
PERCEPTIONS OF TAMALE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM LECTURERS ON GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT: *Hospitality and Tourism (HT) higher education is a recent occurrence in Ghana. Issues of disparity in instruction and curriculum contents create problems for graduate's employability. The industry demands graduates with employable skills and competencies, which lacks hospitality and tourism management students of higher learning put continuous pressure on educators. And can be corrected through higher education curriculum design. The study examines lecturers' insights regarding students' potential employability in HT sectors concerning course content, structure, relevance, adequacy and quality of lectures delivered. The results revealed that lecturers' perceptions of skills and competencies developed by the graduate programme in Hospitality and tourism management (HTM) is inadequate and lacks employable skills. Lack of knowledge and understanding amongst students and lecturers of the hospitality and Tourism industry required skills such as generic hospitality required skills (interpersonal skills, communication skills, work ethics, professionalism, and emotional intelligence). The study adopted a qualitative approach. An in-depth semi-structured interview involving all 40 lecturers of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism of Tamale Technical University The study recommends lecturers and students having industry experience to be abreast with the industry's needs for graduate's employability.*

KEYWORDS: employability, hospitality and tourism, skills, competencies

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry is one of the world's largest and most important industries (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO), 2011). Globally, travel and tourism's direct contribution to GDP was approximately 2.9 trillion US dollars in 2019 (Lock, 2020). It is also among the top-job creating sectors because of its labour-intensive nature and its significant multiplier effect on employment in other related industries (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2020).

In most countries, the hospitality and tourism industry play a fundamental role in shaping the economy (Ozgit and Caglar 2015). The importance of HT management education is acknowledged worldwide (Kumar 2014; Stierand and Zizka 2015; Ozgit and Caglar 2015; Vineet Taing 2014). The Bank of Ghana lists the hospitality and tourism sector as the fourth-highest foreign currency earner behind gold, cocoa and remittances. In 2017 the industry contributed 6.2%, to national GDP and a total of 1.3m international tourists visited Ghana in the year 2017, representing a 6% increase compared to 2016. In terms of employment, the World Travel and Tourism Council reported that the sector supported 682,000 jobs, or 5.3% of total national work, in 2017 (Oxford Business Group 2020).

The need for highly qualified personnel in the industry is vital, and considering the erratic and competitive hospitality and environment, the sector requires profound transformation (Johnson et al. 2010). Ideally, the hospitality curriculum and courses must offer practical skills and 'soft' people management skills (Sheriff 2013). Therefore, the institution of higher learning, the Ghana Technical Universities and some private tertiary colleges in Ghana launched hospitality and Tourism management education at tertiary level. However, hospitality and tourism education with global political, economic, socio and cultural, technological, and environmental mega-trends and tremendous challenges posed by industry dynamism and the educational environment (Sheldon et al., 2008). Education research topics and perspectives are presumed to have become broader and more diversified in such a rapidly changing environment. Employability in modern higher education systems is essential to understand the factors that contribute to students' enhanced employability (Oluyomi Pitan 2016).

Poor employability skills, attitudes, and competencies in Sub Saharan Africa happen on curricula considered outdated and irrelevant to today's current job market (Sadik, 2017). Related to this problem are, the inadequate training provided to students and graduates, outdated teaching strategies, poor career guidance, and dependence on traditional teaching methods, which overemphasizes rote learning and examination-based assessment (Sadik 2017; Pitan 2016).

Interventions put in place by successive governments in Ghana have shown recent developments in the job market reveal the need further look at strategies that would enhance the quality of tertiary graduates emanating from higher learning institutions. Regardless of the growing attention on hospitality and Tourism education, which offers a wide diversity of courses throughout the world, there is lack of reviews on whether the current hospitality education curriculum in Ghana conforms with the industry expectations (Sadik,2019; Sarkodie and Adom, 2015).

Therefore, hospitality and tourism education underpin the expansion of Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry, since the two are compatible. As such, there has been a massive increase in the public and private sector hospitality and tourism education programmes, to fill the gap between the HT education and industry needs, amidst the growth of the hospitality and tourism industry in Ghana in recent times (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2014). The following objectives guided the study; To assess what activities are put in place to ensure that hospitality and tourism graduates have the required experience, knowledge, skills and competencies for the job market and identify the importance of selected career skills for hospitality graduates' employability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the significant functions of education is to make individuals employable (Shil and Pramanik, 2011). Goh (2011) have criticized HT educators for not adequately preparing students for employment in the industry. They often claim that what educators teach in the classroom does not match current industry trends. Therefore, impedes employment opportunities for HT graduates (Airey, 2005; Asirifi et al., 2013). Given this, many studies have also stressed the hospitality students' essential skill to be part of the hospitality industry. For example, Connolly and McGing (2006) suggested that the hospitality curriculum and courses must consist of strong practical skills and 'soft' people management skills. According

to McNair (2003), successful graduates will need to have greater ownership of their employability skills and the confidence to cope with economic upheavals to identify and exploit career opportunities over a lifetime. Aina (2011) asserts that several graduates from these schools do not have the needed competencies or expertise to qualify them for a decent job in their trades.

According to Almeida and Choudhury (2015), developing the right kind of workforce for the hospitality and tourism industry requires formal education, to introduce professionalism. The role of education is essential in any sector. Given this, academic institutions have prepared students for future employment and strive to prepare them to excel in business of their choice (Ogbeide, 2006). Therefore, employability skills are essential for students, organizations, employers, and educational institutions alike. Additionally, every educational institution's ultimate aim is to improve teaching and to learn to achieve its set objectives. The quality of education and the worth of every school is, in no small extent, assessed based on academic achievement and students' performance in the chosen field of work.

As reported in the literature on hospitality and Tourism education, the skill gap includes leadership and managerial competencies essential for senior-level managers, relationship management skills, and change management in hospitality (Chung-Herrera et al. 2003; Suh et al. 2012). Sission and Adams (2013) acknowledge the rapid changes in the HT industry and suggest that to meet this industry's needs, educators must review and revise the curriculum regularly and identify which competencies are essential for graduates. According to Ruetzler et al. (2014), 'The expansion of hospitality programs worldwide has resulted in wide modifications in program structures, curricular offerings, and course content, all of which have prompted researchers to examine essential competencies and industry needs inform programmatic restructuring'.

Johanson et al. (2010) also indicate that business education changes and competitive environment due to micro-environment changes point to curriculum reform in HT management. This line of research will help to identify and prioritize the needs of the hospitality curriculum.

Sission and Adams (2013) assert that HT management course curriculum is essential in enabling graduates to possess the industry's universal knowledge, skills, and abilities. Several factors affect the ability of HT courses to standardize these expectations. The continuing growth of HT by adding a broad range of functional areas affects curriculum development (Sission and Adams 2013). Today, hospitality education teaches the known traditional areas, such as accommodation/lodging, food and beverages, and courses on meetings, events, conventions, festivals, recreation, gaming, and cruise management. Whitelaw et al. (2009) indicated that the market's globalization, growth in technology in recent times and cultural diversity affect the industry's hospitality graduates' requirements.

Baum (2007) indicated that a lack of experience, technical, practical or job-specific skills, the experience of the world of work, and oral communication remain commonly cited issues about HT graduates. Baum furthermore states that human labour is critical for successful hospitality service delivery. It is also imperative to emphasize developing students' ability to work in teams with people from diverse cultures and with different communication skills (Yang and Hu

2015). Skill gaps may vary according to the region, size of the business, and market orientation type (Khare 2014).

Although higher education (HE) inculcates transferable, critical thinking skills in the transfer of knowledge within HT students, these students are unable to exhibit this knowledge in the field of work, a gap that needs to be researched and embedded in curriculum development to ensure that the students are clear on how they can transfer the acquired skills from HE to work (Maher and Nield 2005). Williams (2007) found a lack of teamwork, the right attitude for specific jobs among the deficiencies found in new graduate recruits.

The idea of collaboration in curriculum development between the stakeholders is supported by both professionals and educators, to comprehend better the result of a curriculum that suits the industry needs (Assante et al. 2007; Solnet et al. 2007). Tesone and Ricci (2005) emphasize the relationship between hospitality education and industry expectations for educational institutions to become realistic in providing good quality HT education that fulfils industry needs. Several studies have focused on the importance of the HT education curriculum in enhancing employability skills (Hein and Riegel 2012; Johnson et al. 2010; Mahachi 2012; Yao-Fen and Chen-Tsang 2014; Orphanidus and Nachmias 2011).

Professional management skills are lower than expected, especially in human resource management, administrative management, team building, persuasion and influence, and cost and finance management in hospitality. Employability key skills include self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Pool and Sewell, 2007). Confidence building is vital in customer-facing industries like hospitality education. A study by Yao-Fen and Chen-Tsang (2014) found a lack of confidence in most graduates regarding their core and specific employability and career planning and development skills.

Wang (2009) proposes a restructuring of the learning process to reflect the use of information in the real world, changing the educator's role from a presenter of pre-packaged facts to a facilitator of active learning and transformation. This remark connects well with the LTA innovations that are experiential, student-centred, and focused on enabling graduates to use ICT tools in education and at work (Ali et al. 2014). New technology, globalization and the hospitality market's diversity have become critical factors affecting hospitality graduates needs (Ryan et al. 2013). These issues, therefore, call for concerted efforts by educators to update the competencies that are deemed essential by industry (Whitelaw et al. 2009; Johnson et al. 2010). Ansah (2012) argued that the hospitality curriculum must broaden students' knowledge; current industry happenings are essential in the curriculum development through learning. They further noted that the hospitality management curriculum needs to cover various aspects of the hospitality industry so students can have an opportunity to experience diverse hospitality sectors and eventually determine the areas that most interest them. Therefore, hospitality educators must revamp their curriculum to meet the hospitality industry's changing trends. The curriculum must broaden students' knowledge and reflect industry trends. Hence, using an improved curriculum to allow students to experience the various hospitality sectors is key to delivering students' expectations (Rahman, 2010). The broad range of functional areas in the hospitality industry and the continuous expansion of hospitality affect curriculum development regarding hospitality management (Sisson and Adams 2013). The hospitality industry requires work attitudes and personal attributes as necessary competencies, according to Yao-Fen and

Chen-Tsang (2014). The importance of hospitality education ultimately moved into line with the hospitality industry's expansion (Shariff 2013; Yao-Fen and Chen-Tsang 2014). Babushko (2013), maintains that globalization challenge emphasizes the creation of new approaches to hospitality education, the industry and its staff. The upgrading of human resources aims to achieve investment in human capital and improve training and hospitality staff's competitiveness. The standardization of hospitality education has been an issue for industry professionals and educators.

Sisson and Adams (2013) stress the need to develop a standardized hospitality curriculum to ensure that graduates have similar knowledge, skills and abilities required by industry. However, they argue that several variables meet this requirement, impacting hospitality courses' ability to meet these expectations. Another factor observed by these authors as affecting the standardization of the hospitality course is the expansion of the study, encompassing broad functional areas, such as meetings, events, conventions, festivals, recreation, gaming and cruise management, rather than the known traditional areas of lodging, food and beverages. Therefore, they argue that this expansion demands an added area of study and a broader array of offerings within the curriculum. The development of managers is essential for the growth of the hospitality and tourism sectors that are increasingly affected by globalization trends and competitiveness. To further develop hospitality and tourism education and industry, it is crucial for coordinated efforts comprising education and the private sector. Yizengaw (2008) maintains African countries face many challenges within HE, such as quality faculty; limited capacity governance leadership and management, inadequate financial support, funding facilities and infrastructure, quality research and relevance of teaching and research. Hospitality and Tourism education faces a similar situation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mahachi (2012) observes skill gaps in managerial competencies among hospitality and tourism students in Botswana; this is common in many Sub-Saharan African countries. He indicates a significant skill gap in the Botswanan hospitality and tourism industry lacks business and managerial capabilities. Four areas of interest include management, leadership, personal skills and attributes. He attributes this to in-house training which is unstructured, a lack of confidence and sociocultural issues. He believes that it is worth investigating undergraduates' perceptions of the competencies needed to become influential leaders and managers. However, he noted that there is limited literature on how the developed curricular emphasize managerial competency skills for hospitality and tourism students. Furthermore, indicates that most hospitality and tourism courses are silent regarding the skills they aim to equip students. More recently, the market's globalization, growth in technology, and cultural diversity have become critical factors affecting the hospitality and tourism graduates' needs (Whitelaw et al. 2009). According to the Ghana Tourism Authority (2013), the hospitality and tourism industry is highly dynamic and competitive due to the emergence of international hotel chains in the country, requiring graduates with employable skills to take advantage of the emerging markets and job opportunities. The chapter also reviews the literature on global and African hospitality HE issues compared to Ghana's situation, particularly the Ghanaian HE system, and gaps in Ghanaian graduates' learning, skills and competencies.

Significance of the Study

The study's findings would provide relevant information on channelling instructional supervision towards building requisite skill in students' completion. Finding the survey will

apply to supervisors, school administrators, and other education stakeholders involved in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. It will facilitate the rapid integration of practical approaches teachers can adopt during teaching and learning to aid students channelling of requisite skill for the industry.

Population and sampling

Twenty-five (25) study participants from the Tamale Technical University were involved. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to sample the study participants at the Tamale Technical University hospitality and tourism management lecturers.

Data collection and analysis

A structured interview guide was developed and used for the primary data collection at the study institution. Study participants knew the purpose of the study. The study used inductive thematic analysis to present the results of the data. Categories of responses from the data were identified and coded through searching for emergent themes from the interviews.

RESULTS

Activities that enable hospitality graduates to gain experience for the job market

Study participants stated how they could enable hospitality graduates to gain experience for the job market. Varied responses were collated and the findings presented as such.

Theme one: Trends in the hospitality industry, skills and competences

The first theme that emerged from the data was the hospitality industry trends, skills and competence. One study participant stated this as follows;

'hospitality lecturers requested the opportunity of industrial attachment 3-6 months to acquaint themselves with the new trends in industry, equipment and gargets industry is using. It is a way of enriching your knowledge or enhancing our skills which can modify the way you teach' (P: 1)

Innovation and creativity among lecturers

Study participants expressed the need for lecturers to be innovative in other to improve graduate's employability skills. Study participants stated this in this manner;

'I think that we, the lecturers, should also write reports after teaching about what should be added and what should be removed. Our input is very important. In the report, we make recommendations about what is relevant to the training of the students to fit in with the industry requirements' (P: 3).

Entrepreneurship education with critical thinking skills

Study participants expressed the need for the hospitality education to adopt entrepreneurship education with critical thinking skills to enable graduates to gain the needed skills in self-employment. Study participants remarked as;

'We also have to find out how students can form cooperative groups to form businesses...identifying a product with a very high market potential...Our students should have an entrepreneurial mind too. They need to identify opportunities to establish a business on their own' (P: 3).

The need for longer internships

'Doing an industrial attachment, you are expected to learn what it is like in industry...' the industrial attachment part of the curriculum should be strengthened, regulated and assessed as a requirement for graduating. By so doing, students will take it seriously' (P: 7).

The lecturers reiterated the need to involve industry in training students, as part of the hospitality firms' corporate social responsibility. For this, industry professionals should teach practical aspects of the course with lecturers and provide the institutions with the modern equipment they currently lack. They recommended that final year hospitality students should complete their last year in industry placements. The following statements support these views:

'Industry should be part of the training of students' 'The hospitality industry should provide information to the libraries of hospitality institutions on new developments' 'As part of the social responsibility of the hospitality industry, they should offer to teach and equip the institutions with some modern equipment' (P: 9)

'Also, 'Final years should finish in the industry' 'The hospitality industry should accept students and lecturers for industry training' 'Professionals in the industry should be motivated to lecture' (P: 1)

Participants additionally identified the need for hospitality education to develop the students' ability to recognize career opportunities, in ways that mere technical training in the subject matter will not achieve. There is a need for industry input to enable students to become aware of the changing industry requirements and develop the requisite skills to meet these requirements. They also identify the need for supporting research in the industry. The following statements support this view.

'Hospitality education should emphasize the skills training of students to meet the industry expectations' 'The curriculum should have industry input' 'Education should prepare students adequately on career development and be able to identify the opportunities around them' 'should use modern equipment in teaching to encourage effectiveness and efficiency in productivity' 'A lot of research in the hospitality industry' 'Students' project work should be problems from industry'(P: 11)

The nature of training and resourcing required by lecturers to more effectively teach employability skills in hospitality students was posed to the lecturers, to elicit their critical needs for training, making them better able to facilitate employability-focused learning.

'expanded infrastructure', 'equipment for training workshops', 'adequate funding of hospitality education', 'on-the-job training and mentoring, 'Industry experience in four-five-star hotels', 'build training hotels in selected hospitality institutions', 'refresher courses for lecturers' 'pay lecturers well to motivate them to teach', 'Create hospitality libraries for institutions with the latest books and electronic gadgets' 'Hospitality departments should have internet connectivity'(P: 23)

DISCUSSION

The study examines lecturers' insights regarding students' potential employability in HT sectors concerning course content, structure, relevance, adequacy and quality of lectures delivered.

The lecturers emphasized the need to teach students the core subjects in the field, such as food and beverage management, housekeeping and accommodation, which require simulation learning, guest-houses with modern equipment, and complimentary training in teaching hotels. As evidenced by Bawakyillenuo et al. (2013), as hospitality programmes need to motivate their students to similar situations in the entire industry, there is a strong need for hospitality education to utilize simulation learning. Simulation learning offers considerable benefits to students in many ways, such as decision-making skills. It gives them a certain level of reality by which they can experience the industry without being afraid of not performing correctly. Ansah (2012) suggests a complete re-design and delivery of the curriculum in the polytechnics and universities bridge learning skills and competencies gaps. The existing curriculum regarded as outdated and unresponsive to the needs of trainees and industry demands. The disparity between institutional training and the industry needs has implications for graduate employment because, with an outdated curriculum, students will be underprepared for the job market. These implications for Ghana include the low transition of graduates to the job markets due to the disparity between their skills and skills needed in the industry, which adversely affects the Ghanaian economy (Sarkodie & Adom 2015).

Limitations of the study

The study collected data on the perceptions of lecturers at the study institution. The used of perceptions can be subjective and may change over time. However, the researcher gathered data from study participants' experiences to compensate for this study's weakness.

CONCLUSION

The lecturers indicated the need to balance lecture and examination strategies with other assessments of learning. The lecturers noted a lack of work-related off-campus and on-campus extra-curricular activities that could enhance graduate employability skills. However, lack of modern teaching methods and low satisfaction with the most popular ones; namely, lectures, seminars and projects were cited as challenges.

Recommendations

Stakeholders should have collaboration with the hospitality and tourism industry so that students are equipped with skills to fulfil industry expectations.

Students should visit the industry. Managers of tertiary institutions should offer regular field trips for students and teachers to learn current industry trends and best practices.

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