



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE EVENT

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has immobilized almost the entire world today. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has also incapacitated all aspects of world life including education, community, employment and many more. Tourism and hospitality is one of the industries which seriously affected amid COVID-19 pandemic. It is undeniable that education is highly impacted within the industry amid COVID-19 and affects the future graduates' employability. This study investigates issues and challenges of Malaysian tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 pandemic. A semi-structured interview was conducted through telephone involving 11 tourism and hospitality educators to identify issues and challenges faced within the academic institutions amid COVID-19 pandemic. The number of respondents is considered appropriate for a preliminary study to understand the event before proceeding with further study. The respondents were asked three major questions; (i) issues faced amid COVID-19 pandemic, (ii) challenges and (iii) recommendations for further action in dealing with the issues and challenges. The findings revealed that the critical issues faced within tourism and hospitality education during the pandemic are impacts toward internships and delivery of teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic also brings about challenges in terms of unemployment and requirement of new skills for graduates' employability. Further, three skills are needed by the tourism and hospitality graduates amid COVID-19 namely technology skills, soft skills and entrepreneurial skills. In conclusion, the findings suggest the need to reform Malaysia tourism and hospitality education as digital education. This study is considered as a preliminary study involving only few educators to identify issues and challenges of tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 pandemic,

hence the findings cannot be generalized to the whole academic institutions offering the courses. Future study is recommended to be undertaken using more number of respondents representing the academic institutions in Malaysia.

Keywords:

COVID-19 Pandemic, Tourism And Hospitality Education, Malaysia

Introduction

The world today is experiencing an unprecedented phenomenon of COVID-19 pandemic which contributing serious implications to the society and nation globally. One of the industries which receives great impact of COVID-19 is the tourism and hospitality industry. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), of all the economic sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism has been the worst through the jeopardizing of millions of jobs and livelihoods. The tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia is considered as one of the fast-growing sectors and significantly contributing to the economic growth of the country (Ahmad et al., 2019). In fact, the importance of the industry and the significance of the impacts of COVID-19 to Malaysia have been investigated through few studies (Alwi et al., 2020; Foo et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Khan & Hashim, 2020; Yeong et al., 2021). Additionally, the tourism and hospitality industry is also among the most affected of the COVID-19 pandemic due to cancellation of tour packages, airlines and even hotels sectors. Compared to other industries, the tourism and hospitality industry struggled with an expected loss of RM3.37 billion within the first two months of the year (Dzulkifly, 2020). To enable the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, the government had announced a stimulus package worth RM20 billion (Salim, 2020).

Eventually, the COVID-19 pandemic has damaged many sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry including the educational sector. The pandemic also has great impacts and changes not to the institutions in general but mostly to the students since they have to make changes to their study plan (Kukreti et al., 2020). Many studies have highlighted the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic to the tourism and hospitality education particularly regarding the changes in teaching and learning (Çinar, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Ye & Law, 2021). Due to the changes amid COVID-19, several studies also noted the importance to restructure the education curriculum in order to enhance the graduates' employability to survive the challenges and competitiveness within the industry. Ye and Law (2021) for instance suggest that educational institutions should take action regarding the changes in teaching from offline to online instead of taking actions to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. In another study, Yeong et al. (2021) recommend that the educational institutions need to enhance on initiatives and collaborations to remain adaptive and innovative in teaching and learning amid COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the scenario discussed, the study conducted a preliminary study to understand the issues and challenges of tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia amid COVID-19 pandemic. Several questions derived to answer the objective namely;

- 1) What are the issues within tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia amid COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) What are the challenges faced within tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia amid COVID-19 pandemic?

- 3) Does tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia need to be reformed due to the break of COVID-19 pandemic?

Literature Review

COVID-19 and Tourism in Malaysia

In December 2019, Wuhan, a Hubei Province in China documented a novel coronavirus outbreak which is known as the COVID-19, a group of similar virus to the two recent coronavirus outbreaks - SARS and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Due to the global spread and severity of the disease, the COVID-19 was declared by the WHO as a pandemic crisis on March 11, 2020. This can be seen based on the rapid outbreaks of the virus reported by WHO with globally 81,109 confirmed cases at the end of February 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since April 19, 2020, the WHO reported that the number of COVID-19 cases is still increasing worldwide with 2,356,819 confirmed cases and 161,097 deaths. The highest country is the United States with total cases of 738,923 and 39,015 deaths. This is then followed by Spain with confirmed cases of 195,144 and 20,453 deaths. The COVID-19 first arrived in Malaysia on 25 January 2020 and the case numbers inched up to 22 positive cases within a month. In response, the Malaysian authorities had taken serious action by issuing a two-week Movement Control Order (MCO) beginning 18 March 2020 – 31 March 2020. The MCO was prolonged for another phase until 14 April 2020 and recently it was continued for another two weeks until 28 April 2020. Due to the MCO, majority of non-essential business and services were shut down and additionally, religious events, public gathering and public sporting events were cancelled.

The number of cases in Malaysia as at January 3, 2022 is 2,690 confirmed cases and 31,560 deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic had obviously damaged the Malaysian economy particularly in twofold. Firstly is the knock-on effect from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic abroad and secondly, is the effect of MCO itself. To boost the tourism and hospitality industry, the government had focused the Visit Malaysia Year Campaign to domestic tourism and at the same time introduced the economic stimulus package to help the burden faced by the tourism and hospitality operators. Among the economic stimulus package introduced by the Ministry of Finance for the Malaysian tourism and hospitality industry (Salim, 2020) are:

- Postponement of income tax monthly installments for income tax allowed for tourism-related companies;
- Hotel and travel-related companies will be exempted from making payments to the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF);
- Hotels will be exempted from paying 6% service tax between March and August 2020; and
- Employers are allowed to defer, restructure and reschedule employer contributions to the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) for up to six months.

Tourism and Hospitality Education in Malaysia

In line with the growth and significance of the tourism industry in the country, Malaysia has taken serious initiative by developing more tourism programs in various levels of institutions. It is a fact that tourism education in Malaysia is developed to fill in the gaps between education and the industry needs in line with the expanding of the industry. Generally, the Malaysian HEIs comprise of two groups known as the Public Higher Educational Institutions (IPTA) that are funded by the Malaysian government and the Private Higher Educational Institutions

(IPTS) owned by the private entities. Nowadays, there are 152 IPTA with 20 Public universities, 30 Polytechnics and 72 Community college in Malaysia, and 509 IPTS (Studymalaysia.com, 2018). Due to the growing interest of tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia to support the increasing industry, there are 23 higher education institutions in Malaysia offering baccalaureate degree programs in hospitality management, where six are offered at IPTA while another 17 at IPTS. Further, 15 HEIs including both IPTA and IPTS have been offering degree program in Tourism Management. Table 1 shows the tourism and hospitality education offered among the Malaysian HEIs from both IPTA and IPTS.

Table 1: Tourism and Hospitality Education in the Malaysian HEIs

No.	Degree Programs	Malaysian HEIs
1	B.Sc. Tourism Management (Hons) B.Sc. Hotel Management. (Hons)	Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)
2	B. Business (Tourism Management) (Hons) B. Business (Hotel Management) (Hons)	Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)
3	B. Entrepreneurship (Tourism) (Hons) B. Entrepreneur (Hospitality Management)	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)
4	B. Management (Tourism)	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)
5	B.Tourism Planning and Hospitality Management (Hons)	International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
6	B. Tourism Management (Hons) B. Hospitality Management (Hons)	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)
7	B. Business (Hotel and Tourism Management)	Universiti Malaya (UM)
8	B. Management (Hotel and Tourism Management)	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
9	B.A. Event and Tourism Management (Hons)	UCSI University, Sarawak Campus
10	B.A. Tourism Management (Hons) B. Business in Hospitality Management (Hons)	LIMKOKWING University of Creative Technology
11	B.A. (Hons) Tourism Management	Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU)
12	B. International Tourism Management (Travel & Recreation Management) (Hons)	Taylor's University
13	B. Tourism and Management (Hons) B. Hospitality Management (Hons)	BERJAYA University College of Hospitality
14	B. Tourism Management (Hons)	UNITAR International University
15	B. Tourism Management (Hons)	Open University Malaysia (OUM)
16	B. Business Administration in Hospitality and Tourism Management (Hons)	Quest International University Perak (QUIP)
17	B. Hospitality and Tourism Management (Hons)	Management & Science University (MSU)

18	B.Sc. International Hospitality Management (Hons)	Sunway University
19	B.Sc. Business Administration (Hospitality and Tourism Management) (Hons)	Asia Metropolitan University
20	B. Business Hospitality Management (Hons)	HELP University
21	B Sc. Hotel and Convention Management (Hons)	Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan University College (KLMUC)
22	B. Hospitality Management in Corporate Communication (Hons) B.A International Hotel and Tourism Management	KDU University College
23	B. Hospitality Management (Hons)	SEGi University
24	B. Business Administration in Tourism and Hospitality Management (Hons)	Raffles University Iskandar Malaysia
25	B.A. Business and Hospitality Management (Hons)	Nilai University College

Studies found that organizations are demanding for graduates with greater skills such as effective communication and problem-solving to fill in the labor market (Jackson, 2016; Mattern, 2016). A current study by Quinn and Buzzetto-Hollywood (2019) emphasized that tourism graduates need to possess specific skills in order to succeed within the digitalization and globalization era in the industry. They conducted a survey on the importance of skills to be possessed by the tourism and hospitality graduates. Their survey involved several stakeholders within the industry including students and staff at the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management located at a small eastern Historically Black University. Wakelin-Theron et al. (2018) also conducted a study on tourism graduates' employability based on the perspectives of industry and graduates. Their study investigated the industry and graduates' perceptions regarding skills needed in the workplace within the tourism industry and found that few skills are important to be possessed by the graduates. Further, the study identified several skills to enhance graduates' employability namely, ability to work under pressure, acceptance of responsibility, attention to detail, customer service/awareness, ethical conduct at work, motivation, time management skills and verbal communication. In an earlier study conducted by Fraser and Reddan (2016), third and fourth year tourism and hotel management students as Griffith University were surveyed regarding the impacts of their career development and work integrated on their employability. The study found that the students perceived the ability to integrate theory into practice and commencement readiness as important skills that may enhance their employability within the industry.

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Tourism and Hospitality Education

There are several studies discussing the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality education particularly regarding internships. For instance, Dani et al. (2020) investigated the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on education and internships of hospitality students in India and found that several skills are needed to assist the students in learning through online classes. They noted that the majority of students agreed on the importance of good communication

skills, social values and teamwork for their future internships in the industry. On the other hands, Bilsland et al. (2020) explored three Asia Pacific tourism destinations namely Australia, Vietnam and Cambodia and compared the impacts of COVID-19 in terms of potential implications for work-integrated learning internships placement. They focused on the current studies of virtual training and internships in hospitality and tourism in the post-COVID-19 pandemic instead of the current impacts. Looking at other perspectives, studies also discussed on the online education for tourism and hospitality amid COVID-19 pandemic as it is considered essential for the educational institutions to survive nowadays. A study was conducted by Çınar (2020) regarding the impact of COVID-19 on tourism education in terms of training system and online transformation process of higher education institutions. The study showed that using digital technology in tourism education is vital not just for the teachers but also for the students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is also supported by Ye and Law (2020) regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism and hospitality education in Hong Kong particularly in online education delivery. Their study indicated the importance of online education delivery for tourism and hospitality education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also suggested strong collaboration between academics and industrial practitioners in implementing actions to deal with emergencies such as the COVID-19 in the future.

Additionally, few studies also emphasized on the reformation of tourism and hospitality education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a current study, Yeong et al. (2021) used the Regional Center of Expertise (RCE) that connects a network of individuals, organizations and experts in developing innovative approach in education to further explore in the context of tourism and hospitality education. They found that RCE-university collaboration could benefit the tourism and hospitality industry to remain adaptive and innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, Edelheim (2020) emphasized on his study the needs to transform tourism education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transformation did not just involve the curriculum but mostly the safety and security and health issues that engage in the tourism education environment. He also suggested the importance of higher education provider to provide up-to-date materials for the students in order to gain current knowledge amid COVID-19 pandemic.

The needs to reform tourism and hospitality education due to the COVID-19 pandemic is also suggested by Anastasiou (2020). The study was conducted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to the higher hospitality education in Cyprus focusing on the quality of teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used the DigCompEdu framework to understand the phenomenon and noted that personal empathy and emotional labor personality of the educators determine the teaching quality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings, it is also suggested that new hospitality curricular to be designed to enhance blended teaching and learning due to the COVID-19. Further, Tiwari et al. (2020) adopted a qualitative approach and survey 22 respondents to investigate their perspectives as tourism educators regarding the upcoming challenges in tourism education in the post-COVID-19 phase. The study emphasized that respondents should consider innovation in the delivery of courses particularly in terms of creativity, digital knowledge and vocational skills in specific tourism courses for instance crisis management, business resilience and health and safety.

Research Methodology

Taking into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to unfold, this study used a qualitative approach where a phone-call interview was conducted. 11 educators representing tourism and hospitality educational institutions having at least more than five years experiences in the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education and have doctoral degree as their higher qualification were purposely selected for the study. Based on these criterion, the number was considered appropriate as a preliminary study to explore and further understand the event. They were identified through the academic institutions websites and were emailed asking their willingness to participate in the study. The interviews were recorded and took around 20 minutes. Respondents were firstly explained about the purpose of the study and questions need to be honestly answered. The questions were divided into two categories; the first part asking the backgrounds of the respondents and the second part subjected to the main objectives of the study. Their responses were then manually analyzed to determine the themes to answer the objectives of the study.

Findings

Respondents' Background

The first section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate their background. The findings revealed that 63.6% respondents are female and the remaining 36.4% are male. As for the age category, it was noted that majority of respondents are between the age of 45 – 54 years old (36.4%). This is then followed by 27.3% respondents under the category of age of 24 – 34 years old and 35 – 44 years old. Only one respondent was noted under 55 years old (9.1%). Further, the findings also noted that 63.6% respondents have experiences in tourism and hospitality education between 5 – 10 years and the 36.4% have experiences in tourism and hospitality education for more than 10 years. Details of the respondents' background is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent's Background (N=11)

Item	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	4	36.4
Female	7	63.6
Age category:		
24 – 34 years old	3	27.3
35 – 44 years old	3	27.3
45 – 54 years old	4	36.4
Above 55 years old	1	9.1
Experiences in tourism and hospitality education:		
5 – 10 years	7	63.6
More than 10 years	4	36.4

Issues of COVID-19 Pandemic in Tourism and Hospitality Education in Malaysia

The respondents were firstly asked to identify the issues of COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia. Two themes derived from the analysis conducted as issues of the COVID-19 in tourism and hospitality education. It was found that most respondents believe the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the internships program or industrial

attachment for the students. Most respondents seem to think that the COVID-19 pandemic has greater impact to the student's placement within the workplace. Among their respond:

The major impact of COVID-19 has taken a toll on the internship for all final semester hospitality and tourism students, where services has to be suspended and businesses shut down, limiting the number of employers for our intern. (R1)

Besides, the internship program was badly affected as most tourism and hospitality businesses are affected by COVID-19 highlighting the future issues of employability. (R4)

The issue of students' internships as major factor affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education is further strongly supported by other respondents of the study. One respondent of the study emphasized:

For the hospitality students, they have problem in experiencing the most significant part of learning which is the internship program. (R3)

In fact, respondents also agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had badly affected the internships program or industrial attachment for Malaysian tourism and hospitality students by stating:

Not much except on the practicum/industrial attachment, which has to change to Final Year Project or Business Case Study (safe option in pandemic era). (R6)

Shrinking of opportunities to find internship placement (internship can be a stepping stone for graduates' future career). (R2)

The second theme derived that found by the respondents as significant impact of COVID-19 on the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education is in terms of teaching and learning delivery. Among issues that voiced out by the respondent is:

Furthermore, it has impacted the teaching and learning delivery, where online platforms are warranted and remote learning aggressively transformed teaching delivery methods. Courses that have practical sessions especially, do not meet its original objective, which is to allow the students to have hands-on experiences. (R1)

A few respondents also confessed that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the teaching and learning of tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia in terms of using online and technology platform. Even though the use of technology is important amid COVID-19 pandemic, they however emphasized the disadvantages of online teaching and learning particularly for courses that need hands-on and practical components. For instance, one respondent described:

Online lectures replacing the traditional method (F2Face). The same goes for evaluation for student assessment - online submission requires lecturer to prepare the feedback for students virtually; 24 hours a day - because students might sending their queries regarding the course at any time in a day. (R7)

Another respondent opined:

All the classes had to be done online and this affects the effectiveness of teaching and learning, especially courses that involve practical components. Students also will be lacking in many other aspects such as communication skills and leadership as they are not involved in the face to face class. (R8)

Challenges Faced within the Malaysian Tourism and Hospitality Education amid COVID-19 Pandemic

Further, the respondents were also asked to identify the challenges faced within the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 pandemic. The findings also found two themes derived as factors affected future graduates' employability within the industry. One of the factors is known as limited job opportunities. A few respondents argued:

Since there are so many tour operators and hoteliers closed down their operations, it also gives a negative impact towards the graduates. Graduates are in a difficult position now where job opportunities in this industry are very limited. (R9)

Definitely graduates will be facing difficulty in getting jobs related to tourism and hospitality positions. (R8)

Other respondents also emphasized similar opinions regarding limited job opportunities as factor affected the Malaysian tourism and hospitality graduates' employability due to the COVID-19. One respondent for example opined:

Temporary closing or ceased operations of many tourism and hospitality organizations (graduates' limited/ no options to be employed in the industry). (R2)

Another respondent reflected concerns regarding the unemployment within the Malaysian tourism and hospitality industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic by stating:

I've spoken to many industry people and colleagues, and one thing we all agree on is that we cannot – and we must not – go back to normal. Too many businesses are running on low cash flows and reserves. Consequently, the graduates don't have the luxury as the current job market is horrendous and I think it will also get worse before it gets better. (R4)

Additionally, one more theme derived from this question and was considered as benefit to the graduates is known as requirement of new graduates' skills. A few respondents had emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic would affect future graduates' employability in Malaysia through the importance of having new skills and innovations in line with the digitalization era nowadays. Several respondents pointed out:

This will be seen as the great challenge for tourism and hospitality graduates to get their job and fill in their position in the industry. Once the current pandemic situation recovers, travel and hospitality companies might want to hire those employees with previous skills and experience to fill in the jobs as compared to those fresh graduates. (R7)

The graduates need to have more skills as companies will choose employees that have various knowledge and will give them the advantages. (R3)

Although it can be expected that our future graduates would feel that they will have less job opportunities in the industry, however, I feel that this also opens new opportunity for innovation in the service industry. (R1)

The respondents were further asked to suggest skills needed by the tourism and hospitality graduates in Malaysia amid COVID-19 pandemic. Since the industry today is growing within the era of digitalization, most respondents agreed that technology skills are important as future employability skills for the graduates to possess. Five respondents strongly pointed out:

In my honest opinion, we need our students to be future ready for the upcoming of AI and technology taking over most of tourism and hospitality services. We need courses that encourage innovation, information technology skills, and computer literacy to prepare our students for the future. (R1)

Digital soft skills - somehow what our current students are lacking. (R4)

Since there is a lot of digitization happening in the pandemic era, the students may need to learn more in that aspect i.e. beyond e-tourism. (R6).

Concentrates more hands on training for students at the university by following strict SOP; and enhancing students with various digital skills. (R7)

Due to restriction of having mass physical gathering and movement control order, obviously multimedia and technology are highly demanding skills in the industry. (R9)

The findings also noted that a few respondents recommend technology skills together with other related skills for the tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the second theme was named as soft skills. For instance, four respondents opined:

Information Technology, Communication, Entrepreneurial, Adaptive skills, Self-reliant. (R2)

Problem solving skills, technology skills. (R3)

Other than technology skills, negotiating and networking skills are also important. Since covid-19 impact almost the whole sectors, negotiation is needed to make sure they can save some amount of money especially when dealing with suppliers and this will help to reduce their cost of operations. Networking is important especially with the authorities, NGOs and other industries to make sure they can run their business well and smoothly (ex: marketing, permit/license, customers, suppliers etc). (R9)

Communication, interpersonal and resourceful skills are crucially needed besides digital marketing. (R10)

Finally, two respondents explained:

Entrepreneurial mindset and skill sets dedicated in tourism and hospitality. (R5)

Graduates need to be able to learn new skills outside what is learned in class. One of the most important skills is entrepreneurship because during COVID-19, many people have lost their jobs and it is very difficult to get new job. Thus, universities should enhance teaching and learning related to entrepreneurship and offer various platform for students to involve in entrepreneurial activities even in campus. (R8)

Recommendation to Reform the Tourism and Hospitality Education in Malaysia

To answer the final research question of the study, the respondents were asked to provide their opinions and justification regarding the needs to reform the tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia amid COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of the study revealed several opinions from respondents who strongly want the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education to be reformed. Some of them pointed out:

Definitely yes. (R9)

Yes, rather than using traditional teaching approach, tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia need to switch to Cybergogy for 21st century learning and teaching delivery. (R2)

Yes. Restructuring the syllabus accordingly. (R7)

Yes, need issue on risk management and entrepreneurship to be included in syllabus education to prepare students for pandemic type of issue. (R10)

Further findings supported the reforming of tourism and hospitality education were also explained in detail by a few respondents:

Of course transformation in the teaching and learning is inevitable. However, tourism and hospitality education need a few exceptions, since the program standard requires the element of practical class especially for kitchen class, food and beverage services and housekeeping courses. (R1)

We have already seen a lot of digitalization happening in the education sectors: online classes, online collaborative assessment, team teaching etc. As the hotels are opting automatic check-in, booking procedures and similar repetitive activities, I believe there is a need for curriculum revamp focusing more on the digital aspect of the industry. But, with all the benefits of digital education, there is a downside as a lecturer: you miss your students and you cannot assess them face to face. (R4)

Additionally, the findings also noted that several opinions from the respondents are against the needs to reform the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 pandemic. Their justifications and arguments are described:

There is no need to do so as the pandemic is not something permanent. (R6)

No as we will be back to the conventional once we reach herd immunity level. (R11)

The reform might not be necessary due to the COVID-19 as the public are in the process of receiving vaccine. (R8)

Discussion

The findings revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has variously affected the tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia particularly in terms of internships or industrial attachments and further through the delivery of teaching and learning. The respondents believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected students' internships since services has to be suspended and businesses has to be shut down which consequently limit the number of employers for interns. The tourism and hospitality students are among the graduates who need to have their first hands-on and practical training during their interns. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia has practiced the work-from-home (WFH) and used online to perform tasks for their employees. Hence, this matter eventually creating a negative experience for the students. The findings significantly supported previous studies where internships program is seen as major impact in the tourism and hospitality education due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bilsland et al., 2020; Dani et al., 2020).

Even though Dani et al. (2020) suggested in their study the application of technology and virtual internships program for the students, not all tourism and hospitality sectors are able to provide this aspect. Most small tourism business sectors in Malaysia for instance Homestay operators and food and beverages operators might not even have excellent and quality technology to run their operations. Due to the break of COVID-19, it is very hard for the students to attach the practical training through virtual or online. Hospitality students for example, need to have practical training regarding food service management and front office management. As mentioned by one of the respondents earlier, the opportunities for students to find internship placement will be hard. Also suggested by the respondent, several educational providers probably will have to replace the internships or industrial attachments to Final Year Project or Business Case Study.

Besides internships, the COVID-19 has also affected the delivery of teaching and learning by enforce teachers and students to use the online platform. This matter has not just affected the students but mostly the teachers. In fact, not all educational providers in Malaysia are able to provide facilities and current technology to serve tourism and hospitality students. However, due to the current situation, most educational providers need to teach online. Additionally, the online education is acknowledged as an important platform to reach and educate the students, which is consistent with the study by Ye and Law (2021). Their study regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism and hospitality education in Hong Kong indicated the importance of online education delivery for tourism and hospitality education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, Çinar (2020) also agreed on the importance of having online education for tourism and hospitality due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the respondents of this study found the impacts of COVID-19 on the online teaching actually providing disadvantages to the teachers and students. For example, the respondents noted that several courses particularly that have practical sessions will not meet their purpose because students are not allowed to have hands-on experiences.

Additionally, most respondents also found that the biggest challenges during COVID-19 pandemic are in terms of limiting job opportunities and requiring new skills for the graduates to possess before entering the industry. The COVID-19 pandemic is also perceived by the respondents would reduce the employment opportunities which eventually increase the rate of graduates' unemployment (Shahriar et al., 2021). The closed down of so many tourism and hospitality sectors due to the COVID-19 eventually lead to the limited job within the industry. Hence, this aspect is believed by the majority of respondents to significantly affect the graduates' employability in the future. Even more, the respondents believe that the issue of unemployment within the tourism and hospitality graduates would be worse over time. The findings are consistent to previous study by Kamaruddin et al. (2020) where they found that the employment prospect after the COVID-19 is low. Several studies are also consistent to the theme suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to the requirement of new skills and innovations not just within the tourism and hospitality education but also other tourism sectors (Gössling, 2021; Gretzel et al., 2020). New skills and innovations particularly related to technology are important and considered as factor derived from the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the Malaysian tourism and hospitality education. Further, it is also seen as a great challenge for the tourism and hospitality graduates to enhance their employability within the industry.

Three important skills are needed by the tourism and hospitality graduates due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is undeniable that technology-based learning tools and platforms such as augmented reality (AR), gamification, online videos, podcasting, social networking and even Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) must be implemented in the tourism and hospitality teaching and learning curriculum today (Balula et al., 2019; Chan, 2019; Melluso et al., 2020; Tiwari et al. 2020). Since the tourism and hospitality education amid COVID-19 is using online mode of teaching and learning delivery, the technology skills would significantly assist both the teachers and students to gain efficient information and inputs. Soft skills are also suggested to be possessed by the tourism and hospitality graduates amid COVID-19 pandemic. Among the soft skills considered important to be integrated into the tourism and hospitality education are communication skills, adaptive skills, problem-solving skills and self-reliant skills. These skills play significant roles in enhancing graduates' employability within the industry particularly after the era of post pandemic and can assist graduates to communicate better and perform efficiently as highlighted by Melluso et al. (2020). The findings are also significantly consistent to Malik and Ahmad (2020) which cited soft skills as essential requirement for graduates in order to prepare them for the convenient and suitable future job market.

Entrepreneurial skills are another essential skill emphasized in the study to be possessed by the tourism and hospitality graduates in the future due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Graduates cannot depend totally on the job market as it will be limited job opportunities in the industry amid COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it would be an advantage for the graduates to have entrepreneurial skills to further their career within the competitiveness and globalization of the industry nowadays. Entrepreneurial skills are considered important as they would provide graduates with different skills to face the challenges of highly demanding tourism and hospitality industry (Daniel et al., 2017). In fact, entrepreneurial skills are found by Goryushkina et al. (2019) to be significant for successful career in hotels as the skills can develop basic qualities and abilities to graduates self-development. Hence, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which have affected the industry badly, the tourism and hospitality education needs to emphasize on the skills either through the course curriculum or entrepreneurial activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has effected many industries including the tourism and hospitality throughout the world. The educational sector within the industry is among the biggest sectors affected due to the pandemic. Hence, the findings emphasized majority respondents perceived the tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia need to be reformed in the future to survive the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the time where Malaysia needs to implement digital education not just through using the online platform but also other technologies that can allow the educational institutions to have a quality and effective platform for teaching and learning. Several previous studies have similar findings regarding this matter and have suggested the universities to resort to online applications through virtual environment and applications of smart phones amid COVID-19 pandemic (Anastasiou, 2020; Elhaty et al., 2020). Table 3 presents the summary of the themes accordingly to the objectives of the study.

Table 3. Summary of the Findings

Research Objectives	Themes Derived
Issues of COVID-19 pandemic in tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Teaching and learning delivery
Challenges faced within tourism and hospitality education amid the COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited job opportunities • Requirement of new skills • Technology skills • Soft skills • Entrepreneurial skills
The needs to reform tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia due to the COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital education

Conclusion

It is a fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has created several issues and challenges within the tourism and hospitality education. In the case of Malaysia, it is found that critical issues derived during the COVID-19 pandemic such as impacts to internship and the delivery of teaching and learning. The academic institutions are also facing several challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to enhance graduates' employability for instance limited job opportunities, requirement of new skills and the needs of technology skills, soft skills and entrepreneurial skills within the workplace. The tourism and hospitality educators in Malaysian educational institutions perceived the needs to reform the tourism and hospitality education in the future due to COVID-19 pandemic. The findings significantly contribute to the higher education or universities in Malaysia offering tourism and hospitality programs to plan effective strategies in teaching and learning through digital platform.

Taking into account new future skills required for the graduates' employability amid COVID-19 pandemic is a serious matter in education today, immediate actions must be taken to make sure the graduates are able to perform within the future digital environment. The study however is limited to the tourism and hospitality education which probably includes several courses that are not suitable to be taught online, hence the findings may not be represented to other educational programs in Malaysia. It is also involved a small number of respondents as a preliminary study to identify the issues and challenges and further understanding of the event. Hence, future study is recommended to be undertaken by including more number of respondents representing the academic institutions offering tourism and hospitality courses in Malaysia.

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