (2012) had shown that the coordination between the tourism universities and tourism business owners is missed, with low expectations of the students' experience required for the tourism business market. The internship programs are usually held after the completion of the academic courses as the original part of the graduation requirements. The evaluation of ISP was not executed in most cases and if done it reflects the point of view of business owners away of scientific evaluation of training. In this study, the tourism hospitality students received direct training through the academic courses before joining the internship program which was designed to meet the academic courses' needs. Due to the previous preparations of students before the ISP, the students showed that they were encouraged to attend such ISP especially since the students' point of view was considered when arranging such courses. The times' ISP courses were suitability designed when planned after the direct training received by students through the academic courses and the students showed high self-trust to attend such programs when being well prepared. Yang and Wong (2018) have shown that experiential learning (EL) will improve student self-efficacy in tourism hospitality. Ruhanen(2005) has shown that the experiential learning theory will bridge the gap between the theory and the practice, which was approved through this study through the improvement of the ISP value. The period of the ISP was suitable to offer all the experience needed by the tourism and hospitality students. The linkage of ISP to the academic courses was very satisfactory as the internship training was executed by students with high self-trust built through the direct training. Also, the results showed that the academic staff interfered with the design of ISP programs and what they care about was the approve of joining the program as a graduation requirement. Mustafa (2018) has shown that the training programs should meet the requirements of the market, which was accomplished through direct training and enriched through the directed ISP. The students found that direct training using the ELT procedure helped them to receive continuous training according to the needs of the academic course and the experience needed to integrate

the knowledge gained through the academic courses which were enriched and improved through ISP. The supervision of the direct training improved the students' attendance and improved the experience they gain to improve their capabilities in tourism and hospitality. In direct training using ELT, the training designed through the academic staff which be directed to the students' needs and so will be evaluated by the academic team. Due to the success of ELT method to enrich the experience of the tourism and hospitality students', the study recommended that the tourism and hospitality colleges are recommended to arrange mixed programs to improve the students' experience and supervise both methods directly to ensure the experience gained by the students. Yang and Wong (2018) have shown that the application of ELT in the tourism industry will improve graduates' employability. Ruhanen(2005) has shown that ETL will improve the employability of recipients as it improves the capability of the graduate to solve problems and improve performance. Therefore, the study recommended that mix method of training will ensure the ability of students to gain enough experience that improve their opportunities to join the tourism market.

### Limitations and future research

There are a number of limitations to this study. The first potential limitation is the possible lack of generalizability of the findings, since the study is limited to the case of tourism education in Jordan. Thus, comprehensive future research is required on deferent tourism students in deferent countries. Another recommendation is perhaps to run a comparative study on different service industries. Moreover, in this study, a quantitative approach was employed, therefore, future studies could adopt a qualitative analysis that might further increase the understanding and assessment of relevant training needs.

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