

The “Hospitality Entrepreneur” in Tourism Education in Ghana, Africa

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Abstract

Studies in entrepreneurship education in hospitality and tourism has indicated that further attention could be given toward helping students to develop creativity and critical thinking skills, engage in deeper self-discovery experiences, and understand tourism more fully to help prepare them for entrepreneurial roles. This study aims at evaluating Hospitality entrepreneurial modules offered in Tourism programs in Ghanaian institutions. The curriculum of Tourism in two tertiary institutions in Ghana offering Tourism is studied. The research highlights on the need to integrate hospitality technical skills into Tourism education to create a culture that will enhance the growth of entrepreneurial hospitality into Tourism as culinary Tourism is becoming common. Some of the challenges faced by tourism students and entrepreneurship educators are highlighted. Structured interview technique was used to collect data from 20 purposive sampled students of the selected institutions. The results revealed that the level of importance and attention given to hospitality skills in tourism and the perception of students on acquisition of the required competencies is minimal. It is therefore recommended that more skills and competences in hospitality operation, food and beverage production and service be introduced in tourism education in a more holistic manner with emphasis on skill acquisition in order to make the tourism graduate more creative and critical thinker in today's global competitive environment.

Keywords: Tourism education, Hospitality entrepreneurial skills, Culinary Tourism, curriculum, Ghana

1. Introduction

Tourism has become a major science that is taught in higher education across the world (Malihah, Puspito and Setiyorini, 2014). This is because tourism education plays a key role in fostering tourism development and ensuring continuous supply of quality human resources to meet industry requirements and expectations as well as fulfilling the broader perspective of managing tourism (Lam and Xiao, 2000).

Tourism education has generally been structured to train graduates with academic insight to take up managerial positions and address tourism management problems within the industry. Thus, the need for developing tourism education with academic perspective has increased over the years with little attention given to vocational and practical training (Malihah, Puspito and Setiyorini, 2014; Başaran, 2016).

Even though tourism education has been developed to emphasize theoretical learning in academic point of view, there is still the need to undergo training to gain understanding in occupational knowledge for future ventures (Malihah, Puspito and Setiyorini, 2014). Thus, tourism education also has the potential to develop hospitality entrepreneurs based on practical and technical skills acquired during training (Deale, 2016). In this regard, Lewis (2005) indicated that balancing the conceptual and vocational aspects of tourism education is crucial to producing

well-rounded graduates. The creation of this balance develops students who are well-versed and responsible in tourism development as well as occupationally functional in tourism through the creation of business ventures.

Notwithstanding the need for occupational instructions, the lack of practical and technical skills training to foster applied applications in real world situations has been the weak link of tourism education for years. As a result, several research have revealed that although tourism education has progressed over the years, there has been a lack of focus on practical and technical skills that can foster venture creation, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial mindset among tourism graduates (Zhang and Wu, 2004; Pani, Das and Sharma, 2015; Batra, 2016).

According to Lam and Xiao (2000) the underlying cause of this problem is that, during the planning of tourism curriculum, educational institutes pay more attention to theoretical concepts and knowledge rather than skill development. This means that practical training is given limited attention at most universities and graduates who fail to secure employment lack the competencies to start own businesses. In response, Zhang and Wu (2004) emphasize the need to review tourism education curriculum to make it more market-oriented in order to meet industry's expectations and promote entrepreneurship. Therefore, tourism education requires comprehensive analysis to move away from the normal practice of producing graduates to occupy positions within tourism businesses.

In Ghana, research within the tourism industry shows that there is lack of empirical studies that evaluate tourism curriculum of universities to identify whether entrepreneurial modules are offered. For instance, research in Ghana by Owusu-Mintah (2014) focused on entrepreneurship practice among tourism graduates rather than evaluating tourism curriculum. This shows that there is dearth of first-hand evidence on the assessment of courses that aim at preparing entrepreneurially minded graduates and entrepreneurs for the thriving Ghanaian hospitality and tourism industry. This becomes more problematic because it is believed that there remains a considerable gap between what educational institutions offer compared to actual needs of the hospitality and tourism industry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate hospitality entrepreneurial modules offered in tourism programs in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Specifically, it assesses the curriculum of Tourism in two tertiary institutions in Ghana that offers entrepreneurship within the Tourism program. This present research is significant because it highlights the need to integrate hospitality technical skills into tourism education to create a culture that will enhance the growth of entrepreneurship within the tourism industry as well as create a synergy between theory and practice in the industry.

Literature Review

In the last few decades, tourism education has expanded substantially due to worldwide increase in the number of schools, student population and diversity of programs (Shen, Luo and Lam, 2015). Many tertiary institutions all over the world offer different courses within hospitality and tourism while several travel agencies offer short-term courses to train upcoming candidates (Fidgeon, 2011; Batra, 2016). In view of this, tourism education has been defined as

the academic and professional development and preparation of human resources for the hospitality and tourism industry (Malihah, Puspito and Setiyorini, 2014; Kunwar, 2018). Tourism education is crucial to the industry because it contributes significantly to customer satisfaction as well as competitiveness of tourism businesses (Bashar and Alsaleh, 2013; Romanova et al., 2016).

According to Airey (2008) the evolution of tourism education can be categorized into four stages within 40 years of its existence. The stages are industrial stage (courses focused on the practice and operations of the industry); fragmented stage (characterized by uncertainty about curriculum); benchmark stage (courses extending beyond the industry to include role of tourism in communities and environments); and mature stage (focusing on independent thinking and stimulating intellectual curiosity). Furthermore, Dale and Robinson (2001) opine that tourism education provides three types of degrees namely: generic degrees, functional degrees and market/product-based degrees.

Despite the advancement of tourism education which is evidenced by the growing number of degree and diploma courses, it has largely been criticized for overly focusing of theoretical training. Pavesic (1993) stated that hospitality and tourism management education has been criticized for being very theoretical or industry focused. Similarly, Chen et al (2011) identified that there are huge concerns that tourism education emphasizes extensively on theoretical knowledge, while practical skills and practices are largely ignored. Also, Lam and Xiao (2000) observed that little attention is given to practical training and skill development in tourism education whereas conceptual ideas are highlighted.

Specifically, the Asian Development Bank (2019) argued that tourism education lacks practical specializations and dimensions of core hospitality such as food and beverages management, housekeeping management, etc. Shen, Luo and Lam (2015) revealed that in China, although tourism curriculum design involved practical training, such trainings contributed little because they only happened in the last year of studies. In Turkey, Yeşiltaş, Öztürk and Hemmington (2010) identified that tourism curriculum lacked coordination and collaboration with industry because it failed to meet industry needs and expectations.

As a result, Djurasevic and Kavaric (2016) contend that introduction of practical training into tourism educational curriculum is needed at all levels. Likewise, Tribe (2002) emphasized that tourism education and training urgently require integration of academic and vocational aspects into curriculum to train ‘philosophic practitioners. The fundamental idea of ‘philosophic practitioners’ is that tourism education should provide both theoretical and practical education to equip students with abilities to reflect and act. Also, Shen, Luo and Lam (2015) reiterate that combining theory and practical training better prepares students to apply acquired classroom skills to the working environment.

The outcome of such curriculum improvement is that tourism students become skilled in real world competencies to meet the changing needs of employers, new technologies, and alternative forms of service (Sakharchuk, Khanbabaeva and Daitov, 2013). A typical example of such alternative forms of service is that tourism students can

venture into personal business activities within the industry based on acquired practical skills and specializations to become ‘hospitality entrepreneurs’ in the thriving industry (Ahmad, 2015; Deale, 2016).

Methodology

The study was conducted at two (2) tertiary institutions A and B in Ghana, West Africa. The study evaluated the curriculum of Tourism programs run at bachelor’s level of the universities to determine the core hospitality modules included in the curriculum. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study and according to Burns and Bush (2010) descriptive research focuses on the present situation of the phenomenon under investigation by simply attempting to identify, determine and describe the occurrence. The study population consisted of all students pursuing Tourism program at the two universities. Out of this population, 20 students were purposively sampled and interviewed for the study. Structured interview technique was used as tool for data collection and similar to (Ahmad, 2015) the interview questions focused on assessing students’ perception regarding the practical nature of the Tourism curriculum, overall assessment of the curriculum and preparedness for career prospects. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 whereas web-based content analysis was employed for reviewing Tourism curriculum of the two universities.

Results and Discussion

The study addressed three prominent questions which are related to assessment of Tourism curriculum, students’ perception about practical nature of Tourism curriculum and challenges faced by students in tourism education.

Tourism Curriculum of University A and B

At University A, the Tourism program which is a 4-year Degree program focuses on the following modules: Tourism and Recreation, Communication Skills, Management in Tourism, Culture and Tourism, Marketing Planning, Tour Guiding, Eco-Tourism and Park Management. The findings therefore show that at University A, there are no practical hospitality courses included in the curriculum.

At the University B, the Tourism program which is also a 4-year Degree program emphasizes on the following modules: Tourism and Recreation, Culture and Cultural Practice, Communication Skills, Tourism Resources of Ghana, Tourism Entrepreneurship, Map Reading, Events Management, Tour Guiding, Eco-Tourism, Bio-Tourism and Facilities Management. This signifies that at University B a small number of courses / modules that enhance practical skills are given some level of attention. These courses are Tourism Entrepreneurship, Events Management and Facilities Management.

The findings from the Tourism curriculum review at University A and University B revealed that Tourism curriculum (especially at University B) focused on theoretical training, while little or no attention is given to practical courses or core hospitality modules that can foster entrepreneurship after school. This finding is confirmed by Lam and Xiao (2000) who observed that little attention is given to practical training and skill development in tourism education

whereas conceptual ideas are highlighted. In addition, the finding is similar to Chen et al (2011) when they identified that tourism education emphasizes extensively on theoretical knowledge, while practical skills and practices are largely ignored.

Students' Perception about Practical Nature of Tourism Curriculum

The study assessed the perception of students concerning the practical nature of the Tourism curriculum to ascertain general acceptance among students. Out of the 20 students that were interviewed, 30% disagree that the Tourism curriculum was practical whereas 25% strongly disagree. Moreover, 15% each strongly agree, agree or remained neutral about the practical nature of the Tourism curriculum.

The responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Students' Perception about Practical Nature of Tourism Curriculum

Practical Nature of Tourism Curriculum	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3	15
Agree	3	15
Neutral	3	15
Disagree	6	30
Strongly Disagree	5	25
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The findings from the assessment of students' perception concerning practical nature of Tourism curriculum demonstrate that majority of students (55%) disagree or strongly disagree that the Tourism curriculum was practical enough to enhance their training in core hospitality which can make them venture into small tourism businesses in future. This finding is in line with Ezeuduji, Chibe and Nyathela (2017) assertion that hospitality students in South Africa had concerns relating to inadequacy of hospitality curriculum to address their study needs and prospects for the future.

Challenges Faced By Students in Tourism Education

The study also attempted to identify the challenges that confront students in tourism education at the two universities. Out of 20 students interviewed, 45% identified limited practical training opportunities as the major challenge faced in tourism education. In addition, 30% mentioned lack of specialization as the main challenge whereas the remaining 25% stated inadequate collaboration between education and enterprise. The responses are depicted in Table 2.

The research found that the leading challenge faced by tourism students is limited practical training opportunities. This is supported by Akoglan-Kozak (2009) and Asian Development Bank (2019) who identified that lack of practical skill development is a challenge encountered by students studying tourism and hospitality.

Table 2 Challenges Faced By Students in Tourism Education

Challenges Faced by Students	Frequency	Percentage
in Tourism Education		
Lack of Specialization	6	30
Inadequate Collaboration	5	25
between Education and		
Enterprise		
Limited Practical Training	9	45
Opportunities		
Total	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research basically assessed hospitality entrepreneurial modules offered in Tourism programs in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the curriculum of Tourism programs of two traditional Universities were assessed to determine the core hospitality modules included in the curriculum. The drawn conclusion from the research is that curriculum for the two universities focused more on theoretical training and devote little or no attention to practical skill development. This means that core hospitality courses that can inspire entrepreneurship like food and beverages management, front office management, and housekeeping management remain absent from Tourism curriculum of the two tertiary institutions in Ghana. As a result, tourism education must incorporate courses that develop the skills of students so they can possibly start small businesses within the industry as entrepreneurs.

Therefore, in relation to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

- It is recommended that Tourism curriculum at the various universities is reviewed to include core hospitality courses like food and beverages, front office, housekeeping management, and event planning and management. This is essential in tourism education because it will foster skill development and entrepreneurial mindset among tourism students.
- Also, tourism education should focus more on practical training and offer applied opportunities to students to further develop skills and competencies for future endeavours.

- Lastly, Tourism education should collaborate more with enterprise to ensure alignment between theory and practice.

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