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Emotional labor and the Hospitality and Tourism Curriculum: The development and integration of emotion skills

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Abstract

Emotional labor is integral to guest-host interactions. Given that this is a competency that is desired by industry in graduates, it is important to understand how the concept presents in the Hospitality and Tourism curriculum. This exploratory qualitative study sets out to investigate how hospitality and tourism educators perceive the development of emotion skills in Hospitality and Tourism education curriculum. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with higher education hospitality and tourism educators in Australia. Findings reveal that the development of emotion skills is a taken for granted concept that is not explicitly addressed within the curriculum. Implications for practice discussed include incorporating targeted and explicit learning outcomes that encourage the development of emotion skills into the curriculum, encouraging experiential learning opportunities in teaching and learning practices and adopting multidisciplinary approaches to developing emotion skills in hospitality and tourism students.

Key words: Curriculum; Emotion skills; Emotional labor; Hospitality and Tourism education; Interpersonal skills

Introduction

Emotional labor, which is the emotional effort employees exert in demonstrating organizationally expected norms (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000), is integral to quality service delivery (Kim, Han & Kang, 2019), and makes a critical contribution to customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Lashley, 2015). Hospitality and Tourism (HT) employees face the demands of emotional labor, as the expectation to be respectful, enthusiastic and empathetic is considered part of the job. Because of the benefits that can accrue from a display of such emotions, increasingly service organizations want employees that are proficient in emotion skills (Li, Yang & Wu, 2009; Sisson & Adams, 2013). To be viewed as work-ready, emotion skills are thus an essential competency for HT graduates to possess.

Concerns have been raised about the level of preparedness of HT graduates for the industry (Baum, 2019; Goh & Lee, 2018; Spowart, 2011). Research indicates there is often a gap between what the educational institutions offer and what the industry expects (Huang, Lalopa & Adler, 2016). To close this gap, it is important for graduates to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for them to succeed in their future careers (Marneros, Papageorgiou & Efstathiades, 2020). Curriculum reviews must therefore move in tandem with the dynamic changes in industry expectations to achieve mutual objectives. Having graduates that possess appropriate emotion skills would contribute to the adequate preparation of future HT graduates and enhance their employability. Studies, however, have suggested graduates are entering the industry with limited emotion skills (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019; Hughes, Mylonas, & Ballantyne, 2017; Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016; Sisson & Adams, 2013). This raises the issue of the extent to which the emotional labor concept is integrated into the HT curriculum. The responsibility falls on HT educational institutions to produce

graduates capable of performing to the expectations of the industry (Griffin, 2020), and this includes skills that ensure HT graduates can perform effective emotional labor.

Despite the influence emotional labor has on perceived quality of service, little attention has been paid to the development of emotion skills that would give HT students the enhanced capacity to engage in effective emotional labor. An evaluation of studies in the extant research demonstrate limited empirical evidence on emotion skill development in the HT discipline. Benefits of exploring this issue include providing insight to HT educators and curriculum developers on how to explicitly implement the integration of emotion skills into the HT curriculum. The research will also assist in articulating more effective working relationships with HT industry practitioners in bridging the gap between academia and practice. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the concept of emotional labor is developed and integrated into the hospitality and tourism curriculum. To explore this issue, the perception of educators in HT higher education institutions across Australia was sought. The objectives of this study were:

1. To determine how the development of emotion skills can be enhanced in hospitality and tourism curriculum
2. To evaluate how explicit the concept of emotional labor is made in the hospitality and tourism curriculum
3. To provide recommendations to hospitality and tourism educators and curriculum developers to assist in curriculum review that will lead to enhancing the development of emotion skills

Literature Review

The Curriculum

Hospitality and Tourism (HT) institutions use the curriculum, which is a comprehensive plan made up of several units designed to achieve specified objectives in the education process, to develop desirable learning outcomes in students. Designing a curriculum is an opportunity to be systematic, targeted and explicit about intended outcomes, with a focus on assisting students achieve the competencies they will need in industry. Competency is generally defined as the ability to do something effectively, and involves equipping students with the required knowledge, skills and abilities essential for career success.

The changing nature of the HT industry, and the demand for high quality service demands curricula that consistently meets contemporary industry expectations (Griffin, 2020; Marneros et al., 2020). As HT curricula is developed, attention must be given to recognising that the success of graduates depends on their ability to meet industry needs. There have been assertions that the HT curriculum generally has a narrow focus centered on commercial outcomes and is in dire need of a strategic shift towards well rounded education that includes emotional perspectives (Lashley, 2015; Sisson & Adams, 2013; Hughes et al., 2017). Suggestions have also been made that a more holistic approach to the development of HT graduates beyond technical knowledge would better prepare students for the industry (Kim & Jeong, 2018; Sisson & Adams, 2013). As the industry evolves, graduates need to not only be competent in technical skills, but also be proficient in the behavioural attributes required of the service profession, including emotion skills (Hughes et al., 2017; Marneros et al., 2020; Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016).

Achieving balance between practical and theoretical aspects of the HT curriculum poses significant challenges to curriculum developers (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Scholars have long debated on how more emotional perspectives can be integrated in the HT curriculum. Tribe (2002) advocates for curricula that utilizes reflective practice to encourage more caring guest-host interactions. Caton (2014) suggests HT courses should produce value-driven graduates with well-rounded abilities to exude empathy and respect to others. Lashley (2015) recommends HT curricula that includes liberal values that can produce critical and analytical thinkers with abilities to integrate their commercial, private and cultural knowledges and experiences to enhance quality service delivery. Alexakis and Jiang (2019) suggest approaches that encourage adaptability to different contexts such as action-oriented, critical reflective teaching innovations would best meet industry expectations. Fundamentally, these arguments advocate for a HT curriculum that uses holistic multidisciplinary approaches to provide knowledge, skills and abilities with potential for adding emotional perspectives to the guest-host interaction. Within these philosophical debates however, the place of emotion skills within the curriculum in targeted and explicit terms has largely remained invisible.

Emotional labor

Emotional labor is the process of regulating and managing both feelings and expressions in alignment with organizational norms (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000). Grandey and Gabriel (2015) conceptualize the concept of emotional labor as a process that incorporates three distinct yet dynamic components that integrate to direct the actions of the service provider in guest-host exchanges: emotional requirements, emotion regulation and emotion performance. *Emotional requirements* involve the perception individuals have of the type of emotions their occupation demands – for example, in HT industry, the expectation to be

enthusiastic and empathetic during guest-host interactions – and are governed by display rules, which are explicit or implicit norms that guide service providers on which emotions ought to be expressed and which ought to be disguised (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey 2000); *emotional regulation* is the effort the individual expends in trying to meet the perceived demands of the job, doing this by modifying feelings or expressions. Literature predominantly highlights two strategies that can be applied for this purpose (Grandey, 2000) - surface acting, defined as suppressing felt emotions and faking desired emotions, and deep acting, which is modifying ones felt emotions to display appropriate emotions; and the third component of the emotional labor process - *emotion performance* - is the observable expressions that the individual displays in efforts to meet the job's emotional requirements. Emotion performance requires the display of interpersonal behavior that others would observe as congruent to perceived organizational norms. The premise of emotional labor is the expectations that one will regulate their emotions to align with expected norms (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Thus, the emotional labor concept is dynamic and reciprocal, requiring the management of emotions directed towards executing a job during interpersonal interactions with guests. The effective discharge of emotional labor centers on possessing appropriate emotion skills. A strategic and explicit attention to designing appropriate learning outcomes would be necessary to ensure graduates have the necessary emotion skills required for quality service delivery.

Towards conceptualizing emotion skills

Emotional labor is integral to guest-host interactions (Kim et al., 2019). Since emotional labor occurs in a social sphere during guest-host interactions, the role of interpersonal skills is critical to developing emotion skills. Research on HT curriculum has consistently rated interpersonal skills as being a critical competency for graduates (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005;

Sisson & Adams, 2013; Spowart, 2011). The interpersonal interaction is a fundamental component of the guest-host relationship (Bitner 1995), a competency that is an intricate aspect of discharging quality service. It is within this guest-host interaction that emotion skills require to be managed and performed. A wide knowledge base, that incorporates competent cognitive and technical skills, is critical to the effective discharge of quality service (Kim & Jeong, 2018). But these skills become ineffective if not intricately balanced with emotion skills within the process of service delivery (Kim et al., 2019). The practice is instantaneous and requires the service provider to sense the feelings being communicated by the guest, and instantaneously respond as appropriate. The response considered appropriate is the one that would be perceived by the guest as being applicable for the context. This means that the service provider must sense the emotional state of the guest and apply affective skills to regulate and manage their emotions to empathetically respond. This requirement to manage one's own emotions as well as the guests has had researchers link emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1995) to emotional labor, with the conclusion that emotional intelligence is a resource that influences the discharge of emotional labor (Kim et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2019; Mastracci, Newman & Guy, 2010). Thus, service providers who can better manage their emotions and sense the emotions of others are able to direct their emotions and make decisions on how to act or react during guest-host interactions. The outcome of any guest-host interaction will depend on the actions and reactions of both the service provider and the guest and must be approached through a dynamic and interactive perspective (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). To cover the variability of service encounters and the array of emotions that can be displayed during such interactions, a holistic approach to the emotional labor process incorporating not only performance, but also emotion regulation and awareness of emotional requirements is fundamental to developing the necessary emotion skills.

Approaches to developing emotion skills

Whilst the significance of emotional labor during guest-host interactions has received a fair amount of research interest, attention to how the necessary emotion skills are developed is scarce. Indications are that the development of emotion skills remains untargeted and underdeveloped in industry as well as in HT educational institutions. Although the benefits from developing effective approaches to managing and regulating emotions to achieve quality service is undisputed (Grandey, 2003; Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013; Mastracci et al., 2010), little targeted training in performing emotional labor is undertaken in industry (Shani, Uriely, Reichel & Ginsburg, 2014), and it remains unclear what interventions industry can employ to encourage effective emotional labor (Lee & Madera, 2019). The strategy preferred by industry is often to employ individuals presumed to have natural affinity to exerting emotional labor. Once identified, the human resource practices of recruitment, selection, and employee inductions are utilized to communicate appropriate display rules (Johanson & Woods, 2008).

The same untargeted approach appears to be employed by HT educational institutions. A study by Nyanjom and Wilkins (2016) within the context of hospitality training found that emotional labor was a taken for granted competency that was not explicitly targeted during practical training. The preferred approach for HT educational institutions is to expose students to workplaces in industry for experiential learning opportunities through programs such as Work Integrated Learning (WIL). WIL is a critical component of most HT curricula and its benefits have been extensively reported in literature (Ferrerias-Garcia, Sales-Zaguirre & Serradell-López, 2019; Zhu, Kim & Poulston, 2019). However, there also are inherent issues in WIL that impact student learning and experiences such as poor design (Jackson, 2015), lack of communication between curriculum developers and industry (Zopiatis, &

Theocharous, 2013), and an imbalance in student /industry expectations (Yiu & Law, 2012). These challenges often result in major stakeholders (students, educational institutions and industry) not achieving laid out mutual learning objectives of such experiential opportunities. It often becomes challenging to establish whether the anticipated learning outcomes as designed within the curriculum have been achieved while students are in industry. Depending solely on WIL as the pathway to develop appropriate emotion skills may not be the best option for students to acquire the requisite emotion skill competencies.

The ability to perform effective emotional labor is therefore a taken for granted competency that is often not explicitly targeted for development (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016; Shani et al., 2014). A concept that is highly valued for the discharge of quality service and achievement of competitive advantage remains largely implicit with the assumption that it will be automatically assimilated by service providers. While approaches such as human resources initiatives and WIL may contribute to gaining some level of emotion skills by students, this study suggests a targeted and explicit integration of the concept of emotional labor into the curriculum would accrue most benefit. However, questions remain on how best to integrate the concept of emotional labor in HT curriculum in ways that have significant impact on assimilating the concept.

Methods

This is an exploratory study that adopted a qualitative research approach utilizing in-depth interviews. A qualitative method was preferred as it provides opportunity to attain a greater level of depth and detail to reveal the participant's full range of views regarding the subject under discussion (Saldana, 2015).

Participants

Following the receipt of research ethics approval for the study, purposive sampling was applied to recruit participants. To obtain different perspectives of the same phenomenon and contribute to data triangulation (Denzin, 1973), different stakeholders were approached, with participants being recruited from the higher education academic community across Australia. To be eligible for selection, participants were required to be educators teaching in hospitality and tourism (HT) courses. In total a sample of 13 educators teaching HT courses (four female and nine male) were interviewed. Six (6) worked at university level institutions and seven (7) in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 20 years. Codes have been used in this paper to ensure anonymity of the participants (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' profile

Code	Gender	Institution
S1	Male	VET
S2	Female	VET
S3	Female	VET
S4	Male	VET
S5	Male	VET
S6	Male	VET
S7	Male	VET
S8	Male	University
S9	Male	University
S10	Male	University
S11	Female	University
S12	Female	University
S13	Male	University

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and carried out by the first author. Each interview, audio-recorded, then transcribed verbatim by a third party, lasted approximately 60 minutes. The use of open-ended questions encouraged participants to talk freely and deeply about their perceptions based on their experiences and acquired knowledge. The interview schedule included guiding questions designed to help participants remember their experiences, such as “To what extent are emotion skills addressed in the hospitality and tourism curriculum?” and “How is the concept of emotional labour integrated into the hospitality and tourism curriculum?”. The interviewer made supplementary notes during and after the interviews, which contributed to the triangulation of the data (Denzin, 1973).

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken simultaneously with the gathering of data, using a thematic analysis approach (Saldana, 2015). Thematic analysis is an inductive method for qualitative data analysis with themes emerging from the data rather than being assigned by the researcher. As required by the thematic analysis procedure (Saldana, 2015), the transcripts were analyzed to collect and categorize text segments representing specific patterns that emerged from the participants’ accounts. The identification of themes involved data immersion by means of carefully reading the transcripts several times, and seeking similarities and differences, especially where emerging themes were highlighted. Codes were developed from which themes emerged to allow for the identification of concepts and categories. Table 2 presents the development of the core themes from the data analysis process and summarizes the findings from the study.

Table 2. Summary of findings

Core themes	Subthemes
<i>Developing emotional labor</i>	
External influence: Socialisation	Influence of informal learning Influence of personability Educator control
Internal influence: formal training	Learning about and understanding the nature of hospitality Educator experience Deliberate practice
<i>Integrating emotional labor</i>	
Hidden concept	Emotional Labor not explicit Variable opportunities for practice Uncertain WIL outcomes
Student wellbeing	Student wellbeing Safe learning environment

Findings and discussions

Despite the lauded benefits of emotional labor to quality service outcomes, the study revealed inherent challenges in the development and integration of emotion skills within the hospitality and tourism (HT) curriculum. The development of this critical concept was not being explicitly addressed and appeared to be incidental. Educators perceived that emotion skills development was impacted by both external (Socialization) and internal (Formal training) influences in different ways. Pathways to integrating the concept of emotional labor into the curriculum included experiential learning, and careful attention to student wellbeing. Industry participation was perceived as critical to effective integration of the emotional labor

concept into the HT curriculum. These emergent themes are outlined and discussed below in greater detail.

Developing Emotional labor

External influence: Socialization

It emerged from the findings that emotional skill development was influenced informally through social interactions and environments. Educators perceived that students brought with them societal norms and practices from general life that invariably influenced their abilities to engage in emotional labor, suggesting that “you've got to be bred for it...it's got to be in your blood” (S6). Educators also suggested that students could pick up emotion skills implicitly “just through osmosis” (S12), “by being around a space that says we're hospitality” (S2). This finding aligns with literature, which suggests that engaging in emotional labor is influenced by general social, occupational and organizational norms (Grandey, 2000). Seymour and Sandiford (2005) found that employees in small hospitality units learn implicit rules for performing emotional labor through socialization with colleagues, managers and customers. Similarly, a study carried out in a hospitality training environment (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016) revealed that students invariably increased their capacity for emotional labor from observing others during practical training. This finding suggests educators perceived they had little control over how students assimilated emotion skills.

Findings also revealed that the ability to effectively engage in emotional labor was perceived by educators as innate and challenging to develop. Most educators felt emotion skill development would be challenging because, in their opinion, the practice hinges on the personality of the student. The ability to engage in emotional labor was “a natural gift” (S8)

and those without this “gift” would “find it very difficult to develop those [emotion] skills” (S6). As explained by one educator:

They just know how to do it... They’ll just have this thing about them. ... a persona ...when you find somebody that is really good at it you say ‘how do you do it?’ and they just say ‘I don't know, I just do it’. Maybe they have the emotional intelligence that's picking up on other people and the way other people are reacting to them whereas others mightn't. S1

This finding was somewhat worrying, because if educators believed emotional skills to be innate, they would have less inclination to attempt its development. The finding, however, was not surprising as previous research has found that individuals with highly attuned emotional intelligence appear able to better engage in emotional labor (Kim et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2019). People who are high on emotional intelligence are more adept at regulating their emotions and therefore more likely to perform socially acceptable emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Mastracci et al., 2010). It has been found for example that extraverted individuals – the more sociable and talkative people - have a higher capacity to deep act as they are better able to handle social situations inherent in customer service, while those high in neuroticism – the more self-conscious and shy people - are less inclined to do so (Sohn & Lee, 2012; Kim, 2008). Enhancing levels of emotional intelligence can improve student abilities to perform effective emotional labor (Wang, 2019). Capitalizing on this emotive source within students can assist in enhancing emotion skills.

Whilst the educators perceived that the learning of emotion skills was out of their control, stating “I don’t know how one can actually develop that” (S4), they also suggested that there was potential for these skills to be improved. These two lines of thought appeared

contradictory, but upon reflection intricately supported the educators' view of how emotion skills could be enhanced:

Some people have an innate capacity to be fast runners. ... So, I just suspect that it's probably a similar kind of analogy that some people have the capacity and are going to be good at [emotional labor] naturally but could become even better with coaching. Some people just don't have the capacity and are never going to be very good at it even with coaching. So ... some people have a natural gift and that gift can be enhanced. S8

The findings from the current study emphasize that emotion skills can be enhanced through socialization, and the malleable characteristic of emotion skills makes their assimilation dependent on the different contexts of student experience. Teaching emotion skills is an intricate process that may require a holistic approach to curriculum design and development, as such skills are often more challenging to develop through training (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016). Informal learning can be a powerful tool that educators can take advantage of. Without careful intervention and explicit control by educators, however, students may assimilate attitudes and behaviors misaligned with anticipated learning outcomes.

Internal influence: Formal training

Findings indicated that an understanding of the nature of the HT industry, and the knowledge and experience the educator had about the industry also had a significant role to play in developing emotion skills. Educators perceived that an important aspect of enhancing emotional labor was grasping an understanding of the nature of the hospitality industry, and through this understanding, the emotional labor concept would be assimilated. Working in the hospitality industry was presented as synonymous with emotional labor. Development of

emotional labor would require the capture and understanding of “the essence of what [hospitality] is about” (S1). Students needed to be “mentally prepared that when they go to work this is the thing they're going to come up against” (S10). Students needed to “understand what their job role is and how they should perform it” (S4). The educator’s responsibility in culturing this awareness was “helping [students] come to terms with the nature and the challenges of the industry” (S7) and “helping students realize the importance of the service culture of the industry” (S9). It was perceived that the awareness of hospitality as a concept had potential to encourage the motivation in students to acquire the necessary emotion skills to effectively engage in emotional labor. It was however stressed that teaching emotion skills “probably comes down to the individual lecturer in the individual class in the individual course” (S9). This finding highlights the importance of having explicit and targeted learning outcomes to guide the development of emotion skill during formal training. Formal training brings in important aspects of control into curriculum development and design which can be used to guide teaching and learning processes and ensure anticipated competencies are gained by students.

The practice of guest-host interactions was perceived as essential to developing emotion skills within the HT discipline. Educators perceived there was potential for emotion skills to be developed if students were exposed to opportunities for practice. It emerged that repeated practice could play a significant role in the developmental process. Educators suggested that “you sort of learn it by doing it” (S10), “by repeating it over time” (S4). Assisting students develop emotion skills involved putting them in situations where they would be presented with opportunity to practice guest-host interactions:

We get the student to be exposed to the guest and to the interaction with guests right from the start of their time with us... they at the very least have to feel comfortable in dealing with guests and providing service to guests. S7

Educators at university felt they had less opportunity to develop emotional labor due to less opportunities for practice. This appeared to be an advantage that the VET educators had over the university educators. This study confirms there is a benefit to providing numerous opportunities for practice where students can enhance their emotion skills through the deliberate practice of well-defined tasks. Having an opportunity to learn technical and conceptual skills aids the practice of emotional labor by offering students opportunity to link the emotional perspectives of the guest-host interactions to the tangible aspects of service.

Integrating the concept of emotional labor into the curriculum

Emotional labor as a hidden concept

It emerged that there was little integration of the emotional labor concept in the HT curriculum. There was general agreement from the educators that the concept of emotional labor was not explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, nor were there targeted learning outcomes that address the concept. Emotional labor was addressed “in a very unstructured way” (S8) and “superficial ... It doesn't go to any great depth” (S4). Educators observed that embedded somewhere in customer service training was “[something] about emotional labor but maybe not overtly” (S10). They suggested that integration occurred because “at various points in our course... we talk about interpersonal skills” (S5).

However, perceptions differed on whether the concept of emotional labor was already incorporated into the curriculum in a general sense. While VET educators thought it was a major focus already, albeit not explicitly, educators from the university sector thought there

was a gap in the curriculum in terms of overtly addressing the emotional labor concept. The idea that emotional labor was synonymous with the practice of guest-host interactions persisted in these discussions. The divergent perspectives on the extent of integration could be attributed to the fact HT students in VET institutions have more opportunities to practice guest-host interactions while undertaking their courses as majority of these institutions have practical training spaces such as training restaurants, while a general trend has seen universities around the developed world phasing out practical training facilities (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). This suggests that the opportunity to practice guest-host interactions, where there may be potential for emotion skill development, is variable across HT education institutions.

Emotion skill development was perceived as a shared responsibility between HT institutions and industry, with educators emphasizing that industry had a critical role to play. Integration of the emotional labor concept would involve “getting [students] out there and getting them immersed in what the industry is about” (S5), because placement in industry was “very valuable for that emotional labor development” (S2). Educators were emphatic that “the real learning will only happen once [students] get out into industry and they're dealing with people on a day to day basis” (S6) because enhancing effective delivery of emotional labor “can only happen when a person is immersed in what they actually do” (S4). In fact, most of the educators felt that industry had a responsibility to fill the gap that currently existed in the development of emotion skills in students:

So, if we're not doing it then really the industry needs to help fill that void for us... I think that at the end of the day industry is more aware than us about what's needed to be honest. S9

The value of experiential learning in HT education is undisputed and would be critical to the development of emotion skills into the HT curriculum. Experiential learning, and specifically work integrated learning (WIL) has been identified as an effective solution to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice (Lin, Kim, Qiu, & Ren, 2017; Ruhanen, 2005). Assimilating emotion skills would be reinforced through opportunity to practice guest-host interactions in a live environment. Facilitating integration of emotional labor in the hospitality curriculum would necessitate HT institutions maintain strong links with industry. The inclusion of WIL programs in most HT courses is testament of the recognition of the benefits that accrue from WIL. Educators however, conveyed frustrations about their relationship with industry, highlighting the reluctance of industry to collaborate in effective WIL curriculum design and suggesting that “we've got an industry that says well we're not prepared to [collaborate] because that's all too hard so that's your job” (S7). The absence of collaboration also influenced efforts to place students in suitable establishments:

We find enormous difficulty in trying to get work environments because [the industry] just won't provide it. [The industry has] a wish list as long as their arm but you know they don't come to the party... we can't do everything on our own. S4

The need for higher education providers to work collaboratively with industry to achieve mutual expectations for all major stakeholders is well documented in WIL literature (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013; Yiu & Law 2012). At the same time, research indicates the status of the development of emotional labor within industry is relatively ineffective as there is little development provided on emotion skills (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016; Seymour & Sandiford, 2005; Shani et al., 2014). The assumption is that service providers, including students on WIL, are left to assimilate emotion skills through socialization practices and processes.

Integration of the emotional labor concept into the HT curriculum would need concerted efforts between stakeholders to be achieved, including educators, industry and students.

Concern for Student Wellbeing in teaching emotion skills

In discussions on the potential to make the emotional labor concept targeted and explicit, concern was expressed by educators about the welfare of the students in the process of teaching emotion skills. The process of emotion skills development was perceived as “almost an attack on their personality” (S8). Students would need assurance that the learning environment was “a safe place to learn” (S10) because educators would need to get the students to understand “quite intimate aspect to themselves” (S7). Enhancing emotion skills would need to be done “without it being ... either threatening or demeaning” (S1). This finding raised the complexity of the practice of emotional labor and consequently emotion skill development. Emotion skill development can be more personal than teaching other cognitive-based concepts and may be regarded as an invasion of privacy. Discussion about emotion skills may be viewed as being critical of the personality and existing social and emotion skills of the students and may require students to behave in ways not perceived as personally authentic (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Leidner, 1999). Expectations to behave in a specified way may challenge well established norms and values about individual autonomy and interpersonal respect. These anticipated display rules may also conflict with learning behaviors from life in general. It is possible however, that explicit discussions about emotion skills may render the concept of emotional labor more visible and therefore mitigate some of the challenges in emotion skill development. A clear understanding and development of emotion skills could shield service providers from adverse impacts of learning to perform emotional labor. These findings, however, do suggest that it would be critical to address

coping strategies to mitigate potential issues around student wellbeing in the process of developing emotion skills.

Conclusions

The current study provides empirical evidence on the extent to which the concept of emotional labor is integrated into the HT curriculum. The study contributes to knowledge in relation to how emotion skills can be developed to positively influence the students' work-ready outcomes. Findings from the study confirm that if emotion skills are to be holistically developed in HT students, the concept of emotional labor should be explicitly integrated into the HT curriculum in a targeted manner. Emotional labor is a significant concept in guest-host interactions that impacts the delivery of quality service. Integrating emotion skills as an explicit component of the curriculum is a critical step in preparing students to function effectively in a dynamic HT industry and would produce well-rounded graduates with enhanced emotion skills.

The three research objectives of this study were achieved. First, the study provided empirical evidence on how the development of emotion skills can be enhanced. The study findings demonstrate potential developing and integrating emotion skills into the Hospitality and Tourism (HT) curriculum. Specifically, the findings suggest a targeted review of the HT curriculum is a worthwhile strategy towards enhancing the development of emotion skills. Second, this study affirms that the concept of emotional labor is not explicitly addressed in the HT curriculum. The current study reveals a lack of clarity about how emotion skills are developed within HT discipline. Despite the emotional demands that are integral to practice, emotional labor is a valued but taken for granted concept often assumed to be an inherent part of the service provider. The capacity to effectively exert emotional labor should, however, not be underestimated as underdeveloped emotion skills can have adverse impacts on the discharge of quality service delivery (Kim et al., 2019). Third, insights gained from this study provided the impetus to present recommendations to HT educators and curriculum developers on how the development of emotion skills can be enhanced within the HT

curriculum. A strategic approach to integrating emotion skills into the curriculum can contribute to closing the gap between what is taught to students and the industry's expectation of graduates. Employability of future graduates can only be enhanced when they can demonstrate the competencies required by industry (Marneros et al., 2020) and emotion skills should be part of this skills set.

Implications for practice

The findings that emerged from this exploratory study have important implications on the development and integration of emotion skills into the hospitality and tourism (HT) curriculum. The HT curriculum needs to include targeted and explicit learning outcomes that lead educators and students to explore the concept of emotional labor. Enhancing the HT curriculum with emotional labor content means including objectives that develop emotion skills. In developing emotion skills, assimilating the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the concept should be the objective (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), as this will equip students with abilities to handle variable and contextual situations.

One approach to integration is to embed emotion skills learning objectives throughout the HT course, rather than in any one unit. Ensuring that activities and strategies aimed at developing emotion skills are scaffolded throughout the course could prove beneficial (Hughes et al., 2017) as this would have the effect of providing an all-inclusive skill development. As early as possible in the curriculum, the message should be that emotional labor is integral to hospitality and tourism practice, and there are specific modes of behavior that are expected – or even demanded – in guest-host interactions. The concept of emotional labor could fit into units that have interpersonal content, as well as introductory units that focus on the nature and fundamentals of the HT industry. A fully integrated approach, where emotional labor is discussed in units across the curriculum would expose students to a holistic appreciation of the impact of emotional labor on service delivery. Ensuring that learning

objectives are effectively executed will require careful and persistent coordinated effort from educators. For example, educators must make explicit the connections between learning objectives, learning activities and assessment tasks that target the development of emotion skills. Thus, assessment tasks should be put in place to determine if learning objectives are consistently being met. In addition, a culture of moderation of teaching and learning practices between peers can assist educators ensure they maintain the alignment between learning objectives, assessment tasks, and student achievement. In addition, attention to coping strategies must also be incorporated into the curriculum review, as it is important for students to have knowledge of mitigating strategies for coping with the impacts of emotional labor to preserve their wellbeing and alleviate stress (Teoh, Wang & Kwek, 2019).

Second, it is essential that students acquire a holistic knowledge base about the nature of hospitality and the role of emotion skills within the process of offering authentic hospitality in guest-host interactions (Caton, 2014; Lashley, 2015). Holistic learning can be facilitated by students applying reflective practice on their experiences during the learning process. For example, exposing students to educators who use industry examples and antidotes can encourage students to reflect on their own experiences. Educators can also facilitate holistic knowledge acquisition by exposing students to assessment tasks that utilise peer collaborations such as teamwork which provide mutual knowledge exchanges and requiring students to apply critical reflections on experiential activities such as industry excursions.

Third, experiential learning approaches will be vital to emotion skill development and must be encouraged. Developing emotion skills will require deliberate practice and for this, opportunities for formal active practice are essential (Alexakis & Jiang, 2019; Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016). This can be facilitated by providing more practical oriented learning

activities. By experiencing simulated activities that mirror real industry scenarios, students have opportunity to build their emotion skills. For example, the use of role plays, case studies, and simulations that explore surface and deep acting can facilitate emotion skill acquisition and assist students internalize the principles of emotional labor. Where training restaurants are available, students can be exposed to real and targeted scenarios that provide different perspectives of emotional labor. Experiential approaches that encourage informal learning opportunities through socialization must also be encouraged. Informal socialization can play an important role in the interpretation of display rules, and development of emotion skills (Nyanjom & Wilkins, 2016). For example, bringing students at different levels of study together to execute projects that involve guest-host interactions can provide opportunities for students with different levels of expertise to benefit from observation and role modelling. A learning process that strategically and explicitly integrates formal and informal learning to provide opportunity for deliberate practice may well be the foundation for developing emotion skills.

Fourth, improved collaborations between industry and HT education institutions is in the interest of all stakeholders involved as it is only a strong and effective partnership that can result in mutual outcomes (Yiu & Law, 2012; Zopiatis, & Theocharous, 2013). Successful collaboration can be enhanced by effective involvement of industry where course curricula reviews are made in close consultation with industry, and curricula is reviewed with the focus of meeting industry expectations. For example, educators must facilitate the formation of effective consultative committees that have active agendas with specific tasks tabled for discussion. In such committees, regular discussions on course design and development on how emotional labor can be enhanced can take place and mutual goals and objectives agreed upon and implemented. Educators should also design innovative ways to include industry in the day-to-day learning processes within the classroom. Further, educators must create strong

links with industry by initiating opportunities for collaborative work in industry on joint projects, consultancies and other such forms of knowledge and skill exchanges. Collaborative projects that involve the management of guest-host interactions such as executing pop-up restaurants or mini-festivals can bring key stakeholders together and enhance relationships through shared experiences. Such collaborative experiences can permeate to the objectives of WIL which can be enhanced to include specific learning outcomes that target the development of emotion skills. While in industry, students should be given ample opportunities to experience guest-host interactions and participate in knowledge sharing and observation sessions with experienced service providers.

Fifth, a multidisciplinary approach to developing emotional skills should be considered by curriculum developers. The HT curriculum could benefit from incorporating additional themes from disciplines such as arts, humanities and social sciences beyond what is currently incorporated (Caton, 2014; Lashley, 2015; Tribe 2002). This approach would require that educators and curriculum developers work collaboratively to share pedagogical knowledge and innovative ideas about teaching and learning objectives, delivery and assessment methods that encourage the development of emotion skills, thus presenting opportunities for team teaching. The best approach could be starting the multidisciplinary collaboration at unit level and extending this to course levels.

Adding emotional skills development to the HT curriculum would benefit the education industry as graduates with enhanced competencies would achieve better short- and long-term career outcomes, leading to higher demand for educational courses that deliver content better able to achieve industry expectations. Emotion skills outcomes in the HT curriculum would also be beneficial to the HT industry in several ways. Enhanced emotion skill competencies in new graduate entrants may result in higher quality of service and

increased profitability. This is because graduates with such competencies would be better equipped to deal with varied and challenging guest-host situations, leading to increased customer satisfaction and thus repeat business. Service providers with well-developed emotion skills may have higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment (Kim et al., 2019), thus increasing industry retention objectives and reducing training costs.

Limitations and directions for future research

As with other studies, the current study also has limitations. This study is limited to Australian educators and is not a representative sample. The findings from the study however reveal insights that inform understandings of integrating emotion skills within the HT curricula and may provide paths for future research. The study is also exploratory in approach. Although there is substantial literature on the emotional labor concept, there has been limited empirical exploration of emotion skills within the context of HT curricula, thus providing limited work to build upon. Given the limited research available on this topic, deeper and broader perspectives on developing emotion skills in service delivery is still required, and therefore more research in the area of emotion skill development in HT curriculum is encouraged. Further exploration of how multidisciplinary collaborative approaches and industry partnerships can be applied, with a focus on clarifying factors that facilitate or inhibit such interactions in the process of developing emotion skills in the discipline of HT would also add valuable insight. Where efforts have been made to impart emotion skills in students, it would also be interesting to measure the emotion skill aptitude of graduating students and longitudinally investigate their progress in industry with a view of establishing the effects of emotion skills competencies on employability and career success.

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