



Training of employees in the tourism and hospitality industry through a refresher courses model

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of employee's demography on demand for refresher course training and employees' post-training expectations. The study hypothesized that employees' age, gender, marital status, education, terms of employment, and work experience influence their decision on whether to participate in refresher training or not, and also the employees' post-training expectations. The study design was exploratory and triangulated both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed from which 414 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 83%. A cluster sampling method was used. The target population was employees working in three, four and five star hotels located in five towns in Kenya. The study noted that there was a positive correlation between the respondents' marital status ($r_s = 3.00$, $N = 385$, $p < 0.007$), levels of education ($r_s = 0.098$, $N = 414$, $p = 0.046$), and work experience ($\chi^2 = 23.285$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.003$) and their expectations upon completion of refresher courses. These expectations include enhanced productivity, greater economic and financial reward, and reduction in fear of being retrenched during the low seasons. The study concludes that training institutions should consider employees' demographic attributes as they develop any refresher course training and recommends continuous training for the industry to meet the growing demand based on tourism increases.

Keywords: Refresher courses, training, tourism industry, employees, Kenya

Introduction

The study of benefits and motivators of employees to attend refresher courses has been documented by several authors (Goodall, 2016; Dampney, 2016; Sood & Chougale, 2016), but little has been researched relating to the influence of employees' demographic attributes on their desire to attend such training programmes. A refresher course (RC) is defined as training which improves an employee's knowledge, skills and helps him or her learn about new developments that relate to their chosen career (Collins Dictionary, 2014). Kenya Utalii College (KUC), a public training institution in tourism and hospitality, organizes refresher courses targeting employees in the tourism industry. These programmes target those working for establishments that support KUC through a collection of a training levy from their clientele. To date, KUC has trained 65,700 employees on refresher programmes as compared to 16,600 who opted to take full-time courses. These programmes are offered annually in some major towns located within touristic regions in Kenya. There has been a great increase in the number of employees registering for these short



programmess. Limited documentation is available giving reasons for this increase and what the participants expect after their training. The study also investigated whether the employee's demographic attributes influenced the increased demand for the courses.

Despite numerous studies showing the link between human capital development and performance (Kwon, 2009; Barro, 2001; Fitzsimons, 2015; Wright, & McMahan, 2011), little has been documented on factors that influence employees' motivations to attend refresher courses. The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the influence of employees' demography on training and their expectations after a refresher training period. The study hypothesis that the employees age, gender, marital status, education, terms of employment, and work experience all to an extent influenced their decision on whether to have the refresher training or not and influenced their expectations post- training.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between employees 'demography and their expectations upon completion of refresher training

Review of literature

According to Becker (1964), training is a financial investment that is undertaken if the net present value of wage returns exceeds the training costs. Previous studies have found a strong correlation between wages and training (Konings & Vanormelingen, 2015; Chui & Miremadi, 2015). This study hypothesized that among the factors that motivate the adult learner to attend refresher course training was the desire to improve their individual productivity and capabilities. Although this study was not on motivation, it to some extent it borrowed from Vroom's Expectation Theory which states that there is a relationship between the effort employees put into their job, their performance, and the rewards they anticipate to receive (Lee, 2007). This study hypothesized that among the factors that motivate employees to attend refresher courses were financial gain, promotion, and greater job security.

Likewise, a study by Chowdhary et al. (2014), showed that employees expect economic growth and to gain knowledge and skills improvement on completion of their training. During the said training, the participants anticipate making new friends and improving their professional network. To some employees, refresher training is initiated by their employers after identifying some knowledge and skills gaps, while for others, it is self-motivated but with the belief that training would improve their current remuneration levels. According to the Human Capital Theory, individuals who invest in education and training have a higher chance of increasing their skill level and may be more productive than those who are less skilled, and so expect higher earnings as a result of their investment in them (Stevens, 1999). Is this the scenario for employees in Kenya? The answers are presented later in the paper.

The fear of retrenchment during the low season has not only influenced employees to attend further training in Kenya but also other parts of the world (Abramowitz & Zelnick, 2015; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2013). This fear has been known to make many employees feel that their jobs were not secure (De Witte & De Cuyper, 2015; Lam, et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2008) and prompts them to attend training in order to prolong their employment life and increase their job security. Refresher training has been used by employees as a survival strategy in their current jobs. Other scholars have found some correlation between job performance and refresher course training and have advocated this form of training as a method to improve service provisions and job performance (Nishiyama et al., 2015; Taylor, 2015; Spatz et al., 2015).



Despite the body of knowledge agreeing that refresher training improves the knowledge and skills required by employees to perform better, few of these studies have examined the influence of employees' *age, gender, marital status, education, terms of employment, work experience* on their need to attend these courses and expectation thereafter. Previous studies have indicated that amongst the barriers for adult education is a lack of time to pursue education, greater family responsibilities, learning schedules and a learning environment that is not suitable for adults and finally, the cost of education (Rubenson, 2010). This study hypothesized that these demographic attributes significantly influence the purpose of attending training programmes and the benefits employees' expect to obtain after completion of their training.

Methodology

The study sought to explore factors that motivate employees to attend refresher courses. The study design was exploratory and triangulated both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed from which 414 were completed and returned giving a response rate of 83%, hence a cluster sampling method was used. The target population were employees working in three, four and five stars hotels that are located in five towns that host tourists in Kenya. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS while descriptive data were analyzed using Chi-square Goodness of Fit, Spearman Correlation and cross tabulation to test the independence of respondent's demographic attributes and their expectation after completing their refresher training. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data while Cronbach alpha (0.911) was used to test data reliability.

Respondent's profile

From a total of 414 respondents 46% of them were males as compared to 54% who were females, the majority (62%) of whom were married. There was a significant difference in respondents marital status ($X^2=135$, df (2), $P<0.001$). The majority (55%) of them had secondary education as their highest level of education as compared to 44% who were university graduates. This observation was significant ($\chi^2=240.506$, df=3, $p<0.001$) which was considered as a true representation of the industry. There was a significant difference in their terms of employment ($X^2=211$, df (4), $P<0.001$) where the majority of them (54%) were employed on permanent terms as compared to only 1% who were self-employed. The majority of them (54%) were in their youth (25 to 35 years ($X^2=225$, df (4), $P<0.001$) with only 5 % who were above 45 years of age.

This means that the workforce for most hotels was relatively young and the majority of them (69%) had worked in the hospitality industry for less than 10 years ($X^2=113$, df (4), $P<0.001$). The respondent's demographic profile was significantly different between the observed and expected frequency thus rejecting the hypothesis that respondents' demographic attributes were the same for all variables used in their profile (Table 1.) These details were very important since as they were used as independent variables for this study.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profile

| Demographic Profile | Attribute | Frequency (%) | Chi-square Goodness of Fit, df, P- value |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------------|--|
| Gender | Male | 54(%) | $\chi^2 = 2.815$, df=2, $p<0.093$ |
| | Female | 46(%) | |
| Marital status | Married | 65(%) | $\chi^2 = 135.112$ df=2, $p<0.001$ |
| | Single | 36(%) | |
| Highest level of education | Primary | 17(%) | $\chi^2=240.506$, df=3, $p<0.001$ |



| | | | |
|--|------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| | Secondary | 54(%) | |
| | University | 44(%) | |
| Professional qualification | Certificate | 39(%) | $\chi^2 = 91.00, df=3, p<0.001$ |
| | Diploma | 44(%) | |
| | Degree | 6(%) | |
| Mode of respondents training | On job | 31(%) | $\chi^2=211.757, df=4, p<0.001$ |
| | College | 53(%) | |
| | University | 9(%) | |
| | Others | 1(%) | |
| Terms of employment | Self-employment | 1(%) | $\chi^2 = .358, df=5, p<0.001$ |
| | Permanent | 53(%) | |
| | Contract | 34(%) | |
| | Free lance | 1(%) | |
| Work experience | Less than 5 yrs | 29(%) | $\chi^2 = 31.48, df=3, p<0.001$ |
| | 5 to 10 yrs | 40(%) | |
| | 10 to 15 yrs | 19(%) | |
| | Over 15 yrs | 10(%) | |
| Salary and benefits in Kenya shillings | Less than 20,000 | 18(%) | $\chi^2 = 126.6, df=3, p<0.001$ |
| | 21,000 to 40,000 | 48(%) | |
| | 40,000to 60,000 | 25(%) | |
| | Over 60,000 | 3(%) | |

The findings show that the majority of employees who seek to take refresher courses are male and most of them are married and in their youth. Most of them have secondary schooling as the highest level of education with only 44% of them having a degree. Only 6% had training in tourism and hospitality related areas, with a majority of them having a diploma in hospitality related fields. The majority of the respondents were employed on a fulltime bases and 70% had less than 10 years' work experience. About 48% of them earned between USD 210 to 400 with 18% earning less than USD 200. This demographic data is important for any training institutions that intend to organize refresher courses and could be useful when developing the content of such training and meeting the expectations of the participants.

Discussion of the findings

Motivating factors for employees to attend refresher course training

There respondents were requested to indicate the factors that influenced them to attend refresher courses; the majority (86%) of the respondents said that they were sure that the training would improve their productivity and capabilities at their workplace. More than 55% of them said that they expected economic growth, promotion and gaining more knowledge and skills (92%). Other reasons given, were that the training would give them a chance to improve the quality of their work and make them more competitive for their current job (please refer to Table 2on the next page).



Table 2. Motivating factors for attending refresher training

| Motivating factors for training | Yes | No |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| In order to improve my individual productivity | (357) 86% | (4) 1% |
| I expect economic growth after training | (228) 55% | (46) 11% |
| I expect to gain more knowledge and skills | (380) 92% | (8) 2% |
| I expect to Increase my social relationship | (227) 55% | (54) 13% |
| Make new friends and have more networks and linkages | (231) 56% | (48)12% |
| It is a requirement from the company | (76) 18% | (170)41% |
| Poor remuneration in my current position | (45) 11% | (191) 46% |
| Fear of retrenchment during the low season | (8) 2% | (229) 55% |
| I feel my job is not secure | (21) 5% | (216) 52% |
| Training is a survival strategy in my current job | (78) 19% | (175) 42% |

This study hypothesized that employees' aspirations to attend the refresher training was independent of their demographic attributes, and hence used the data gathered during a Focus Group Discussion with employees from the accommodation sector in the tourism industry where they listed the main motivators in attending the refresher training. These reasons ranged from the expectation of being more productive after training, attainment of economic and financial growth, gaining new knowledge and skills, social relationship, increases in remuneration and the lessening of fear of retrenchment during the low seasons. The items in the list were long but were required to be reduced but still capture the parameters that explain the highest variance.

To examine variables that would explain the highest variances, factors analysis was conducted using product component, rotation Varimax, maximum iteration (25) and factor with Eigen values more than 0.5 were extracted. This analysis extracted four factors which explained 84% of the variance. These factors were fear of retrenchment which explained (33%) of variance, in order to gain knowledge and skills (27%), in order to improve job productivity (12%) and poor remuneration in the current position (11%). The four variables had a loading factor of 5.208, 0.995, 0.837 and 0.601 respectively. This observation meant that although the participants gave many reasons that may have influenced them to attend refresher training, these four aspects were the main ones (refer to Table 4).Afterwards, these four variables were subjected to Spearman correlation using age, marital status, level of education and work experience as independent variable. The findings has been discussed later in this section

Table 4. Factor analysis of reasons why respondents chose to attend refresher training

| Reasons for attending refresher course training | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | |
|---|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| | Loading Factor | % of Variance | Cumulative % | %of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1. Fear of retrenchment and loss of job | 5.208 | 57.862 | 57.862 | 33.173 | 33.173 |
| 2.To gain more knowledge and skills required for the job | 0.954 | 10.598 | 68.460 | 27.414 | 60.586 |



| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|--------|--------|---------------|
| 3. In order to improve job productivity and performance | 0.837 | 9.304 | 77.765 | 12.383 | 72.969 |
| 4. Feeling that they could improve their current remuneration and position. | 0.601 | 6.682 | 84.446 | 11.477 | 84.446 |

Dependence of respondents’ training needs on their age, marital status, level of education and work experience.

There was a significant relationship between respondents’ demography (age, marital status and work experience) and their desire to attend refresher courses. Their demographic attributes significantly influenced the respondents’ reasons for taking refresher training. These attributes were fear of retrenchment, a desire to gain more knowledge, in order to allow them to perform their jobs better and the hope that the training would make them negotiate for better salaries and benefits (see Table 4.).

Influence of Age on refresher training

The majority (86%) of the respondents agreed that the main reasons that prompted them to attend the refresher course was to improve their productivity ($\chi^2= 16.986$ df=8, $p<0.030$), in order to gain more knowledge and skills required for their current job ($\chi^2= 23.285$, df=8, $p<0.003$) and fear of retrenchment in case of down size ($\chi^2= 25.521$, df=8, $p<0.001$). The majority (95%) of them were aged less than 25 years of age. There was a correlation between the respondents’ age and reasons for attending the course ($r_s=0.102$, N (414), $p<0.05$). The respondents’ age would influence 10% of the reasons why these employees attended refresher courses. These findings imply that there was a significant relationship between respondents’ age and reasons for attending the courses. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that respondents’ reasons for training were dependent on their age. As their age increased, the desire reduced (please refer to Table 4.5)

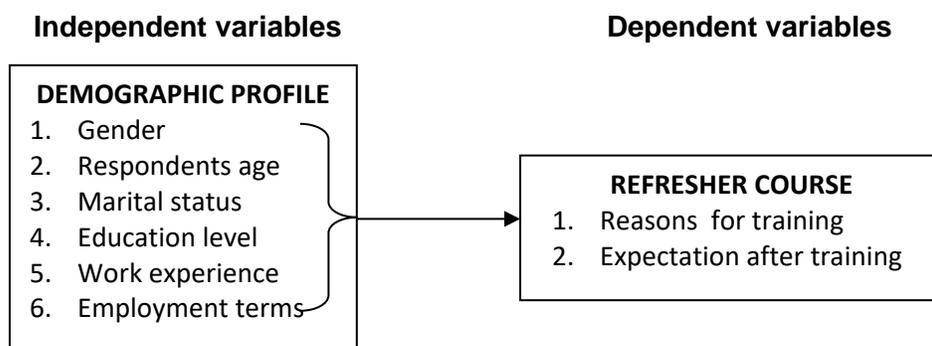


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Influence of Marital status on training

The result showed that there were positive correlations between respondent’s marital status and their reason for attending training which was to improve their productivity ($r_s = 0.079$, N (385), $p = 0.125$), economic gains ($r_s = 0.090$, N (385) ($p<0.77$) and improved remuneration ($r_s = 3.00$, N (385),



$p < 0.007$). That study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that respondents ages significantly influences employees' reasons for attending training and their expectations after the completion of a course. (Table 4.5)

Influence of Education level on training

The study noted that there was positive correlations between respondents' education level and their reason for attending the training which was; improve their productivity ($r_s=0.098$, N (414), $p<0.046$) economic growth ($r_s=0.098$, N (414), $p=0.046$). That study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was enough evidence to support that respondents desire to attend the training and expectation after the course was dependent on their level of education as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Dependence of employee's desire for further training on their demography

| Factors that influence employees desire for further training | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | Productivity | Economic growth | Knowledge and skills | New friends | Company requirements | Poor remuneration | Retrenchment Fear |
| Gender | Pearson Chi-Square | .209 | 0.117 | 0.156 | 0.037 | 0.151 | 1.907 | 3.827 |
| | Df | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | Sig | 0.901 | 0.943 | 0.925 | 0.982 | 0.927 | 0.592 | 0.148 |
| Marital status | Chi-Square | 5.488 | 3.129 | 0.701 | 4.259 | 7.306 | 5.528 | 8.838 |
| | Df | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | Sig | 0.064 | 0.074 | 0.704 | 0.118 | 0.026** | 0.137 | 0.012** |
| Education level | Chi-Square | 14.855 | 9.608 | 7.786 | 27.726 | 6.589 | 6.415 | 4.322 |
| | Df | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| | Sig | 0.021** | 0.142 | 0.254 | 0.001* | 0.361 | 0.698 | 0.633 |
| Work experience | Chi-Square | 11.401 | 3.110 | 23.285 | 12.794 | 8.600 | 17.490 | 18.889 |
| | Df | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| | Sig | 0.018** | 0.927 | 0.003** | 0.119 | 0.377 | 0.132 | 0.015** |
| Age | Chi-Square | 16.986 | 7.680 | 23.656 | 7.832 | 11.917 | 12.142 | 25.521 |
| | Df | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| | Sig | 0.030** | 0.465 | 0.003** | 0.450 | 0.115 | 0.434 | 0.001** |
| Terms of employment | chi-square | 6.804 | 7.665 | 7.331 | 5.304 | 6.447 | 13.580 | 11.719 |
| | df | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| | sig | 0.558 | 0.467 | 0.501 | 0.725 | 0.598 | 0.328 | 0.164 |

** Significant at 0.05



Influence of work experience on training

The study noted that there was a significant relationship between work experience and the reason for attending training which included: to increase job productivity ($\chi^2= 11.401$ df=8, $p<0.018$), to gain additional knowledge and skills for their job ($\chi^2= 23.285$, df=8, $p<0.003$) and fear that if they don't get more training they may lose their jobs ($\chi^2= 18.889$, df=8, $p<0.015$). That study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was sufficient evidence that the respondents' desire to attend the training and their expectation after the course was dependent on their work experience. (see Table 5)

Summary of research findings and limitations

The study noted that there was a significant relationship between the respondents' demographic profile (age, marital status, levels of education and work experience) and their desire and expectation after attending the refresher course training programs. The main reasons for attending the courses included fear of retrenchment, gaining more knowledge and skills and in order to solicit a better salary and greater benefits. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that reason that makes employees attend refresher courses and their expectation after the course was dependent on their demographic variables used in this study. There was therefore a positive correlation between respondents' demographic profiles and expectations after attending refresher courses. The findings indicated that there were many other reasons and demographic attributes that influence reasons for attending refresher courses and expectations thereof that were not considered in this study. These limitations may have caused some biases and may have affected the findings in the study.

Findings implications and the way forward

The study observed that the supply and demand dynamics of employees in the Kenyan tourism industry has changed. Most training institutions have programmes and policies created to take care of full-time students aged from 15 to 24 years. These programmes are not suitable for full-time employees and whenever a chance of taking refresher course arises, the numbers of employees who are willing to take such programmes are on the increase. The traditional way of curriculum development and delivery for tourism and hospitality careers is therefore not suitable for adult learners on full-time employment that desire to upgrade their professional skills. The training institutions must therefore be more innovative in their curriculum development and delivery, so that they can meet the needs for both full-time and part-time adult learners who have severe limitations of time and finances affecting them.

Most employees aged above 30 years had families and were financing their children from primary schools to post-secondary institutions and therefore were not be able to pay for their own training. That may be the reason why the KUC refresher courses attract a large number of adult learners, since they are offered free to applicants from *bona fide* catering levy paying establishments. The number of those demanding these categories of short tailor-made programmes will continue to grow. The other reasons are these programmes are offered in some regions in Kenya where regular full-time training is not being available. Training institutions are therefore advised to offer refresher course targeting employees located in these remote areas where tourists visit. A self-sustaining model would be recommendable. Tourism private ranches and other community owned ranches should be considered since most of the employees working there cannot access training in the traditional institutions which are located far from their rural locations. Innovation to online education and the introduction of mobile training programmes would therefore be



encouraged. The study noted that the tourism industry demands employees to have post-secondary training and those who are employed require continuous upgrading of their knowledge to be competitive in their industry expectations after the course. The young and newly employed appear to be a threat to the older employees who might not have the right certificates such as degrees that may be required in order to be promoted to supervisory and management levels, despite their often vast experience.

The study observed that employees with post-secondary and professional training earn significantly more than those with less training. Employers are therefore willing to release their employees to join refresher course when available and recognized the certificates awarded during job appraisal and promotion. Employers in the tourism and hospitality industry do not rely wholly on newly employed graduates and prefer balancing them with the older employees already in employment. Refresher training is therefore regarded as an important component in the advancement in one's career.

It was observed that the number of employees desiring to attend refresher courses will keep increasing and therefore training institutions should prepare for such increases. Flexible and convenient online refresher programmes are recommended to meet the growing demand. The number of adult learners who are willing to take the refresher course will continue to grow. The tourism industry recognizes the certificates awarded after this course and is willing to release their staff for the duration of a two week block period. Most respondents indicated that they have challenges in attaining post-secondary certificates and other credentials which may be required when one changes from one job to another. It was noted that the refresher courses are more focused and targeted oriented when compared to full-time programmes in tourism and hospitality and are therefore suitable for both individual and industry needs.

KUC and other training institutions should therefore offer more short and tailor-made programmes to meet the needs of the employees. Training policies and guidelines for refresher course should be developed so that they can be standardized to meet the requirement of job competencies as the industry demands a wide range of skills. The involvement of other stakeholders is therefore recommended, due to the ever-increasing demand for jobs and career changes which have also motivated employees to attend these programmes. As employers downsize their workforce only those employees with highly updated and specialized skills have a higher possibility of remaining in their jobs. The fear of retrenchment was one motivator of attending the courses. It was also observed that the respondents preferred work-related courses with narrow topics delivered in a concentrated manner and the award of a certificate after completion.

Way forward for KUC and other training institutions that offer refresher programs

Employees are looking for more flexible and accelerated learning options due to a number of challenges. They are competing with time, energy and family resources. They desire short curricula offering interim credentials which are linked with their career development. They desire applied learning models and practical programmes which tap into their experience and work life. KUC and other institutions training for the tourism and hospitality should endeavour to improve their partnership with all the stakeholders in the industry, who could help them integrate job-related contents and offer the employees what they need to advance in their career. The programmes should be in such a way that they can advance in the subject area and award certificates and credits that can be used while advancing the career and be recognized by other institutions for credit transfer. The government and other tourism stakeholders should facilitate



the integration of relevant training policies for short courses and design models that suits adult learners as well.

Since institutions that offer refresher courses may experience financial constraints, the study recommends the urgent consideration of alternative financial aid programmes as most people taking short course do not qualify for the traditional education loan schemes offered by the government to full-time students. Training institutions should explore ways of reducing costs through innovation in delivery methods and through mainly online platforms. Recruitment of trainers with both industry and training experience is recommended, since this would enrich the said refresher training programs for the long term benefit of the industry and the sustainability of Kenyan tourism.

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