AN EVALUATION OF STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF HOSPITALITY AS A CAREER CHOICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The students' perception of hospitality is expected to move from negativity to positivity. To date the enrolment into hospitality and related courses are still debatable and below expectation. This study examines and evaluates the effect of personality traits, socio-economic status and employment status on choosing hospitality as a career with the aim of finding solutions to why students develop negative perception of hospitality programme and to improve students' enrolment into hospitality and related programme. After reviewing related literature, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed to 200 students, out of which 60% were from hospitality courses and 40% from hospitality related courses. The participants were selected through purposive random sampling. The data collected were analyzed using mixed strategy i.e. quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. In conclusion, the results of the study showed that the effect of personality traits and employment status have a strong influence on students' negative perception of hospitality while socio-economic status has mild influence. The research finds students positive perception due to five motivational factors as provided by the industry. The motivational factors include self-actualisation, job opportunity, field attractiveness, ease of study and scholastic achievement. On the other side the study also out line some of the reasons for negative perception as long hours out of the normal work schedule and relatively low pay, low status, low employee retention, job dissatisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors and high turnover that appear common in the industry as the major causes of setback in the industry.

Keywords: Students, Perception, Hospitality, Personality Trait, Socio-Economic, Employment Status, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Research has identified students' negative perceptions about hospitality and related programmes, some students were found to be ashamed of associating themselves with the programme, others believe it is a threat to their personality and career (Okoli, 2010). As graduate of hospitality related programmes are viewed as individuals who cooked or serve food and drinks in the restaurant; work in the hotels where service to the customer is always the main duties without any chance of occupying managerial positions or future progression. However, development of the hospitality industry creates greater employment opportunities than imagined, as it is often criticised as generating low-skilled and low-paying jobs that offer little job satisfaction, create stagnation and lack career progression (Getz, 1994) poor attitudes (Goodal, 1987). Consequently, the hospitality industry has a reputation for high staff turnover and a waste of trained personnel. In addition to these, the level of student's enrolment into hospitality and related programs has not been encouraging and does not reflect the position of the industry in providing employment opportunities. The rationale of the work is to measure the extent of students' voices to identify why students' develops negative perception to hospitality as a career choice. Richardson, (2009) identified some argument such as "young transient workforce, low levels of pay and formal qualifications, high level of female student, part time and casual workers, a high proportion of low skilled jobs, a large number migrant staff, poor utilisation of students' labour and high levels of staff turnover" as the major reasons

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for students' negative perception in tourism and hospitality industry. Research conducted by Broadbridge, *et al* (2006) identifies similar factors that result to students' negative perception to tourism and hospitality industry. The authors found long and unsociable hours; low pay, low status and high staff turnover are the key factors that account for students' negative perceptions in tourism and hospitality industry, which they generate during the students' work experience programme. Roney and Oztin (2007) share the same view that, tourism and hospitality industry is being criticised for providing primarily low skilled and low paying jobs. However, a study conducted by Lee, Kim, and Lo (2008) contradicted the other studies. The research found a positive perception due to five motivational factors as provided by the industry. The motivational factors include, "self-actualisation, job opportunity, field attractiveness, ease of study and scholastic achievement" are the reasons viewed as part of the positive perception so far identified.

This argument has generated a lot of write-ups since early nineties and will continue until the possible problem is rooted and tackled. Most if not all the studies focused on the employee/employers' aspect of the problem and fail to touch the students' attitudinal and enduring factors, such as the effect of peer groups, personality traits and the societal problem that view hospitality industry as dirty business, that encourage prostitution and alcoholism. Other possible causes may be because of non-professional running the top management positions in the industry and are looking the professional as inferior (Broadbridge, *et al*, 2006 Okoli, 2010, Richardson, 2009). The research presents a challenge not only to the researcher, but also to all hospitality professionals, this is because there are little or no research made on the subject matter, leaving the students, teachers, and professionals of the industry, to use their creativity, initiative and managerial ingenuity to formulate studies that will not only stand the taste of time, but ensure a steady development of hospitality programme and the industry in general. This paper is an attempt to bridge the gap highlighted while acknowledging that there are still other possible areas to venues to bring to light the positive side of the profession capable to contributing to the needed change presently been viewed by outsiders regarding the hospitality industry at large . Therefore, the paper will be concerned with setting the ball rolling with identifying the general feelings of the students on the relevant programmes in order to contribute ways by which others can be drawn into the profession and make the best out of their potentials.

Conceptualisation of Hospitality

The practice of hospitality is dated back to ancient Greek as argued by some scholars, notably, Jacques (2003) who argued that the practice started with the ancient civilisations of what the Greeks referred to as guests offering, a gesture shown to visitors since early biblical times. The Greeks and Romans demonstrate this gesture by providing shelter to travellers on government business in houses and other resting places. An example of such house is, in the words of Jacques (2002:4) Thermal Bath:

> *"The Romans were the first to develop thermal baths in England, Switzerland and the Middle East. Later still, caravanserais appeared, providing a resting place for caravans along Middle Eastern routes... Monasteries and Abbeys were the first establishments to offer refuge to travellers on a regular basis. Religious orders built inns, hospices and hospitals to cater for those on the move".*

To compliment this fact, Dittmer (2002:1) states that:

> "The word hospitality has ancient roots dating from the earliest days of roman civilisation. It is derived from the Latin verb 'hospitare', meaning 'to receive as a guest.' other related words from the same Latin root, include hospital, hospices and hostel. In each of these, the principal meaning focuses on a host who receives, welcomes, and caters for the needs of people temporarily away from their homes. The phrase to receive as a guest implies a host prepared to meet a guest's basic requirements. The requirements of a guest are traditionally food, drinks and lodging or shelter".

Another scholar, Jones (2002) viewed that, the term hospitality has emerged as the way caterers would like their industry to be perceived, it conveys an image that reflects the tradition of service that goes back over many centuries to the earliest days of Inn-keeping. Thus, in 1987, the Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management Association, the industry's professional association changed the name of its journal to Hospitality, likewise in 1991, the British Hotelier, Restaurateurs and Caterers Association the UK industry's main trade association changed its name to the British Hospitality Association. The term has also been adopted by educators, so that most, if not all, universities and colleges now offer courses in hospitality management. In essence, hospitality is made up two distinct services the provision of overnight accommodation for people staying away from home and the provision for people eating away from home or not preparing their own meals. Both of these services meet very basic human needs, the need to sleep and the need to eat. The hospitality industry includes all businesses that provide food, beverages, and accommodation services. This includes restaurants, pubs, bars and clubs, contract catering, and hospital services. Traditionally hospitality is classified under tourism industry. Okoli (2010) asserts that while tourism is primarily concerned with travels and leisure, hospitality deals with accommodation, catering services and entertainment. Conceptually, hospitality is an important component of tourism and has traditionally been situated as a subsector of the tourism sector. Economic growth in most countries around the world, with economic prosperity contributing to dramatic changes in social habits has transformed hospitality to an industrial sector and has indeed, become a global industry (Abhajeet, 2010 and Dittmer, 2002). Accelerated growth in global demand for tourism products has also caused a rapid growth of hotels and restaurants worldwide (Okoli, 2010). From the foregoing therefore, there have been the tourism sector and the hospitality sector both providing tangible and intangible element of products and services to the people (Fosket, *et al*, 2003). These sectors though distinct, are mutually inclusive and symbiotic. The generic closeness between the two sectors has informed the contemporary approach towards an integral tourism and hospitality industry (Okoli, 2010). Fosket, *et al*. (2003:8-9) outline some of the importance of hospitality industry.

> "The travel, tourism and hospitality are the world's largest industry. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the annual gross output of the industry is greater than the Gross National product (GNP) except the United States and Japan, worldwide, the tourism and hospitality industry employs over 112 million people".

The industry is considered to be among the economic value drivers in the world especially in the United Kingdom, along with the logistics and financial services. The number of hotels, restaurants and other hospitality units are growing rapidly. According to Oxford Economics; the UK core hospitality economy today has an estimated turnover of ninety billion Pounds

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(£90billion) to the UK economy in Gross Domestic Product (GVA. wages and profits) terms, and directly contributes 2.44 million jobs at least 1 in 13 of total jobs, and over 1.2millions jobs. This makes the hospitality economy the UK's 5th biggest industry in terms of employment, ahead of other broad sectors such as financial services, transport and communication, constructions, engineering and similar in scale to education (BHA, 2010). Despite this eminent contribution, the industry still lack some act of professionalism and is facing a lot of drawbacks, as MacGinn and Binder (1991) outline that, one of the most disturbing problems is lack of professionals running the affairs of the industry which in most cases have resulted to inefficiency and casting a negative image of the industry which in some instance cast doubt in the minds of upcoming ones who will take over the running of the industry. This inculcates a sense of disregard to the profession. Okoli (2010) notes that hospitality and tourism industry is one of the largest and the fastest growing industries worldwide. In parallel with the growth of the industry, consumer expectations and demands for quality are rising while competitions among the firms both nationally and internationally intensify. The hospitality and tourism industry, therefore, needs to capitalise on skilled and qualified manpower. Kusluvan (2003) advises hospitality and tourism organisations to ensure that they employ and retain guest service employees who are professionals in their own vocation. This is because specialised knowledge and skills are required for effective quality service in the industry. The study has demonstrated some of the historical perspectives, meaning and contribution of hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of choice of career in hospitality that examine the image of working life in the hospitality and tourism industry (Baron and Maxiwell, 1993, Kusluvan, 2003, Okoli, 2010 and Richardson 2008, 2009 and 2010). In a study of students studying hospitality programs conducted by Barron and Maxwell (1993) identify the choice of career in the industry changed from being positive to negative due to the students experience during industrial experience which makes up the core of the students' program of studies. The negative image and perception that prevails regarding working life in the industry was identified in the comprehensive review of employment status in the hotels, a research conducted by Haywood (1995) and further emphasised by Richardson (2010). Both studies identified the long, hours out of the normal work schedule and relatively low pay, low status, low employee retention and high turnover that appear common in the industry as the major causes of setback in the industry. The image of careers in hospitality is also affected by the transient nature of careers found common in the industry in another development Blomme *et al.* (2009) identifies pre-entry expectations of hospitality students, he explores distinct differences in expectations of work, family balance, salary, and development opportunities, performance related pay and career opportunities. Blomme argue that, the discrepancies of what employee expect and important factors may lead to negative perception and consequently lead to turnover. Similarly, Kim *et al.* (2009) collected 126 completed questionnaires from hospitality and tourism students in Korea and examined the factors students wanted in their work place, the study found good working condition and benefits to be the most valued factors in career choice. The level of instability such as high rates of turnover would no doubt bring, the concept of job mobility, especially as a means of rapid promotion appears a common strategy amongst graduates in hospitality industry (McCabe, 2001). Based on the different perceptions the argument is very unique, the negative image of the industry as held by hospitality students appears to be developed in proportion to the increase in students' exposure to working life in the industry and the perceived nature of the industry and inadequate experience of the nature of the industry, such as the unsatisfied working condition (Riley *et al*, 2002). Riley's view is similar to McMahon and Quinn (1995:15), and as a result Jenkins (2001)

found that majority of hospitality graduates ignore career choice in the industry after graduation. Deery (2002) identified a turnover habit that is common in the employment status within the hospitality industry with rates of up to 300% per annum. Broadbridge (2003) suggested that students' work experiences programme in catering retailing where students gain insight into real working situation can have a great effect on graduates' career entry choices. All the arguments reviewed so far proved a very negative perception attributed mostly to working conditions and human needs of greener pasture, individual progress and self actualisation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON CAREER CHOICE

Career is the series of occupations whether paid or unpaid which one undertakes throughout a lifetime or a portion of his time. 'Career' includes life style and roles, leisure activities, learning and work. Patton, and McMahon (2001) defines career as the personal development and action especially those related to individual occupation throughout his lifetime. A career is often composed of the jobs held, titles earned and work accomplished over a long period of time, rather than just referring to one position in a work situation. Different scholars developed theories on the choice of career; notable among them is Holland theory of career choice. The theory explains the behaviour of people at work such as; the type of career person should choose that will or likely lead to job success and satisfaction. It also explains other human activities and feelings like success and satisfaction in educational institutions and other training programs (Lawrence, 2001). Holland theory of personality is the widely used theory in the field of students' psychology and perceptions and for most career councillors in educational institutions. The theory help to make an informed decision and good selections about the occupations that will suite an individual personality, choice of academic disciplines, or training programs that best fit an individual personality. The study of Holland theory will guide the student on the right career best suite his/her personality. Holland's developed his theory on people, culture and the six personality types such as the realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional that influences the choice of career of an individual, employee of the same personality type working together in an organisational environment that suite their personality type. For instance, where social able persons are working together on a job situations or study in the same environment, they form a work or study environment that are social and all their behaviours and thinking will be in a social way. Employees always look for environments where they can utilise their intellectual abilities and demonstrate their values and attitudes and show their commitment that will often boost their morale in work situations. For instance, people with an investigative personality types will always look for investigative environment to work; person with artistic personality look for artistic environment, social type search for social environment, enterprising type search for enterprising environment hospitality type search for hospitality environment and so on. It is believed that choosing to work in an environment similar to a person's lifestyle. For example, social persons will be more satisfied in a social environment, like choosing to be a sale representative in a retail outlet organisation an environment that is full of social type people where social interactive abilities and expression are highly valued, or hospitable persons choosing to be a chef or receptionist where his abilities are highly valued. In general an extrovert person is likely to excel in hospitality industry.

METHODOLOGY

This paper examined the student's perception of hospitality as a career choice in Nigeria. To explore the research problem, students' perceptions and experience was examined. It is believed that student's developed negative perceptions of hospitality as a career choice which affect their enrolment into hospitality and related courses. Based on the literature review, a survey questionnaire was administrated that contained 25 items related to student's perceptions

and career choice and the demography of the respondent's personal profiles related to gender, age, educational qualification, profession, nature of work, monthly income were observed.
The study used Liker-scale to measure all responses, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree and 5=strongly agree.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected from 5 polytechnics offering Hospitality courses drawn randomly one from each of the five geopolitical zone in Nigeria. Questionnaires were distributed among the staff and students of the institutions and requested them to complete the surveys that are designed for research purpose. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed out of which 200 questionnaires were returned. The data was extracted from questionnaires and fed into SPSS 21.0 version. Simple frequency, correlation tables and one sample t-test were performed to find relationship of the study variables

Case Processing Summary

A structured questionnaire was used to obtain data for the analysis. The valid responses are 200 and there is no missing value in them. The missing values cases were omitted from data analysis. The gender, age, educational qualification and profession of respondents were observed. Out of the 100 per cent (n=200) valid responses without missing value in all categories. The missing values cases were not omitted from data analysis. The gender, age, profession, occupation, place of work, nature of work and the monthly income level of the respondents were observed. In gender variable, 33.5 per cent were male (n=67), 66.5 per cent (n=133) were female, Four categories were defined for age description ranging from less than 18 years to more than 35 years. Percentage of less than or equal 18 years respondents is 5.5 per cent (n=11), 19-23 years is 53 per cent (n=106), 24-29 years is 34 per cent (n=68), 30-34 years is 5.5 per cent (n=11) and more than or equal 35 years is 2 per cent (n=4). While determining the occupation of respondents, more percentage was observed of paid with 65.5 percent (n=131) and 34.5 percent unpaid (n=69). Only 25.5 per cent (n=51) non-hospitality professional were recorded on profession, while 74.5 percent (n=149) were hospitality professional. Among paid employee 32 per cent (n=64) were working in hospitality organization while 36.5 per cent (n=73) were working in non-hospitality organisation, with 31.5 percent (n=63) missing value. In the nature of work category, out of the total paid workers only 3 percent (n=6) were working at managerial level and 64 percent (n=128) were working as technical staff, with 33 percent (66) missing value. Observation of respondents' monthly income showed that 58 percent (n=116) were earning less than or N20, 000 a month, 11 percent (n=22) were earning between N20, 000- N30, 000 and 3 percent (n=6) were earning more than N50, 000. 32 per cent (n=63) were missing value for non-working respondents. No score were recorded on categories earning between N31, 000-N50, 000.

Table 1 Correlation among the Study Variables

	Career choice in Hospitality	Effects of personality traits in career choice	Effects of Socio-economic status of Students in career Choice	Effects of Employment Status in Career choice
Career choice in Hospitality	1			
Effects of personality traits in career choice	-.365	1		
Effects of Socio-economic status of Students in career Choice	.648	.417	1	
Effects of Employment Status in Career choice	.383	1.000	.525	1

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

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study focuses on the students' perceptions of hospitality as a career choice. Students are believed to have negative perception of Hospitality as career choice. Some of the factors affecting the choice of careers are personality traits, socio-economic status and employment status of individuals. This study examined the effects of personality traits, socio-economic status and employment status on career choice. The study generally found a negative perception of students as observed from the survey results. Correlations showed that personality trait has a significant correlation with student's perception of hospitality as a career choice; it shows that personality trait is not an important predictor of career choice. Some of the personality traits are proved to have no significant influence over the choice of career in hospitality among the respondents. Therefore, in the questionnaire the sub-dimension elements that defined personality trait such as self-efficacy, peer group and personal characteristics cannot be determinant of career choice in hospitality industry others such as sociability, emotional stability, and extroversion are some of the personality factors that affects student's perception of hospitality as a career choice. Weber and Ladkin, (2009) study the career factors of 104 hospitality professionals of 15% in Asia. The author noted the most dominant career factor to be related to the lifestyle of individual. Richardson (2009) observed that personality and character fits well with the types of job available in the hospitality industry. Socio-economic status of individuals has no statistical significance with students' perception of hospitality as a career choice. Socio-economic status was not a good motivator in career choice. The sub-dimension elements of the questionnaire such as effect of family member, industry reputation, societal influence, family economic background and parental influence does not show a significant relationship and influence on students perception of hospitality as a career choice. This study contradicts a study conducted by Wong and Liu, (2010) who found that, parental influence such as economic, welfare, prestige, barriers and support are the major predictors of career choice in hospitality and tourism industry, other factors identified by the study includes gender, parental income, educational level and parent work experience. Employment status has no statistical significance with student's perception as a career choice. The results suggest from some sub-dimension items that proved negative perception on employment status. This finding contradicts many studies who found employment status as one of the key significant motivator of student's perception in career choice, employees hope to get better job that will give equal treatment with respect to pay or promotion. If hospitality creates a fair competitive environment, like fair treatment, fair compensation, fair work hours, these will improve employee job attitudes and positive perception; good employment status can also motivate

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employees to be hard working. Sub-dimension elements such as nature of work, work experience, treatment received by employee in the hospitality industry were some of the effects that have significant relationship with career choice in hospitality. Holden and Jameson (1999) cited in Pang, (2010:21) "Revealed that hospitality graduates were working at the operational and supervisory level with skills that were below their capacity in terms of what they have studied at college". Pang, (2010) Claim that, hospitality industry is still struggling to battle out to reduce negative perception of hospitality graduate. Leaders from the industry should take proactive step into addressing these important issues to avoid losing experienced professionals. The study also finds that students are very much ignorant about the nature of the industry before enrolling into hospitality program, some of which are either undecided about their career or chose to deviate from the course in future. In a study conducted by Richardson, (2009) students were claiming not find pleasure working in the hospitality industry, this seems to contradict the fact that student will take career in the industry after graduation. This indicates for students to have pleasure working in the industry there are factors related to job in hospitality industry that needs to be addressed to clear negative perceptions. The results suggest that personality traits, socio-economic status and employment status have significantly explained students' perceptions of hospitality as a career choice. In the personality dimension, seven items were examined, four items were found to be insignificant in this study the items are self-efficacy, effect of peer group, personal characteristics and age, for these four items the null hypothesis are accepted. For the remaining three items the study found a significant effects on career choice, the items are emotional stability, sociability and extroversion.

Holland's theory of personality confirmed this, Holland's developed his theory on people, culture and the six personality types such as the realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional that influences the choice of career of an individual, employee of the same personality type working together in an organisational environment that suite their personality type. Another theory by Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma Theory – 1951 Lawrence (2001) found that vocational choice is characterised by four factors; the educational process, the reality factor, emotional factor and the individual values. The general perception on socio-economic status sub-dimension items were all not supported by the respondents, majority of the respondents do not agree that family members or economic class has any influence on career choice in hospitality and were agreed that the industry has bad reputation among the society. The study also found that workers of the hospitality industry are not valued in the society. The employment status dimension explores reasons for positive student's negative perceptions on two sub-dimension items; nature of job in the industry was found to be the reasons for negative perceptions of hospitality as a career choice. Jenkins (2001) and Doherty *et al.* (2001) reports that many hospitality management graduates are leaving the industry or even failing to enter the industry upon graduation because of job dissatisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors resulting in high staff turnover and wastage of trained and experienced personnel. Another study by Richardson (2010) identified the long hours out of the normal work schedule and relatively low pay, low status, low employee retention and high turnover that appear common in the industry as the major causes of setback in the industry.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the students' perception of hospitality as a career choice in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to analyse the impact of the chosen variables, (employment status, personality traits and peer group on student's perceptions of hospitality as a career choice). The results of this study provide useful information to institutions offering hospitality and related programme, students, and the policy-makers in hospitality and related organisations in Nigeria. First, the findings of this study may affect the enrolment into the programmes. As the hospitality and related industry flourishes all over the globe, more institutions, particularly private, self-financed, and continuing education units, offer hospitality and related education to fill the existing and growing need for professionals as the industry is fast growing, and there is competition among institutions offering hospitality courses for potential students. The methodology and instrument items used for this paper may be adapted to conduct further investigation on the student's perceptions of hospitality as a career choice. The findings of this research may be evaluated, piloted, analysed and modified for another study relevant to student perception of hospitality. Based on the analysis of the results the study explores the negative perception among the students' in the study areas, the findings concur with that of Jenkins (2001), Deery (2002), Riley *et al* (2002), Kusuluvan (2003), Geiz (2004) and Richardson (2009) who found a negative students' perception due to the long, hours out of the normal work schedule and relatively low pay, low status, low employee retention, job dissatisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors and high turnover that appear common in the industry as the major causes of setback in the industry.

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