

Alignment of the Recreation Business Management Curriculum with Tourism Industry Competency Requirements

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ABSTRACT

The rapid transformation of the tourism industry toward digitalization, sustainability, and experience-based services requires higher education curricula to align with evolving competency demands. However, limited studies have systematically examined the alignment between the Semester Learning Plan (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester—RPS*) and industry-required competencies in tourism education. This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), curriculum document analysis, semi-structured interviews with academic staff, and surveys of industry practitioners and alumni. The SLR covered publications from 2018 to 2024 to identify key competency trends, while empirical data were used to assess curriculum implementation and relevance. The findings indicate that the RPS sufficiently addresses foundational competencies such as business management, customer service, and tourism operations. However, significant gaps were identified in digital marketing, data-driven decision-making, tourism technology utilization, and sustainability practices. Industry stakeholders highlighted the need for greater emphasis on practical skills, technological readiness, and experiential learning. These findings suggest that current curricula remain predominantly theoretical and insufficiently responsive to industry transformation. This study proposes a more adaptive, industry-driven curriculum model that integrates digital and sustainability competencies while strengthening academic-industry collaboration. The study contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive curriculum-industry alignment framework informed by multi-source data, with implications for improving graduate employability and curriculum relevance in tourism education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the most strategic sectors in Indonesia, contributing significantly to national economic growth, regional development, and employment generation. Government initiatives such as the “Wonderful Indonesia” campaign and the development of priority destinations—including Mandalika, Borobudur, and Labuan Bajo—have accelerated the expansion and global competitiveness of the tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia, 2021). This rapid growth has intensified the demand for a highly skilled workforce capable of delivering quality services, adapting to technological advancements, and responding to dynamic market expectations. Consequently, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to play a critical role in preparing graduates with competencies that align with industry needs.

Within the Indonesian higher education system, the Semester Learning Plan (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester—RPS*) functions as a fundamental instrument for translating curriculum design into instructional practice. The RPS outlines learning outcomes, course materials, teaching strategies, and assessment methods, and is guided by national regulatory frameworks such as the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia—KKNI*) and the National Standards for Higher Education (*Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi*) (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). As such, the RPS serves as a key mechanism for ensuring that academic programs produce graduates with competencies that meet both academic standards and professional expectations. However, the extent to which the RPS reflects current industry demands remains a critical issue, particularly in rapidly evolving sectors such as tourism.

The tourism industry has undergone substantial transformation in recent years, driven by digitalization, globalization, and shifting consumer preferences. Technological innovations—including online booking platforms, digital marketing, virtual tourism experiences, and data-driven customer analytics—have redefined how tourism services are produced, marketed, and consumed (Tussyadiah, 2020). In parallel, there is growing emphasis on sustainable tourism practices, community-based development, and culturally sensitive service delivery (Bramwell & Lane, 2013). These changes require tourism professionals to possess not only traditional managerial and service-oriented competencies but also digital literacy, analytical skills, and sustainability awareness. As a result, tourism education must evolve to incorporate these emerging competencies into its curriculum design.

Despite these developments, previous studies indicate that many higher education curricula in Indonesia remain predominantly theoretical and insufficiently responsive to industry transformation. For example, Suryani and Wijaya (2019) found that tourism-related programs often emphasize conceptual knowledge while providing limited opportunities for practical application and industry engagement. Similarly, Putra and Budiani (2020) highlight the growing gap between digital competency requirements in the tourism sector and the skills acquired by graduates. This mismatch suggests that existing curriculum frameworks, including the RPS, may not fully capture the competencies required for contemporary tourism professions, thereby affecting graduate employability and industry readiness.

To address this gap, stronger collaboration between academia and industry has been widely recognized as essential. The Indonesian government has introduced the “Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka” (MBKM) policy, which promotes experiential learning through internships, industry projects, and cross-sector collaboration (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021). This initiative encourages universities to design more flexible and practice-oriented curricula that enable students to gain real-world experience and develop job-relevant skills. Research suggests that such academic–industry partnerships can enhance curriculum relevance, improve graduate employability, and foster innovation in teaching and learning (Jackson, 2016; Susanti & Ermawati, 2022). Nevertheless, the implementation of these collaborative approaches varies across institutions, and systematic evaluation of their impact on curriculum alignment remains limited.

In addition to digital transformation and industry collaboration, sustainability has become a central dimension of tourism development. Increasing awareness of environmental degradation,

cultural preservation, and community welfare has led to a shift toward sustainable and responsible tourism practices (Rindrasih, 2018). International frameworks, such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), emphasize the integration of sustainability principles into educational curricula to prepare graduates for global challenges (UNESCO, 2017). However, the incorporation of sustainability competencies into tourism education in Indonesia is still inconsistent, with many programs lacking structured integration within their RPS. This further underscores the need for curriculum evaluation and reform.

Given these challenges, there is a clear need for a comprehensive assessment of how well higher education curricula align with industry competency requirements. While prior studies have examined curriculum relevance and employability in tourism education, few have adopted an integrated approach that combines systematic literature analysis, curriculum document evaluation, and multi-stakeholder perspectives. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the alignment between the RPS of the Recreational Business Management study program and the competency needs of the tourism industry in Indonesia. By employing a combination of Systematic Literature Review (SLR), document analysis, interviews, and surveys, this research provides a holistic understanding of curriculum–industry alignment.

Specifically, this study aims to (1) evaluate the extent to which the current RPS reflects industry-required competencies, (2) identify key competency gaps between academic preparation and professional expectations, and (3) propose strategic recommendations for curriculum improvement. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering an integrated framework for curriculum alignment and providing evidence-based insights for higher education institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

Ultimately, aligning higher education curricula with industry demands is not only essential for improving graduate employability but also for supporting national development goals. As Indonesia seeks to strengthen its position in the global tourism market, the role of higher education as a provider of skilled human capital becomes increasingly. Universities must therefore adopt adaptive, innovative, and collaborative approaches to curriculum design, ensuring that graduates are equipped with the competencies required to thrive in a dynamic and competitive tourism environment.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design complemented by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach and field-based data collection. The combination of SLR, document analysis, and stakeholder inquiry allowed for triangulation of data sources to assess curriculum–industry alignment comprehensively.

2.1 Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The SLR procedure followed established academic protocols for literature identification, screening, classification, and thematic analysis (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). Sources included peer-reviewed journals, governmental policy publications, curriculum frameworks, and prior studies focusing on tourism competencies, curriculum alignment, and higher education in Indonesia.

Relevant literature was retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and Sinta using keywords including: *“tourism competency,” “curriculum alignment,” “workforce readiness in tourism,” “RPS Indonesia,” “higher education and employability,”* and *“recreational business management.”*

Inclusion criteria:

1. Published between 2018–2024
2. Focused on tourism, hospitality, business administration, or vocational education
3. Discussed competency requirements or curriculum models
4. Peer-reviewed or authoritative institutional documents

Exclusion criteria:

1. Non-English and non-Indonesian academic sources

2. Conference abstracts without full papers
3. Articles lacking methodological transparency

This SLR enabled the identification of emerging competency trends, particularly those related to digital transformation, sustainability, and service personalization in tourism.

2.2 Document Analysis of RPS

Document analysis was conducted on the Semester Learning Plans (RPS) used within the Recreational Business Management program of the target Indonesian institution. The analysis focused on:

1. stated learning outcomes
2. course content and topics
3. instructional methods
4. assessment strategies
5. competency formulations aligned with KKNi and SN-Dikti

The RPS components were mapped against industry competency frameworks drawn from literature and professional tourism guidelines to determine the degree of alignment and identify possible competency gaps.

2.3 Interviews with Academic Staff

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members responsible for teaching core and specialization courses within the program. The interviews explored:

1. the rationale behind curriculum design
2. perceptions of industry competency needs
3. integration of practical skills and digital competencies
4. experience with industry collaboration
5. implementation insights related to MBKM (Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka)

Interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically using qualitative analysis procedures.

2.4 Industry and Alumni Survey

A structured survey was distributed to representatives of tourism-related businesses and program alumni currently employed in the sector. The instrument employed Likert-scale and open-ended questions to evaluate:

1. perceived relevance of current RPS
2. adequacy of practical and technical skill preparation
3. observed competency gaps in graduates
4. recommended areas for curriculum improvement

Survey findings were quantified to illustrate frequency distribution while narrative responses were qualitatively interpreted.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a combination of thematic coding, competency gap analysis, and triangulation:

- a) Themes from SLR were extracted and compared with those emerging from interviews and surveys.
- b) Competency mapping tables were created to identify areas of overlap and discrepancy between RPS learning outcomes and industry expectations.
- c) Triangulation was used to ensure validity across the three data sources: literature, documents, and respondents.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation in interviews and surveys was voluntary, and respondents' identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Institutional permission was obtained for accessing curriculum documents and conducting the academic inquiry in compliance with academic ethical standards.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The findings of this study reveal a partial alignment between the existing RPS in the Recreational Business Management study program and the current competency demands of the tourism industry in Indonesia. Several important observations emerged from the analysis:

First, the RPS strongly addresses foundational competencies such as managerial understanding, customer service principles, and basic business operations in tourism. These components demonstrate consistency with curriculum standards regulated by SN-Dikti and KKNI, indicating compliance with national education requirements.

However, significant competency gaps were identified in relation to emerging industrial competencies. Many industry respondents emphasized the increasing importance of digital marketing, social media engagement, data-driven decision-making, sustainability management, and personalized service design—areas that are currently insufficiently represented in the RPS. Additionally, survey results indicated that graduates often experience difficulties in applying digital tools used in tourism settings, such as booking platforms, CRM systems, and tourism data analytics dashboards.

Furthermore, the interviews with academic staff acknowledged that while efforts to integrate practical skills have been made—especially through internship programs and MBKM—the RPS structure remains academically oriented and lacks experiential learning components tied directly to industry scenarios. Industry participants noted that graduates tend to possess theoretical knowledge but require further practical exposure to real-time industry operations.

Finally, the SLR confirmed that global tourism competency trends emphasize sustainability, digital transformation, and experiential tourism—competency indicators that must be increasingly incorporated into higher education curriculum models in Indonesia. This reinforces the importance of recalibrating the RPS to ensure future graduates remain competitive in the evolving tourism landscape.

Table. Mapping of RPS Competencies vs Industry Competencies

Competency Area	In Current RPS	Required by Industry	Gap Status
Basic business administration	✓	✓	Fully aligned
Customer service & hospitality	✓	✓	Fully aligned
Tourism management principles	✓	✓	Fully aligned
Digital marketing for tourism	✗ / minimal exposure	✓ (high priority)	Significant gap
Data-driven tourism analytics	✗	✓ (high priority)	Significant gap
Use of digital platforms & booking systems	✗ / minimal practice	✓	Moderate-to-high gap
Sustainability & eco-tourism knowledge	✗ / limited	✓	Moderate gap
Community-based tourism approach	✗	✓	Moderate gap
Cultural competency & local wisdom	✓ (partial)	✓	Partially aligned
Industry-based experiential learning	Partial (internship)	✓	Partially aligned
Entrepreneurial innovation in tourism	✓	✓	Fully aligned
Applied communication & negotiation skills	Partial	✓	Partial gap

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a critical gap between the current implementation of the Semester Learning Plan (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester—RPS*) in the Recreational Business Management program and the rapidly evolving competency demands of Indonesia's tourism industry. While the curriculum adequately emphasizes foundational competencies such as managerial knowledge, administrative skills, and service ethics, these elements alone are no longer sufficient to address the complexities of the modern tourism sector. The industry has undergone significant transformation driven by digitalization, sustainability imperatives, and the growing demand for personalized and experience-based services. Consequently, higher education curricula must move beyond traditional content delivery and incorporate adaptive, industry-relevant competencies that reflect real-world operational dynamics (Tussyadiah, 2020). This shift necessitates not only revisions in curriculum content but also fundamental changes in pedagogical approaches to ensure that graduates are equipped with both theoretical understanding and practical capabilities.

The persistence of a predominantly theoretical curriculum reflects broader patterns within Indonesian higher education, which have historically prioritized conceptual knowledge and academic rigor over applied and experiential learning (Priyatno & Nugroho, 2021). Although this approach has contributed to strong foundational knowledge, it has also limited students' opportunities to develop practical skills and industry readiness. In contrast, the contemporary tourism industry requires a more complex set of competencies, including digital literacy, data-driven decision-making, intercultural communication, and innovative problem-solving. The emergence of experience-driven tourism further reinforces this need, as service delivery increasingly focuses on creating meaningful, personalized interactions that engage customers emotionally and culturally (Pine & Gilmore, 2019).

This misalignment between academic preparation and industry expectations indicates not merely a curricular deficiency but a deeper paradigm gap between traditional education models and current industry realities. Bridging this gap requires a transformative approach to curriculum design that integrates experiential learning, technology-based instruction, and industry collaboration. Approaches such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and industry immersion programs have been shown to enhance student engagement and competency development in applied fields (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Furthermore, embedding digital tools and real-world case studies into the learning process can better prepare students for the operational demands of the tourism sector. Therefore, reorienting the RPS toward a more flexible, competency-based, and industry-driven framework is essential for improving graduate employability and ensuring the long-term relevance of tourism education in Indonesia.

3.2.1 Implications for Curriculum Development

Curriculum reform must begin with the recognition that knowledge frameworks traditionally considered peripheral may now constitute essential competencies. For instance, digital literacy—previously treated as supplementary—has become fundamental in tourism marketing, operations, and customer experience (Tussyadiah, 2020). Integrating modules such as “Digital Tourism Management,” “Data Analytics for Hospitality,” and “Smart Destination Technologies” would prepare students for technology-mediated tourism ecosystems where data-driven decision-making becomes central to business strategy. Similarly, sustainability has transformed from a niche interest to a mainstream imperative, driven by both international industry standards and increasing consumer concern about environmental impact (Bramwell & Lane, 2013). A dedicated course on “Sustainable Tourism Practices” would cultivate an understanding of environmental stewardship, community-based tourism, and responsible resource use—competencies that directly affect destination longevity and brand reputation.

Furthermore, embedding competency-based learning outcomes in line with Indonesia's National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and international competency models can ensure alignment with both national and global skill expectations (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). Aligning learning outcomes with UNESCO's education for sustainable development goals can also advance

global citizenship and contextual awareness in tourism graduates (UNESCO, 2017). Such curricular adaptation is not simply additive but transformative, reshaping how knowledge is conceptualized, integrated, and applied.

3.2.2 Implications for Teaching and Learning

The pedagogical implications of these findings are equally significant. Indonesian university classrooms traditionally rely on lecturer-centered instruction, emphasizing linear delivery of theoretical content (Suryani & Wijaya, 2019). However, the development of competencies such as digital problem-solving, customer profiling, and adaptive service execution cannot be attained solely through passive learning. Instead, problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning (PjBL), and authentic assessment methodologies must be incorporated to promote experiential understanding and independent inquiry. PBL encourages students to engage with real-world challenges, apply critical thinking, and collaborate in teams to develop solutions—an approach consistent with cognitive constructivism and meaningful learning theory (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Similarly, scenario-based simulations, customer interaction roleplay, and digital platform exercises can deepen practical competence, enabling students to experience both success and failure in controlled environments. In tourism education, simulation-based learning has shown effectiveness in developing communicative competence, intercultural responsiveness, and emotional intelligence among service providers (Wang, 2021). The involvement of industry practitioners as guest lecturers or adjunct instructors can also provide contemporary industry insights and expose students to practical trends such as customer analytics, online reputation management, and responsive complaint handling.

Moreover, embedding applied technology within learning activities—through CRM tools, digital marketing dashboards, and analytics software—can reduce the transition burden as students move from academia to industry settings. This is especially relevant in Indonesia, where tourism SMEs are increasingly adopting digital technology to remain competitive within the ASEAN tourism market (Putra & Budiani, 2020). Thus, instructional shifts are not a secondary improvement but a pedagogical necessity.

3.2.3 Implications for Industry–University Collaboration

A consistent theme that emerges from the data is the crucial role of industry–university collaboration in mediating knowledge transfer and updating educational relevance. Collaboration is no longer a complementary element but essential to understanding real-time workforce competencies. In Indonesia, this is supported by the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) framework, which encourages students to spend up to three semesters engaging in internships, entrepreneurial projects, and industry immersion (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021). Such experiential engagement can minimize competency gaps by exposing students to operational realities of tourism businesses, including digital workflow integration, customer interaction complexities, and market-responsive commercial decisions.

In addition to internships, collaborative curriculum design involving industry stakeholders can ensure that learning outcomes reflect real expectations. Industry advisory boards, curriculum audit teams, and employer feedback loops can provide updated input regarding emerging skill requirements. This model of co-creation transforms universities from isolated knowledge generators into collaborative talent incubators (Jackson, 2016). Joint initiatives such as industry certification programs—e.g., digital marketing certification, hospitality service excellence certification—can further credentialize students with market-recognized qualifications, strengthening employability.

Industry partnerships also open opportunities for collaborative research on user experience (UX), destination management, sustainable tourism development, and service innovation—research that can inform both academic refinement and industrial practice (Rindrasih, 2018). Ultimately, collaboration must evolve from transactional internship provision toward strategic co-development of human capital.

3.2.4 Implications for Graduate Employability

The employability implications of this competency gap are profound. When graduates lack technological fluency, adaptive communication, and a sustainability mindset, they enter the workforce with diminished competitive advantage. Employers increasingly seek candidates who can operate competently in digital and hybrid service environments, interpret customer data, and collaborate within interdisciplinary teams (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). Thus, future tourism professionals must embody both cognitive and meta-cognitive competencies: digital competence, communication competence, cross-cultural competence, and lifelong learning aptitude.

Curriculum alignment, therefore, directly affects institutional reputation and attractiveness to students. Universities with industry-responsive programs are more likely to produce highly employable graduates, receive stronger employer recognition, and attract partnerships and funding (Yorke, 2006). Meanwhile, graduates who demonstrate proficiency in sustainability concepts can support environmentally responsible tourism models, benefiting both local communities and destination continuity.

Furthermore, tourism graduates must possess entrepreneurial potential, reflecting a shift from tourism employment to tourism venture creation (Susanti & Ermawati, 2022). With Indonesia's large informal sector and community-based tourism opportunities, entrepreneurial skill development is critical for empowering local economic innovation, destination promotion, and creative tourism product development.

In summary, the discussion underscores the structural need for transformation in tourism higher education in Indonesia. The integration of industry-driven competencies, innovative pedagogy, sustained industry collaboration, and employability orientation is essential to producing graduates capable of contributing to a technologically advanced, socially responsible, and economically competitive tourism industry.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that while the current RPS in the Recreational Business Management program successfully delivers foundational competencies in business administration and customer service, it remains insufficient in addressing the emerging demands of Indonesia's increasingly digital, data-driven, and sustainability-oriented tourism industry. This gap highlights the need for curriculum reform incorporating technology-based competencies, applied analytics, and sustainable tourism principles to enhance graduate readiness and employability. However, the scope of this research is limited by its qualitative orientation, reliance on document analysis, interview insights, and surveys from a selected group of stakeholders, thus preventing broad generalization across all tourism-related programs in Indonesian higher education. Consequently, future research should incorporate larger samples, multi-institutional comparisons, longitudinal tracking of graduate outcomes, and quantitative performance assessments to provide more comprehensive evidence for curriculum development, as well as explore the impacts of industry-driven course modules and experiential learning on measurable student competencies and employment trajectories.

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