

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
IMPLEMENTATION IN TOURISM
AND ADVENTURE PROGRAM AT
MALAYSIA COMMUNITY
COLLEGES: AN IN-DEPTH
EXPLORATION**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor Philosophy
(Hotel & Tourism Management)

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management

August 2023

ABSTRACT

For the past thirty years, technical and vocational based education or training programs have been mushrooming in learning institutions. Such programs involve a lot of hands-on approach; therefore, it is often associated with experiential learning style. Experiential learning style is able to overcome the restrictions of traditional learning techniques and introduce new tools of shifting knowledge. Looking at the exciting development, this study explored the challenges and strategies to strengthen the implementation of experiential learning style from the lecturers', industry players' and policy makers' perspectives. In addition, this study assessed the industry players' perception on students' competencies, specifically for the Tourism and Adventure program at community colleges in Malaysia. This research used a qualitative approach with constructionist research paradigm and cross-sectional time horizon approach. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the informants at places convenient to them. A total of thirty respondents consisting of thirteen lecturers, thirteen industry players and four policy makers were interviewed. The face-to-face interview was done directly at involved community colleges and industry premises. The data gathered was transcribed verbatim and analysed for themes. Twenty main themes and forty-eight sub-themes were identified out of the three groups. For the findings, the most highlighted challenges are related to top level program management issues, followed by lecturers' insufficient competencies and students' unfavourable attitudes for experiential learning style. As for the suggestions on new strategy for experiential learning implementation, the results suggested enhancing lecturers' skill and knowledge, as well as more support from the top-level program management. Meanwhile the findings from industry players' perceptions on the students' competencies indicate the students should have the 'industry ready' competencies. A triangulation on the themes between the three groups of respondents was also done and the result shows a pattern of concentration and connection between the findings on challenges, strategies, and perceptions on students' competencies. The findings of the study contribute to the literature on teaching and learning style using experiential learning for hospitality and tourism-based program. Practically, the outcome of this study may be used by the Ministry of Higher learning; community colleges and other relevant agencies to further strengthen the implementation of experiential learning approach, specifically for tourism and hospitality education. Knowing the challenges, needed strategies and the main stakeholders' (lecturer, industry players, and the policy maker) perceptions help relevant parties to improve and better strategies resources to enhance the experiential learning implementation. The findings also could assist the policy maker to review or come up with better policies for the smooth-running of the experiential learning operation in higher education.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, challenges, strategies, competencies, tourism, and hospitality program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I wish to thank Allah Almighty for His blessings and grace for me to have the opportunity to embark on my PhD and for completing this long, challenging, and exciting journey successfully. I hope that this research will provide valuable information on tourism education focuses on experiential learning. My gratitude and thanks go to both of my beloved supervisors, Associate Professor Dr. Norzuwana Sumarjan and Dr. Ahmad Esa A. Rahman for their supervision and patience. Their endless approach and motivation guided me to finish my dissertation with proud. I would not reach to the end if it not because of their constant support. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to all the staff and lecturers of Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM Puncak Alam for all the help and support during my study. Thank you to all my friends especially Aween, Dr. Jiha, Dr. Leen, Dr. Izyanti, Doc. Eda, Wana, Dr. Anis, Dr. Faizal, Alif and RK for the assistance and continuant support mentally, physically and spiritually. Thank you for always making my experience in this journey as a memorable Soulful Traveller. My respectable appreciation goes to all community colleges staffs, members and friends that involved directly during Data Gathering & Charity Project: A Journey to Remember. I also would like to extend my appreciation to all my mentors and subordinate in community colleges and polytechnics who had involved directly and indirectly in this journey. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my beloved family members – my daughter Dhiya, my mother , my brother Dr. Ady and my sister Kak Ina for their endless prayers, support, sacrifice, time, motivation, and love together with me along this beautiful journey. Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart. This Soulful Traveller will continue to face more adventure in the future, Insha’Allah and Alhamdulillah.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the experiential learning implementation in Tourism and Adventure Program at community colleges in Malaysia. It includes the research background, problem statement, research objectives and research questions. It also includes the significance of the study from academic and practical perspective. Additionally, the chapter presents the structure of the study, definitions of terms and ends with a summary.

1.1 Research Background

Tourist arrival and tourist receipt in Malaysia is maintaining at a positive amount annually. The number of tourist arrivals in Malaysia for the year 2019 was 26.1 million, but the number fell sharply in 2020 at 4.3 million and 2021 at 13 thousand due to the Covid-19 Pandemic (Tourism Malaysia, 2022). Nevertheless, in September 2022 the number of tourist arrivals has experienced a rise again by 1.2 million (Trading Economics, 2022) after Malaysia began to enter the endemic era and the tourism industry rose again. Currently, the amount of tourist receipt is reported at 0.24 billion for the year 2021 (Tourism Malaysia, 2022). Based on the reports from UNWTO, global tourism experienced a 4 percent upturn in 2021, however according to preliminary estimates by UNWTO, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) were still 72% below the pre-pandemic year of 2019 (Tourism Malaysia Marketing Plan, 2022).

Before the pandemic, the dynamic growth of tourism in Malaysia has significantly contributed towards the development of employment in the tourism sector and it continues to exhibit positive grows for the year 2019. Such expansion also contributed to the rapid growth of hospitality and tourism education. (Abidin & Shariff, 2015; Tourism Malaysia Marketing Plan, 2022). The Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (MOHE) acknowledged the importance of training in tourism and hospitality (MOHE, 2022) and this has resulted to the mushrooming numbers of educational institutions offering hotel and tourism program in Malaysia