

Impact Of ‘Rotational’ Training On Students’ Professional Experience: Case Study Of Accra Polytechnic Hospitality Management Students

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Abstract

Professional training tends to be an important component in higher education, and plays a key role in intellectual and professional development of contemporary graduates. This and many other crucial factors have indeed resulted in some educators incorporating professional training related-activities in teaching and learning at the graduate level. The purpose of the research is to ascertain the impact of professional training on the learning experience of Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management students in Accra Polytechnic. The research method adopted in this study was the triangulation method which involved the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings suggest that when students are given the opportunity to work in different departments it enhances employability, competence, career path and professional development. The main conclusion drawn from this study is that most of the respondents have a positive perception of the professional training and intend making a career within the hospitality industry. The limitation of this study was the sample size which made generalising the findings to a larger population inappropriate. For a better picture of the professional training experience, this study recommends that future research be carried out where the entire population of students could be involved in the study.

Keywords: training, hospitality education, hospitality career path

Introduction

Higher education in general and hospitality education in particular have indeed come to the point where their significance to society is highly advocated by both academics and industrialists. The hospitality industry is sometimes faced with the issue of recruiting the right, motivated, trained and qualified employees who are capable of delivering the accepted standard of service to customers. This inevitably has influenced the sort of teaching and learning done by educators especially as the industry has criticised them for teaching that lays too much emphasis on theoretical concepts (Barron, 2008). Education in hospitality management used to be characterised by hands-on vocational programmes where curricula were practically oriented, hence restricting the quality of education received by graduates (Formica 1996). This hands-on approach has also been criticised by Cousins, (1992) as he describes it as a closed system where traditional approaches seem to replicate themselves. This could affect the wide range of managerial skills needed by many hospitality students. Looking at the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry means that continuous improvement in teaching and learning in Hospitality Management education needs to take a new direction. In the quest to develop graduate professional knowledge and assist in the area of developing a better attitude toward the industry, many educators provide industrial training for graduates.

The prime focus of educators as they shift from the traditional methods of routine operations in hospitality management education is to devise means of meeting the changing demands of the current hospitality market and also understanding what actually results in such changes (Formica 1996). One obvious means has been the inclusion of professional training related-programmes in the curricula of many hospitality management courses by some institutions.

Although this may not be a panacea for solving all the problems related to the changing demands of the contemporary hospitality market, it could go a long way to help solve some of the problems to a large extent. There is empirical evidence that suggests that students who go on such programmes tend to become more employable, competent and develop their career path. Additionally, on the whole these programmes make them develop a better outlook on the hospitality industry (Auburn, 2007; Singh and Dutta 2010; Jenkins, 2001; Walo, 2001; Mc Mohan and Quinn 1995). He adds that there has been a strong transitional movement from its vocational base globally. Similarly, Lashley (2000) mentions that there has been a paradigm shift in hospitality education over the past twenty years. Professional training which tends to enhance the employability of today's hospitality graduate has been emphasized by some studies (Crebert et al., 2004; Auburn, 2009). Surprisingly, developing a positive outlook on the industry seems not to be the case in some situations as a number of studies

reveal that the opposite is true (Getz, 1994; Jenkins, 2001; Purcell & Quinn, 1996). These negative attitudes could be specific issues pertaining to the industry. For instance, studies have shown that quite a large number of hospitality and tourism management graduates tend to leave the industry as a result of low job satisfaction, menial work, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Kusluvan and Kusluvan; Richardson, 2009). Although these studies could be alarming, they may not reflect a general trend looking at the setting and the population for the studies. The multifaceted nature of the hospitality industry is likely to help graduates identify their strengths and weaknesses as they go through 'rotational' training during their placement year. This is more crucial at a time when hospitality has been deeply embedded within higher education, as commented by Morrison and O'Gorman (2008). There is the likelihood that as graduates learn the intricacies of hospitality in different sections by way of rotation, a better attitude could be developed. Hence, they develop an optimistic outlook on the job at present and for the future. Teng (2008) shares this view as he mentions that people who have better understanding and more knowledge concerning hospitality jobs tend to have a reduced gap between job expectations and the reality of working in the industry.

Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management students of Accra Polytechnic undertake a three months professional training placement in the industry during their course of study. This according to the aims spelt out in the Students' Handbook, will help students gain and develop knowledge meant to enhance their employability and learning experience. Additionally, it is meant to build graduates' confidence in handling new situations and experience in managing people. Despite the negative attitudes developed by some interns after professional training as some studies have reported (Getz, 1994; Jenkins, 2001; Purcell & Quinn, 1996), there is empirical evidence that suggests that professional training enhances students' competence, employability, professional development and career path. (Auburn, 2007; Singh and Dutta 2010; Jenkins, 2001; Walo, 2001; Mc Mohan and Quinn 1995; Blackwell et al., 2001).

However there is no specific study that has identified the influence these variables have on the kind of training received by students whilst on professional training. The gap has indeed necessitated this study. It is therefore against this background that this study seeks to investigate the impact of professional training with special emphasis on 'rotational' training on students' learning experience. This is crucial since the Polytechnic prides itself on holistic education where both the intellectual and professional capabilities of graduates are enhanced through teaching and learning.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research instrument

Quantitative method where structured questionnaire was used. This method was likely to enable the researcher to solicit views from Hotel Catering and Institutional Management students in Accra Polytechnic.

2.2 Questionnaire design

A structured questionnaire with items related to the impact of rotational training on the learning experience of hospitality management students was designed. The questions in sections B and C were rated using Likert-style rating scale. The questionnaire had different sections. Section A consisted of general information about students such as gender and age. Section B was based on questions related employability, competence, supervisor empowerment, professional development and career path of respondents. It consisted of a numeric rating question which asked respondents to mark on a 5-point Likert scale by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with series of statements. Section C consisted of nine questions and was similar to section B as respondents were asked to mark on a 5-point Likert scale by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with series of statements. It also looked at the impact of job specialisation on employability, competence, supervisor empowerment, professional development and career path of respondents. This was because there is the likelihood that some of the students may not have had rotational training and therefore the same variables under rotational training were repeated under job specialisation. The last section which was section D consisted of four variables on career path, four variables on demographic and finally, four variables on working experience making the total variables fifty-four. Both open and closed ended questions were asked under this section.

2.3 Population and Sampling size

The population of Accra Polytechnic Hospitality Management students is about 280. The sampling method that was employed in this study was purposive sampling which is an example of a non-probability sampling as it enabled the researcher to answer the research questions. In all, about Thirty five (35) Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management students who have had their professional training were involved in the study. This figure was small since the survey was conducted at a time when students were on recess. These students having

had experience in the area of professional training were likely to provide useful information that could help the researcher answer the research questions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic variables

In all, thirty-five questionnaires were received out of fifty-five questionnaires that were sent out representing a response rate of more than 60%. The descriptive statistics relating to section A of the questionnaire which concerned the demographic variables of gender and age and shows that that the sample was composed of 6 males and 29 females representing 17.1% male and 82.9% female as shown in Table 4. The descriptive statistics also shows that the ages of respondents ranges between 18 and 25 years old.

3.2 Rotational training and competence

Regarding this section, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed for series of statements relating to rotational training and competence using Likert rating scale where (1) denotes strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly agreed. It can be seen from Table 4.4 that all the variables recorded a mean of more than 4.0 indicating positive effect. The mean scores for the variables were as follows: challenge abilities (mean = 4.1429), opportunity to view job issues from multiple perspectives (mean = 4.3429), opportunity to learn and adapt (mean = 4.3143) and enhancing managerial skills (mean = 4.1429).

Similar to the above, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed for series of statements relating to rotational training and employability using Likert rating scale where (1) denotes strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly agreed. It can be seen from Table 4.5 that all the variables recorded a mean of more than 4.0 indicating positive effect. The mean scores for the variables were as follows: career goal (mean = 4.2000), leadership skills (mean = 4.3429) networking contacts (mean = 4.4000) career path (mean = 4.2571) and personal and professional value (mean = 4.2571). Table 5 illustrates the perception of the experience by respondents. It can clearly be seen from the table that a larger percent of respondents had a positive perception of the experience. More than 90% of respondents had a positive perception of the experience.

From table 6, 5.7% of respondents disagree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisors to learn from their mistakes, 5.7% of respondents were neutral, 42.9% of respondents agree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisors to learn from their mistakes and 45.7% of respondents strongly agree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisors to learn from their mistakes. Also, from table 7, 2.9% of respondents disagree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisor to understand the technical nature of the job, 17.1% of respondents were neutral, 34.3% of respondents agree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisor to understand the technical nature of the job and 45.7% of respondents strongly agree that they were regularly encouraged by their supervisor to understand the technical nature of the job. Table 8 presents the extent to which academic course, formal and informal training enhance professional development. It can be seen from the table that all the variables recorded a mean of more than 4.0 indicating positive effect. The mean scores for the variables were as follows: academic course (mean = 4.3429), formal training (mean = 4.2857), informal training (mean = 4.4857).

Concerning seeking for job in the hospitality industry, most respondents expressed the desire of working in the hospitality industry. Table .9 shows that whilst more than 95% of respondents are sure of looking for a job in the hospitality industry, only 2.9% of respondents do not intend looking for a job in the hospitality industry.

Table 10 presents the sector of the hospitality industry respondents intend to work. From the table, 14.3% intend to work in restaurants, 62.9% intend to work in hotels, 2.9% intend to work in leisure and 20.0% intend to work in tourism sector. The department preference of respondents can be seen in Table 11. The percentages is as follows: 20% of respondents prefer to work in the food and beverage department, 28.6% prefer to work in sales and marketing, 37.1% prefer to work in the front office, 11.4% prefer to work in the housekeeping department and 2.9% prefer to work in the accounting and finance department.

The position respondents intend to occupy after five years of graduation can be seen in Table 12. The percentages are as follows: owner 5.7%, General Manager 40%, department manager 11% and supervisor 22.9%. Concerning whether respondents had these positions in mind before the professional training, 57.1% answered in the affirmative whilst 42.9% responded No.

Concerning the issue of working before the professional training, that is whether respondents have had previous working experience, most respondents answered No. The findings of the result suggest that students have a positive perception of the professional training and ultimately have the desire of pursuing a career in the hospitality industry. Although, this result differ from some published studies (Getz, 1994; Jenkins, 2001; Purcell

& Quinn, 1996) which reported that some hospitality students do not want to make career in the hospitality industry especially after the professional training, it is consistent with that of (Mahon and Quinn, 1995). Their studies suggested that some students have positive image of the industry and have the desire of pursuing a career in it. In fact critically looking at the training received by the students Mahon and Quinn, (1995) used in their studies shows that these students had the opportunity to encounter different departments during their professional year. There may be other variables that dictate why students do not associate positive training experience with working in the industry. For instance as mentioned in the literature, graduates tend to leave the industry as a result of low job satisfaction, menial work, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Kusluvan and Kusluvan; Richardson, 2009). This and many other factors could make respondents hesitant in making a career in the hospitality industry and not necessarily the mere exposure to the industry through professional training as some studies suggest.

Concerning professional development, all variables registered a mean score over 4.0 indicating that the training had a strong influence on professional development. Furthermore, the result indicates that respondents mainly agreed that having encounter with different departments during professional training has a positive influence on their competence.

The variable that stands out is the opportunity to view job issues from multiple perspectives. All the variables recorded a mean score of more than 4.0 indicating a positive effect. This supports the assertion made by Leslie, (1991) that professional training provides the opportunity to combine theory and practice to enhance competence. Additionally, a close look at the findings on employability shows that the mean scores for all the variables related to rotational training and employability were above 4.0 which provides a clear evidence that rotational training enhances employability. This is in line with Crebert et al., (2004) findings on a study on graduates' perception of developing generic skills at the University, during work placement and in employment where the results suggested that professional training provides opportunity for employment and career path. Also the findings validate the importance of supervisors' empowerment in the professional training experience. The findings suggest that 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged by their supervisors to understand the technical nature of the work.

Additionally, 88.6% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged by their supervisors to learn from their mistakes. This could enhance the experience as Singh and Dutta (2010) findings suggest that supervisory support during professional training is crucial as it goes a long way to affect how interns perceive the whole experience. This is evident in this study as respondents perceive the experience positively. Coupled with the above most of the respondents appear ambitious since 40% do not just want to work in the hospitality industry but aspire to be General Managers.

4. Conclusion

The result of this study shows that rotational training enhances employability, competence, career path and professional development. From the data analysis and discussion presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that there is a positive perception of the professional training experience by most respondents. The role of the supervisor during the professional training year could have possibly influenced the positive perception of the experience as more than half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisors encouraged them to learn from their mistakes and understand the technical nature of the job. This is where the assertion made by Teng (2008) that, people who have better understanding and more knowledge concerning hospitality jobs tend to have a reduced gap between job expectations and the reality of working in the industry could be true. Consequently, many of the respondents intend making a career within the hospitality industry which appears not to be the case in many other related studies as earlier on mentioned.

Although the current result for this study indicates that students display positive attitudes towards getting hospitality jobs, the findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. There is still the need for educators in the Accra Polytechnic especially those responsible for professional training to incessantly offer training and development that will encourage positive outlook on the industry by students. This is important since students can easily dissuade other people from pursuing the hospitality programme when they develop a negative perception on the industry and its related programmes. Also industry practitioners could be more innovative and make professional related programmes less repetitive and expose interns to professional training that is not just challenging but relevant to the educational needs of the contemporary hospitality management student.

APPENDIX 1

Table: 1 Gender

gender

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid male | 6 | 17.1 | 17.1 | 17.1 |
| female | 29 | 82.9 | 82.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 2 Ages

ages

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid 21 | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| 22 | 14 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 42.9 |
| 23 | 15 | 42.9 | 42.9 | 85.7 |
| 24 | 5 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 3 Rotational training and Competence

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------|----|--------|----------------|
| challenge abilities | 35 | 4.1429 | .80961 |
| multiple perspectives | 35 | 4.3429 | .68354 |
| learn and adapt | 35 | 4.3143 | .63113 |
| managerial skills | 35 | 4.1429 | .64820 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 35 | | |

(n=35)

Table: 4 Rotational training and employability

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------|----|--------|----------------|
| career goal | 35 | 4.2000 | .67737 |
| leadership skills | 35 | 4.3429 | .63906 |
| networking contacts | 35 | 4.4000 | .55307 |
| career path | 35 | 4.2571 | .65722 |
| value | 35 | 4.2571 | .70054 |
| Valid N (list wise) | 35 | | |

(n=35)

Table: 5 Perception of experience

Perception of Experience

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid 3.00 | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| 3.50 | 2 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 8.6 |
| 4.00 | 12 | 34.3 | 34.3 | 42.9 |
| 4.50 | 10 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 71.4 |
| 5.00 | 10 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 6 Supervisor empowerment

learn from mistakes

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Disagree | 2 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| Neutral | 2 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 11.4 |
| Agree | 15 | 42.9 | 42.9 | 54.3 |
| Strongly agree | 16 | 45.7 | 45.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 7 Supervisor empowerment

understand technical nature

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Disagree | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| Neutral | 6 | 17.1 | 17.1 | 20.0 |
| Agree | 12 | 34.3 | 34.3 | 54.3 |
| Strongly agree | 16 | 45.7 | 45.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 8 Professional development

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|--------|----------------|
| academic course | 35 | 4.3429 | .53922 |
| formal training | 35 | 4.2857 | .57248 |
| informal training | 35 | 4.4857 | .61220 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 35 | | |

(n=35)

Table: 9 Job in hospitality industry

job in hospitality industry

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid definitely | 12 | 34.3 | 34.3 | 34.3 |
| possible | 22 | 62.9 | 62.9 | 97.1 |
| definitely not | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 10 Sector of hospitality

sector of hospitality industry

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid restaurants | 5 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 14.3 |
| hotels | 22 | 62.9 | 62.9 | 77.1 |
| leisure | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 80.0 |
| tourism | 7 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 11 Department Preferences

| | | department preference | | | |
|-------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | food and beverage | 7 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 |
| | sales and marketing | 10 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 48.6 |
| | front office | 13 | 37.1 | 37.1 | 85.7 |
| | house keeping | 4 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 97.1 |
| | accounting and finance | 1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 12 Position to be held after five years of graduation

| | | position after five years | | | |
|-------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | owner | 2 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| | GM | 14 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 45.7 |
| | department manager | 11 | 31.4 | 31.4 | 77.1 |
| | supervisor | 8 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 12 Position in mind before placement

| | | in mind before placement | | | |
|-------|-------|--------------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | yes | 20 | 57.1 | 57.1 | 57.1 |
| | no | 15 | 42.9 | 42.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

Table: 13 working experience

| | | working experience | | | |
|-------|-------|--------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | yes | 12 | 34.3 | 34.3 | 34.3 |
| | No | 23 | 65.7 | 65.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 35 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

(n=35)

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