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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMPOWERING THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE JOBS IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN INDUSTRY AND GRADUATES USING THEIR RESEARCH PRODUCTS

***Adam Issah**

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Tamale Technical University, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The problem of unemployment among catering graduates from the Technical Universities and Polytechnics is the lack of information on areas and/ or possibility of collaboration and partnerships with the hospitality industry to produce and market their research products. The main purpose of the study was to obtain information to empower graduates from hospitality institutions on areas of collaboration to address unemployment. The study design employed in the research was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The study revealed that majority (56.5%) of the sampled graduate respondents was female and 43.5% were male. The respondent Managers/ Manageresses of hotels were 73% males and 27% females. About 52% of the Catering graduates sampled were employed whilst 48% were not. However, out of the 52% graduates employed, only one-quarter self-employed (i.e. setup and operating their own facilities), the rest 75% worked as employees in other agencies. Only 15% of respondent Managers/ Manageresses of hotels were ever approached by catering graduates for partnership or collaboration. About 17% of catering graduates sampled ever made attempts seeking partnership with Managers/ Manageresses of hotels within the metropolis even though 70% of the practitioners were willing and ready for their partnership. Awareness level among Managers/ Manageresses of the hospitality facilities about products of final year catering students was low, only 36% whilst 64% were unaware of such products. The majority (76%) of Managers/ Manageresses of hospitality facilities sampled were never invited to final year catering students' products exhibitions. Collaboration between the Tamale Technical University and the hospitality industry players was good at time of the research, but was not holistic enough to engender jobs creation for graduates. The study revealed that, overall, 74% of final year students picked their research problems just to meet the requirements of the academic work but had not considered any future enterprise creation from them. About 69% of catering graduates 'agree' that their research products could compete well with similar products on the market; 22% 'disagree' whilst 9% 'neither agree nor disagree'. Seventy eight per cent trusted in their products being accepted by industry and 22% 'neither agree nor disagree'. Ten per cent of Managers/ Manageresses sampled were willing to collaborate with graduates by offering them work space to produce their products for retail elsewhere; 4% willing to collaborate by offering them work space to produce and as well retail the products; and 86% willing to collaborate by contributing resources to commercialise the research products. Approximately 83% of graduates mentioned lack of capital preventing them from starting their own enterprises and 13% mentioned lack of technical support. A total of 87% of the graduates apart from the commercial banks had no knowledge of agencies established to support graduates intending to set up their own enterprises. The study recommends that Tamale Technical University should re-strategise their collaboration plans with hospitality operators in the metropolis in a manner that will engender job creation for its graduates and strengthen the partnership by involving practitioners more during exhibitions; the university must begin to identify potential research products and use them to initiate start up enterprises using the graduates; government agencies set up to support graduates interested in operating their own enterprises must make the agencies prominent on tertiary institutions campuses.

Key words:

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INTRODUCTION

Contextually empowerment takes different meanings; across various disciplines, i.e. in economics, education, health, governance, social life or gender, etc. Empowerment can happen at the individual, community, national or international level.

***Corresponding author: Adam Issah**

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Faculty of Applied Science and Technology, Tamale Technical University, Ghana.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2011) defines empowerment as:

An increase in the capacity of people to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.

Empowerment has three key elements: information, education and knowledge. Information is the act or fact of informing i.e. facts told, read, or communicated; it is knowledge acquired through research; or factual data. Knowledge is an awareness of some facts, information acquired through discoveries. Information is a means of resolving uncertainties and therefore vital for many reasons including alerting people to take advantage of existing opportunities, access services, and to bargain deals which will inure to their benefit. When people obtain relevant information timely it helps them initiate actions to enhance their well-being. This study sought to provide information critical to changing the lives of many, particularly catering graduates. Unemployment across the different regions of the world is the recent biggest threat to global security, peace and stability; especially the fragile democracies in the Africa region (ILO, 2014; Ianchovichina, Mottaghi & Devarajan, 2015). Among the major underlining causes of 'the Arab spring' was unemployment, particularly among the youth (Michalief, 2010). The unemployment problem in Ghana is blamed on many factors including inadequate and slow growth of the economy; lack of synergy between tertiary education syllabi and skill needs of industry, leading to churning out of unemployable graduates. Others are the shift in focus by tertiary institutions from their core mandate regarding the calibre of graduates to train; etc. While these factors are true for majority of the tertiary graduates churned out yearly; for instance, several thousand graduates come out of school obtaining degrees or Diplomas in marketing, Secretariatship and Management, Business Administration, Accounting; a rhetoric question one has to ask is: where are the enterprises to engage these graduates?

Problem Statement

The problem of unemployment among catering graduates from the Technical Universities and/ or Polytechnics is the lack of information on areas and/ or possibility of establishing linkages and partnerships with the hospitality industry to produce and market products from their research project works. It was against this background that this study sought to investigate and unravel vital information regarding industry practitioners' willingness and possible areas of partnerships as a means to empower young graduates to partner hospitality industry players to create new enterprises and curb unemployment.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to obtain information to empower graduates from hospitality institutions on areas of collaboration to address unemployment.

The specific objectives of the research study were:

- To determine the willingness of hospitality industry Practitioners to support in promoting catering graduates research products.
- To assess efforts of catering graduates in seeking partnership with industry to market their research products.
- To determine hospitality Practitioners awareness level about catering graduates research products.
- To determine catering graduates' awareness level about agencies mandated to support enterprises creation.

- To determine potential areas of collaboration between catering graduates and industry.

Literature

The Situation of the Unemployment Problem in Ghana

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (cited in ACSET, 2016), in sub-Saharan Africa youth unemployment rate is approximately 12%; marginally lower than the global figure of 12.4%. Nonetheless, Africa leads in the League of Nations with the working poor, where significant number of the working population earn less than US\$2 a day. Millions of Africa's graduates who complete tertiary institutions each year lack the opportunities to be employed. ISSER cited in GNA (2017) approximately 90% of graduates from Ghana's public tertiary institutions do not get employment within the first year of completion; and for majority them, it may take not less than ten years to get employed.

A Review on Ghana's Job Creation Initiatives

The 'Seven (7) Year Development Plan of 1963 to 1970' under Nkrumah of the first republic created the Workers' Brigade programme; 'Operation Feed Yourself' and National Reconstruction Programme between 1972- 78 of the National Redemption Council; and between 1982- 93 government sought to implement the National Mobilisation Programme. Each of these programmes which each the administrations planned and tried implementing were aimed at solving the problem of unemployment. Because these programmes could not solve all of Ghana's unemployment problems, in 1983 government in an attempt to achieve economic liberalization adopted the Economic Reform Programme (ERP), following which the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was also adopted in 1985 which saw a privatisation of inefficient state and businesses partly owned by government. Unfortunately, the latter two programmes with all their good intentions instead of creating jobs rather turned out to worsen the unemployment situation. This saw the introduction of the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) through the establishment of community projects aimed at creating employment for rural households in the northern part of Ghana, for low income workers, unemployed and vulnerable urban households, and for retrenched workers. Part of this was the provision of credit to women operating small enterprises and others in small-scale mining (MELR, 2014).

Vision 2020 meant to propel Ghana to achieve a middle income country status and also to build employment promotion interventions to reduce high levels of unemployment and vulnerable employment implementation started in the mid 1990s. In the year 2000, a number of job creation projects and programmes such as expansion of Skills Training and Employment Placement Programme (STEPP), National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), the Graduate Entrepreneurial & Business Support Scheme (GEBSS), Microfinance and Small Loans Centre, Rural Enterprises Programme, and Young Entrepreneurs Programme, were being implemented (GSS, 2015; MELR, 2014). The job creation initiatives by various administrations since from the year 2000 have failed to include measures which will adequately address graduates needs.

Regrettably, all of these efforts have not been able to address the challenges of unemployment in Ghana. It is high time a new approach was adapted to deal with the problem and that is, through creation of partnerships between skilled graduates and their respective industries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study design employed in the research was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. Tamale Metropolitan Assembly area is where the research was conducted as a case study. Tamale Metropolis is a cosmopolitan community with a total population of 360,569 (World Population Review, 2018). There were 74 hotels/ guest houses in Tamale during the research data collection period (GTA, 2017). The study population comprised of two subsamples: Managers/ Manageresses of hospitality facilities, and Catering graduates. A purposive sample of 24 Managers/ Manageresses of hotels was selected by simple random out of a total of 74. A subsample of 23 graduates who had completed National Service was selected by snowballing method. Two separate questionnaires, one for each group were used to collect the data. The questionnaires for graduates were administered in two ways: one-on-one or face-to-face and others whom the study had no other way of reaching, via telephone. Some of the questionnaires administered to hotel Managers/ Manageresses was self-administered and others face-to-face. Questionnaires were used because they were comparatively better at providing comprehensive information, relatively cheap, quick and come as more efficient to administer. The study data was analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 computer software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that majority (56.5%) of the sampled graduate respondents was female and 43.5% were male. This is comparatively diametrical to the proportion of respondent Managers/ Manageresses of hotels, that is, 73% males as against only 27 per cent females. Approximately 52 per cent of the Catering graduates sampled were employed whilst 48% were not. However, out of the 52% graduates employed, only one-quarter self-employed (i.e. setup and operating their own facilities), the remaining 75 per cent worked as employees in other agencies. The goal of tertiary level technical/ vocational education is to produce low to middle-level manpower to feed industries deriving the economy of Ghana. Having run and trained graduates to meet this objective for several years and the realization of challenges and needs of industry not being met, educational reforms are being implemented towards making graduates entrepreneurial. However, the lack of derive by catering graduates to make efforts to partner with practitioners is partly responsible for the high rate of unemployment among them. The situation where an overwhelming majority of catering graduates was employees of other agencies defeats the objective of current focus of our tertiary level technical or vocational training institutions of equipping them to become entrepreneurial. This was also affirmed from the results that, final year students' when conceptualizing their research problems, majority did not consider the future use of the end products of the research to create enterprises. Hospitality Practitioners responding to the question of whether any catering graduates ever approached to partner with them, only 15 per cent said yes. Majority (85 per

cent) were never approached by catering graduates to discuss a possible partnership or collaboration. The study also revealed that an overwhelming majority (approximately 83 per cent) of catering graduates sampled said they never made attempts seeking partnership with Managers/ Manageresses of hotels within the metropolis to produce and market their research products even though 70 per cent of practitioners were willing and ready for their partnership. Even though from the study results, the hospitality industry Practitioners sampled were willing to go into partnership with catering graduates. What these revelations demonstrate clearly is that the graduates lack a critical mix of attitudes of initiating, risk-taking intelligence, collaborative minds set, and capacity to seek, find and seize opportunity to better their life; which attitudes Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group cited in Zhao (2014) termed as entrepreneurial mindset.

The awareness level among Managers/ Manageresses of the hospitality facilities about products of final year catering students was low, only 36 per cent whilst majority i.e. 64 per cent were unaware of products of catering graduates they could retail in their facilities. This was strongly supported by the fact that majority (76 per cent) of Managers/ Manageresses of hospitality facilities sampled were never invited to final year catering students' products exhibitions. This finding corresponds with the high level of same respondents being unaware of students' products. This clearly indicates one of two things: 1) a very poor or the lack of collaboration between industry academia i.e. the Hospitality and Tourism management department; or 2) a neglect of an aspect of collaboration/ partnership between academia and industry. Seventy per cent of Managers/ Manageresses interviewed were willing to collaborate if they were approached by graduates. Nevertheless, a significantly high proportion i.e. 30 per cent was unwilling. Institutional collaboration, particularly between academia and industry are very important when it comes to creating opportunities of jobs for graduates. Hospitality, Catering and Institutional Management of Tamale Technical University over the years has collaborated very well with industry, specifically in the area of training, where undergraduates go to industry on attachment. A perusal of documentation in the form of letters from hospitality industry players seeking to collaborate with the department reveal at least eight (8). However, regarding the type of collaboration with potential to create jobs has been almost non-existent as seen from the per cent of players who were ever invited to the annual exhibitions of students' products. This is affirmed by high level of practitioners' unawareness about graduates' products they could retail.

The study sought to understand what considerations final year hospitality, catering and institutional management students' take into account when picking research problems. It was revealed that, overall, 74 per cent picked the research problem just to meet the requirements of their academic work without any consideration of future enterprise creation; close to 22 per cent 'disagree'; whereas about 4 per cent neither 'agree' nor 'disagree'. Approximately 69 per cent of catering graduates 'agree' that their research products could compete well with similar products on the consumer market; 22 per cent 'disagree' whilst close to 9 per cent 'neither agree nor disagree'. Regarding graduates perception about the potential of their research products being used as a bargain to partner hospitality industry practitioners, 78 per cent 'agree', in other words, they trusted in their products being accepted by

industry. None harboured any mistrust in the potential of their products potential, however, those of them who 'neither agree nor disagree' were also significant (i.e. 22 per cent).

There were three specific areas of possible partnership identified practitioners are willing to engage with graduates as follows:

- A 10 per cent of Managers/ Manageresses sampled are willing to partner graduates by offering them work space to produce their products for retail elsewhere;
- Approximately 4 per cent are willing to partner with graduates by offering them work space to produce and retail their products; and
- Majority i.e. 86 per cent are willing to partner graduates by contributing resources to commercialise their research products.

Approximately 83 per cent mentioned lack of finances preventing graduates from starting their own enterprises whereas only 13 per cent mentioned lack of technical support. However, 87 per cent of the graduates had no idea about the existence of government funding agencies established to support graduates intending to set up their own enterprises, clearly demonstrating their lack of entrepreneurial drive.

Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to obtain information on possible partnership between catering graduates and hospitality industry players in promoting their research products and creating jobs.

Based on the study findings, it safe to conclude:

- Industry players are willing and ready to partner graduates in promoting their research products.
- The Hospitality, Catering and Institutional Management graduates are not being entrepreneurial despite that students are taught entrepreneurship for at least two semesters as part of their study.
- There is some level of collaboration between the department of hospitality and tourism management at the Tamale Technical University industry, but this collaboration had nothing much in terms creating job opportunities for graduates.
- Graduates had no knowledge about agencies that are mandated to support them create their own enterprises.

Recommendations

- Training institutions should enhance their collaborations with industry by exploring ways of linking their students and industry through marketing their research products.
- Government agencies set up to support graduates wishing to start their own enterprises must do vigorous campaign on various tertiary campuses to better inform students before their graduation.
- Graduates must change their attitudes by exploring their environment creatively to enhance their chances of finding jobs or possible partnership.
- Training institutions must begin to identify potential student research products and initiate start up enterprises using the students which will also serve as entrepreneurial mentorships for students.

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