Challenges and Prospects of Work-Integrated Learning in Hospitality Training and Education in Botswana: A Case of Botho University's Dual Learning Model

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Abstract

The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the Dual Learning (DL) program, an innovative work-based learning approach adopted by Botho University's Faculty of Hospitality and Sustainable Tourism. The model ensures that students spend half of their study period at work while the other half is spent in class. Being a pioneer programme in the country, there is limited information regarding the effectiveness of this work-integrated learning approach, particularly in Botswana's context. Data was collected through eight in-depth interviews with representatives of partner hotels where the students are attached and four focus group panels with students from different cohorts that are undergoing the DL program. The study revealed that the dual study program has faced several teething challenges, including a lack of preparedness among students and hotel staff, undefined expectations, burnout among students and unforeseen costs for both students and the industry. It was however evident that the envisaged benefits of this initiative outweigh the challenges in the mid to long term. There is therefore need for the key players (universities, students and industry) to work on the issues identified in order to make this program a success in Botswana.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning; graduate competitiveness; experiential learning; student and industry perspectives

Introduction

Increased competition, technological change, and the need for competitive graduates, require universities to constantly orient curriculum to suit the contemporary environment. To address this crucial aspect, work-integrated/based learning has been increasingly adopted by many tertiary institutions given its focus on providing a holistic education that embeds both theoretical knowledge and practical experience (Graf et al. 2017; Fleming & Haigh, 2017). WIL is generically defined as an all-encompassing term denoting an approach to education where the curriculum dictates the use of relevant work-based experience to enable the integration of theory and meaningful work practice (Effeny, 2020; Du Plessis 2019; Drewery et al., 2023). There are several variants such as cooperative education, simulations and case studies, on-the-job training, attachments/internships, apprenticeships and Dual Learning (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2017; Jackson & Dean, 2022; Remington, 2018). All these aim to impart skills and competencies that will enable a seamless transition to the professional work environment. Work-integrated learning (WIL) learning is highly valuable in industries where

practical skills and experience are critical components such as health care, engineering and hospitality and tourism (Cecil, 2012; Effeny, 2020). Based on this universal appeal, Botho University, since its inception adopted the internship approach entailing a 6-month mandatory attachment for all students in the second semester of third year. Whilst efforts have been made to improve the students and graduates' fitness for the workplace by incorporating the internship element in the hospitality management degree curriculum, the six months was considered generally inadequate for the learner to have grasped and practiced all the necessary skills and competencies required such that the hospitality industry has persistently highlighted that institutions produce "half-baked" graduates requiring further training upon employment (Manwa et al., 2011). The adoption of DL approach was also motivated by the consistency of research pointing to low skills, disconnection between curriculum and industry needs, and poor work ethic in the hospitality and tourism industry (Al-Romeedy et al., 2020; Bello et al., 2019; Business Botswana, 2022; Government of Botswana, 2000, 2008; Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2014; Jefferies et al., 2019; Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2020; Sarkodie, 2018). According to Musikavanhu (2017) skills shortage and poor customer service are inherent challenges in the hospitality and tourism sector. Given the dynamism of the hospitality sector, there is a paucity of research from a Botswana perspective assessing the impact of DL on both the industry and students in aspects such as emotional well-being, workload, work relations, and acquisition of skills. The skills set in Botswana, especially service culture and work ethic are viewed as problematic, hence the research aims to close this gap. The objectives of the study are to;

- Assess the success of the DL model to date.
- Explore challenges faced by both industry and student in the DL model.
- Identify gaps between student and industry expectations.
- Suggest measures of enhancing DL curriculum and experience

The uniqueness of the DL model stems from heavy emphasis on the practice component accounting for 50% of the entire programme and the logical synchronisation with curriculum (Zhang & Schmidt-Hertha, 2020).

Botho University DL model

The Bachelor of Science Hospitality Management degree has a duration of 9 semesters (4.5 years). With the DL approach, students spend the entire first semester in class where they acquire the basic theoretical understanding of the industry. The class is then split into two where one group proceeds to work (industry) while the other remains on campus from the second semester. After 3 months, the students swap, those in industry return to campus whilst those on campus go to industry. At any given time, half of the class will be at work while the other will be in class. Most importantly, only two students will be alternating in a position at a specific company for four years. In essence, this means that the company will have each student for two years instead of the usual 6 months. This cycle continues until the 8th semester. In the ninth semester, all students will be in the industry to satisfy the mandatory six-month internship as dictated in the current program structure. Upon graduation, the students would have been fully prepared for the workplace. It is envisaged that such graduates thoroughly understand the organizational culture and intricacies of the company they were attached to making it easier to secure employment. Furthermore, DL makes it easier for industry partners to identify talent early in the students' career life. The approach did not change the programme duration and content; however, it enhanced the intensity and duration of industry engagement to maximise the acquisition of requisite skills and competencies.

Literature review

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has emerged as a transformative educational model worldwide well established in developed countries and showing significant growth in developing countries such as South Africa where all students in higher education are expected to partake in work-based training as part of their studies (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2018). The recognition is premised on the high potential in addressing high unemployment rates, skills mismatch and gaps, limited entrepreneurship and promoting economic development. The most common format incorporates a 6 month or one-year internship period normally in the third year of the programme. As indicated earlier (Effeny, 2020) WIL comes in multiple forms and DL is increasingly being embraced as institutions seek to align education more closely with industry demands. DL stems from the German apprenticeship system and is distinctive and innovative in that it combines vocational education with on-the-job training to meet the demands of a changing economy (Remington, 2018; Zhang and Schmidt-Hertha, 2020). Students in dual learning programs spend part of their time in school and part of their time working in a paid job allowing learners to acquire both theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills concurrently. It is premised on bridging the gap between education and the workforce and is applied at macro and micro levels (Effeny, 2020).

The key element of DL is its partnership between educational institutions and employers where the collaboration ensures that the curriculum aligns with the evolving needs of the job market. According to Remington (2018) and Zhang and Schmidt-Hertha (2020) DL is largely responsible for the reconstruction of Germany after the Second World War hence the wide appeal and adoption in many other countries especially developed such as Austria, Switzerland, and the United States of America. DL is a relatively new concept in many developing countries but holds significant promise, adoption has been slow given the demand for resources, investment, and greater collaboration required between academia and industry (Zhang and Schmidt-Hertha, 2020). Based on this background Botho University adopted DL at a micro level.

Theoretical basis

Historically, the nature of hospitality and tourism education revolves around developing concrete technical and soft skills. Considering this background, the study was based on experiential and social learning theories whose concepts can be applied to Dual Learning.

The experiential learning theory (ELT)

Experiential learning theory (ELT) is grounded on the connection between theory and practice, focusing on three components, namely, learning, knowing, and doing. It is based on theories of foundational scholars such as Piaget, Dewey and Lewin (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). ELT is defined by Kolb (1984) as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. This entails active student engagement through multiple approaches such as field trips, internships, work-based learning, case studies, simulations and apprenticeships (Lee, 2008; Mak et al., 2017). Kolb and Kolb (2005) contend that ELT is premised on six interlinked pillars. Firstly, learning is a process characterised by continuous engagement and feedback whilst in the second pillar learning entails relearning that is testing and reexamination leading to the acquisition of new ideas. Learning is the resolution of conflicts where divergence of opinions and disagreements are the key drivers of the learning process. The fourth pillar views learning as holistic, that is, the integration of multiple aspects of behaviour, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. Learning involves interacting with the environment leading to the acquisition of new experiences whereas in the sixth pillar learning is the creation of new knowledge. The construction of knowledge occurs in four sequential stages classified into two

steps, "grasping experience" (concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) and "transforming experience" (reflective observation and active experimentation). Hospitality and Tourism products are defined as an experience that is intangible and highly variable. Based on this background, experiential learning becomes critical in the acquisition of requisite hard and soft skills essential for the provision of memorable experiences by the hospitality employee. Such skills cannot be fully imparted in a classroom setting (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2017). There are several experiential learning methods such as role playing, fieldwork and service learning; however, the underlying aspect is that learning is achieved when students actively participate, reflect and apply skills and knowledge gained to new scenarios.

The social learning theory

Social learning (Bandura, 1977) occurs when human beings learn from one another through social interactions, observation, memorisation, and imitation. In DL settings, learners work with designated supervisors throughout the study period. Given the high level of interaction between the learners, supervisors and other employees, the three general principles of social learning theory observation, imitation and modelling can be effectively applied to evaluate experiences and perspectives. Observational learning takes place when the behaviour of learners is shaped by seeing and imitating (copying) the actions of models (workmates). The learning occurs in three ways, demonstrating or acting a behaviour (live model), giving orders of what to do through descriptions and explanations (verbal instruction model) and displaying behaviour in books, electronic and print media (symbolic model) (Bandura, 2006; Xiao & Mao, 2022). At times, the observed behaviours are not effectively learned, achievement is determined by factors relating to the learner and model. The success of the modelling process is therefore determined by four factors: the need to pay attention, the ability to memorise and recall observed information (retention), the capability to replicate demonstrated behaviour (reproduction) and learners' desire to showcase learned material (motivation). The theory thus provides a basis to evaluate perspectives on workplace education and its impact on aspects such as commitment and career development. The two theories have been combined to gain a holistic understanding of how and what the learners and supervisors (Industry) learn through experience and observation. Their perspectives provide a solid foundation for enhancing effectiveness and quality DL.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach to collect data from students and industry representatives. The students are attached to four different hotels, of which two are 4-star whilst the other two are 3-star according to Botswana Tourism Organisation classification system. Currently, there are no five-star hotels in Botswana. There were sixteen second year and eleven third-year students, divided into two groups per stream such that one group will be on campus whilst the other one is in industry. Four focus groups based on how students are divided for DL were used to collect data from the students. Focus group discussions were selected because they allowed active interaction and detailed discussions that triggered new ideas, initiated debates that ultimately generated valuable information and insights (Palinkas et al., 2015). A list of ten questions was used to solicit information from the four focus groups. The questions prompted the students to give their opinions regarding the relevance of the DL program to them, their experiences to date, challenges faced and future prospects of the program. To ensure that balanced, rich and diverse opinions are given, all students in the group were given equal opportunities to speak. The small nature of the focus groups made this possible. Each focus group discussion too between 60 and 90 minutes. The focus group discussions were conducted over a three-month period during the campus learning phase. The discussions enabled capturing

diverse experiences as respondents openly shared their opinions and perceptions in a manner impossible with other research methods (Liamputtong, 2019).

Data from the industry was collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with purposively selected supervisors or managers directly working with the students on a day-to-day basis. Given the hectic schedules, data collection lasted three months as some interview appointments were rescheduled more than three times. To ensure coverage of all divisions covered by the students, eight respondents, that is, two from each hotel were selected from Rooms and Food and Beverage (F&B). For purposes of anonymity the hotels were identified using letters as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Industry respondents

Hotel	Respondents
Hotel A	Front Office Manager and Banqueting Supervisor
Hotel B	F&B Manager and Housekeeping Supervisor
Hotel C	Executive Housekeeper and F&B Assistant Manager
Hotel D	F&B Manager and Housekeeping Supervisor

All the interviews were physical, and the respondents offered valuable perspectives on aspects such as impact on operations, importance and future outlook.

Purposive sampling ensured the selection of respondents with relevant and informative data, allowing in-depth understanding of the industry perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The key respondents were training managers/supervisors or any individual who was assigned by the hotel's human resource department to oversee student training. These were targeted because they had all the relevant information about the DL program and the students' experiences.

The data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach. In particular, Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis were adopted and these include (i) familiarising with the data (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes (iv) reviewing the themes (v) defining themes and then (vi) writing up. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its ability to analyse in-depth qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004), thematic analysis enables the researcher to examine the perceptions of various participants, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence and generating unanticipated insights. The key themes that emerged included attitudes and perceptions, benefits and challenges, coping strategies and stakeholder outlook regarding the DL program in Botswana.

Findings
The introduction of DL was well received by both the students and industry as focus was on the envisaged benefits of the model, however, there were mixed feelings related to progress, implementation and monitoring. The thematic analysis yielded four interrelated themes namely, attitude and perception, benefits and challenges, coping strategies and stakeholder outlook.

Attitude and perception
The initial attitude was positive enthusiasm as 21 out of the 27 students were intrigued by the concept of DL which presented a unique opportunity of acquiring experience whilst learning. There were high expectations of skill development. Four students indicated that their initial attitude was characterised by anxiety and hesitation as they wondered how they were going to cope with the demands of DL. The apprehension also stemmed from the fact that as pioneers they did not know what to expect as there was no reference point. One student 1 indicated adopting a neutral open-minded (wait-and-see) attitude as she was not sure of the impact of DL. All students stated that their attitudes and perceptions changed after being exposed to DL.

Although positive about the overall outcome of the programme, 23 students indicated that the high enthusiasm significantly dropped after exposure to industry realities and unmet expectations that led to frustration and disappointment. One student remarked, *"After the first industry attachment, I realised real world situations are different and more complex than the theories in classroom learning."*

Despite the negative attitudes, 22 students were more resilient and ready to tackle the challenges. The hands-on experience motivated them to excel in the practical and theoretical components of the programme. Five of the students indicated that they now have an indifferent attitude and are struggling to cope as the gap between expectation and reality was too wide for them. Findings revealed initial high enthusiasm and positive attitudes were formed solely based on word of mouth from explanations and assurances by lecturers, and exposure was limited to laboratory practical work. Twenty-three students highlighted that prior to enrolling in the programme, they did not have exposure to the hotel environment, and their first experience of a hotel setting was on induction organised by the faculty. Given this background, industry experience was akin to being "thrown at the deep end of the pool" hence the attitude and perception shift as they try to adjust. This concurs with Lingadkar and Sankaranarayanan (2023) findings that prior to the internship expectations were largely positive however they changed after exposure to industry realities. Although the overall view remained positive there is a need to effectively manage the change in attitude as it can negatively affect the performance of both the employer and students (Deen & Tichaawa, 2016; Xiao & Mao, 2022). The evolution of attitudes reveals the need for and importance of evaluating students' perceptions (Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2016) to enable comprehensive orientation, strong support and monitoring systems given the inexperience, youthfulness and naivety of the students.

The industry had a strong positive attitude and perception of DL. One of the supervisors mentioned *"The programme is good as it exposes students to the industry for a longer period of time facilitating the development of skills."*

All respondents from the industry indicated that the positive view is premised on envisaged benefits that will have the potential to address consistent complaints that hospitality and tourism graduates lack relevant practical experience. The success of DL, however, depends on students' focus since the industry requires dedication and passion.

Benefits and challenges

The finding revealed immense benefits, however, the challenges should not be overlooked, given the potential to derail the gains. The analysis is divided into students and industry perspectives.

All the students indicated that DL offered lengthy industry exposure, which will generate a host of other benefits. The hospitality industry in Botswana is operations based hence, DL provided adequate exposure to multiple roles, consequently expanding knowledge and expertise in selecting careers for specialisation. The program offered vast networking opportunities to directly interact with experienced professionals early in their careers, brightening future employment prospects. As observed by three of the students, the hospitality industry in Botswana is small and tightly knit; thus, networking and connections will be vital in securing future employment given that most vacancies are shared amongst colleagues before release for public consumption. All students stated that the greatest asset of DL was comprehensive exposure to practical skills and subsequent professional development in hospitality. Studies based on WIL variants yielded similar findings relating to the acquisition of practical skills and competencies vital for the work environment (Ezeuduji et al., 2017; Taylor & Geldenhuys, 2018). Twenty-three students clearly explained that DL enabled the in-depth acquisition of hands-on experience, greater understanding and practical application of

theoretical knowledge to real-world hotels. This is essential in an industry that has a strong practical orientation.

DL, as pointed out by almost all of the students, facilitated soft skills development imperative for today's technological and rapidly changing environment. The soft skills mostly cited were time management, effective communication, problem solving and negotiation. Four of the students outlined that DL strengthened resilience to challenges and enhanced adaptability to multiple situations. The skills being acquired, for example, communication widened opportunities as they can be used in other sectors such as customer relations and human resources. The exposure also led to greater understanding and sensitivity to diverse cultures as the hotels hosted conferences and international guests. The benefits from students' perspectives were centred around the acquisition of skills and competencies that brighten future employment opportunities.

Despite the positive outlook, DL is fraught with challenges, especially for the pioneering group. The greatest challenges repeatedly cited by all students were excessive workload, fatigue and burnout stemming from the shift between industry and campus learning that left no room for semester breaks. The need to accommodate industry and campus learning reduced the semester break to one and a half weeks compared to almost two months before the adoption of DL. One student remarked, *"I am a zombie and no longer know myself. After finishing my exams, I am expected to be at work in a week's time."*

The work pressure is immense and two-pronged. Quick adjustment was required at the workplace to cope with long working hours and shifts. The first group was attached to the industry immediately after the full relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, 22 students observed that the hotel was understaffed, resulting in an increased workload. Although a work schedule was provided, the situation on the ground sometimes dictated setting the schedule aside. One respondent remarked, *"The hotel hosted a 3-day conference for more than 100 delegates, we were all summoned to assist serving and cleaning. It was hectic and demanding."*

As explained in the first theme, there were mismatched expectations as the actual work environment did not align with initial perceptions and mental maps. All students indicated struggling to transition from academic to practical settings. On further probing, 20 of them believed that the campus orientation prior to deployment did not fully address expectations, given that some of them had not been exposed to a hotel setting. Almost all of the students depend financially on government sponsorship, amounting to about P1800 per month. Twenty-four are renting accommodation and they highlighted that transport costs increased significantly, worsening their already depressed financial status. During the industry phase, they commute to work for six days whereas travel to campus is at most four weekdays. Due to the low population, transportation within Gaborone is solely provided by hired taxis or 15-seater commuter taxis, which ply short routes. Hotels are located all over the city, so most of them need two taxis to get to work. This is worsened because only one hotel provides an allowance to cushion the extra costs. Stress levels increased as monthly budgeting became an uphill task.

Eight students stayed in areas outside the zones served by hotel transportation; hence, it was a struggle to be consistently allocated shifts that enabled the use of public transport services. In most suburbs, there is no public transport after 8 p.m. The study by Deen and Tichaawa (2016) had similar findings of transport and income challenges that negatively impacted the internship experience for South African tourism students. At the workplace, all students are expected to be in uniform daily, however, the hotels do not supply the uniforms to students, whilst government sponsorship only caters for one uniform set for the whole study period, which is insufficient.

Given that it was their first time to work, 22 of the students struggled with workplace communication and interpersonal relationships, resulting in conflicts at times. Students rotate hotel departments. However, supervisors have different personalities and diverse understandings of DL requirements. Fifteen students reported that, at times, the language and attitude of supervisors lacked professionalism, and too much work would be assigned. The unprofessional attitude was also evident in cases of work misconduct where all students would be 'painted with the same brush' demoralising the hard-working and focused students.

Academically, all students experienced severe challenges in balancing academic and work requirements. The semester was short, and the workload was high, such that 11 of the students reported a drop in grades as they struggled to keep pace with the stress and pressure. All indicated that borrowed modules from Business, Accounting, Education and Computing were a challenge since the content was unfamiliar and required extra effort in extremely limited time. Concerns raised by 20 students were that the faculty support, especially supervision, was low and response time to issues was very long. The faculty tended to support industry supervisors when complaints were raised. As a result, complaints were addressed as a group, yet some required individual attention. The academic supervisors concentrated on the importance of DL without tackling pertinent issues, relating to welfare and workload leaving students disillusioned. Given that the ability to grasp practical concepts differs, five of the students felt that it was unfair to consistently compare high and low performers publicly as it demoralised and stirred sentiments of favouritism. Although the benefits outweigh challenges, students highlighted the importance of ensuring timely attention to issues raised.

Perspectives from the industry were largely similar, all respondents attested acquisition of practical skills and competencies especially operational skills that are highly sought in the industry. The program greatly improved the alignment of curriculum to industry expectations, thus minimising industry-academia divide. Studies have consistently shown a hospitality and tourism skills gap. Bello et al (2019) and Hyasat (2022) concur that the tourism and hospitality education sector in Malawi and Jordan is struggling to align skills with the dynamic labour environment and this is compounded by theoretical curriculum. Almost all of the industry respondents indicated that the integration of practical and theory provided an effective platform for students to appreciate and understand workplace intricacies at an early stage thus benefitting future employers. If properly implemented DL promotes the wholesome development of hard and soft skills through observation, imitation, modelling and experience as outlined in the Social and Experiential theories. Employee turnover in hotels is generally high hence half of the industry respondents indicated potential improvement in retention rates as students will have acquired requisite competencies by graduation time. Investing in student training through internships as pointed out by Ezeuduji et al. (2017) created a win-win situation as the hotels partly reduced labour costs whilst the institution was provided with facilities for training.

Findings revealed that challenges were higher in hotels where student overall performance was low. According to two of the respondents, DL increased costs and depleted resources because some students were naive, petty and negative such that they required intensive monitoring to ensure compliance and completion of tasks. One hotel supervisor remarked;

"The student is not serious, at times does not report for work only to bring a sick note. This makes it difficult to determine if it is genuine. The lack of communication disrupted workflow as measures have to be taken to fill the gap resulting from lack of notification."

Given the unique nature of DL, half of the respondents indicated lack of effective quality control especially in relation to how supervisors assessed students. Although an instrument was shared, not all relevant staff members were orientated on frequency and assessment method. In some hotels, this was worsened by resignation of supervisors without

effective handover of DL requirements. One training supervisor indicated the challenge of finding mentors with requisite qualifications since most of the supervisors were certificate and diploma holders promoted through experience. Training is required to ensure that students are not viewed as a threat.

Coping strategies

The coping strategies were varied however both students and industry were positive, desiring to ensure success of DL. Student's coping strategies focused on managing time and resources. All students indicated that proper scheduling of activities to effectively manage industry-campus transitions. Scheduling allowed focus on specific targets, especially during campus learning where voluminous content must be covered over short time periods. Twenty students indicated that they sought guidance from supervisors and lecturers. Exposure to work environment generated several strategies as 23 of them indicated effective communication and maintaining professionalism as important in dealing with challenges. This was achieved by punctuality, avoiding conflict, willingness to learn, openness to criticism and respect. A student highlighted that; *"I had to be professional and communicate effectively always because we rotated amongst the departments interacting with different supervisors of different personalities and characters. I quickly learnt how to adjust and adapt when dealing with different people."*

Other coping strategies highlighted include sharing experiences and ideas, seeking counselling, refraining from organisational politics especially aligning with workplace factions and remaining focused. Twenty-two students observed that there was a tendency to relax after getting used to the work environment. As the program was introduced in 2021, one hotel took many students. Twenty out of the twenty-seven students outlined the need to avoid negative group behaviour that resulted in rudeness. Students observed that the hospitality sector is dynamic requiring proactiveness, passion and resilience.

Given that DL is still in its infancy all industry respondents emphasised supporting supervisors through workshops and awareness seminars on how to handle and assess students. Six of the eight industry representatives stressed the need to maintain clear communication channels and feedback mechanisms enabling early detection of challenges.

Stakeholder outlook

The stakeholder theme focused on future perspectives of DL in Botswana. Despite the diversity of opinions, interest and support for DL was high. To successfully ensure implementation, 21 of the students suggested that the University should play a greater role, especially in setting up clear and consistent communication channels, regular monitoring, guidance and counselling on well-being and careers. One student highlighted; *"As a young student, I am at times naive and undecided, so I need strong social and academic support systems."*

Students had mixed views on the adoption of DL by other institutions as sixteen of them believed it would result in greater collaboration between industry and academia, relevant curriculum, innovation, seamless transition to industry upon qualification and quality improvement of future professionals. However, eleven students stated that the uniqueness will be diluted with students struggling to get places for attachment. Meticulous planning is therefore required to avoid oversaturation and homogenisation of education. All students indicated that the government should increase funding to cater for uniforms and increased expenses during attachment phase.

The industry had positive outlook emphasizing stronger effort to continuously align curriculum with industry needs given the dynamism in technology and shift in consumer trends.

One manager remarked; *"There is a need to actively engage the industry in curriculum development to cater for changes and new trends."*

This resonates with Hyasat (2022) findings that the inclusion of stakeholders (institutions, students, industry and government) will ensure proper alignment of curriculum to industry needs. Prudent implementation would reduce the current skills gap, attract investment, and stimulate growth of the sector. Six of the industry respondents emphasised the need for hotels to provide a conducive environment whilst the university should focus on developing comprehensive assessment enabling consistent supervision of students. Students are encouraged to continuously establish professional networks that will increase industry knowledge.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the study objectives, it can be concluded that although Botho University DL started well, it generated mixed feelings by both students and industry. As a pioneer DL programme in Botswana, teething challenges were encountered mainly emanating from lack of prior experience. It was also evident that expectations from both industry and students were not very clear from the onset therefore there were frustrations and unexpected social and economic costs. One can also conclude that DL benefits to students and industry are apparent and outweigh the drawbacks. With proper planning, orientation and communication among the three key stakeholders (students, university and industry) DL can yield the expected outcomes. The government of Botswana through its tertiary education fund is also expected to support such a noble initiative but providing an additional cushioning allowance to students. Based on the Germany experience where students on DL are paid a living wage by the companies they are attached to; the study recommends the same in Botswana. While the DL program was benchmarked from the Germany apprenticeship approach to tertiary education, the study recommends that Botho University adapts the program to its local context given the different economic and social context. Since the study was exploratory in nature, future studies should focus on issues raised and potential solutions. An empirical longitudinal study can focus on assessment strategies effectiveness, stakeholder collaboration and impact on industry in aspects such as strengthening of skills and competences.

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