

Impact of Institutional features on Hospitality Education

Evidence from Bangladesh

Amin Khandaker

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First edition (Printed in Germany and other countries)

978-3-347-07263-3 (Paperback)

978-3-347-07264-0 (Hardcover)

978-3-347-07265-7 (eBook)

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Published & printed by: tredition GmbH, Halenreie 40-44, Hamburg, Germany

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Acknowledgments

Every person has an inspiration and guideline for growing. Publishing a book was never an idea or fall under my competencies. A heartfelt thank to dearest Reshma Adhikari who made me able to take this challenge and define my competencies. You deserve it.

The book took a year to research and write. The author was fortunate to have the assistance of a number of people and organizations. Among the organizations were the EduSwiss Educational Services, Swiss Institute for Management and Hospitality, and the University of Salford.

I would like to thank every member who was directly or indirectly associated with this project and for every bit of effort that they placed in for my success. I especially appreciate the participants who provided me with their time and honest opinions, which were the basis of collecting data needed to accomplish this book.

Researching, writing, and editing a book of this size requires patience, support and hard work. It also requires the occasional willingness to sacrifice technical accuracy in favor of clarity.

A considerable amount of time went into checking the data entries, but if any mistakes have slipped through, the author apologizes and accepts full responsibility.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my first written book to my Superman; **My dad!**

Without whom I would not be where I am.

I love you more Abbu

Abstract

This book aimed to examine the impact of institutional features on hospitality education using evidence from Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the world's emerging economies that is expected to grow and play a leading role in the global economy. The country, officially known as The People's Republic of Bangladesh, is the world's most populous country, ranking just behind its neighbor Pakistan. The main objectives of the book were: to explore the key attractions and developments in the hospitality industry, to examine the challenges facing Bangladesh Tourism and hospitality industry, to explore the institutional factors that influence the training of human resources; and to assess the importance of discipline in hospitality management. The author interviewed several respondents and their views regarding the impact of institutional features on hospitality education in Bangladesh collected. The study findings reveal that several institutional factors play a critical role in the direction that Bangladesh tourism takes and help shape the future of the industry. Lack of investment in human resources and lack of physical infrastructure have an adverse effect on the growth of tourism. It is also evident from the respondents that the first step towards tourism prosperity in Bangladesh involves having the government and the bureaucrats behind any chosen form of intervention. The study has the potential of informing policy as it is related to investment in the training of personnel to perform a critical role in the hospitality industry in Bangladesh. The development of tourism is seen by many as holding the key to opening up some of the underdeveloped regions of the country.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Bangladesh is a country located in the Bay of Bengal in Southern Asia. The country is one of the world's emerging economies that is expected to grow and play a leading role in the global economy with time (Hassan & Ullah, 2013). According to the author, the country, officially known as The People's Republic of Bangladesh, is the world's most populous country, ranking just behind its neighbor India and Pakistan. The country has rich fertile lands, tropical rainforest, mountain ranges, and numerous waterways that make it very rich in biodiversity and geographical variations. Agriculture is the leading economic activity in the country, contributing about 20% of the GDP (Mahboob Ali & Parvin, 2010). Other key economic activities include oil and gas, manufacturing, especially textiles, and tourism.

Tourism is a sector that many believe could propel the economy of Bangladesh very far. The country is not short of attractions from the resort city of Cox's Bazar to the Sylhet region, and three world heritage sites (Mahboob Ali & Parvin, 2010). Bangladesh is home to the world's longest beach, increasing its appeal even more. Other attractions include the diverse culture of the country's people, historical monuments, and sites, wildlife, and resorts. Some people may also visit the country for the spiritual purpose given it is home to some prominent religions such as Islam, Buddhists, Hindu, and Christianity. The sorry state of tourism in Bangladesh is appalling, and one would not fail to get dismayed why no one has done enough to promote the economic activity given that the country has so many tourist attractions. It shows a lack of concern on the part of the government because it is one industry that could kickstart the country's economy, but it has not done anything to harness this massive potential. According to Shamsuddoha, (2014), developing tourism is a win-win for all because not only does it lead to the creation of jobs but also the development of crucial infrastructure such as roads, airports and electricity and contributes to the country's sustainability. The author notes that the government must take deliberate steps to grow visitor numbers, indicating that improving the business environment, removing barriers such as Visa obtaining procedures, and providing incentives for the creation and development of knowledge could contribute to the growth of tourism.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 General Objectives

To assess the Impact of Institutional features on hospitality education in Bangladesh

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To explore the key attractions and developments in the hospitality industry
- ii. To examine the challenges facing Bangladesh Tourism and hospitality industry
- iii. To explore the institutional factors that influence the training of human resources
- iv. Importance of discipline in hospitality management



Picture: Saint Martin Island, Cox's Bazar (2018)

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section will examine relevant literature on the impact of institutional features on hospitality education. The study will specifically focus on key attractions and developments in the hospitality industry in Bangladesh, the challenges facing Bangladesh Tourism and hospitality industry, and institutional factors that influence the training of human resources in Bangladesh.

2.2 The attractions and developments in the hospitality industry

Bangladesh's tourism is somewhat of a paradox. Everything about the country's attractions is wild. Even the 125-kilometer long beach at Cox's Bazar that is longer than any other in the world is not a place that is ever filled with tourists every time (Baker, 2014). The author, writing for The Guardian on a tour of the country, however, notes that the figures have been on a steady rise over the past two decades, something to cheer about the state of the nation's tourism. The potential that Bangladesh holds for travel is massive but lags behind some of its Asian neighbors such as India and Thailand for various reasons.

Chandra Roy and Roy (2015) give a breakdown of some of the leading tourism hotspots in Bangladesh. The most recognizable attraction is perhaps Cox's Bazar with the 125-kilometer long beach that is second to none on the globe. The best time to visit Cox's Bazar, according to the authors, is during winter, and leisure seekers can explore the magnificent white sandy beach and the beautiful weather. Visitors can also visit the island of St. Martin that has the most beautiful coral anywhere, and here they can get to do activities such as snorkeling and deep-sea diving. One can also visit Kuakata's sandy beaches and get to experience sunrise and sunset while there, making for an unforgettable experience.

There is more to Bangladesh than the sandy beaches. Sylhet is a region in the country that offers beautiful spots where tourists can go and get wowed by the wild beauty of the country. Jaflong

situated at Bangladesh's border with the Indian state of Meghalaya. The region is home to the Khasia tribesmen, and here visitors can get to learn about the lifestyle of the locals and experience how they live as well as their cultures. The place is just about few hours from Dhaka, making access very easy. While in Sylhet, adventure seekers may also visit Bisanakandi, also located on the Bangladesh- India border. Here they get to explore the serenity and the beauty of the gardens situated among the hills and just breathe the countryside fresh air that is a welcome break from the pollution and impurities of the city. The place is ideal for people looking for a getaway from their usual hustle and bustle, and they'd be so rejuvenated when leaving the region. Sylhet is so diverse, and one may also visit the Ratargul freshwater swamp by the river Goain. Many say that the place has a feeling and a flavor like that of the famous Amazon jungle.

Bangladesh is a land of water. The country has numerous rivers, waterways, and swamps, on top of kilometers of coastline. Various waterfalls provide for scenic viewing and exciting feeling. One of them is the Madhabkunda waterfall, among the largest waterfalls in the country. Beautiful tea gardens line up the way leading to the falls, and the lemon and rubber plantations make for a stunning landscape. Himchori, not very far from Cox's Bazar, is also famous for a waterfall, which is another beautiful spot. Kaptai Lake, a human-made lake formed as a result of the Kaptai dam, is another water body that is a draw for many tourists. Bangladesh has many rivers and waterways, and visitors can enjoy a boat ride as one gets to see a wild beauty up close.

Bangladesh, as a tropical country, has a substantial portion of its land under forest, and that may interest many visitors, especially the sworn lovers of nature. On a visit to the country, one may want to visit the Sundarbans. At over 10'000 square kilometers, it is easily the world's largest tidal mangrove forest, and 60 percent is located in Bangladesh with the rest in India. The forest is a UNESCO world heritage site, further increasing its appeal. The Lawacherra Rainforest chain is one of the best-reserved forests in Bangladesh, and visitors will want to tour this forest dubbed a paradise in Asia. Herein they would see the famed and rare Chloroform tree.

Bangladesh is famous for its tea, and one would do well to visit the tea estates on their trip to the country. Srimongal, known as "the land of two leaves and a bud" is the country's tea capital and home to the most extensive tea gardens in the country. Here not only will tourists get to experience the beauty and marvel at the lush green carpets over the land but also learn a lot about what goes

into the making of one of the most loved beverages in the world. There is also a tea museum which provides for a trip down memory lane and provides insights into the development of tea farming over the decades. One may also choose to explore the wildlife.



Picture: Wile life at Sundarban (2017)

The list of places to visit in Bangladesh is endless. However, one should not miss a visit to the dozens of prehistoric and archeological sites scattered throughout the nation. The Shaheed Minar is a monument in Dhaka that is a sight to behold. Ahsan Manzil is a palace that used to host the famous Nawab family and is still an attraction to this day. Lalmai, Moinamoti, and Shalbon Bihar are other famous Bangladesh historic sites located close to the city of Comilla. These places are just a few of the many spots that a visitor to Bangladesh would find irresistible.

There is only a lot to discover, and it is the perfect place for those that seek thrill in having an adventure.



Picture: Sylhet (2019)

2.3 Challenges facing Bangladesh Tourism and hospitality industry

India and other leading Asian tourist nations embark on elaborate marketing campaigns to attract visitors to their countries, but Bangladesh does little on that front. The problem starts with the fact that the country lacks a proper strategic plan and framework upon which to base its tourism promotion and development (Baker, 2014). This deficiency is telling because it means that Bangladesh faces the problem of identifying the necessary interventions that would propel the country's tourism sector to the desired levels. Even where there is a policy, the implementation is usually inadequate and, thus, at best ineffective.

As an example, the government in 2010 made changes to the national tourism policy with the goals of promoting sustainable economic development, increasing the environment, and environmental sustainability and purity (Shamsuddoha, 2013). The government in revising the policy from the

1990s was intent in filling the gap in the rules and guidelines for the tourism sector and also wanted to make the regulations work. It also hoped to create responsibly, and all-inclusive tourism by enjoining local people, non-governmental organizations, local administration, and women groups. Further, state agencies acknowledge in the policy that they need to do a lot more towards ensuring that they develop human resources to drive the industry as well as create a conducive environment that will allow tourism to thrive. The author notes that while the state updated its policy, the implementation has been less than pleasing, and there is not enough effort to transform the contents on paper into concrete action and tangible results.

Any country that wants to develop and achieve its tourism potential must invest a significant amount of resources in the sector as well as related areas. One problem that Bangladesh faces is chronic underinvestment in this crucial economic segment. Shamsuddoha, (2013) notes that even though funds for tourism development and investment have increased over the years, there is still a lot that the state needs to do to elevate the status of the country's tourism, especially in the critical hotspots such as Cox's Bazar, Sundarbans, and Kuakata. The lack of the critical investments implies that the country misses out on the revenues that would accrue to her when visitors, especially foreigners, come to visit the various tourist attraction sites.

The Bangladeshi tourism sector faces years of neglect and lack of prioritization despite the potential benefits it could bring to the country's economy. Other Asian countries such as Maldives, Malaysia, Laos, and Cambodia began developing their tourism sectors much later but have leaped so much ahead of Bangladesh (Shamsuddoha, 2014). The author gives an example of Cambodia that in 1999 recorded less than 100,000 tourists while Bangladesh received 176, 000 visitors. Slightly over a decade later, in 2010, Cambodia would manage 2 million visitors while Bangladesh could only record 267,000. The picture is shocking, if not appalling. It explains just how dire the situation is, and there is simply no hiding for the country. Failure to buck the trend sooner than later will see Bangladesh fall even further away, and the country is at a point where it needs an elaborate plan of action if it is to join the ranks of the world's elite tourism destinations.

While Bangladesh tourism has consistently faced inadequate budget allocation and lack of a marketing plan, perhaps the most debilitating problem facing the sector is the sorry state of the

infrastructure in and out of the country's leading tourist areas. The leading tourist destination of Cox's Bazar experiences problems such as lack of a well- functioning water and sewage system, no gas connection, and the existing air facility can only support a limited number of flights (Shamsuddoha, 2014). The author goes on to give a second example of Kuakata, another excellent beach destination which, despite some recent road improvements is not appealing enough to tourists because the facilities are not up to standard. Bangladesh boasts a host of archeological sites, three of them having attained world heritage site classification by UNESCO, and five more under review. However, Shamsuddoha, (2014), notes that tourists shun Paharpur, a world heritage site, because the area is quite a distance from the capital Dhaka, and there are no facilities such as hotels in the surrounding region where they can stay. If Bangladesh is to have a chance of achieving even half of the untapped potential that is tourism, the government, and other parties must make a concerted effort to invest in the appropriate infrastructure as a matter of priority.

Mahboob Ali and Parvin (2010) that in Bangladesh, the tourist spots, as well as the costs, have a positive impact on the economy. They opine that the government should make an effort to develop tourism as a priority sector because the benefits of doing so are immense. Tourism is an essential ingredient for the economy to take off, and there should be an effort to apply the synergy between the marketing plan and its implementation. The only way to do this would be via an integrated marketing strategy that would take care of all the facets and areas of tourism in the country. The authors in making their case for prioritization of tourism cite Fayissa and Tadasse (2007). They found that earnings from tourism contributed significantly to the GDP and the economic growth of sub- Saharan countries, as did the development of human capital. They, therefore, argue that Bangladesh, just like the Africans, can experience fast economic growth in the short- run by investing in the development of tourism.

This is especially critical when other sectors of the economy are experiencing a slump or are not growing as per expectation. Mahboob Ali and Parvin (2010) also cite Deegan and Moloney, who argued that there is a strong correlation between the growth of the tourist sector and overall economic growth and development. The authors further suggest that as far as the global macroeconomic is concerned, there is reason to believe that tourism can contribute to the growth of

the economy for years to come. However, the only way to achieve this growth is if the concerned parties come up with proper measures and strategies to address the matters on the table.

Bangladesh has Bengali as her official language, and there is a host of other local languages that the people speak. The scenario creates a problem because foreign tourists coming to the country find it hard to communicate with their hosts. Shamsuddoha, (2014), lists the language barrier as a critical hindrance to tourism development in the country, just as with the infrastructural challenges and inadequate marketing. North-Western Bangladesh is well- known for its archeological sites.

However, some people are wary of visiting the area because of a lack of interpreters and persons conversant with foreign languages. The visitors would need someone with local knowledge to walk them through the various historical sites, and the fact that they cannot communicate with the people there inhibits the effectiveness of their trips to those places.

The language barrier is so pervasive, especially in the remote and far-flung areas that would draw in a significant number of tourists. Still, many stay away because of their interaction with the people they find there is limited by the inability to communicate with them. While it might not be possible for the native people of Bangladesh to master all foreign languages, it would help to know some key terms in the words that the population from the vital source markets speak.



Picture: Cox's Bazar Sea Beach (2019)

Personnel issues do not just stop with the language barrier. Shamsuddoha (2014) observes that Bangladesh has a deficiency of adequately trained staff that can work in the tourism industry. Aside from the physical and financial resources, human resources form a critical part of the investment required for any undertaking or sector to take off. Bangladesh, like any other country, needs well-trained and equipped people to drive the activities of its tourism sector.

The staff working at the various hotels, museums, or resorts play a very crucial role as far as the country's tourism and its marketing are concerned. The perception that tourists have of the various staff whom they interact with at different points along their journey could have an impact on how they rate the country and its tourism product, as well as their decisions on whether to have a return visit or not. If the picture is a positive one, it may lead to their return for subsequent visits, but if it is negative, then these people could stay away or cancel plans to come back if they had considered making a return trip.

The problem of inadequate training is two-fold. According to Mahboob Ali and Parvin, (2010), the first part is the youths who would like to work or are starting to work in the industry but have no skills that would enable them to forge successful careers in the field. This group of people forms the pool of talent from which the Bangladeshi tourism sector would tap into for expertise but the lack of proper and adequate training makes it hard for them to become employable. The depressed state of tourism in the country over the years has not helped their case either because that means there is no sustained demand, which would probably prompt various people and concerned organs to take remedial action. The second cluster of persons is the individuals that are already working in different roles in the sector. These individuals, according to Mahboob Ali & Parvin (2010), may possess years of experience with them. Still, they occasionally need to update their knowledge and skills to improve their effectiveness.

In its 2010 tourism policy, the Bangladesh government identified training and the creation of a pool of qualified staff as a critical driver of the industry. As such, the government set out to create and equip training facilities that would serve as centers of excellence for the staff working in the hospitality industry in the country (Mahboob Ali & Parvin, 2010). The government must take

cognizance of this gap because it has the resources and the capabilities to bring the required change, more than any individual or private organization.

Further, the state is in a position to do the activities in a much more efficient way than any private undertaking. The reason for this is that the government can carry out its operations at a comparatively lower cost because it does not carry out its initiatives with a profit motive. Having identified the problem that the country faces, the state is then in a position to come up with the requisite policy changes and course of action to deal with the situation. Further, the government can then rope in private sector players who also offer the training to supplement its initiatives because government measures and interventions alone won't suffice.

Part of the government's role as far as the training of industry personnel goes is to seek out private entities for collaborations and public-private partnerships for the sustainability of the sector through training and capacity development. The rationale for such a move is the recognition that the government alone cannot satisfy all the needs, given the resource constraints and competing needs that it faces, and it, therefore, requires a hand from private organizations to meet the objectives. One of the functions of any government in the social and economic contexts is to play a facilitating role.

The facilitation involves the creation of a suitable environment and providing the factors necessary for private entities to carry out their activities. Also, the facilitation could imply the formation of strategic partnerships that enable the parties involved to make the most of what they have. Bangladesh, as a country with immense tourism potential, has to have thoroughly trained and motivated people working in her tourism and carrying out the various functions that make the industry thriving. These people should receive training that matches the very best on the globe, and for that, the country can benchmark her standards with what the leading countries in the world have to offer.



Picture: Hotel Royal Tulip, Cox's Bazar (2019)

The government of Bangladesh has set up institutions whose work is to promote tourism activities in the country. One of the leading bodies in this respect is the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation that acts as the country's national tourism promotion. The organization is the primary government agency tasked with developing and promoting all tourism activities in the country.

Every country that counts tourism as one of her economic activities has to have a body dedicated to promoting tourism activities and investment for sustainable development of its economy. The organization has, among other functions, the task of coming up with a structural framework upon which to base the country's tourism marketing and promotion initiatives. The role includes mapping the leading tourist areas in the nation and turning that into a marketing plan of action for both the local and international markets. One of the achievements that Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation has achieved is the establishment of the National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute (NHTTI).

NHTTI is a Bangladeshi government institution that was set up with the mandate of bringing professionalism to the nation's tourism sector through the training of professional staff to serve in various roles, throughout the industry. The NHTTI's mission lists some objectives that it intends to fulfill as part of meeting its purpose. The first primary goal is producing highly skilled and trained personnel to work in the hotel, travel agency, and other related fields ("National Hotel & Tourism Training Institute (NHTTI)," 2016).

This objective targets especially young people who are starting their pursuit of higher education and who would like to carve out a career in hospitality. In its second goal, NHTTI recognizes that there are some people already working in the industry but have no prior professional training and, as such, may not achieve their full potential and effectiveness. For this group of workers, the institute has programs that aim at equipping these individuals with the skills that, combined with their existing industry experience would make them better employees at their respective places of work.

While there are people who work in the industry with no form of qualifications, there are others that do possess some training, but that training does not meet the required standards or is not on par with what is expected to work in the sector. The NHTTI recognizes this and has programs in place to ensure that this group is also taken care of so that they can get they can attain the requisite qualifications for them to perform at their very best.

Also, NHTTI takes into consideration the fact that hospitality practitioners require continuously updating their skill set to match the dynamic market needs. To this end, the institute has come up with refresher courses, on- job training and mobile field training for employees at various tourism establishments. This particular objective aims to ensure that staff is up to date with the requirements and demands of their jobs so that they can perform at the very highest level. In the ever-changing world, it is paramount that organizations change with the times, and one of the ways to do that is through ensuring that one's employees are conversant with all the relevant knowledge about their areas of operation.



Picture: National Carrier of Bangladesh with latest 787 Dreamliner (2019)

The training of staff for jobs in the tourism industry is of utmost importance. While most of the practice may be for entry-level positions, the training agency, as well as the various establishments, must have a cadre of people, mainly young professionals specially trained and fast-tracked for management roles in the sector. To this end, NHTTI offers specialized and intense courses meant for young and energetic individuals with the potential to undertake management responsibilities in a few years from the start of their training. The programs are more cumbersome in content compared to other ordinary courses, and one is ready for a managerial role at the end of such a program.

NHTTI has made several strides in providing well trained and qualified staff for the Bangladeshi tourism industry over the years. However, some players still feel that the efforts of the entity are inadequate and do not help fulfill the country's needs. The Daily Observer quotes Taufiq Rahman, the Chief Executive of Journey plus as well as the chair of the Tour Operators' Association of Bangladesh