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Factores que inciden en el empleo de los graduados de hostelería y turismo en Santiago de los Caballeros
Factors that affects the employment of hotel and tourism graduates in Santiago de los Caballeros

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RESUMEN: La empleabilidad es un proceso complejo, caracterizado en los últimos años por disímiles requerimientos, por lo que representa un reto para los graduados de las universidades, debido a la exigencia de competencias profesionales y sociales que demanda el mercado. Dada la preocupación existente, para garantizar de forma eficaz el proceso de empleo de los graduados de las carreras de turismo en las Universidades de Santiago de los Caballeros, de la República Dominicana, se realizó un diagnóstico que permitió la identificación de los factores que inciden en el proceso.
Palabras clave: Competencia; Graduado; Turismo; Empleo

ABSTRACT: Employability is a complex process, characterized in recent years by dissimilar requirements, which represents a challenge for university graduates, due to the demand for professional and social competencies demanded by the market. Given the existing concern to effectively guarantee the employment process of the graduates of the tourism careers in the Universities of Santiago de los Caballeros, in the Dominican Republic, a diagnosis was carried out to identify the factors that affect the process.
Keywords: Competence; Graduate; Tourism; Employment

Introduction

Employability is a complex process, characterized in recent years by dissimilar requirements, which represents a challenge for university graduates, due to the demand for professional and social competencies required by the market.

In this sense, the development of personal and social competencies is of great importance due to the results that can be obtained. This process of competency development will allow showing before the end of the professional career that graduates can improve their employability and employability, deepening their theoretical knowledge on entrepreneurship and leadership,

didactics, among others. To this end, it is crucial that this process is conceived as part of institutional strategies and contributes to the successful employment of university graduates.

Employability is a term analyzed by dissimilar authors indistinctly over time Dhiman (2012), Fleuren *et al.* (2016), Di Fabio (2017). A search of national and international literature identified definitions of the term from 1998 to 2020. Of the definitions consulted in the literature, one of the concepts currently in force is the one established by the International Labor Organization (ILO), although dating from 2014, it is highly relevant for the present research; therefore, this definition is assumed. ILO (2014) emphasizes that: employability refers to transferable skills and qualifications that strengthen people's ability to take advantage of the education and training opportunities available to them with a view to finding and keeping a decent job.

The various authors who have defined the term employability have analyzed it in the light of the concept of competency, so that neither can be separated from the other, since employability, in short, is the accumulation of professional and social competencies attained during academic training.

The concept of competence has been defined by several authors; however, in this research, reference will be made to two of them. First, the definition made by MINERD (2014) and specified in the National Qualifications Framework of the Dominican Republic MNC (2015) highlights that: competencies are the ability to act autonomously in diverse contexts and situations, mobilizing concepts, procedures, attitudes and values in an integrated manner.

Competency-based training is established in all the curricula of the Universities of the Dominican Republic, but in this research attention will be focused on careers in the area of tourism, specifically in the Universities of Santiago de los Caballeros, due to the concern that has been generated in the Universities about the employment of graduates in the area of hospitality and tourism, on the verge of assessing the closure of careers.

In view of this situation, the objective of this research is to identify the factors that affect the employment process of hotel and tourism graduates in Santiago de los Caballeros, through a documentary analysis and field study.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: The identification of the factors that influence the employment process of hotel and tourism graduates in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, through a documentary analysis and field study, will allow establishing the

correspondence of the professional profile of the graduates with the generic competencies demanded by the market.

Development

The research focuses on the Universities of Santiago de los Caballeros, being the field of action the careers of tourism with its different qualifications that is why it is important to describe the context where it was developed. The following is a brief explanation of the tourism typology.

The Dominican Republic is a destination made up of different tourist structures integrated by 4 poles, #1 and #3 to distinguish sun and beach tourism, tourist pole #2 to name business tourism, number #4 for mountain tourism and ecotourism, golf tourism as a predominant complementary offer in each tourism pole.

Santiago de los Caballeros, the second most important city in the Dominican Republic offers as a tourist destination pole #2 for business tourism, number #4 for mountain tourism and ecotourism. It is located in one of the most fertile areas of the country.

Santiago is the first city in the Republic and one of the few in Ibero-America with a Culture for Development Agenda, with 25 consensual projects. Ordinance 3127-16 of the Council of Aldermen makes this initiative official. It accumulates some 10,400 industries or cultural enterprises through which three billion pesos circulate annually. The most frequent are the organization of events; handicraft production, footwear and accessories; architectural design micro-enterprises; exhibition galleries; as well as restaurants and food and catering centers.

In view of this panorama, four (4) Universities in Santiago de los Caballeros offer nine (9) careers in tourism specialized in Tourism and Hotel Business Administration, with mentions in food, beverages and modern languages. Of the total number of careers, eight (8) correspond to Administration in the sector, which represents 88.9%.

On the other hand, the object of study was contextualized through the construction of a theoretical framework referring to the subject, based on a detailed analysis of theories developed and empirical generalizations proposed by some authors, both at the international and national level, and specifically in "Santiago de los Caballeros".

1- Theoretical foundation

The employment of tourism graduates is a controversial process, which has been the subject of analysis by various authors: academics and employers Brondani (2016) *et al.*; Contreras (2019) *et al.*; Basurto and Vidal (2019); Carbajulca-Milla (2023); Forero *et al.* (2020); Barrera *et al.* (2021); Alamo-Larrañaga (2023); Bellucci *et al.* (2023); McKercher *et al.* (2023); Mejia and Wickey (2023) and others. The authors cited above reflected on: Salaries are not commensurate with the competencies acquired during the career and the functions developed, influencing labor fluctuation Brondani (2016) *et al.* They also highlight that when graduates are hindered in finding work in the sector, they state that they are willing to work in any activity within the sector, even if it is not of their training Contreras (2019) and others. Also, there is an absence of regulations that contribute to timely placement and protection of graduates. Similarly, the lack of entrepreneurship in the sector does not contribute to the generation of employment (Basurto and Vidal, 2019); weaknesses in the training received, lack of practice and poor handling of information technologies applied in the management of the tourism sector Carbajulca-Milla (2023); Forero *et al.* (2020); deficit in languages Forero *et al.* (2020) and insufficient training in internships, therefore, has been increasing the degree of demotivation and desertion in the sector Bellucci *et al.* (2023).

At the national level, analyses have been made in relation to the employment of tourism graduates, emphasizing the relationship between the occupational position and the salary earned, as highlighted in the first place by the economist Luis Mota (2022), where he refers to the following: the demand for professionals in the tourism and hospitality sector is greater than the number of university graduates required by the market, which has led to companies opting to hire unqualified human capital and train them directly on the job (Central Bank of the Dominican Republic, 2021); all-inclusive hotels in the main tourist resorts of the Dominican Republic, perform a special type of hiring for a defined period of time, specifically in high season, so there is no guarantee of permanence, does not achieve vast experience and vital skills for professional development, so the business sector is affected by lack of loyalty of its employees.

According to MESCYT (2019), the positions in a hotel are occupied by low qualified and prepared personnel, in positions such as: chambermaids, cleaning assistants, kitchen assistants, stewards (kitchen and restaurant cleaning), assistant waiters, gardeners, security, among others and the hiring of human capital that is being formed is not precisely the professional graduated from universities, but a technical level training personnel, who receive a minimum wage in the labor field, which represents lower cost for the business sector (Luis Mota, 2022).

The Central Bank of the Dominican Republic (2021), reports that for 2018 the employment rate in tourism was 336,479.7 maintaining a growth of 6% in relation to 2017 and even with a more favorable outlook for 2019. They highlight that in 2000 there were 167,170.00 direct and indirect jobs, as well as in low season with the low occupational rate decreases the level of employment.

Fourteen airports operate in the country, nine international and five domestic, connecting the main tourist points. The economic development of any country requires an educational platform that contributes to the training of professionals in the different areas of tourism and the economy. However, despite the development of tourism, no studies have been found that reveal the relationship between the training of employees and its impact on the performance of their duties.

The literature review of primary, secondary and tertiary sources allowed the construction of the Theoretical Framework of the Research, describing: the employment behavior of tourism graduates at the international level, in the Dominican Republic and at the local level in "Santiago de los Caballeros". The reflections of the cited authors, both national and international, coincide in different aspects that influence employment and allow reflection on the design of new curricula in hospitality and tourism based on competencies, with emphasis on practices; as well as on regulations that protect the graduates of the sector.

2- Methodological approach

The present work assumes a mixed approach because it intends, in a first instance, to approach with a realistic criterion to the object of study, sustaining consequently, the character of truth that encloses our study phenomenon. The realist criterion would be the ontological foundation of the quantitative approach, which, according to Téllez (2017), conceives that reality is a pre-existing fact independent of the subject's consciousness. In addressing the competencies of tourism school graduates we frame ourselves in a fact of which we will become aware and close to the object of study as it is.

From an epistemological point of view, when approaching this section with a quantitative approach, we will focus on the fact that measurement would be the criterion that guarantees objectivity and precision.

3- Results and Discussion

For the collection of information, the direct interview technique was used through a closed questionnaire of mutually exclusive questions, where three dimensions were measured based on

the table of operationalization of the variables. The first instrument was applied to 42 teachers and the second to 83 graduates (from the last 10 years) of hospitality and tourism of the Universities of Santiago de los Caballeros: Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCCM), Technological University of Santiago (UTESA), Dominican University (O&M) and Open University for Adults (UAPA), of which two (2) of them are also managers-teachers.

The first section is related to: the Higher Education Institution (HEI) where they work and the position they hold at the University. In the second section there are five (5) questions, which are answered following a Likert scale of five (5) levels: (1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Neither agree/Nor disagree; (4) Disagree; and (5) Strongly disagree.

On the other hand, there is a third section related to the general competencies (14 in total) of the graduates of the hospitality and tourism careers of the HEIs under study. It also has five (5) levels of the Likert scale. The levels are: (1) Very satisfied; (2) Satisfied; (3) Neither satisfied/nor dissatisfied; (4) Dissatisfied and (5) Very dissatisfied.

Finally, a fourth section corresponds to the competencies (24 in total) of the graduates according to the profiles established in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The five (5) levels of the Likert scale are applied: (1) Very efficient; (2) Efficient; (3) Neither efficient/nor inefficient; (4) Inefficient and (5) Very efficient.

The results achieved will be analyzed for each section, according to the answers obtained in the first level of the Likert scale.

Analyzing the second level, which responds to: if the HEI to which the teacher belongs applies employment strategies for tourism graduates, in the level Very, in agreement O&M, occupies the highest percentage with 50% and UAPA occupies the second highest percentage with 42.9% and in third place UTESA with 40% and PUCMM with 28.6%. Also, it was evaluated whether the HEI promotes practical activities with future graduates, highlighting PUCMM in first place with 100%, UAPA with 71.4% in second place, O&M in third place with 50% and UTESA in fourth place with 20%.

In relation to the results achieved in the third section, which responds to: if the HEI develops certifications and seminars with future graduates, UAPA stands out with 57.1%, O&M with 50%, PUCMM with 42.9% and UTESA with 40%.

Finally, the fourth section responds to the question: whether the HEI establishes undergraduate projects linked to companies in the tourism sector. UAPA in first place, with 71.4%, O&M with 50%, PUCMM with 28.6% and UTESA responded from the second level (Agree) of Likert with 80%.

Regarding the section related to the general competencies that are linked to the graduate of the tourism career, teachers valued in a higher percentage: work ethics and human relations, both with 95.2% and in a lower percentage the mastery of languages with 71%, mastery of history and culture with 76.2%.

According to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the ability to apply knowledge in practice, appreciation and respect for diversity and multiculturalism, social responsibility and civic commitment, interpersonal skills, decision-making ability, teamwork ability and ability to act in new situations, creative ability, ability to work autonomously, ability to formulate and manage projects and commitment to quality are valued in a higher percentage (95.2%). The following resulted in a lower percentage: skills in the use of ICT with 81% and this percentage coincides with the ability to identify and solve problems; in 85% the skills to search for and process information from different sources and, finally, the ability to research with 71.4%.

In the second questionnaire, related to graduates, it is noteworthy that only 47.7% work in the sector, which reflects weaknesses in the employment process carried out by the Universities of Santiago de los Caballeros, since 88.9% of the academic offer corresponds to the same training: Bachelor's Degree in Tourism Business Administration. The Universities with offerings are: Universidad Dominicana O&M, Universidad Abierta para Adultos UAPA, Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago UTESA and Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra PUCMM. The offer in hospitality and tourism is varied; however, the graduation profile of the graduates of the sector does not offer an answer to the demand of tourism organizations, which require specific qualifications in practical activities of daily life, associated with the provision of services, linked to accommodation and food, which require a technical training of less than 4 years.

Conclusions

Considering that undergraduate training in tourism in the universities under study does not even reach half of their trained population, it is important to detail the competency-based approach. First of all, there is evidence that shows insufficient levels of language, research and information technology (ICT) skills. In a country that receives international tourism, this represents a weak point that may represent a key factor that keeps graduates away from efficient employability. On the other hand, the research character represents an analytical qualification to think about opportunities and synergies within the tourism area, allowing understanding part of the large ecosystem that surrounds the visit and enjoyment of foreign and local citizens. Finally, the limitations or expeditious management of ICTs represent technological limitations in an increasingly globalized world in the digital era.

On the other hand, the strengths evidenced in terms of soft skills, such as ethics, human relations, interpersonal skills, teamwork, among others not least, although they are part of the formative armor for a correct professional development, by remaining on the sidelines of hard skills, they deprive the graduate of a sufficiently competitive qualification.

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