

# Practical Learning in Tourism Education: A Hands-on Bidding and Planning Practice

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## ABSTRACT

In line with the six key emerging industries in Taiwan is the 'MICE industry' as one of the service industries targeted for the future development. 'Taiwan MICE Advancement Program' intends to provide technologized MICE services align with building an attractive international MICE environment. Taiwan Vanguard Project has set Taiwan as an Asian MICE powerhouse and a platform for cooperation and exchange in the region (Meet Taiwan, 2013).

With this national plan in mind, this paper aims to discuss the advantages of practical courses on students' learning by taking the idea of MICE as a practical course project. Practical courses are the hands-on activities by which students learn how to deal with the tasks in real workplace. Beggs, Ross and Goodwin (2008) believed that practical activities related to the application of knowledge would provide the opportunity of firsthand learning for the students.

Ninety-five students of the course 'Destination Bidding and Planning' took part in this study. In their teams, these students had to plan, coordinate and manage a MICE event in the city of their choice. They had also to prepare and display their posters and present their MICE event in two phases. The result of their evaluation shows Taipei, New Taipei city and Taoyuan are the first three cities suitable for a MICE event.

**Keywords:** Bidding, Planning, Practical learning, Tourism education, Higher education, MICE, Taiwan.

## 1. Introduction

It is said that 'practice makes it perfect' but how can it be true for an educational environment like universities when there is not much of practice opportunities for the students? Does a degree program in tourism have a role in preparing students for industry?

Tourism is an applied subject area (Solnet, Robinson & Cooper, 2007) and the tourism-related courses should combine education with practical activities. Tourism education has to provide hand-on activities for the students to enhance their skills and experiences for their careers. The classroom along with the textbooks may not establish the concept of 'specific and generic skills' as much as a practical courses. The practical courses are the grounds for a proper liaison between academia and the industry through which the students learn how to perform professionally. Students can integrate learning through the academic foundation in a business setting. However, different applications of practical training vary in different cases.

Professional oriented curricula should prepare students for their future career by providing an appropriate level of qualification. This idea is more critical in societies like Taiwan where education is a priority for students and their families. Taiwanese students have to continue higher education (HE) right after their junior high school. Except of a few, the students do not have the chance of work experience during or before HE.

This article discusses the design, implementation, and evaluation of a practical course called 'Destination Bidding and Planning'. This course concentrates on MICE as a new market in Taiwan. During the semester the lecturer conveyed the elements of MICE and how to plan, organize and market MICE as an event. The students had to work on strategic planning, bidding, destination promotion as well as presentation skills.

## 2. Conceptual framework

Tourism higher education requires operational training and facilities to provide technical skills and practical experiences (Alexander, 2007). There is an increasing demand for well-qualified labors with a range of skills (Robinson, Barron & Solnet, 2008). That is why tourism students prefer concrete and active learning style than the theory (Zagonari, 2009).

If the tourism institution fails to understand the market trends and the industry requirements in training their students, this will take students' future career opportunities away. Experiential exercises are particularly useful and necessary in the service industry (Phelan et al., 2009). The tourism educators play a role in preparing graduates' acquisition of tourism industry-required professional and practical skills. The study of Phelan, Kavanaugh, Mills, & Jang's (2009) showed that instructor valued experiential teaching methods resulted in higher levels of learning and active participation.

Alexander (2007) suggested that institutions providing operational training in the professional practices could offer a more balanced syllabus for students to develop skills at both a practical and theoretical level. A practical course can add the value of know-how (practice) to the students' know-what (theory). Airey (1996:17) stated that the environment should provide the students the opportunity of putting theory to practice and make a balance between vocational and theoretical content. Practical courses can facilitate students' learning of job-related competencies. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2001:1) cited in Fidgeon (2010) believes that the relationship between theory and practice is a strong feature of any program. Although the operational training can be expensive and resource-intensive (Alexander, Lynch & Murray, 2009) but it will develop the students' performance in real workplace. The experiential exercise is the instructional technique used for professional preparation providing the chance for students to gain work experience (Xie, 2004; Phelan et al., 2009). Beggs, Ross and Goodwin (2008) cited Clark and Whitelegg (1998:326) advising that learning by doing reinforces classroom understanding by contextualizing knowledge.

## 3. Practical learning in Tourism Higher Education in Taiwan

The combination of knowledge and application is important in the new era of knowledge economy. According to Jashapara (2011: 9) knowledgeable workforces have a graduate degree with practical and personal skills. Taiwan has a new policy about tourism and hospitality majors to follow the new economy concept in training the qualified employee. The country has been transformed from a labor economy to knowledge economy (Chang and Hsu, 2010).

Hong and Lee (2005) explained that tourism higher education began in 1965 in Taiwan and gradually divided into academic higher education (includes universities, colleges and teacher colleges) and technical or vocational institutes (such as universities of technology, vocational colleges, junior colleges, graduate institutes, day and evening divisions). While managers are trained at the former, practical skills are of concern for latter. Hong and Lee (2005) also added that various institutes responded the call from the industry and integrated the practical training to their theoretical teaching. The technical/ vocational system put more emphasis on industry-oriented skills and training but the general university system highlighted the management capabilities.

Among the three private universities with tourism and hospitality education, namely; Tamkang, Ming Chuan and I-Shou at an international level, only I-Shou offered the practical courses in its Chinese program.

## 4. The case of practical course 'Destination bidding & planning'

Within the Department of Tourism at I-Shou University, Taiwan, there is a practical course called 'Destination Bidding & Planning'. This capstone course teaches the knowledge and skills of planning and executing MICE as the new market in Taiwan. By this hands-on course, students will obtain an insight towards planning, managing and communication skills to handle the events such as MICE. Students' task starts from designing a poster to advertise different cities (i.e. its people, culture and heritage), display their posters in an exhibition, and present their project in T&H department as their graduate project. The practical learning through this course help them gain general confidence and the ability to solve the problems. This practical exercise broadens their knowledge with a better perception of the real workplace. The lessons these students learned through their MICE project are the experience of team-working, oral communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, presentation skills, marketing and organizing a MICE event.

## 5. The stages of course implementation

During the first class session in fall 2013, students' consent for participation in the evaluation was secured. In order to protect the consent and consistency along with gathering, editing the date and information for the future evaluation, the nominated tutors arranged regular meetings. Other faculty members and students participated to perform as the referees and teams. Students volunteered to cooperate with each other as a team although there was no credit for the volunteers regarding the courses.

The developed course manual included information on the topics covered during class instruction. The faculty member and the leader affiliated with the program were available to discuss any problems or issues that arose. Students communicated with the faculty member via weekly meeting and weekly bilingual presentation practice. Following each weekly session, the student completed a log that called 'reflection' on their learning and practice process. The learning log considered a consistent way to monitor students' progress and prevented confusion and nervousness through traditional reviewing method: interview taping (Katajavuri, Lindblom-Ylanne & Hirvonen, 2006).

The students participated in classroom instruction during the first five weeks of the semester. Course content focused on event business strategic planning, bidding, destination promotion as well as presentation skills. Following the five weeks of instructions, the students enrolled in the program searched the data within their teams (i.e. gathering, editing, formatting, promotion, marketing, and presentation) for the MICE event at their chosen destination. During the first three weeks of the semester, the faculty member was responsible for teaching topics pertaining to destination marketing, facilitating discussion during the weekly meeting in order to decide the topic, logo, slogan, graphics and design of exhibition booth. The leader of the destination marketing team was responsible for collecting students' weekly power point projects and managed to team up students for bilingual presentation. (in the destination-marketing contest held in the 2012 Taiwan Exhibition & Convention Industry Show in Taipei, Taiwan.) The leaders were the one who had attended the destination-marketing contest held in the 2012 Taiwan Exhibition & Convention Industry Show in Taipei, Taiwan.

At the end of the semester, students and faculty convened to evaluate the program and celebrate the students' accomplishment. The faculty members who facilitated the courses were the reviewers of oral presentation and hands-on practice. Students would feel more secured in uttering their actual feelings and consequently the true results and achievement of the program should be converted into students' actual professional competencies.

## 6. Methodology

To examine the effect of this practical course on students' learning, the instructor asked 95 students enrolled the course 'Destination Bidding and Planning' at the Department of Tourism to plan and bid different cities in Taiwan to represent Taiwan to bid for the opportunity to hold World Leisure Congress 2020 in Taiwan. Students had to consider the following criteria (Table 1) for their projects while they worked in teams:

Table 1: The criteria for planning and bidding cities

Value for money for the World Leisure Association (e.g. the registration fee)	Value for the money for the delegates (e.g. the costs)	Accessibility (e.g. transportation)	Capacity to attract
Suitability of meeting venue	Quality and attractiveness of the social event venues	Networking opportunities	Association development opportunities

Based on the above criteria and according to Angelo and Cross (1993) assessment techniques (Teaching Goal Inventory, TGI) (Table 2) along with the project prospectus mentioned in Angelo and Cross (1993, 248), the assessment administered. The project prospectus according to Angelo and Cross (1993, 248) "assess students skills at synthesizing what they have already learned about a topic or field". In this case, the students had to prepare posters to plan and bid for their cities.

Table 2: Modified from (Angelo and Cross, 1993)

TGI Goal 1	TGI Goal 36
“Assessing students’ skill in applying what they have learning. The teaching goal is to help students develop an ability to apply principles and generalizations already learned to new problems and situations (TGI Goal 1).” (Angelo and Cross,1993, 67)	“Assessing students’ reactions to small- group work. The teaching goal is to help students develop an ability to work productively with others (TGI Goal 36) (Angelo and Cross, 1993, 98)

### 7. Design and development

The syllabus for ‘destination bidding and planning’ course included the content and elements of MICE events, international and national MICE, marketing for conference and exhibition, organizing conference and exhibition, planning conference and exhibition, planning and evaluation of the venue, finance planning, catering and accommodation, social program MICE travel and human resource planning. Based on the lectures, the students had to choose a city in Taiwan to represent for the MICE event, complete the weekly log reporting the progress after each meeting on Blackboard. The students’ next task was to prepare a poster to display and two presentations to utter to follow the TGI Goals 1 and 36 (Table 2). As for the posters, within the teams, each member had to evaluate others from zero to 100. Among the teams, each team had to evaluate other teams from zero to 10. Regarding the presentations, the students had to present their projects in the class and answer the questions raised by the instructor and the peers. The criteria of scoring the teams comprised budget and finance, attractions, souvenir for delegates, souvenir for the committee members, reception and gala dinner, accommodation, environment and facilities nearby the venue, custom clearance, venue, international and domestic transportation, local associations, support from the government and inspiring slogan.

The second presentation was at a departmental level to compete with other students as their ‘graduation project’. For the past couple semesters, During four semesters, undergraduate students who major in majoring in the Event Business Planning Program, minor of Department of Tourism, at the I-Shou University had taken Introduction to MICE, MICE Planning, Marketing for MICE, English for MICE, and Presentation Skills for MICE.

According to the criteria for poster and presentation design, the teams introduced their cities creatively. They discussed the accessibility of Taiwan by showing the map of the country along with and airplane moving towards the island, then in each city they showed the different important events held to date, they showed the buildings and venues in which the event was held to show the suitability of the place, they displayed the celebrities or VIPs of the region to highlight the importance of the city, food was another attraction that teams discussed, accommodation as a necessary component of MICE also was stated. Site sightseeing and festivals were the other items to cite in their project.

Table 3: Value for the City and Nation

City	Score		Total
	A	B	A+B
	10	10	20
台北 Taipei	8.67	8.65	17.32
新北 New TPE	8.46	8.23	16.69
桃園 Taoyuan	8.07	7.93	16.00
彰化 Changhua	8.06	7.88	15.94
雲林 Yunlin	7.90	7.78	15.68
台南 Tainan	7.91	7.76	15.67
高雄 Kaohsiung	7.87	7.78	15.65
台中 Taiching	7.83	7.75	15.58
宜蘭 ILan	7.82	7.74	15.56
新竹 Hsinchu	7.82	7.73	15.55
苗栗 Miaoli	7.85	7.69	15.54
花蓮 Hualien	7.79	7.71	15.50
嘉義 Chiayi	7.79	7.71	15.50
南投 Nantou	7.76	7.69	15.45
台東 Taitung	7.77	7.67	15.44
屏東 Pintong	7.75	7.67	15.42

As Table 3 shows, the students had to score other teams' project from zero to 10 with the criteria of A) potential and future development of the city and B) the importance and influence of the city towards the image and industry for the region. The criteria for city marketing were:

- Marketing for the global society
- Unique characteristics and creativity
- Marketing skills and tools
- Booth exhibition
- Innovative planning and extended effect of the city
- Unified Appearance of the Team
- Attractive activities
- Green MICE

## 8. Conclusion

Practical learning is an important part of tourism program in which the students figure out their role as a potential employee in the real workplace. Tourism is a service industry and its future depends on how customers are satisfied with the services provided for them. This includes the employee and their training in offering those services to the customers. Regarding the future demands and the idea of qualified and knowledgeable workforces, the universities as the bridge between the potential workforces (students) with the industry have to make a possible balance between the courses in the curricula and what the market really need to have.

This paper focuses the experience of a tourism department that furnished students with a program responsibility to design a MICE event. By integrating the principles of some related course along with the onsite facilities, the department faculty members provided a cooperative learning environment for students to get familiar with the duties of an organizer of a MICE event.

From the theory to practice and to train the knowledgeable tourism workforce, this study suggests that the existence of the practical learning program certainly remains as the core of tourism education. This research has important curriculum implication as it examines the effectiveness and utility of the inclusion of participation.

The inter-school year cooperation and integration meetings may be innovative and effective teaching assessment, particularly in terms of theory to practical quality experiences. Students found that the experiences rewarding and valued the opportunity for practical learning and academic growth. Having the opportunity to interact with one another and share their perspectives with regard to different understanding of tourism industry. Critical competencies and appropriate design are necessary component of educational experiences to acquire specific knowledge and skills.

This study, as Angelo and Cross (1993, 248) mentioned supplied valuable information about students' understanding of bidding and planning their destination in a MICE event. This study was a challenge for students with regard to their professional experiences. Nevertheless, some of the challenges or negative experiences had to do with personal factors that detracted from personality or academic and practical preparation. Lack of knowledge and personal experiences or even work experience like internship made it difficult to contribute professionally to the discussion and practice. However, that was the original purpose of this program to prove that the mechanism of apprenticeship virtually is the spirit of this practical training.

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