



IMPACTS OF TOURISM EDUCATION DIMENSIONS ON RAISING TOURISM AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS OF GENERAL EDUCATION: SAUDI ARABIA IN LIGHT OF THE GLOBAL TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between tourism education dimensions and improved awareness of tourism among students in intermediate and secondary schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The relationship between the items of tourism education dimensions and improved awareness of tourism is examined in this study. The proposed framework suggests that there exists a potential relationship between these items (knowledge, concepts, skills, and trends) and improved awareness of tourism. This is significant to the curricula developers and General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage regarding the need for curricula development to enhance prospects of cooperation between them in the education sector. This, in turn, leads to enhancing the flow of students from general education that have more information in the field of tourism. The paper concludes that the Ministry of Education should devise and implement more students' activities and reforms, which would plug in social studies curricula on knowledge, concepts, skills, and trends in the field of tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Several reasons can be attributed to people's awareness of their tourism potentials. Also, tourist agencies are responsible for tourism awareness because they often fail to provide attention to tourism and tourist attractions so that tourism development is sustained (Magablah & Deeb, 2000). Abu Arad (2008) upholds Magablah and Deeb's (2000) proposal by stating that there is an urgent need to establish orientation through educational platforms. Tourism is a vast economic resource, which provides the country with a good income. Therefore, countries have started to direct more attention to tourism. Ministries and independent agencies for tourism have put forward plans and designed suitable tourism programs based on the country's policy and culture to fit the social situation (Pohjola, 2002). It is important that people's attitudes and perceptions towards tourism are taken into

consideration as people's acceptance or rejection can affect successful tourism, as well as the development projects that are sustainable in these countries.

Tourism has become one of the most important economic and social phenomena, which reflects on the behavior of humans and movements at any place and time. Tourism has become an incorporated part of our life and, therefore, it is one of the areas of social studies. Tourism should not be deemed as a luxury but a necessity to fill the vacuum of official holidays and breaks. This is the main reason behind satisfying the needs of the natural and cultural resources surrounding humans unless they find their needs and desires in other environments (Alomairi, 2013). Tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is paramount because of its important role in the economic, social, and cultural development. Tourism contributes to shaping the features of the components of the Saudi society on the world map through tourists, who visit the Kingdom (Alomairi, 2013). Furthermore, KSA exhibits rich and unique Islamic cultural heritage. The Kingdom is renowned for its hospitality as Saudi people are friendly, welcoming, and generous when receiving guests, visitors or strangers. Moreover, KSA is known for its Islamic values and indigenous habits and traditions of the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, the Kingdom has achieved much so far through the comprehensive renaissance in various fields as the country is growing fast. There are also many other elements that contribute to the promotion of tourism in the KSA, including adequate security, low costs of living, and lower rates of taxes like zero tax rates (Abu Arad, 2008).

Tourism is considered as a prominent economic activity in the 21st century as it ranks the second activity among the international economic activities (Deschenes & Greenstone, 2007). Therefore, Saudi Arabia has recently focused on the tourism sector because of many sacred religious places in the Kingdom like the city of Mecca (also Makkah) in the region of Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula. It is the capital of Makkah's administrative headquarters. Mecca is the Muslim pilgrims' destination every year with numerous pilgrims from different Islamic countries all-round the year. Mecca is the holiest city in Islam because it is the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and his first site of the Quran revelation. The annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the holiest city for Muslims, is called Hajj. Performing Hajj is an obligatory duty for Muslims. Hajj must be performed at least once in Muslims' lifetime, who are physically, as well as financially capable of undertaking the journey of Hajj. Mecca is also home to Kaaba, which is the direction of Muslims in their prayers. Therefore, Mecca represents the most cosmopolitan city in the Islamic world. Moreover, during summer and spring seasons, the climate is usually moderate in many regions of the Kingdom, which makes it a popular destination for tourists from the Gulf area and neighboring Arab countries (Abu Arad, 2008). In Saudi Arabia, tourism has been increasing in recent years to become an integral part of the tourism development policy, which is adopted by the Kingdom (AL Dosari, 2014). This study tackles a specific problem, i.e., the lack of tourism education dimensions in social studies curricula and, consequently, there is a lack of tourism awareness among students in two important stages of public education in KSA, including intermediate and secondary stages.

This research aims to investigate the relationship between these items, including knowledge, concepts, skills, and trends and improved tourism awareness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the existing literature and previous studies on tourism education. An overview of Tourism Education Dimensions (TED) in social studies curricula in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is provided. This includes the reasons for the absence of TED in social studies curricula in Saudi Arabia and what impacts these items (knowledge, concepts, skills, and trends) exert on raising tourism awareness among students

2.1 OVERVIEW OF TOURISM EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Education is the foundation and bedrock for the development of individuals and societies. Education plays a leading role in development. Many countries have adopted education as an entry point to achieve many of the goals and objectives, including economic and social development (Cotton, 2006). Therefore, education has become one of the key pillars upon which classification of countries in the field of human development is based (AL Tayab, 2012). There is a complementary relationship between tourism and education. Both tourism and education are disciplines forming parts of social sciences and humanities. The desire of human beings and their nature are considered in the national development plans of any country and, therefore, have a significant role in determining the sustainability and outcome of national development plans (ALAhmadi, 2014). Accordingly, it is important to make tourism part of education because there is a relationship between them. Education and tourism as a concept can be defined as the process of deploying and achieving cognitive and emotional awareness and behavioral skills to tourism and its various components through formal and informal educational institutions, and using strategies, methods and educational tools (Popescu & Băltărețu, 2012). The purpose of tourism education may be even more pronounced.

Promoting education and improving the quality of education for children and youth tourism aim at gaining concrete knowledge through designed programs, which are called educational tourism. It represents an important aspect for the child and youth tourism as a specific branch of tourism education (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In addition, educational tourism involves different ages and provides opportunities to acquaint individuals with cultural and historical contents and facilities. This is to gain and broaden knowledge, improve health, perfect skills and acquire new ones, participate in programs that give a sense of self-fulfillment, and develop a network of collaborators and friends (Serbia, 2012). Tourism awareness, as well as the tourism culture dissemination, represent significant requirements because of the key role they play in the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge of tourism issues (Abu ALasal, 2007). Therefore, synchronizing Saudi Arabia's international interest in tourism education and creating specialized bodies that work on raising public awareness to understand the tourism industry have become the engine of development and the dream world (AL Dosary, 2014).

Fidgeon (2010) indicates that the introduction of tourism as a subject of study in the 1980s for 16-18-year-old students' category in the United Kingdom has been a significant development. This effort has subsequently been preceded by the creation of National Vocational Qualifications offered by several schools and colleges. Such positive practices should, therefore, be encouraged in KSA by relevant Saudi authorities. The focus should be placed on the quality of education and training, an

integrated personal development that can cope with changes and adapt to the demands of the future. In addition, adequate emphasis should be placed on the importance of accompanying training for teaching at different levels to boost the tourism sector and meet its needs (ALnaimi, 2008).

Environmental education is a learning procedure that builds the individuals' information and mindfulness about the earth and relevant difficulties. It builds up the fundamental aptitudes and the ability to address these difficulties, cultivates mentalities, inspirations and duties to settle on educated choices and do the needful when the need arises within the surrounding location (Singh, 2006). In KSA, the lack of formal or informal knowledge of environmental education strategies has posed a devastating threat to the growth of the tourism industry in the Kingdom. The lack of awareness of the benefits and the significance of tourism has influenced the residents' commitment to tourism development, which is supposed to guide the residents on the type of environmental activities that are tourism-friendly (Ejiofor & Elechi, 2012). The authors state that it is important for environmental education to be incorporated into the curriculum of educational institutions to preserve the local environment and its components. This would, in turn, influence the residents' commitment towards tourism activities with a special interest in how the educational level of the people influences their perceptions towards their environment and commitment to tourism. Johnson (2010) emphasizes that tourism can be used as an initiative for economic reform in KSA. However, sustainable focus and planning are required, and they should be set within the framework of Islamic values as they are the key drivers of all activities and projects inclusive of effective leadership and strategic directions.

3. RESEARCH THEORY

This section presents and discusses the theories that supported the proposed framework in this study to enhance tourism education in Saudi Arabia. The Curriculum Theory is adopted in this research, which was developed by Jon Dewy. According to Hewitt (2006), the curriculum theory was originated in the early 20th century when the curriculum came to prominence as a formal way to improve schools. This formal beginning of curriculum is dated back to Franklin Bobbitt's books, i.e., 'The Making of Curriculum' in 1918 and 'How to Make a Curriculum' in 1924. The Social Constructivism Theory (SC) was extended by the early twentieth centuries scholars such as Marx and Weber, Cooley and Mead, and Veblen and Commons (Scott, 2005).

3.1 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The research framework illustrates the research model for this study, Figure 1. This model was developed based on the curriculum theory and its formal beginning of the curriculum, which is dated back to Franklin Bobbitt's books, including 'The Making of Curriculum' in 1918, 'How to Make a Curriculum' in 1924 (Hewitt, 2006). The curriculum theory is regarded as the best way to guide curriculum making (Marsh & Willis, 2007) and the social constructivism theory. The importance of the theory of social constructivism could contribute to a deep understanding of tourism knowledge (Airey, 2004; Paris, 2011). Social constructivism perceives to knowledge and learning with emphasizing social activity in multi-cultural environments. Based on the view of tourism as an inherently social phenomenon, social constructivism has relevance not only to tourism education but also to an in-depth understanding of tourism.

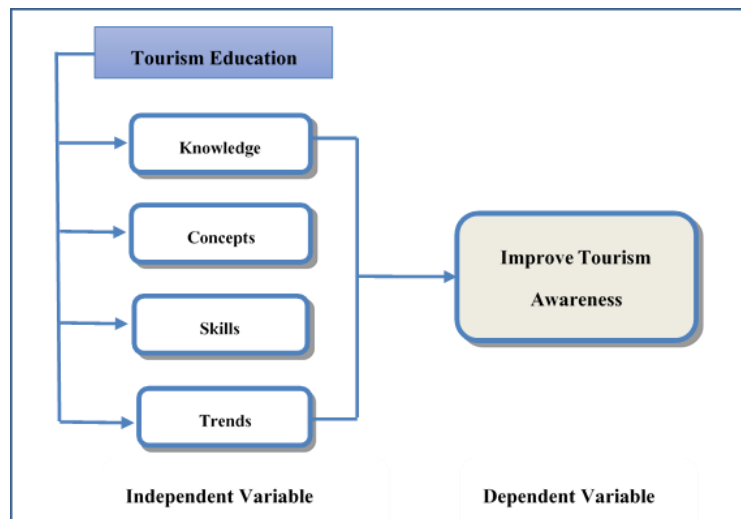


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

Promoting a classroom experience based on the social constructivist perspective of learning advances successful learning in the classroom. It also provides the foundations for successful lifelong learning. This, in turn, provides the dynamic nature of tourism, which is particularly appreciated. Therefore, tourism development depends on the effectiveness of the school curriculum in raising and developing tourism awareness among students. Tourism stands out as being of crucial importance because tourism is the main essence of knowledge to achieve tourism development among students (Airey, 2004).

To achieve tourism development among students, educators emphasize the need for tourism knowledge via upgrading the social studies textbooks for students. This should be done by providing methods that are achievable based on contemporary educational and psychological theories, including the constructivist theory. The model identifies the TED (i.e., knowledge, concepts, skills, and trends) as independent variables of the study and improved awareness of tourism as the dependent variable. Moreover, eight main hypotheses are included in the research model.

- H#1: test the relationship between Knowledge and improve awareness of tourism.
- H#2: test the relationship between Concepts and improve awareness of tourism.
- H#3: test the relationship between Skills and improve awareness of tourism.
- H#4: test the relationships between Trends and improve awareness of tourism.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presents and discusses the methodology of this research to achieve the objectives of the study with the aim of establishing empirical evidence. Therefore, a conceptual framework has been proposed in which the relationship between (TED as IVs) and improved awareness of tourism (as DV) is examined in Saudi Arabia. The adopted methodology served as conceptual modeling that depicts a new framework, which combines significant constructs. To construct this model, which is contextual in nature, several data sources were analyzed. The data were collected from social studies teachers in Saudi Arabia's education sector by using a well-structured survey questionnaire. The teachers were selected from the Ministry of Education in KSA, and it included a total of 210 respondents from the total population of 210 based on Krejcie and Morgan's published 'Table Rule of Thumb' for determining sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970, p.608). A five-Likert ordinal scale

was used as follows: 1 = Absolutely Not Important (ANI), 2 = Not Important (NI), 3 =Somewhat Important (SWI), 4 = Very Important (VI), 5 = Absolutely Very Important (AVI). The result is given for tourism variables Knowledge, Concepts, Skills, Trends. For improvement on awareness of tourism, a five Likert scale would be adopted using ordinal scales as 1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), 5 = Strongly Agree (SA).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A pilot study was conducted within the sub-study population prior to the main study. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments were tested before the data collection phase. The statistical methods of data analysis included descriptive statistics of the respondents' background and Partial Least Square PLS estimation approach. In line with Ringle, Wende, and Will (2005), Smart PLS®2.0 can be utilized to estimate measurement and structural model parameters. This is because PLS path-modeling technique is a general method for estimating causal relationships in path models that involve latent constructs, which are indirectly measured by various indicators (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Mooi, 2010). In addition, a two-step process was adopted to calculate the PLS model criteria based on Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009). Table 1 illustrates a summary of path coefficient and hypotheses testing of the direct effect.

Table 1. Summary of Path Coefficient and Hypotheses Testing for Direct Effect

Hypothesis	Path	Beta value	SE	t-value	p-values	Result
H#1	KN -> TAW	0.122	0.072	1.706*	0.044	Supported
H#2	CO -> TAW	0.114	0.089	1.277	0.101	Not Supported
H#3	SKL -> TAW	0.245	0.089	2.751**	0.003	Supported
H#4	TRE -> TAW	0.574	0.063	9.136***	0.000	Supported

*** significant at $p < 0.01$, ** significant at $p < 0.05$, * significant at $p < 0.1$, bootstrapping (n=5000) KN = knowledge dimension, CO = concepts dimension, SK = skills dimension, TR = trends dimension, TAW = improve awareness of tourism.

Table 1 shows that:

H#1: Knowledge was found to have a significant impact on improving awareness of tourism t-value =1.706. Therefore, H1 is supported that there is a relationship between the knowledge dimension and improving awareness of tourism.

H#2: Concepts dimension was found to have no significant relationship with improving awareness of tourism (Beta=0.114, t-value = 1.277), given the significant value of 90% and the cutoff value for t-value as 1.282. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is not supported. This implies that there is no relationship between concepts dimension and improving awareness of tourism.

H#3: skills dimension (SK) has shown a relationship with improving awareness of tourism, where (Beta=0, 245 t-value= 2.751). Consequently, H3 that was postulated to have a relationship between the skills dimension and improving awareness of tourism is supported.

H#4: Trends dimension, TRE was found to have a significant relationship with improving awareness of tourism, where (Beta= 0.574, t-value = 9.136). Therefore, we can conclude that H4, which was suggested to have a positive impact on the trends dimension and improving awareness of tourism, is supported. As shown in the Table 5.14 below.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the proposed independent variable effect of improved awareness of Tourism (IAT) as depicted in Figure 1. The proposed framework has significant contributions in relation to bridging the gap of social studies curricula in Saudi Arabia. First, if the proposed model is validated, the proposed effect will generate findings that provide curricula developers, educational institutions, and social studies experts (teachers) with useful insights into the key role of “curricula development and reform of educational policies” in Saudi Arabia to bridge the gap of tourism awareness due to the lack of TEDs in social studies curricula and activities among students in Saudi schools. Second, the results suggested that if the TED-IAT gap, as well as the proposed framework, are validated, the findings of the study will have practical contributions into increasing the TEDs in social studies curricula so that students are more aware of tourism dimensions. This, in turn, will help them in their future life because these dimensions aim to fulfill the students’ needs and boost economic growth in the Kingdom. This implies that students, as well as teachers, will be provided with important dimensions in the tourism field with the aim of increasing the capacity of target students to access the best results.

7. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The used or generated data and the result of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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