



Competency Development among Hospitality Graduates in Kenya: Assessing the Influence of Industry Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

The quality of Kenya's graduates continues to pose concerns with various stakeholders raising the red flag. Industry based learning has previously been used successfully to expose trainees to requisite job related experiences. In acknowledging the potential impact of industry based learning, this study assessed the influence of industry-based learning on competency development among hospitality graduates in Kenya. The study adopted the explanatory research design to examine the cause-effect relationships between industry based learning approaches and competency development. Both stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample 210 final year hospitality students. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaire for students. Data were cleaned for missing values and outliers upon which 191 cases were retained for analysis. Multiple regressions were used for data analysis. Among the key findings made were that all the three approaches namely internship, practicum and apprenticeship had positive and significant influences on competency development among hospitality graduates. The study concluded that Kenyan Universities offering hospitality education need to invest heavily on industry-based learning that will not only boost their training status but also expose students to realities of the industry expectations.

Key words: competency development, industry based learning, experiential learning, hospitality graduate.

INTRODUCTION

Kenya's hospitality industry remains among the core sectors in the service industry. However, like many other industries, this industry grapples with the challenge of maintaining a qualified and skilled workforce required to successfully address the changing customer needs. Concern is fast emerging on the inability of graduates in this industry to exhibit skills required to meet customer expectations (Alhelalat, 2015; Yang & Cheung, 2014). Attention is now turning towards hospitality education which is seen as an avenue that can be used to expose hospitality students to current and emerging trends in the industry as a whole.

The need to invest in hospitality education is hinged on the premise that the industry requires to have specialized and skilled manpower ready to handle the service orientation of this industry (Rahman, 2010). Delivery and evaluation of hospitality education is therefore taking centre stage with stakeholders sharing the view that the involvement of industry practitioners is paramount (Rahman, 2010). Rahman argues that industry practitioners being the experts possess the necessary experience that hospitality students require



LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have identified experiential learning as the panacea, to the glaring gaps in skills among hospitality graduates (Moscardo & Norris, 2004; Papamarcos, 2002; Ruhanen, 2005). Lashley and Rowson (2005) point out that, employers in the hospitality industry expect to bring on board graduates who are critical thinkers and more importantly, who have hands on experience. Maier and Thomas (2013) concur that in employing graduates with hands-on experience, the hospitality industry is bound to experience improved advancement and placement. While advocating for learning based on experience, Dilorenzo-Aiss and Mathisen (as cited in Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010) argue that industry based learning approaches such as internship programmes have the potential to not only prepare students in terms of career advancement, but also bring value to Universities and organizations in question. Industry based learning that imparts experiential skills to trainees continues to receive support from scholars. Gault et al. (2010) posit that industry based learning enhances undergraduate marketability and career preparation. Gault and colleagues argue that this approach to learning has a significant influence on job offers and compensation.

The urge to invest in hospitality education has permeated Kenya's colleges and Universities. Most Universities have designed and customized hospitality courses, giving them different names but targeting similar skills. Concerns are however being raised concerning the inability of Kenya's university graduates to meet the expectations of the job market. The cabinet secretary for interior security the Hon. Dr. Fred Matiangi has openly questioned the quality of students graduating from public universities in Kenya (Daily Nation, March 2017). He observes that employers are passing up opportunities of hiring graduates from public universities due to the mismatch between industry expectations and graduates' competencies.

The World Bank has also echoed concerns over the quality of university graduates. According to Business Daily Africa (2017), the World Bank is of the view that there exists disconnect between labour market needs in Kenya, and the ability of university graduates to meet them. The concerns over Kenya's university graduates to meet industry expectations have not escaped the attention of the President of the Republic of Kenya. According to the Presidential Strategic Communications Unit (PSCU, 2017), President Uhuru Kenyatta notes that universities in Kenya need to match industry skills expectations by working closely with industry stakeholders. This no doubt lays ground for industry-based learning.

Industry based learning is reported to have been incorporated in higher education in the early 1930s as is manifested through internship, practicum, apprenticeship, and volunteering among others (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Internship remains the most common industry based learning approach that empowers learners to connect theory with practice (Austin & Rust, 2015). Internship is a practical pedagogical approach that is conducted in periods that offer a practical orientation to training in order to impart job experience required for a given career progression or specific field (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013). Internship is widely used by industries in their efforts to meet their demands for skilled employees and managers (Austin & Rust 2015). Under the internship programme, student trainees identify learning targets, which they have to achieve. In so doing, the student trainees get exposure to job reality that they cannot experience in a classroom setting.



Practicum is the second industry based pedagogy that features in the discourse on industry-based pedagogy. Practicum is a structured and supervised approach to learning that seeks to impart work experience (Jones, 2016). Jones for instance points out that in the hospitality industry, faculty supervisors coordinate practicum, which is then directed by qualified site supervisors, and provides student trainees with the required professional preparation. Practicum has previously been used in hospitality education to integrate academic and technical as well as career education (Quantela, 2013; Yiu, & Law, 2012).

Apprenticeship constitutes the other industry-based pedagogy. According to apprenticeship framework online (2013), apprenticeship is a broader mix of learning undertaken in the workplace together with formal training acquired off the job. Students enrolled in the apprenticeship program are expected to acquire technical knowledge, personal and functional skills, and practical experience relevant to job expectations. In Kenya, apprenticeship is coordinated through the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) which ensures that equipment is pooled together, and up-to-date training is provided from a common perspective (DIT, 2007). The extant literature is inundated with studies showing the positive effects of apprenticeships in aspects such as better labour market outcomes, better job matches and higher wages (Parey, 2009; Quintini & Manfredi, 2009).

Another approach to learning that is industry based is voluntary service. Curtis and Lipsett (2009) observe that volunteering, as a concept has been made popular by the harsh economic climate that has made employers to look for industry specific skills among fresh graduates. Cappellari and Turati (2004) agree that volunteering accord graduates opportunities to develop specific skills and boost their employability. Graham (2007) affirms that besides contributing towards economic gains, volunteering also hones knowledge and skills commensurate with career progression. Volunteering has been associated with positive impacts that include health benefits (Yeung, Zhang, & Kim, 2018).

The array of studies documented clearly justify the need for industry based learning especially for hospitality graduates and more so considering that the industry expects graduates that have hands-on-experience. Questions however linger concerning the influence such learning approaches have on competencies that these graduates acquire. How for instance do internship, practicum, and apprenticeships in Kenya influence competency development in the hospitality industry? This study therefore explores the influence of industry-based learning on competency development among students undertaking the hospitality education programme in Universities in Kenya. The study conceptualizes that manipulation of industry based learning approaches has a direct influence on competency development (see figure 1).

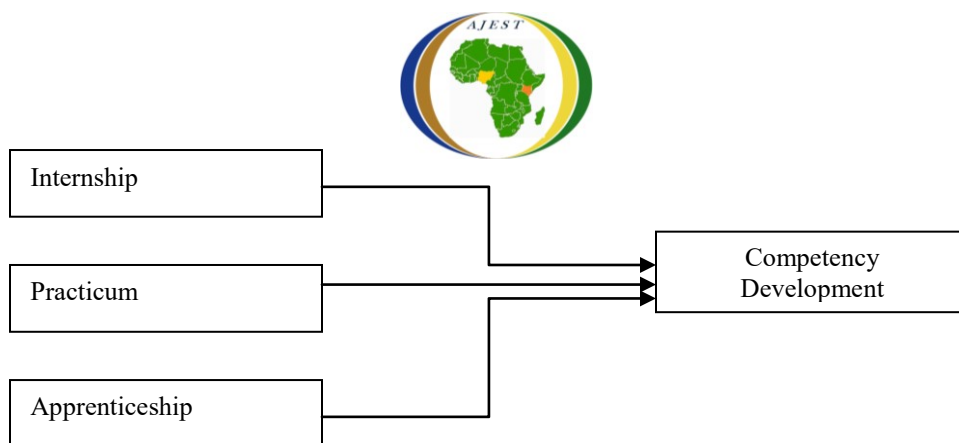


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in public Universities located in the western region of Kenya. There are eight public universities in the western region offering hospitality management. The criterion for inclusion was that the university in question offers a course in hospitality management. Consequently, hospitality management students from the eight universities comprised the target population. Choice of universities in the western region was based on the understanding that this region has an array of upcoming hotels that can provide the necessary atmosphere for experiential learning. The study was grounded in the post-positivist worldview, and therefore adopted the explanatory research design. Choice of the explanatory research design was informed by the fact that being a causal research, it allowed for identification of the extent and nature of the cause-and-effect relationships between industry-based learning approaches and competency development among hospitality graduates (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2012). The study employed a sample of 210 final year hospitality students drawn proportionately from a target population of 460 students in the sampled universities. Final year students were preferred because by this time they had undergone mandatory industrial training during their study.

The study-utilized data collected using a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) for students. The dependent variable for this study was competency development, which was measured using competency indicators for potential hospitality employees (Ehlers, 2005). The independent variables were the three commonly used industry based learning approaches namely; internship, practicum and apprenticeship. The variables were used basing on the emphasis put on them in the extant literature (Austin & Rust, 2014; Jones, 2016; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013).

Data were treated for missing values, and screened for univariate and multivariate outliers. Data were confirmed to be normally distributed with skewness and kurtosis values falling within acceptance range. The final sample comprised of 191 students. Linearity which is a precursor to regression was examined using correlation analysis for which the three industry based learning approaches were found to have positive correlations with competence development, an indication that regression analysis was possible. Multiple regression analysis was used to model competency development in the hospitality industry as a function of industry based learning.



RESULTS

This section presents the results of this study in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive Statistics Results

The descriptive analysis focused on establishing student's gender, frequency of industry based learning undertaken, their rating of experiences gained during industry based learning, and their awareness of types of industry based learning approaches. Table 1 reveals that 65.4% of the respondents were female while 34.6% were male. This is an indication that although most of the hospitality education students were female, the course also attracts males in good proportions. A majority (74.9%) indicated that they had attended industry based training twice. This shows that most of the universities expected students to be attached to an industry atleast twice during the course. A significant proportion of students (51.3%) rated industry based training as extremely relevant, while 42.9% found it very relevant. This is a clear manifestation that hospitality education students are aware of the importance of exposure to industry based learning. A majority (73.2%) were nevertheless aware of the various industry based training approaches indicating that universities in Kenya have taken cognizance of the potential inherent in industry based learning.

Table 1: Students Background Information

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	66	34.6
	Female	125	65.4
Frequency industry based learning undertaken	Once	11	5.8
	Twice	143	74.9
	Thrice	33	17.3
	More than three times	4	2.1
Rating of Industry based learning	relevant	11	5.8
	very relevant	82	42.9
	extremely relevant	98	51.3
Awareness of types of industry based training approaches	yes	139	73.2
	no	51	26.8

Inferential Statistics Results

Inferential analysis was conducted for purposes of affirming the influence of industry based learning on competency development among hospitality education graduates. Multiple regression analysis was the preferred inferential analysis statistic since it allows the influence of each independent variable to be determined when others are held constant. Correlation analysis results in Table 2 confirmed existence of linearity with positive correlations between internship and competency development ($r = 0.781$, $p < 0.05$); practicum and competency development ($r = 0.658$, $p < 0.05$); and between apprenticeship and competency development ($r = 0.793$, $p < 0.05$). This therefore paved way for multiple regression analysis.



Table 2: Testing linearity

		Apprenticeship	Internship	Practicum	Competency development
Apprenticeship	Pearson Correlation	1	.771**	.642**	.793**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Internship	Pearson Correlation	.771**	1	.710**	.781**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
Practicum	Pearson Correlation	.642**	.710**	1	.658**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
Competency development	Pearson Correlation	.793**	.781**	.658**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the regression model summary (Table 3) it was apparent that the three industry based learning approaches accounted for up to 70.7% (R-square = 0.707) of the variance in competency development among hospitality graduates. Moreover, the significant ANOVA output ($F_{3, 187} = 150.355$, $p < 0.05$) was testament that the model relating competency development to industry based learning was a good fit.

Table 3: Testing Model Fit

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	38.792	3	12.931	150.355	.000 ^b
Residual	16.082	187	.086		
Total	54.874	190			

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.841 ^a	.707	.702	.29326

b. Predictors: (Constant), Practicum, Apprenticeship, Internship

Influence of Industry Based Learning on Competency Development

The main aim of the study was to examine the influence of industry based learning on competency development in the hospitality industry in Kenya. Consequently, the study focused on the three conceptualized industry based approaches.

Influence of Internship on competency development in the Hospitality industry

First, internship was regressed against competency development. The multiple regressions analysis results in Table 4 revealed that internship had a positive and significant influence on competency development among hospitality graduates ($\beta = 0.350$, $p < 0.05$). The standardized β value of 0.350 indicated that a unit standard deviation increase in internship frequency has potential to improve competency development by 0.350 standard deviations.



Table 4: Influence of Industry based Learning on Competency Development

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	.379	.178			2.121	.035
Apprenticeship	.466	.067	.443		6.965	.000
Internship	.362	.072	.350		5.055	.000
Practicum	.107	.050	.125		2.168	.031

a. Dependent Variable: Competency development

Influence of Practicum on Competency Development in the Hospitality Industry

Secondly, competency development was regressed against practicum. The multiple regressions (Table 4) indicated that practicum also had a positive and significant influence on competency development among hospitality graduates ($\beta=0.125$, $p<0.05$). The β -value of 0.125 indicates that a unit standard deviation increase in practicum frequency was likely to result in a 0.125 standard deviations improvement in competency development.

Influence Apprenticeship on competency development

Finally, competency development was regressed on apprenticeship. The multiple regression analysis results (Table 4) confirmed that in the case of hospitality graduates in Kenya, apprenticeship was a positive and highly significant predictor of competency development ($\beta = 0.443$, $p<0.05$). A unit standard deviation increase in apprenticeship frequency has potential to improve competency development by 0.443 standard deviations. Besides, the t-value of 6.965 affirms that out of the three approaches, apprenticeship influences competency development the most.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

On the basis of the regression analysis results, Table 5 presents a summary of findings made.

Table 5: Summary of Findings

Aim	Inferential statistics	Findings
1. Influence of internship on competency development	$\beta = 0.350$, $p = 0.000$	Internship has a positive and significant influence
2. Influence of practicum on competency development	$\beta = 0.125$, $p = 0.031$	Practicum influences competency development positively and significantly
3. Influence of apprenticeship on competency development	$\beta = 0.443$, $p = 0.000$	Apprentice has a positive and highly significant influence.

Consequently, the following equation was used to model competency development in hospitality industry as a function of industry based learning.

$$\text{competency development} = 0.379 + 0.350 \text{ Internship} + 0.125 \text{ Practicum} + 0.443 \text{ Apprenticeship} + \epsilon$$

DISCUSSIONS

The study justifies the place for industry based learning approaches in hospitality education in public universities in Kenya. Such training should be designed in a way that can take cognizance of the core approaches that industry players use to engage trainees both in terms



of ‘minds on’ and ‘hands on’ activities. In establishing that internship as a learning approach influences competency development positively and significantly, the study adds to existing knowledge on the utility of internship, but from the Kenyan context. Internship has previously been identified as an approach that exposes students to a practical orientation that gives job experience (Zopiaties & Theocharous, 2013). Moreover, it has been recognized as an approach that hones up skills and leads to practical experience (Chang & Chu, 2009); as well as an avenue for gaining professional experience while at the same time, enhancing positive image for institutions (Thiel & Harthley, 1997). This study explicitly shows that internship also spurs the development of competencies that enable hospitality graduates to attain diverse experiences in real life hospitality settings.

The findings showing that practicum also influences competency development among hospitality graduates positively supports other findings that report practicum to be a practical approach with immense potential to empower students to showcase grasp of knowledge for real life settings (Jones, 2016). The implication is that universities could perhaps see it necessary to juxtapose the use of internship with that of practicum for purposes of maximizing competency development. Moreover, the study established that apprenticeship had a significantly bigger influence on competency development when compared to the other methods. This finding no doubt justifies the coordination of apprenticeships in Kenya through the directorate of industrial training (DIT, 2007). The point here is that apprenticeship is viewed as being extremely relevant to competency development among graduates. Universities and stakeholders may see it appropriate to enhance use of apprenticeship in hospitality education. With emerging concerns on the quality of Kenya’s graduates, the study concludes that it may be incumbent upon Kenyan universities to invest heavily in industry based learning in order to boost the quality of their training, and also expose students to the practical orientation of the labour market.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that industry-based learning is central to the development of competencies that can enhance hospitality graduates’ ability to cope with the expectations of the hospitality industry. Use of internship, practicum and apprenticeships impacts positively on development of requisite competencies, and should therefore be high on Universities training agenda. Universities and stakeholders may see it appropriate to enhance use of apprenticeship in hospitality education on account of its highly significant effect on competency development. Considering the thorny debate regarding the quality and capability of university graduates to fill the required occupational skills gap, the study recommends that: it may be incumbent upon Kenyan universities to invest heavily in industry based learning in order to boost the quality of their training, and also produce managers who are well informed on industry expectations and occupational standards. The analyzed demographics clearly show that efforts are in place to expose students to industry based training. Perhaps what is required is for universities to bring on board industry players for purposes of pointing out expectations that should be factored in curriculum design. The present situation where technical and vocational education graduates are preferred across industries should be a wake up call for Universities to change their training approaches to fit in industry standards.



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