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## **The Impact of the Corona (Covid-19) Pandemic on Internships of Tourism and Hospitality Students: The Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management at Yarmouk University as a Case Study**

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### **Abstract:**

The current study aimed to explore the impact of the Corona pandemic (COVID-19) on the internships for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels Management at Yarmouk University in terms of the training environment and the skills acquired. An electronic questionnaire was distributed to the study sample of students who registered for internships in the second semester 2019/2020 and the first semester 2020/2021. The descriptive-analytical methodology was used to carry out this study, as the results of this study indicated that the training environment was safe because of increasing preventive measures due to the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. Results showed that the Corona pandemic has positively affected some of the acquired skills, such as dealing with the software available in the work area, dealing with the tools and supplies available in the work area, and the student's self-confidence. The results also showed that the Corona pandemic did not significantly affect the number of training hours or the number of training days.

### **Keywords:**

Corona pandemic, internship, internship hospitality, Yarmouk University, Jordan

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### **Introduction**

The hospitality industry is considered one of the most important and most vital parts of the service industry that currently attract the attention of Jordan (Masa'deh et al., 2017; Al-Badarneh et al., 2019; Masa'deh et al., 2019 a,b). As it is considered one of the industries with many returns and little waste or negative effects, especially if there is an application of international laws and legislation that emphasizes clean or green tourism. It also greatly contributes to supporting the state treasury and engaging local communities in the tourism industry that would eliminate unemployment and increase their income (Akbari & Monzavi, 2015).

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, which indicated that since 2005, tourism and hospitality industry is the largest export sector in the Kingdom, the second-largest employer in the private sector, and the second-largest producer of foreign exchange (Jawabreh, 2020). The tourism and hospitality industry is an important source of income for the Jordanian economy because Jordan contains many distinctive tourist attractions, whether cultural, historical, archaeological or entertainment (Bazazo & Alananzeh, 2020). It constitutes 13% of the national economy and employs more than 50,000 people directly. The local tourism sector presents in a unique manner to the local, regional and foreign tourist a beautiful picture of the rich historical past of the country, shows the established traditions of hospitality in this country and sheds light on Jordan's unique treasures, and also seeks to introduce local and international visitors to distinct places and experiences that can only be found on lands Jordan.

The tourism industry focuses on continuous modernization and development to meet the needs of tourists (Sharpley, 2009). It also focuses primarily on recruiting, selecting, and training new employees to enable them to provide the best possible service. Therefore, these service establishments depend on educational institutions to provide them with trained manpower. This is because the graduates of these educational institutions have been rehabilitated and trained within the academic programs of these institutions to meet the needs of the labor market. Practical training is a major part of many applied majors at universities. Also, in the field of tourism and hospitality, the important part in honing students' skills and converting what they have learned theoretically into practical application is considered. Some students rely on practical training as a window for their future jobs, and they may decide to enter or not enter the hospitality industry based on practical training experience and build a positive image among students that makes graduates more interested in choosing hospitality and/or tourism as a first career choice (Dwyer et al., 2009; Alananzeh, 2014; Moh'd et al., 2013 a,b).

Since its establishment in 2011, the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels has been keen to provide its students with the knowledge, science, and expertise necessary for its students to join the labor market and keep pace with its continuous development in the field of tourism and hospitality. As it not only provided its students with scientific knowledge but also made sure to provide them with practical experiences in the labor market through courses included in the requirements for obtaining a bachelor's degree of a practical nature (Yarmouk University, 2021).

At the present time, the world is suffering from the new Corona pandemic, accompanied by many government decisions that provide for increased preventive measures against the emerging coronavirus (COVID-19), and some of them also stipulate the closure of

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restaurants and many hospitality institutions, which may sometimes generate some obstacles in the training process, in addition to the decisions that stipulate converting the educational process from traditional methods to electronic learning, which from the student's point of view may not be sufficient to acquire the desired skills from the practical training process for students.

Hence, the problem of the study revolves around answering the following question: What is the impact of the Corona pandemic on internships for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Yarmouk University?

Based on the above, the current study aims to know the impact of the Corona pandemic on practical training courses for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Yarmouk University in terms of the nature and environment of training. In addition, it aims to know the impact of the Corona pandemic on practical training courses for tourism and hotel students at Yarmouk University in terms of experience gained. The importance of the current study stems from the importance of practical training courses in providing students with the practical skills and knowledge necessary to engage in the labor market, in addition to the importance of developing and improving the practical training process for students that would increase the effectiveness of these students in the labor market and provide them with the largest amount of information and experience during the training period. Also, this study was conducted to demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on the practical training of college students in order to find solutions to develop the practical process for students of the College of Tourism and Hotels.

### **Literature Review**

The spread of COVID-19 appeared easily throughout the world at the end of 2019. Countries began issuing laws and regulations to limit the spread of this epidemic and reduce the number of infections, as all institutions and companies were forced to close overnight and then began to return to normal life, but cautiously. The world is still recovering from a major health and economic crisis. One of the most important laws issued by the World Health Organization and the medical authorities is the focus on personal hygiene, frequent hand washing, social distancing, wearing a mask, and reducing the number of people in the same place, whether it is a hotel, restaurant, transportation or workplace by half. The new standards are now starting to normalize, and people have begun to adapt to these new standards and become part of the culture of the individual and society (Abu Zayyad et al., 2020; Bae & Chang, 2020; İnce, 2020).

At the beginning of the outbreak of the pandemic, the entire tourism and hospitality sector was affected badly, as thousands of planes stopped flying and many airports closed their doors to travelers and arrivals, and many tourists were forced to cancel their travel and stay at home amid strict closure measures (Rodríguez-Antón & Alonso-Almeida, 2020). Reports of the United Nations World Health Organization (UNWTO) indicated that many tourist destinations around the world still impose some forms of travel restrictions and that some of them have begun to ease these restrictions. These restrictions affected tourism revenues and their workers, as many companies and institutions operating in this industry resorted to reducing the number of their employees to overcome the financial operational problems of these institutions. Where reports indicated that there are about 120 million jobs in the tourism sector that may be at risk (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

In addition, it became difficult to obtain a new job due to the decrease in the number of tourists. The resort of hotel establishments in particular to reduce the number of their employees and many countries have borne the consequences of that. As many governments rushed to follow an emergency plan to help tourism companies and support laid-off workers. For example, Jordan quickly rescued the tourism sector through allocating 10 million dinars to preserve the tourism professions (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Also, company owners were exempted from fees and fines when renewing licenses for their establishments.

In addition, during crises, it became more difficult to get a new job due to the decrease in the number of tourists. In addition, hotel establishments, in particular, have resorted to reducing the number of their employees, and many countries have borne the consequences of that (Alanzeh et al., 2018; Abuhashesh et al., 2019). Many governments rushed to pursue an emergency plan to help tourism companies and support laid-off workers. For example, the Jordanian government, represented by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, hastened to save the tourism sector by allocating 10 million dinars to preserve the tourism professions. Company owners were also exempted from fees and fines when renewing licenses for their facilities (Masa'deh et al., 2018, 2012).

These conditions affected training and employment opportunities for tourism and hotel graduates. The training was sometimes remote and not face-to-face has an impact on the quality of training and skills acquired through direct training (Hunaiti et al., 2009; Tarhini et al., 2015; Al-Dmour et al., 2017; Obeidat et al., 2017, 2019a,b; Alrowwad et al., 2020). Kawasaki et al. (2021) pointed out that the hospitality sector is one of the sectors most affected by the epidemic, as they indicated that services related to hospitality such as food and beverage services have witnessed a significant decline.

The spread of the epidemic has had a great impact on the education sector in general and on applied education in particular. Countries have resorted to electronic education via distance learning, using many techniques, methods, and electronic platforms. As for practical training, there were strict procedures at the beginning of the pandemic in terms of adherence to health conditions in the training places, then the training stopped during the peak period of the pandemic, and the training began by holding meetings between the trainer and the trainees using the Zoom app. It caused the suspension of practical training for students of the hospitality sector, who were receiving training in many fields such as administration, restaurants, cooking, and other skills related to this sector, as their number was reduced and some foreign students returned to their countries. After the number of infections caused by the Coronavirus decreased, training returned gradually, but with great caution.

The study of Ferrara et al. (2020) aimed to find out the effects of (Covid-19) on the practical training of ophthalmology students through a survey distributed to students trained in (32) countries of the world, and the study indicated the significant impact of the 2019 epidemic (COVID-19) on the operation and educational activities for residents and foreigner students. Future perspective was more optimistic, as evidenced by the greater number of responses reporting an assumed "moderate" effect. The study recommended the importance of adapting to the new reality of education and using modern methods of training such as surgical procedures using simulations and distance learning.

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Dani et al. (2020) conducted a study to find out the impact of this pandemic on education and internships for hospitality students. They stressed the skills students should acquire such as good communication skills, social values, teamwork, and many other skills that are affected by the pandemic and cannot be learned through online classes. They have pointed out the problems that students face through online tutoring such as poor network, loss of interest, the availability of space in their home for online studies, and sometimes they cannot access online classes. The results of the study showed that their internship programs have been severely affected by the epidemic and that most of the students prefer the traditional training method (face-to-face) over the online teaching and training method. Based on the above, two hypotheses were performed:

*H1:* The Corona pandemic has no impact on internships for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Yarmouk University in terms of the environment of training, as the environment of training are health-safe for trainees due to the procedures of general hygiene and sterilization in hospitality institutions that receive trainees.

*H2:* The Corona pandemic has no impact on internships for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Yarmouk University in terms of the skills gained.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **The Study Area**

The Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management at Yarmouk University was established in the academic year 2011-2012 as part of the university's drive to provide a qualified and specialized workforce that contributes to the sustainability of economic and social development. According to the direction of the College of Tourism and Hotels, the Department of Hotel Management, and the Department of Tourism and travel have approved these practical courses as part of their study plans, and this has been evident since 2013 when a study plan for the Bachelor's programs in the faculty has been developed that includes around 50% practical courses of 132 credit hours. The training courses for the Hotel Management Department include training in food and beverage production, food and beverage service, and technological applications for hotel and restaurant reservations for a full semester in one of the five-star tourist restaurants, and practical training for another full semester inside one of the five-star hotels determined by the Hotel Management Department through an agreement between the college and the hotel concerned in order to train the students in all departments of the hotel. As for the Tourism and Travel Department, it has the same training hours, but at airports, tourism and travel offices, tourist sites and nature reserves. In the interest of the college's administration to develop the educational process to keep pace with the developments of the labor market (Yarmouk University, 2021).

#### **Research Design and Data Collection**

The study followed the descriptive and analytical methodology to collect and analyze data from the study population by distributing the study tool (questionnaire) electronically to the study sample in order to achieve the objectives of the study, which is to identify the impact of the Corona pandemic on internships for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Yarmouk University. The statistical analysis software (SPSS 11.5) was utilized to analyze the collected data. The study population consisted of all students of practical courses for all colleges at Yarmouk University, and because of the difficulty in selecting all training students in various colleges where the university has 15 colleges that contain many departments, the study sample was limited to all male and female students registered

for internships at the College of Tourism and Hotels for the second semester of 2019/2020 and the first semester of 2020/2021, totaling (75) male and female students, according to the Department of Admission and Registration at Yarmouk University.

The emails and phone numbers of the students registered for internships were obtained from the electronic records in the college and through the Department of Admission and Registration at Yarmouk University, and they were fully contacted. The number of respondents was (63) male and female students registered for practical training courses at the College of Tourism and Hotels for the second semester of 2019/2020 and the first semester of 2020/2021.

The study tool consisted of three sections: The first section is about the demographic information of the study sample. In addition, the second section consists of two dimensions: the first axis is about the environment and nature of training, and the second axis is about the acquired skills. The demographic information section dealt with some personal information: (gender / academic level / academic department / practical training course registration class). While the first axis consists of nine paragraphs, and the second axis consists of eight paragraphs. The paragraphs of the first axis were formulated in light of defense orders and health procedures recommended by the Jordanian Ministry of Health. All defense orders directed to facilities to adhere to health procedures were reviewed and announced on the Jordanian TV channel and official local newspapers by the Ministry of Health. The paragraphs have been drawn up in order to measure the extent to which establishments adhere to these procedures. As for the paragraphs of the second axis, they were formulated through consulting some employees in the tourism and hospitality sector in order to determine the experiences that the student could acquire during practical training. The items in the questionnaire were discussed with experts in the tourism field and other professional lecturers at Yarmouk University. The experts were asked to identify any objectionable items to the respondents to enhance the items' clarity, readability, and content validity.

## Findings

### Respondents' Personal Profile

The study sample consisted of (63) male and female students for all registered students or who had completed practical training courses in the Hotel Administration and Tourism Administration sections for classes that were registered during the pandemic, and Table (1) shows the distribution of the sample members according to demographic variables.

**Table 1. Description of respondents' personal profile**

Variable	The category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	34	54%
	Female	29	46%
Academic level	in the first year	0	0.0%
	Second-year	8	12.7%
	Third-year	16	25.4%
	Fourth-year	39	61.9%
Department	Tourism Management	20	31.7%
	Hotel Management	43	68.3%
Internship	Second Semester 2019/2020	33	52.4%

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	First Semester 2020/2021	30	47.6%
	Total	36	100%

### Descriptive analysis

For the descriptive analysis of the study variables (Environment and nature of training, acquired skills), the means and standard deviations were calculated.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study variables**

<b>Environment of training</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Minimize the use of hand handling	3.77	1.142
Provide hand sanitizing fluid	4.42	1.131
Provide appropriate sterilization tools in the work area and easy to access	4.47	0.997
Periodically sterilize surfaces and floors in the training areas	4.39	1.157
Sterilization of tools used during the training process	4.36	1.051
The wearing of masks and gloves by employees and customers	4.46	0.930
The appropriate number of students trained in the department at the same time	3.85	0.877
The number of training hours is appropriate	3.58	0.909
The number of training days is appropriate	3.63	1.096
<b>Acquired skills</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Dealing with work stress	3.44	1.043
Development of communication skills	3.52	1.216
Dealing with the software available in the training area	3.66	1.107
Dealing with tools and equipment available in the training area	4.00	0.879
Development of administrative skills	3.69	1.072
Time management and organization	3.79	1.018
Enhancing the student's self-confidence	3.79	0.953
The student's ability to transfer his experience to new trainees	3.44	1.074

It is evident from Table (2) that the arithmetic averages came with high scores, where the item (providing appropriate sterilization tools in the work area) came the highest, then followed by the item (wearing masks and gloves by employees and customers). This indicates the positive impact of the Corona pandemic on all paragraphs of the first axis, with the exception of the number of training hours and the number of training days, as the last two items obtained the least arithmetic averages indicating that the Corona pandemic does not affect these paragraphs. In general, all these values indicate that the Corona pandemic has positively affected the improvement of the environment and the nature of training, as preventive measures have been increased to limit the spread of Coronavirus.

It is evident from Table (2) that the arithmetic averages of the second variable ranged from medium to high, where the arithmetic averages ranged between (3.44-4.00). Where the items (dealing with tools and equipment available in the training area, organizing and managing time, enhancing the student's self-confidence) received the highest values of the arithmetic mean, and this indicates the positive effect of the Corona pandemic on these skills. This pandemic has also positively affected (dealing with available software in the training area, development of administrative skills), but to a lesser extent. While there was no positive or negative impact of the Corona pandemic on (dealing with work pressures,

developing communication skills, the ability of the student to transfer his experience to new trainees) and this is evident through the obtaining of these items on average values.

**Hypotheses Testing**

The main aim of this study was to find out the impact of covid-19 on internships of tourism and hospitality students regarding the environment of training and skilled acquired. To test the study hypotheses, one sample t-test was utilized.

**Table 3. One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean environ	63	4.07	.704	.089
Mean Exper	63	3.67	.783	.099

**Table 4. One sample t-test to measure the study variables**

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Mean environ	12.091	62	.000	1.072	.90	1.25
Mean Exper	6.801	62	.000	.671	.47	.87

It is clear from Tables (2, 3) that the arithmetic averages came with high scores, as the first variable (Training environment a) came with an arithmetic mean (4.07) and a standard deviation of (0.704), and which is statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . The variable (acquired skills) came in second place with an arithmetic mean (3.6706) and a standard deviation of (0.783) and which is statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the researchers conclude that there is a statistically significant effect of the Corona pandemic on the training environment. Therefore, the researchers reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the hypothesis of the study in the sense that there is a positive effect of the Corona pandemic on training environment for students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels Management at Yarmouk University. The study also confirms there is a statistically significant effect of the Corona pandemic on the acquired skill. Therefore, the researchers reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the study hypothesis in the sense that there is a positive effect of the Corona pandemic on the students' acquired skills.

As the results indicated that the training environment is health-safe for the trainee students due to the general hygiene and sterilization procedures in the hospitality institutions that receive the trainee's students, and also indicates the agreement of the majority of the study sample that there is a positive effect of the Corona pandemic on the skills that the student acquires during the field training period.

**Conclusion**

This study came to explore the impact of the Corona pandemic (COVID-19) on the internships of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, as the total number of practical hours is approximately half the credit hours in the Hotel Management and Tourism Administration



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programs. The student is trained in one of the establishments that specialize in tourism and hospitality services. The results indicated that, with regard to the training environment variable, it was safer as a result of the increase in preventive measures following the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, where the paragraph "providing appropriate sterilization tools in the work area and making them easily accessible" was the highest, and then came the item "wearing masks and gloves by employees and customers ", then, followed by the "provision of means for sterilizing the hands." However, the paragraphs referring to training hours and the number of training days were the least, and this confirms the measures taken to reduce working hours in establishments in order to preserve employees and customers.

As for the second variable of the study, the respondents expressed their opinions that the Corona pandemic has positively affected some acquired skills such as dealing with software available in the work area, dealing with tools and equipment available in the work area, developing administrative skills, organizing and managing time, and student self-confidence. The reason for this is the availability of sufficient time for students to train, and also the availability of a sufficient number of the staff to train students due to the lack of hotel work or because of the lack of hotel customers, which is attributed to the impact of the Corona pandemic on the global tourism movement. The results also showed that the Corona pandemic did not positively or negatively affect the acquisition of some other skills, such as dealing with work pressures, developing communication and communication skills, and the student's ability to transfer his experience to new trainees. This confirms that these aforementioned skills are well acquired through direct interaction with customers, whereby the student or trainee is exposed to direct contact with customers and fully accomplishes the tasks assigned to him.

### **Recommendations**

This study may help the colleges of Yarmouk University and other educational institutes to improve student internships and make them more effective and fruitful, taking an interest in setting an emergency plan to compensate students for some of the skills that they lose due to current or similar future situations. These institutions must also communicate with training bodies to provide and compensate students for training at times when things return to normal. These colleges should focus on virtual internship by communicating with students through modern and advanced electronic technologies such as the Zoom application and others.

The study also focused on exploring the impact of the Corona pandemic on training for university students. A modern study tool was designed in a new way through direct contact with workers in tourism and hospitality establishments to formulate the most important direct paragraphs that serve the objectives of the study, as well as by reviewing the official instructions for dealing with the pandemic, which was published in the official media. Therefore, researchers can benefit from a tool to study, develop it, and study other factors that affect student training in times of crisis.

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