



Perceptions Towards the Influence of Curriculum on the Quality of Training in Hospitality Management; A Case of University of Eldoret and Kenya Utalii College, Kenya

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Abstract

Every graduate hope to secure a job after school, but this is not usually the case as recently, employers are now considering a lot of factors before hiring. Studies have shown that employers prefer hospitality graduates from Kenya Utalii College (KUC) as compared to other learning institutions. Kenya Utalii graduates represent about 20% of the hotel employees in Kenya. There are more than 200 institutions offering hospitality programmes in Kenya. This being the case Kenya Utalii still has a bigger percentage of graduates on the job market. The researcher carried out the research study to establish why there is a preference of graduates from Kenya Utalii College by employers. The all-round educational quality theory by David Kolb, (1984) and behavioral learning theory by John Watson, (1913) guided the study. This study was qualitative in nature and employed a narrative research design. The respondents consisted of 10 graduates and 8 lecturers from the University of Eldoret and Kenya Utalii College in Nairobi. The target population was hospitality graduates and hospitality lectures from UoE and KUC. The sample size comprised of 18 respondents and these were 5 graduates from each institution and 4 lecturers from each institution. The study utilized purposive and snowball sampling techniques to obtain the sample size. The study utilized interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. The interviews were conducted on the graduates while the lecturers were involved in focused group discussions. Data collected was coded and organized to search for patterns and themes which helped to interpret it. The results were aimed at assisting hospitality institutions in Kenya to offer quality training thereby producing quality graduates who are suitable for the job market. The finding indicated that curriculum is one of the key factors towards provision of quality training in hospitality management. A reviewed curriculum remains relevant as it comprises of current knowledge and skills that is in use in the industry today. Collaborations between learning institutions and the industry leads to better formulation of the curriculum. The industry shared ideas and knowledge of what is happening in the industry. This enabled institution to draft a curriculum that is industry based. The study concluded that through offering quality training graduates acquired skills and knowledge that is needed in the industry. This ensured that graduates secure employment in the industry easily.

Keywords: Institutions, Curriculum, Hospitality, Graduates and Training

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is growing fast globally (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013). This growth has led to the demand for hotel workers. Colleges offering hospitality programme have also increased in numbers, to accommodate all the students who are enrolling for hospitality courses. The success of the industry has led to the urge to come up with a good

curriculum which will produce a work force equipped with the required skills for the industry (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). In contrast, documented studies show a gap between what is taught in the learning institutions and the skills required in the job market. According to Morrison and Nguyen, (2013) the current hospitality course is not able to produce the skills needed now, and in the future.

There is a wide variation between employers and the learning institutions regarding the qualities' a graduate should possess to secure employment in the job market (Nachmias, Paddison & Mortimer, 2014; Gebbels & Goss Turner, 2019). Recently employers have started to consider the institution that an individual attained their education from before hiring them. Gacohi & Chepchieng (2017) state that; some of the considerations that employers are making, are value of education provided to a graduate.

A study done by the university world news (2015) showed that industry leaders are checking the legibility of institutions among other measurements including the duration an institution has been in existence and the programs it specializes in. Institutions should strive to uphold their certification by offering high quality course work, qualified lecturers, and employment-based courses thereby producing graduates who are skilled for the industry and win employers trust (University World News, 2015).

Currently, there exists a gap between the expectation of employers and the hospitality professionals and the training offered in colleges and universities in Kenya (Gursoy, Swanger, 2012). The industry is doubtful of graduates meeting the market expectation; this limits their future inspirations of securing jobs. Despite this gap the country receives a lot of tourists. To offer good service to these tourists, the host country needs to have people who have hospitality skills. This reflects on high learning institutions' training in the hospitality management, and the strategies of training that the institutions adopt to produce graduates for the job market. The demand for hospitality services has increased, in response to these increment Kenyan colleges and universities strive to improve their hospitality curricula.

The world expects higher education to provide knowledge, wisdom and solve the shortcomings it encounters (Ryan, Dillane & Flood, 2021). Since the world is evolving fast, high education curricula easily become irrelevant. This creates a mismatch between what is taught and what is needed in the industry. Universities need to revise their content to avoid becoming certificate awarding institutions with no values. Curricula can be regarded as instructional practices, learning experiences and assessment that enhances learner's growth in knowledge and skills (Tanner & Tanner, 2007). This means that curricula should have content that empowers learners with long lasting skills needed in the industry. Taylor, (2016) noted that curricula should be useful, flexible, cover many fields and be updated to give the skills needed by students to cope with future challenges. Having seen that curriculum is essential in producing quality graduates, this study reviewed the curricula for University of Eldoret and that of Kenya Utalii College. Hospitality education and its curriculum assessment has been studied widely. These studies tend to pay attention to employers' perception and only a few consider the education providers and those who receive it.

Most hospitality departments are now reviewing their curriculum to assess areas that need additional information to ensure that they offer what is needed. Recently there has been an increase in regular industry contacts where they visit classrooms or take part in the education programs (Lever & Withiam, 1998). Gursoy and Swanger (2012) categorized hospitality education according to the beliefs of hospitality professionals

and identified the gaps between perceptions and current curriculum. He came up with a model of hospitality curriculum programs for high learning business institutions.

Lefever and Withiam, (1998) did a curriculum review to investigate the perceptions of the industry towards the hospitality education. The results showed that the hospitality educators believe that graduates are highly motivated and have expectations of working in the industry but this is not the case. Li and Kivela (1998) went a step further and found that there exists a difference between the hotel manager's and the students' perceptions of the relevance of possessing skills suited for careers in the industry.

Curriculum development is a continuous process and it involves various stakeholders; they include the subject experts, practitioners, regulators and alumni and employers in the hospitality industry. It is the responsibility of the hospitality department to establish and sustain good ties with all stakeholders who are involved in developing the curriculum. It might be established that a good curriculum will result in production of graduates with skills needed in the job market. Dopson and Tas (2004) said that the first step in curriculum development was establishing the composition of the curriculum in order for it to stay current given the changing nature of the industry. The industry's advice is important in guiding the hospitality department in the formulation of the curriculum (Dopson & Tas, 2004). There is a predicted decline in hospitality management education with industry experience over the next 10 years. This prediction can be curbed by establishing a connection between the hospitality industry and the departments. This will develop a continuous positive attitude for the continuation of hospitality management program (Phelan, Mejia & Hertzman, 2013).

Barrows and Johan (2008) suggest that hospitality training is important for the success of the industry. They noted that student's perspective and teaching effectiveness were most frequently occurring articles. Barrows and Johan (2008) argued that students and faculty benefit from collaboration with the stakeholders in the formulation of a current curricula and also graduates get absorbed easily in the industry. They concluded that the hospitality faculty should focus on creating and delivering relevant programs to students and also strengthen associations with the industry itself.

To remain useful to the hospitality industry, research argues that curriculum needs to consider the activities and practices that are happening in the industry to be able to train what is relevant (Hein & Riegel, 2012; Ricci & Kay, 2012). The process entails department's inquiry and research into curriculum requirements of the programs and what is in the industry. To enable program evaluation, its characteristics take the form of a change in text or teaching methods. However, these changes require alterations to program courses through curriculum reviews.

Learning institutions should ensure that they offer quality education to students. This will enable them to secure jobs in the industry. Quality training will only be possible if the institutions are using relevant curriculum while training the students. Studies has shown that employers prefer hospitality graduates from Kenya Utalii College (KUC) as compared to other learning institutions. Kenya Utalii graduates represent about 20% of the hotel employees in Kenya. There are more than 200 institutions offering hospitality programmes in Kenya, Kenya Utalii has a bigger percentage of graduates on the job market (Nduini & Baum, 2021). This research wished to investigate the perceptions towards the influence of curriculum on quality training in hospitality management in the University of Eldoret and Kenya Utalii College in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative approach and utilized a narrative design. Interviews and focused group discussions were used to collect data. Validation in this study was checked by triangulation where the questions in the interviews were rephrased to appear different but basically asking the same information. The rephrased questions were used as topics for discussion in the focused group discussion. This was in an effort to see whether same issues will be raised by the respondents.

The research was carried out in the University of Eldoret in Eldoret and Kenya Utalii College in Nairobi, Kenya. The target population was the hospitality graduates and lecturers from the two learning institutions. The sample size comprised of 18 respondents and these consisted of 5 hospitality graduates from each institution and 4 hospitality lecturers from each of the two learning institutions. The interviews were carried out on the hospitality graduates who were selected by use of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling technique was used because these graduates had already left the institutions. Snowball sampling is useful when the potential participants are hard to find. Focused group discussion was employed on the hospitality lecturers; this was because it was easy to get the lecturers while at the learning institutions at once as opposed to the already graduated graduates. The lectures were selected by utilizing purposive sampling method. This method was useful when selecting participants who have the required traits. In this case the hospitality lecturers had the required traits which are knowledge about the hospitality curriculum.

The researcher assured the respondents that the information given was purely for educational purpose and was never to be used against them. This gave the respondents confidence to participate in the study. The researcher visited the two institutions at different times and also made appointments with the graduates at different times and collected data for a period of one month. The researcher was able to meet or the respondents some face to face while others participated in the interview through phone calls. Information gathered from the interview and focused group discussion was read and reread in an effort to put it to patterns or themes which would assist in data analysis. After data was arranged four themes were identified and were discussed. The themes included; curriculum themes, curriculum review and industry linkages.

RESULTS

The findings consist of the views given by the respondents during the interviews and during the focused group discussion. The following themes will be discussed separately;

- i. Curriculum themes
- ii. Curriculum review
- iii. Industry linkages

Curriculum themes

In simple terms curriculum is a description of what, why, how well students should learn in a systematic and intentional way. The curriculum helps educators to foster quality learning to students (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Bureau for Education, 2011). According to CEDEFOP, (2011) a curriculum entails activities used to design, organize and plan an education or training session, including definition of learning objectives, content, methods and materials as well as arrangements for training lecturers and trainers.

Curriculum themes are the concepts or the main ideas. Each individual semester has a theme that guides the whole course. This helps lecturers to know the boundaries of the content they are supposed to teach their students. Respondents had the following to say;

'Our curriculum is adequate; it offered students with the required knowledge which is useful in the hospitality industry. I think if you look at the curriculum itself it outlines different themes like marketing, production, service each semester has a different theme (Respondent F, Nile high learning institution, FGD)'.

The respondents also said that by having the themes it helped them to come up with courses which are derived from the themes. These courses are the ones that are now taught by the different lecturers. Another respondent from phoenix high learning had this to say about their curriculum;

'We rarely teach what people would want to know, our training is specific to the departments in the hotel, it mirrors the hotel and that is why we have a training unit where we mirror the hotel (Respondent C, Phoenix high learning institution, FGD)'.

Most of the respondents from the interviews said that the curriculum they undertook was adequate some had this to say;

'The curriculum gave me the skills required in the job market. We did more practical courses, we cooked, served made beds, cleaned kitchen utensils in the demonstration facilities in the school (Respondent 5, Phoenix high learning institution, interview)'.

'The curriculum gave us the best skills. I studied front office, and we learnt all that is needed in the front office. We were taught how to handle customers in whatever circumstances even if you are insulted by a customer remain calm. You have to smile and assume that the customer is always right and this helped to perform well in the industry (Respondent 2, Phoenix high learning institution, interview)'.

'The curriculum was wide and maybe to point out something which was not touched well is soft skills, which is teaching people to be aware of their selves as persons, attitudes and how to relate to one another. The curriculum for hospitality should also include soft skills which reflect on an individual (Respondent 7, Nile high learning institution, interview)'.

'To some extent the curriculum was alright but when it comes to practicals the department was not well equipped. Therefore, in terms of practicals we did not do much but the theory part they were well prepared. It is what we were taught that is making us survive out there with appositive attitude but if a person has a negative attitude, he will have rough time. So, to me the curriculum theory part was good only that the department should improve on the practical part (Respondent 8, Nile high learning institution, interview)'.

This shows that a good curriculum helps graduates acquire quality training and possess skills required in the job market. The institution should ensure they have a rich curriculum content which will ensure that graduates get absorbed immediately because of their acquired knowledge and skills.

These themes were being taught using various methods of teaching, it was the choice of the lecturer to choose the most appropriate method, however as Respondent G said in a focused group discussion;

'It depends on the topic you are teaching, if you are conducting practicals, you will use demonstrations and if you are giving theory then you can use lecture method'.

Another respondent shared this;

'It is difficult to single out one teaching method as being the best seeing that each and every method has its advantages and disadvantages. Basically, as my colleague have said it actually depends on the topic you are covering, it will guide on which method will help the students get the concept you wish to pass easily (Respondent E, Nile high learning institution)'.

The teaching method that should be used is one that is easy and appropriate to the topic under study. The lecturers should use teaching methods that are inclusive so that when they teach both the lecturer and the students feels as part and parcel of the learning process and this will guarantee good results.

Curriculum review

Curriculum review is the examination of academic programs in order to optimize student's learning experiences led by the academic staff who teaches the program (Taylor, 2021). Respondent A in a focused group discussion shared this about their curriculum review in their institution;

'We produce quality because we work in liaison with the industry. They tells us what is trending, currently we are doing curriculum review which is usually done as a policy after every 5 years. We send questionnaires to the industry they give us their input which is going to be put in the system. As you can see this is our structure (the respondent showed the researcher the structure in the computer) we are at the proposed ones the process is going on so when you look at these structures. You can see we are at it to ensure that our curriculum is relevant'.

Respondent D supported this and said;

'We try so much to modernize our training and keep our curriculum polished so that we give our students what is needed in the industry. I think the reason we do this is the fact that we include the industry in the process of review. Yesterday I had a link up with 5 managers as we were conducting oral exams for food and beverage course and because of this they ask relevant questions. They give you what is in the industry versus what you teach and this helps you to review you curriculum thoroughly'.

The aim of curriculum review and redevelopment is to enable student to learn what is needed and also to assess outcomes (Drake & Peacock, 2021). Curriculum review and enhancement is very important as it is a developmental process for both individuals and programme teams. It is fruitful if planned and executed well to improve communication and collaboration between staff this leads to a stronger programme team and identity.

Clearly it is evident that institutions should schedule time for their curriculum review to ensure that they are offering quality skills and knowledge to students. The world is changing rapidly and so an old curriculum becomes obsolete and the students who would train using such will be greatly disadvantaged when it comes to securing a job. The hospitality department should liaise with managers of the hotels so that they can share ideas on how to come up with a curriculum that will benefit both the students and the industry at large.

All curricula have a common goal which enabling students learn what is intended. Good curricula create and reflects culture and identity of an institution. Through the use of a good curriculum quality graduates will be produced who will leave a legacy in any industry they work in. It also makes learning consistent as there is a clear laid out strategy to be followed and it also provides measurable targets where by students can be tested to see how well they have captured the content (Bell, Rector & Washle, 2021). All these facts should challenge institutions to ensure that they have the best curriculum which comprises of knowledge that is updated.

Industry linkages

According to Shengjun Zhu, (2016) industrial linkages is defined as the contacts and flows of information and/ materials between two or more industrial sectors or firms. This concept is used in industrial and economic geography to show interim interdependence.

Respondents in FGD said the following in relation to institution and hospitality industry linkages;

'We should have a lot of support to have linkages to the industry. What happens is when you go to the industry and the industry wants to link with you, you just take their contacts but when you comeback it is over. But if there was a way, we could have a department that take cares of that so that they can follow up to make sure that the link continues and not wait for the next time you go to the industry for assessment (Respondent E, Nile high learning institution)'.

These linkages are the ones which will help institutions share ideas with people in the industry. This is beneficial to students because they can get jobs easily and also the hospitality departments can be updated on the current concepts when formulating their curriculum. The respondents agreed that in the area of industry linkage the institutions have not done their best, and hope that in future this trend would change for the better.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to assess the perceptions towards the influence of curriculum on quality training in hospitality management. The results conclude that, curriculum affects the quality of training offered to hospitality students. This consequently affects the quality of graduates that an institution produces. The study also found out that curriculum theme assisted trainers to plan their lectures and also know areas that they will teach. The industry is waiting for qualified workers. The hospitality departments have a responsibility of changing the mindset of the people in the industry.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that departments should review their curriculums to ensure that they offer relevant information. They should maintain collaborations and linkages with the industry; they will help in curriculum review by sharing ideas on what is happening in the industry. To offer quality training it is evident that a good curriculum should be used. The study suggests that hospitality departments should ensure that their curriculum is updated to ensure that the knowledge and skills they are delivering is current.

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