ENHANCING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM SECTOR: CHALLENGES, INITIATIVES, AND SOLUTION

Uktamov Mironshokh Utkurovich
Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10829467

Abstract. *This article examines the imperative role of human resource development in fostering growth within Uzbekistan's tourism industry. It explores the country's burgeoning tourism sector and the associated challenges and opportunities. Through a comprehensive analysis of government initiatives, educational programs, and industry partnerships, the study identifies key issues hindering human resource development and proposes practical solutions. By addressing these challenges, Uzbekistan can cultivate a skilled workforce capable of driving sustainable growth and competitiveness in the global tourism market.*

Introduction:

The tourism industry in Uzbekistan stands at a critical juncture, poised for exponential growth amidst evolving market dynamics. The Republic of Uzbekistan has witnessed a remarkable surge in international visitation during the year 2022, welcoming an impressive 5,232,800 foreign visitors from across the globe. The share of travel and hospitality total contribution to global gross domestic product (GDP) was 7.6%, amounted to 7.7 trillion U.S. dollars. In 2023 Samarkand was elected as capital city of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the venue for the 25th anniversary session of the UNWTO General Assembly (tourcentralasia.com). These comprehensive statistics illustrate the diversity of motivations that attract visitors to Uzbekistan and highlight the importance of our country's growing tourism sector on the world stage. Moreover, it should also be emphasized that the travel patterns of citizens who left the country for tourism purposes was 5,163,200. From business and education to leisure, family connections, and regional exploration, these journeys reflect nation's openness and curiosity about the global community.

Increasing number of demands for travel can prove the importance of human resources enhancement to meet the labor demand of the economy during the development of this industry.

Methodology:

Employing a mixed-method approach, this study utilizes qualitative analysis of government policies and industry initiatives, complemented by quantitative data on tourism sector growth and employment trends. Data collection methods include analysis of government decrees and initiatives, and statistical analysis of employment data**.** By integrating deductive and inductive reasoning, the research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders. To start with, in 2019, Uzbekistan was home to 139 museums, 366 pilgrimage sites, 427 tourist routes, 3,755 handicraft workshops, 623 souvenir shops, 191 amusement parks, 26 theme parks, 28 water parks, 54 water attractions, 186 folklore ensembles, 24 tasting rooms linked to the gastronomic tourism offer, and 101 tourist information centers. By 2019, 193 ecotourism facilities had been created. Ecological parks are actively involved in the tourist turnover, the total number of which amounted to 26 at the end of 2019. As a consequence, the volume of exports in tourism services reached a total of USD 1.3 billion approximately and tripled from 2016–2019. In the same period, the number of tourism organizations increased three times and the number of employees in the tourism sector increased 1.5 times (UNWTO, 2023).

In employment and job creation this represents around 210,000 jobs in average considering the employment data from 2019 to 2021. According to the World Tourism Organization report, in Uzbekistan the top tourism industries that generate employment are the ‘food and beverage-serving services’ employing 62,898 people; ‘road passenger transport’ with 56,430 jobs; ‘accommodation services’ with 51,955 employees, followed by ‘sports and recreational with 16,236 people; and ‘cultural services’ employing up to 11,693 people in average considering 2019 to 2021.

Moreover, through consistent reforms and visionary policies, it is aimed to create jobs, diversify our economy, accelerate regional development, and improve the quality of life for citizens. One of the cornerstone initiatives is the Presidential Decree dated December 2, 2016. This decree, titled "On measures to ensure accelerated development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan," outlines the key tasks and priorities of our state policy in the field of tourism (www.lex.uz). It unequivocally designates tourism as a strategic sector of our economy, positioning it as a powerful tool for sustainable development. In addition to the 2016 decree, several other Presidential Decrees have been implemented to facilitate and bolster the growth of our tourism industry:

Result:

As a result of government degrees and initiatives, In the last three years, the industry has witnessed an extraordinary expansion in the number of higher education institutions dedicated to tourism education. From a modest 16 institutions, there are now 35 institutions specializing in tourism (www.stat.uz). Equally remarkable is the increase in the number of students pursuing studies in the field of tourism. In just three years, the number of students studying tourism rise from 4,100 to an impressive 11,500 (uzdaily.uz). This surge in enrollment underscores the growing interest and importance of tourism education in Uzbekistan.

To complement this growth, we have also made substantial progress in enhancing the scientific potential of our educators. In 2020, the scientific potential of pedagogues teaching in the field of tourism in higher education institutions stood at 24.2 percent. Today, I am pleased to share that this figure has risen to an impressive 37.6 percent in 2023. This signifies our commitment to research, innovation, and academic excellence in hospitality.

However, we should also note the challenges hospitality industry facing to provide the qualified personals to the industry. The tourism sector holds significant potential for economic growth and cultural exchange in Uzbekistan. Current challenges are

- *Theoretical Level Knowledge:* Many educational programs in Uzbekistan focus primarily on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills relevant to the tourism industry. Graduates may lack the hands-on experience required to excel in various roles within the sector.

- *Talent Training Programs:* Existing talent training programs may not adequately prepare individuals for the diverse and evolving demands of the tourism sector. Programs may lack practical components and fail to incorporate industry-relevant skills and knowledge.

- *Lack of Vacancies:* Despite the potential for growth in the tourism sector, there may be a scarcity of suitable job vacancies for graduates and professionals. Limited job opportunities contribute to underemployment and talent migration to other sectors or countries.

- *Less Competitive Environment:* The tourism sector in Uzbekistan may face challenges in attracting and retaining skilled professionals due to a less competitive environment. Factors such as inadequate wages, and insufficient training programs may deter individuals from pursuing careers in tourism.

- *Developing Sector:* While Uzbekistan's tourism sector is experiencing growth, it is still in the developmental stage compared to more established destinations. Human resource development initiatives need to be tailored to support the sector's growth and enhance its competitiveness on the global stage.

The following solutions are provided taking into consideration the above mentioned challenges:

- *Practical Teaching:* Introducing practical training components within tourism-related education programs to enhance students' hands-on skills. Establishing partnerships with tourism businesses to provide students with opportunities for internships and real-world experience.

- *Curriculum Integration:* Updating academic curricula to reflect current trends and demands within the tourism industry. Incorporating modules on cultural competency, sustainable tourism practices, and customer service to prepare students for diverse roles within the sector.

- *Teacher-Student Cooperation:* Encouraging collaboration between educators and students to facilitate a deeper understanding of industry dynamics and challenges. Organizing industry visits, guest lectures, and workshops to expose students to real-world scenarios and foster networking opportunities.

- *Expand Tourism Products:* Diversifying tourism offerings beyond traditional attractions to attract a wider range of visitors. Investing in the development of niche tourism products such as adventure tourism, culinary tourism, and eco-tourism to cater to diverse traveler interests.

Enhancing human resource development in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan is essential for maximizing the sector's potential contribution to economic growth and sustainable development. By addressing the current issues through practical teaching, curriculum integration, teacher-student cooperation, and expansion of tourism products, Uzbekistan can build a skilled workforce capable of driving the tourism industry forward and it enables to unlock the full potential of its tourism sector and contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, having examined tourism sector through a comprehensive analysis of government initiatives, educational programs, and industry partnerships, key issues hindering human resource development and proposes practical solutions are provided. By addressing these challenges. Enhancing human resource development in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan is essential for maximizing the sector's potential contribution to economic growth and sustainable development. By addressing the current issues through practical teaching, curriculum integration, teacher-student cooperation, and expansion of tourism products, Uzbekistan can build a skilled workforce capable of driving the tourism industry forward and it enables to unlock the full potential of its tourism sector and contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Department of Commerce. (2023). Uzbekistan: Travel and Tourism. Country Commercial Guides. Retrieved from https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/uzbekistan-travel-and-tourism
2. Tour Central Asia. (2023). Uzbekistan Tourism Industry Statistics. Retrieved from https://tourcentralasia.com/uzbekistan/uzbekistan-tourism-industry-statistics/

3. World Tourism Organization. (2023). Uzbekistan Visitor Economy Survey. Retrieved from https://webunwto.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/imported_images/45108/150910_uzbekistan_visitor_economy_survey_jc_final.pdf
4. World Tourism Organization. (2023). Uzbekistan: Final Report. Retrieved from https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-10/uzbekistan-final-report-october23.pdf?VersionId=eYs954.8rom5hTdY_nR6YADqAaz0rLcR
5. State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics. (2023). Tourism education institutions: How many specialized educational institutions are there for training specialists in the field of tourism? Retrieved from https://www.stat.uz/en/press-center/news-of-committee/28246-turizm-sohasiukk-uchun-mutaxassislarni-tayyorlash-bilan-shug-ullanadigan-qancha-ta-lim-muassasalari-mavjud-4
6. UzDaily. (2023). Uzbekistan to attract foreign specialists for tourism industry. Retrieved from https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/84103
7. Lex.uz. (2016). Retrieved from [https://lex.uz/docs/4600563]