A Study on Experiential Learning Model of Tourism Management in Higher Education in China: A Case Study of Chongqing Normal University

Cuiping Xu, Mei Wang, Qixin Luo, Yunyao Zhang*

College of Geography and Tourism, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China
Email: *zhyunyao@126.com

Abstract

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has brought a great impact on the whole tourism industry and thus has profoundly affected the market demand for tourism talents. In order to cope with the changing market environment and to solve the problem of misalignment between the real supply and demand of tourism talents, structural reform of tourism education in China is urgently needed. Tourism management is a practical and application-oriented major, which is closely integrated with the tourism industry and society, and practical teaching is an important part of it, and cognitive experience activities are an important practical teaching part of this major. In this paper, taking the tourism management major of Chongqing Normal University as an example, through analyzing the current market demand characteristics of tourism talent and the dilemma of tourism talents cultivation in colleges and universities, experiential learning was introduced in the practical teaching and the OTCPE cognitive experience model was constructed. The model is designed to solve the problem of disconnection between tourism talent training and market demand. The practical results of this model prove that it has a very good promotion effect on students' professional ability, practical ability, learning effect, and learning initiative.

Keywords

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) brought a huge im-

pact on the whole tourism industry, profoundly affecting the market demand for tourism talents, thus also making Chinese tourism education face huge dilemmas and challenges (Juan et al., 2022). To cope with the changing market environment and solve the problem of misalignment between the real supply and demand of tourism talents, it is necessary to promote the innovation of teaching modes and teaching methods in Chinese tourism education.

However, in the tourism higher education in China, most schools lack a comprehensive and profound analysis of the characteristics of tourism talent demand, resulting in unscientific classroom teaching and practical teaching, a serious disconnect between talent training and industry demand, unsatisfactory employment, unsatisfactory tourism industry, and even a part of tourism professionals flowing into other industries for employment (Xiao et al., 2021). On the one hand, tourism management is a very practical and comprehensive profession, on the other hand, the product provided by tourism is the "tourist experience", and the focus and difficulty of tourism management are the interactive process between employees and tourists, with a preference for situational management and emotional management, which cannot be achieved by purely book-based knowledge transfer. As a new learning model, experiential learning is more participatory and interactive and focuses on the acquisition and experience of students' learning skills (Zhang et al., 2020), which allows students to develop their abilities in practice and quickly grasp operational skills through experience, and it makes up for the shortcomings and deficiencies of traditional teaching models. Therefore, to get rid of the dilemma of Chinese tourism education and to cultivate highly qualified skilled tourism talents suitable for tourism enterprises and economic development, advocating experiential learning is no less than one of the important paths. In 1996, Chongqing Normal University took the lead in introducing experiential learning to the training of tourism management professionals to solve the dilemma of training tourism management talents, and continuous change to fit the development of the tourism industry. This paper mainly analyzes the current market demand characteristics of tourism talents and the dilemma of cultivating tourism talents in colleges and universities, and then takes the College of Geography and Tourism of Chongqing Normal University as an example to systematically summarize the thinking and practice of the college in tourism higher education for more than 20 years in terms of talent cultivation mode and education methods, and forms a specific education and teaching mode that integrates theory and practice with relevance and innovation for tourism higher education: OTCPE cognitive experience model, which is objective setting, teacher-student cooperation, curriculum integration, process implementation, and evaluation summary.

This study can not only enrich the theoretical study of tourism education but also contribute to seeking the teaching mode of the tourism profession and constructing a teaching system for cultivating high-quality skilled service talents in tourism. It can also lay a good foundation for the sustainable, rapid, and healthy development of tourism.

2. Literature Review

Experiential learning was first introduced in outdoor training abroad (Yildiz, 2021) and has a deep theoretical foundation and rich practical experience. The concept of experiential learning originated from Rousseau's "Naturalism" and Dewey's "learning by doing" (Liang, 2021). Rousseau put forward the idea of "seeking knowledge by acting, learning by experiencing", which is the germ of experiential learning (Sidhu et al., 2021). In the early 20ᵗʰ century, Dewey, a famous American educationalist, put forward the educational idea of "learning by doing", believing that learning takes place in concrete situations and learners acquire knowledge through practice and reflection, which explains the nature of experiential learning (Schreck et al., 2019). In the 1930s, research and practice on experiential learning models began to emerge. In the early 1980s, David Kolb put forward the famous experiential learning circle theory, which divided experiential learning into four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning circles have been universally recognized since their introduction, and are widely used in various educational fields such as outdoor education, vocational education, and school education.

Research has revealed that experiential learning is a framework for learning that integrates the theories of educator Dewey's "learning by doing", social psychologist David Kolb's "experiential learning circles", and cognitive psychologist Piaget and Rogers. Summarizing the many theories, it is clear that experiential learning is a way of learning that allows learners to gain experience from an activity and to share it with others to reflect on it and thereby distill the experience that will guide future activities (Moorhouse et al., 2017). Experiential learning is explained by David Kolb's "Experiential Learning Circle", Figure 1.

In David Kolb's concept of experiential learning, he sees "experiential learning as a process in which the learner returns to the concrete experience based on the concrete experience, through the internalization process of observation and reflection, abstraction and generalization, and the expansion and transformation of action and application" (Kolb, 2014), and in which the learner continues to circulate, hence the term "experiential learning circle".
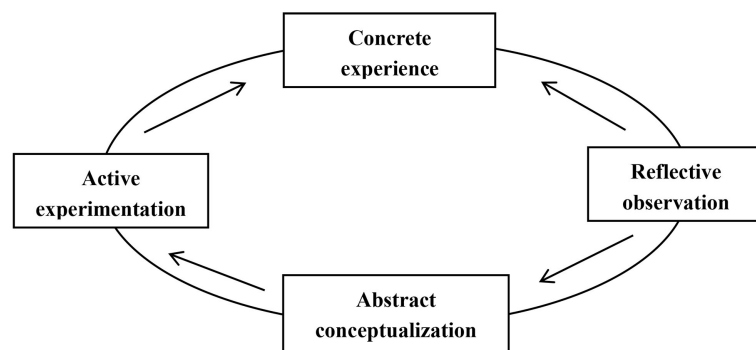

Figure 1. David Kolb's experiential learning circle.

The first stage of the "experiential learning circle" is concrete experience, students' perceptions during the teaching and learning activities. Students integrate their thinking, emotions, and attitudes into real situations, interacting with them for an emotional experience in which they can use the cognitive skills already in their thinking to acquire knowledge and skills (Arcodia et al., 2020). The second stage is reflective observation, the internal transformation that takes place in students' thinking and cognition, which affects the way they perceive things in the outside world and the logic of their thinking. It is not an act, but a process of knowledge-processing, a process of converting students' emotional experiences generated through the interaction of emotions and thinking with real situations into an internal structure of knowledge (Guachalla & Gledhill, 2019). The third stage is abstract conceptualization, students' comprehension during the teaching and learning activities. The emotions formed by students through their interaction with the external environment are transformed by the knowledge-processing process of observation and reflection, resulting in the internalization and sublimation of cognitive skills and thinking logic, a process in which students' cognitive skills are enhanced and their knowledge and understanding become more comprehensive and systematic (King & Zhang, 2020). The fourth stage is active experimentation, an extension conversion, which requires students not to stop their learning activities at getting experience through personal experience but to generate meaningful learning conclusions based on observation and reflection, and apply these conclusions to practice, then have personal experience from practice, to verify in practice whether the generated learning conclusions are correct, and to obtain new thinking and emotions from them (Cavlek & Nevenka, 2015). These four stages make up the complete process of experiential learning and act in a spiraling manner in the human learning process. KoIb pointed out that these four stages represent the four learning styles of perceptual learning, reflective learning, theoretical learning, and experimentation, and thus experiential learning is essentially an integrated learning (Kolb, 2014). Its significance lies in providing important reference values and insights to address the current problems of disconnection between learned knowledge and skills and the real world, excessive didactic education and receptive learning, which are prevalent in school education.

Tourism management, as a highly practical, comprehensive, and applied profession, has corresponding requirements for students in terms of both theoretical foundations and practical operations (Kim et al., 2019). The disciplinary characteristics of tourism management are precisely in line with the concept advocated by experiential learning circles, where students form the most elementary knowledge perceptions and cognitive structures through concrete experiences (Helate et al., 2022), first-hand experience in real situations, learning knowledge in classroom teaching, enhancing their cognitive abilities and knowledge frameworks after the connotative transformation of observation and reflection, internalizing and transforming the acquired experiences and the learned knowledge into their own the cycle of internalizing and transforming the know-

ledge gained and learned into one's knowledge structure, applying it to practice (Kim & Jeong, 2018), verifying and constantly improving one's knowledge structure and generating new experiences and perceptions (Neubert et al., 2020) through practice in real situations, forms the "experiential learning circle" of the tourism management discipline.

3. Case Study: Tourism Management of Chongqing Normal University

Tourism management at Chongqing Normal University is a first-class major at the national level, the most representative major in Chinese higher education, and the school's outstanding talent engineering major. It won the second prize in National Teaching Achievement. Moreover, there is a master's degree in tourism management. It is also the Ministry of Education's key national tourism vocational teacher training based on the profession. The institute produces highly qualified professionals with outstanding abilities and international vision.

Chongqing Normal University has applied experiential learning to undergraduate tourism management cognitive experience activities, the cognitive experience activity is a special activity of the tourism industry and tourism destination for undergraduate tourism management majors, and it is one of the core contents of the professional practical teaching link (Hu, 2015), for more than 20 years. After continuous exploration, the OTCPE cognitive experience model of "objective setting; teacher-student cooperation; curriculum integration (theoretical course + field course + online course); process implementation (experience, reflection, generalization, application); evaluation summary (activity performance + activity report + team task + result report)" has been formed, Figure 2.

3.1. O: Objective Setting

At the beginning of the cognitive experience, set the objectives that the activity wants to achieve and design the content of the subsequent cognitive experience activity around the objectives. This cognitive experience activity is mainly led by the teacher to the students in the form of "tourism", to experience tourism service work, perceive various tourism resources, and investigate the tourism market in real tourism scenic spots. According to the requirements of tourism management talents training and the characteristics of tourism talents demand, the specific objectives to be achieved by this cognitive experience activity are as follows: in terms of emotional objectives, to stimulate national pride and enhance cultural self-confidence; to advocate dedication and establish service consciousness; to pursue diligent learning and truth-seeking and strengthen innovation ability; to promote the spirit of labor and enhance their skills; to strengthen team spirit and cultivate team consciousness. In terms of knowledge objectives, the students will strengthen the cognition of tourism resources and master the criteria of tourism resources classification; deepen the cognition of the tourism industry and understand the law of tourism industry development; gain insight
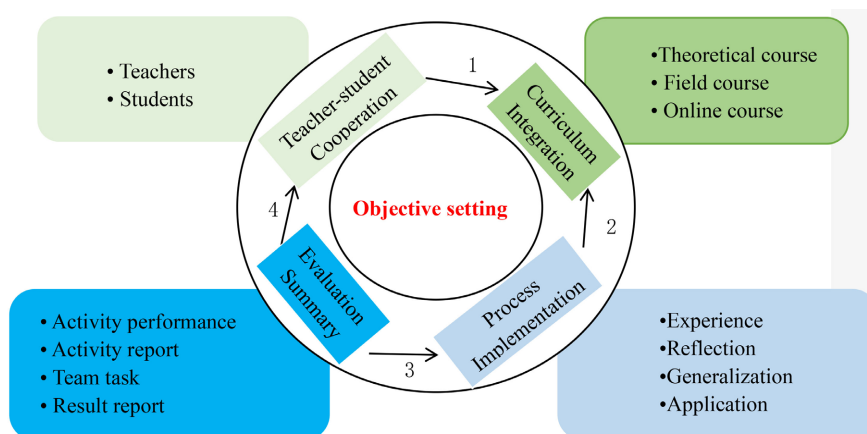
Figure 2. OTCPE cognitive experience model.

into tourism business behavior and understand the mode of tourism resources development; deepen the cognition of tourism behavior and master the law of tourists' consumption behavior; examine the current situation of ecotourism and consider the strategy of sustainable development of tourism places. In terms of skill objectives, master the methods of tourism resources research and classification; understand route design and itinerary organization; make optimization suggestions for the development of tourism destinations; understand the strategies of tourism marketing; learn the process and basic skills of tour guide services; understand the process of hotel services (Zhang, 2020).

3.2. T: Teacher-Student Cooperation

This cognitive experience activity is jointly participated by teachers and students. Students conduct cognitive learning under the guidance of teachers, and teachers improve their teaching level in the cognitive experience activity of students. The application of experiential learning in the cognitive experience activity can improve students' teamwork ability (Mak et al., 2017) and promote cooperation and mutual support between teachers and students and between students and teachers.

During the preparation of cognitive experience activities, teachers need to remind students to prepare mentally, learn, and prepare materials for the cognitive experience. At the same time, teachers and students jointly design the route of cognitive experience activities to improve the effectiveness of cognitive experience and realize the smooth implementation of cognitive experience activities.

In the process of cognitive experience, teachers and students go to the tourist places together to conduct specific experience activities, observe the actual situation of the tourist places, and exchange knowledge about the tourist places. At the same time, teachers and students reflect and summarize the activities after each day's cognitive experience.

After the cognitive experience, teachers check students' practice logs and guide students to analyze the cognitive experience and internalize the knowledge and experience into their knowledge structure. At the same time, students held a

debriefing session to share the results of the cognitive experience, while the teacher summarized the activity. Finally, students apply the abstracted knowledge from the cognitive experience to the practice, and then verify the correctness of the conclusions generated in the practice and gain new thinking from them.

3.3. C: Curriculum Integration

Although this cognitive experience activity is a practical teaching activity, it focuses on the combination of learning and thinking, and the unification of knowledge and action, so the teaching adopts the combination of theoretical teaching and practical teaching, the combination of teacher explanation and student discussion (Zhang, 2020). Therefore, a curriculum integration teaching system was constructed, "theory course, field course, online course".

The cognitive experience activity is a comprehensive practical teaching activity based on theoretical courses such as Introduction to Tourism, Tourism Psychology, Economics, and Management, etc. Students already have relevant basic theoretical knowledge before the cognitive experience.

In the process of cognitive experience, students receive "field courses" at the tourist site. Students can experience the tourism resources, observe the influencing factors of tourism, and learn the process and basic skills of tour guide service. At the same time, the students conduct research activities such as marketing research, service system research, and cultural research in tourist places. In addition, in the context of the Internet era, this cognitive experience also uses smart teaching methods, and after each day of the experience, students broaden their theoretical knowledge by watching the online courses on the Chinese University MOOC app. At the same time, according to the questions they encountered in the "field course" every day, they posted them in the discussion area on the Chinese University MOOC app, allowing students to express their opinions online.

3.4. P: Process Implementation

Process implementation is the core of the OTCPE cognitive experience model. David Cooper puts forward the famous experiential learning circle theory, which divides experiential learning into four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract generalization, and action application (Kolb, 2014), and the cognitive experience activity is mainly to recognize the knowledge of tourism industry in the form of "experience", therefore, the implementation process of the cognitive experience activity is divided into four stages: experience, reflection, generalization, and application according to the actual situation of the cognitive. Therefore, the implementation process of this cognitive experience activity is divided into four stages experience, reflection, generalization, and application, according to the actual situation of the cognitive experience activity and concerning the content of the experiential learning circle.

In the experience session, students are led by the teacher to the tourism place

for field experience, in the real tourism resource environment, incorporating their thinking, emotion, and attitude to feel the tourism service work, cognitive tourism resources, grasp the tourism market, etc., to obtain tourism-related knowledge and skills; and in the tourist place to conduct marketing research, service system research and cultural research and other research activities and cultural tourism product design. The routes of this cognitive experience activity are all in tandem with attractions and tourism products, which can let students enjoy learning while traveling.

In the reflection session, students write an experience log at the end of each day's cognitive experience activities and are asked to reflect on the day's activities based on the experience session, the process of processing the relevant tourism knowledge perceived through the interaction of emotions, thinking and real situations in the tourist places and thus converting it into an internal knowledge structure.

In the generalization session, after the cognitive experience, students summarize and abstract the knowledge structures that have been transformed through observation and reflection throughout the activity. In this process, students' cognitive ability and thinking logic are enhanced, and their knowledge and understanding of things become more comprehensive and systematic.

In the application session, after the cognitive experience, students apply the meaningful learning conclusions generated based on observation and reflection to practice, in which they verify the correctness of the generated learning conclusions through hands-on experience and gain new ideas from them.

3.5. E: Evaluation Summary

After the cognitive experience activity, the teacher instructs students to write activity reports, and students hold their activity debriefing and summary meeting, and then the teacher summarizes the activity. In addition, the teacher carries on the comprehensive appraisal of each student's performance in this activity, which mainly includes four aspects: the first is the activity performance, including the research task, the experience log, the professional discussion, etc; the second is a personal activity report; the third is the task of team activities, including research report, tourism culture and product design, etc; the fourth is the report of the activity results.

The implementation of OTCPE cognitive experience model for undergraduate majors in tourism management in the College of Geography and Tourism has been tested for more than twenty years since 1996, which has significantly improved students' practical ability, innovation spirit and comprehensive quality, effectively enhanced their interest and motivation in professional learning, given them a clearer understanding of their future career, and enabled them to make targeted career planning.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the characteristics of tourism talent demand in the digital

background and the shortage of traditional tourism education methods, combines the actual problems in the cultivation of tourism management professionals in colleges and universities, unscientific classroom teaching and practical teaching, the mismatch between supply and demand of talents, and unsatisfactory employment situation, then proposes the path of using experiential learning in the practical teaching of tourism management professionals and explores the OTCPE cognitive experience model. The application of this model in undergraduate tourism management at Chongqing Normal University has proved to be effective, and students who have participated in cognitive experience activities have a very good promotion effect on their professional ability, practical ability, learning effect, and learning initiative (Wang et al., 2023) compared with those who have not participated in cognitive experience activities. OTCPE cognitive experience model is not only a new practical teaching model for undergraduate tourism management majors but also has promotion value for other applied undergraduate majors.

This study will not only enrich tourism education theories but also be able to provide a baseline for the practical teaching mode of tourism majors and make an important contribution to the cultivation of high-quality skilled service talent in the tourism industry. In addition, since the author has not personally participated in the cognitive experience activities of undergraduate tourism management majors, but only conducted research with the help of relevant literature, the details related to the content of cognitive experience activities in this study will be somewhat deviated. In future research, we should focus on the real feelings of students in the experience, and we can obtain relevant information by interviewing or personally participating with the students to make the research content more convincing and accurate.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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