



# Expectations of role-players in the hospitality industry regarding entry-level employment for Grade 12 learners

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## Abstract

The hospitality industry which falls within the tourism sector plays a major role in the South African economy, as indeed in most countries economies. Consequently, it has much to offer to those seeking employment or business or entrepreneurial opportunities. The subject of Hospitality Studies contains the development of operational and organisational skills that underwrite to the macro vision of the hospitality industry and the development of a philosophy of service excellence in South Africa. The study therefore sought to determine the perception of role players in the hospitality industry regarding their expectations of entry-level employment in the hospitality industry for students who have completed the Grade 12 Hospitality Studies curriculum at a high school level. A qualitative research approach with in-depth, semi-structured interviews was adopted for this study. An interpretative survey design was used to conduct the study with 25 role players as participants in five, four- and three-star hotels. Accordingly, the data was collected from the general managers of the hotels, and the ATLAS.ti™ software programme was used to analyse the data. Ethical issues such as confidentiality and informed consent were carefully observed at all levels. The findings reveal a disparity between the existing skills set of the hospitality curriculum and the desired skills. Personality skills were consequently found to be the key skills set for entry-level positions in the industry. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that students leaving schools should ascertain what the trade's expectations are prior to considering a career in this challenging but rewarding industry.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, secondary education, hospitality industry, unemployment, South Africa, hospitality industry's expectations.

## Introduction

The hospitality industry is one of the most consistently expanding industries in the world, the same trend being currently reflected in South Africa. According to the December 2016 edition of Tourism Satellite Account for South Africa published by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2017), one in 22 employed individuals worked in the tourism industry in 2015. It amounts to a total number of 711 749 people (up from 679 560 in 2014) employed in the industry, with 20% of those jobs being in the food and beverage segment and 19% in accommodation (Fin24.com, 2017).

Due to the hospitality industry being service-orientated, some of the hospitality programmes prioritise the industry's expectations and opinions. The Hospitality Studies' curriculum is focused on the providers and recipients of the education, however, with very little attention given to the actual

employers' perspectives. Employers, even though they are experts in the industry, often lack the appropriate educational knowledge to realistically and thus meaningfully assess the hospitality curriculum (Rahman, 2010). Educators can assess the hospitality curriculum with regard to how well they contribute to students' readiness for future hospitality careers as they participate in learning (Rahman, 2010:2). Eisner (2005) established that, in order to attract skilled and educated individuals who have the required qualifications to fill entry-level positions in the industry, the hospitality industry must improve its recognised ability and positive long-term career outlook for the sector.

South Africa currently has an unemployment rate of 27.7% of the labour force, equating to 4.1 million people, with a potential of increasing to 36.6% by the end of 2017 (Stats SA, 2017). There are still employment opportunities available in the hospitality industry, however, despite the bleak economic outlook. The hospitality industry is increasing in size at a rapid rate, and is already accountable for approximately 10% of global employment (PricewaterhouseCoopers [PwC,] n.d.). Hospitality Studies as a subject consequently includes the development of functioning and administrative skills that will contribute to the ultimate vision of the hospitality industry in promoting the development of a philosophy of quality service delivery in South Africa. The subject is therefore quintessential in providing general hospitality values that are appropriate to a wide range of cultures, traditions, and operations (DoE, 2003).

The Department of Tourism started to concentrate on curriculum-related concerns in the tourism sector as early as 2006. The key issues detected were: Hospitality Studies as a subject at high school level is not a designated university subject; the value and quality standing of the three service subjects (Consumer Studies, Tourism, and Hospitality Studies) in education; and educators are not formally trained in tourism and hospitality subject content (Xasa, 2014).

A Hospitality Studies' curriculum is an evolving development strategic document that guides the transformation of students from secondary school to tertiary institutions, and even to managerial positions in the industry for those who are ready to accept supervisory positions and face the world-wide encounters offered by the hospitality industry. Consequently, the curriculum must address this development and support the required evolution from theory to practice by means of application-orientated training, building enthusiasm among scholars, producing specialists, and keeping up to date with all salient changes across the world (Van Hoof, Verbeeten & Estrella, 2017). There is limited research available on overcoming the disparity between Hospitality Studies on secondary school level and the industry's expectations, while the aim of every educational institution is to increase the value of education and learning on secondary school level in order to achieve its set objectives (Kwameadom, 2015).

The curriculum, in turn, aims to equip students to enter the hospitality industry and, in doing so, contributes to the economy through small business opportunities such as function catering and entrepreneurship e.g. popup restaurants, baking cakes and providing accommodation (Swart, Booyse & Burroughs, 2015). Valuable skills are taught in schools, which develop knowledge, skills and abilities to prepare students for employment. Hospitality Studies, as a subject in secondary schools, provides the elementary knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential for the industry and will prepare the student for such a career (Rahman, 2010). According to Kay and Moncarz (2007), school students' success with entry-level employment in the industry could be enhanced if they were au fait with the relevant know-how, proficiencies, and competencies that are required for employment in the hospitality industry. Employers in the industry are highlighting their need for students who are educated with sufficient knowledge, skills and abilities that are needed in the workplace (Rahman, 2010).

The chief executive officer of Sun International, Anthony Leeming, said that "given the growing importance of tourism to economic growth, it's essential we start attracting new skills to our industry well before they reach tertiary level" (DoE Newsroom, 2017).

## Theoretical background

Success or failure in the hospitality industry depends on the quality and skill sets of its employees. Therefore, managers need to encourage staff to be as productive as possible while taking an active interest in the development of employees skills and in suitable employee programmes. There appears to be a widening divergence between the Hospitality Studies curriculum on secondary school level and the expectations of the industry. Generic and curriculum-specific skills must be evaluated in order to determine whether students have the elementary knowledge and practical expertise that are obligatory for the industry (Swart *et al.*, 2015).

The hospitality industry, as a large and complex industry that has a great influence on and significance for South Africa's economy, requires qualified employees with the relevant knowledge, skills and abilities. Education and training in the hospitality industry enable employees to acquire the prerequisite knowledge, specialised skills and particular abilities to meet the industry's challenges and requirements (Abomeh, 2012). Literature confirms that students and educators' perception of hospitality is important to surmount the differences between students and the industry. Educators should reform their programmes to align it with industry's needs regarding curriculum content and occupational requirements, which will serve to improve the work environment and attract educated students (Mak & Melody, 2014).

The main focus of this research was to determine whether entry-level employees have the necessary skills to successfully enter the hospitality industry after completing the Grade 12 Hospitality Studies curriculum on secondary school level. The reason for the focus on the Grade 12 Hospitality Studies curriculum was to determine how to adapt the curriculum if necessary to improve the chances of employment in the hospitality industry for school leavers. This was done by comparing it with the expectations of role players in the industry. To attain the main objective, the following sub-objectives needed to be achieved: Firstly, to determine the perception of the industry regarding hiring an individual for an entry-level position; secondly, to determine which curriculum-specific skills are needed for entry-level positions that are related to the perception of industry role players; thirdly, to determine the knowledge, skills and abilities industry role players expect an entry-level employee to have; and fourthly, to determine what industry role players expect from an individual whether they are applying for a position with or without a qualification. Entry-level employees could include school leavers, seasonal part-time employees and foreign employees. In the hospitality industry these employees often work very long hours for poor wages without the opportunity to be supported by a union. If the needs of industry could be met, the opportunities for these entry-level employees would be improved and their bargaining power increased.

The intention of this study was to analyse and compare the expectations of the industry with the content of the secondary-level Hospitality Studies curriculum in order to determine whether the school qualification (National Qualifications Framework [NQF] level 4) meets the requirements of the hospitality industry for entry-level positions. Hospitality education programmes in South Africa have to be recognised so that future employees of the hospitality industry are properly prepared for employment in the industry locally and abroad (Sibanyoni, 2013). By incorporating the hospitality industry's expectations in the school curriculum, students will be able to better align themselves with the expectations of the industry. Matriculating (Grade 12) students with such an elementary knowledge of the trade should be able to enter the hospitality industry to good effect (Swart *et al.*, 2015).

## Methods

### Sample and procedure

The target population for this study consisted of hotel groups (N=25) in the City of Tshwane (formerly Pretoria – one of the capital cities of South Africa). Hotel groups in the City of Tshwane were selected for interviews by the researcher with the senior/executive management of each hotel group. Twenty-five (N=25) participants were selected as the target population of hotel groups. The population of this study comprised key hospitality industry employees, and purposive sampling procedures were

adapted for the 12 participants, as respondents, to provide their perspectives of the skills that they consider important for entry-level students (with a Grade 12 qualification in Hospitality Studies). The non-probability and purposive sampling method was carefully chosen for this study as the questions posed to the experts from industry could be addressed due to their having the relevant knowledge and experience (Guarte & Barrios, 2006).

## Methods

Qualitative research consists of a narrative approach, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographies or case studies (Creswell, 2014). From a phenomenological viewpoint researchers aim to comprehend, to make a statement, to assess the implication of the procedures people in particular situations make use of, and how their world is organised by the applicants in it (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The focus of qualitative methodologies is on the interpretation of the participants' experiences and reality (Grix, 2004; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Qualitative interviews were conducted with industry experts to determine their perceptions of the expectations the industry has of students who completed Grade 12 Hospitality Studies and who wanted to start their careers within the industry (Goldman, 2011). For the purpose of this study, in-depth interviews were used.

The interviews consisted of three types of questions, namely: Introductory questions were structured questions that allowed each participant to share his or her experience freely; follow-up questions allowed them to elaborate on the introductory questions; and probing questions elicited more detail regarding their experience and perceptions (Ambe-Cohen, 2015).

The individual hotels were contacted telephonically to make an appointment with the desired participants, and the planned research was explained to them. They were also informed of the voluntary nature of the study. As this industry is often unpredictable, some of the chosen sample participants wished to view the relevant documents regarding the approval of this study by the Ethics Committee and the written consent form, requesting that the outline of the types of questions be emailed to them. The interviews were conducted at the different hotels as these were the participants' workplaces, and informed consent was obtained in accordance with the procedures specified for this study. The main purpose of informed consent is to ensure that participants understand the risks and benefits involved in their contribution to the research (Rice, 1999).

Some of the interviews were not recorded because some of the interviewees did not feel comfortable with such an arrangement for various reasons which were not stipulated. Detailed notes were taken in order to record key concepts, such as body language, expressions and demeanour. At the end of the interviews, a debriefing was done by concluding the session with a summary of all the questions and interviewees' responses thereto. In this way, the interviewer believes the interviewees presented all the information they wished to contribute to this study and that it was correctly captured by the researcher. After completing the interviews, these were transcribed to a Microsoft Word file, and each transcript was assigned with a date and a fictitious name so as to afford participant due confidentiality and anonymity. The data was then coded and analysed in a manner that yielded increased knowledge of the actual expectations of the various role players in the hospitality industry regarding Grade 12 students.

## Data analysis

Groenewald cites a statement by Kvale (1996) that, given the concern about data capturing during qualitative research interviews, the interview should be presented as a conversation during which an exchange of perceptions and opinions between two persons communicating about a theme of common importance take place. Data analysis therefore is the understanding of the participant's perceptions and opinions that have been collected, giving an explanation of the phenomena to the extent that it can be described in the researcher's own terms, and providing a description of the experience (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Zikmund, 2003).

All analyses of the data were completed by the researcher using the computer software programme ATLAS.ti™. As this is a sophisticated software programme that helps to arrange, reassemble and

manage materials in creative and systematic ways, it met the qualitative data analysis needs of this study. This software programme was developed by scientific software development specialists as a tool that reviews, selects, interprets and summarises data without distorting it. ATLAS.ti™ software was used to analyse the data and to develop the codes and themes (Du Toit, 2015). By using the ATLAS.ti™ software that supports the organised breakdown of data, it saves time and possibly increases the validity of the data (Friese, 2012). The ATLAS.ti™ programme enabled the researcher to code and compare segments of data and to organise codes hierarchically so that smaller codes/categories were placed under larger units such as themes (Kalargyrou, 2009).

To assist with the interpretation of the results, the sections used in this discussion are as outlined in Figure 1, which specifies the four major themes that emerged, namely: 1) organisation; 2) interviewees; 3) employability; and 4) qualifications.

The analysis of the correlation between these results and the research questions that guided the study included six aspects, namely: 1) company characteristics; 2) personal characteristics (of the interviewee); 3) employability expectations; 4) expectations of hiring; 5) experience for hiring; and 6) comparison of qualifications. These led to four major themes emerging from the coding, namely: 1) experience related to operational department content (organisation); 2) elaborating on interviewees' characteristics; 3) factors contributing to employability in the industry (employability); and 4) influence of qualifications and expectations before appointment (qualifications/experience).

Figure 1 summarises the topics that emerged from the literature from which *priori* codes were developed. Supplementary concepts and content that were relevant to this study were also coded as *posteriori*-codes, with their explanation and alignment to the four main themes used in this data analysis.

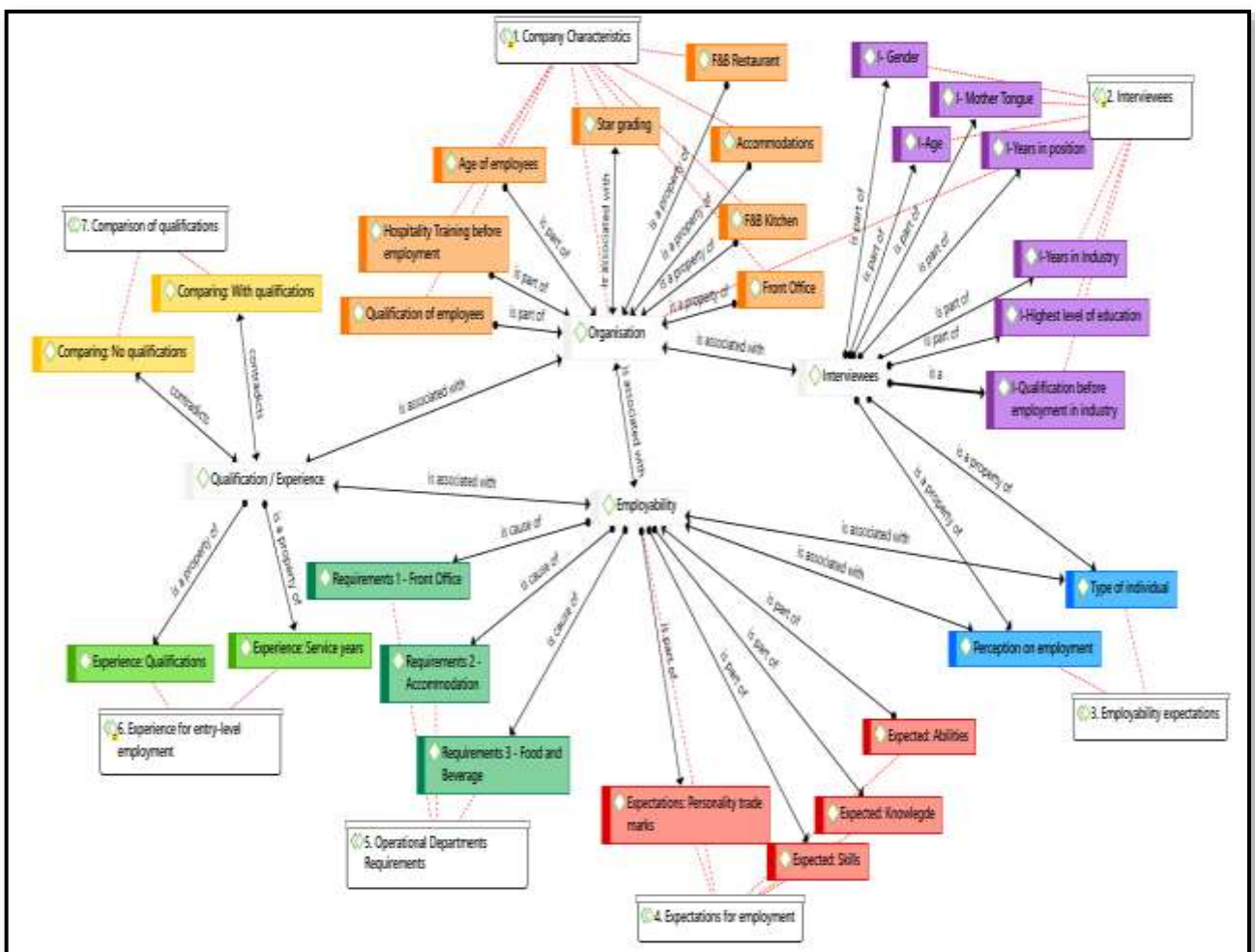


Figure 1. Mapping of Atlas.ti™ on the topics that were used for this study. (Source: Author's own)

## Results

This section reveals the results of the interviews and the analysis of data by using Atlas.ti™, as related to the research objectives guide this study. The objectives were met to address the outcome of this study.

### Organisation

The company characteristics of the hotels, the personal characteristics of the interviewees and employees' characteristics per department are presented only to give an understanding of the interviewees' responses and demographic profile for this study. A total of 12 interviewee responses were received from the 25 target population.

Given that six of the hotels are listed on the JSE, one hotel is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and five are not listed at all, the profile of the majority of the hotels is relatively upmarket. One hotel has a five-star grading, three have a four-star grading, and eight have a three-star grading. All these hotels have the relevant operational departments of food and beverage, front office, accommodation and conferencing facilities, and one hotel has a boardroom for small conferences. One of the hotels has the luxury of a spa as part of its operational departments.

### Personal characteristics of interviewees

Although the personal characteristics of the interviewees were not considered as key variables in the sampling, the respondents' information is presented for background purposes. The respondents who participated in the study reflect that the majority of respondents were males (67%) between the ages of 50 and 60 years, the balance being females (33%) between 30 and 50 years. While the majority of the interviewees used English as the language of the industry, their mother tongues were as follows: Afrikaans – 5, English – 4, Hindi – 1, Setswana – 1 and Chewa – 1.

The respondents who were general managers had been employed in the industry between 11 and 40 years in various roles prior to their appointments as GMs. It was found that 67% of the interviewees had started on entry-level employment in the industry with only Grade 12, and had no formal qualifications prior to employment. Twenty-five per cent (25%) of them had gained a qualification during employment in the industry, however. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of the interviewees had started on entry-level with a qualification in the hospitality industry (degree or diploma). Therefore, only 58% of the interviewees had a qualification in the industry prior to having been promoted to a general manager position. Forty-two per cent (42%) of the interviewees had not completed any formal qualification, and had only received in-house/on-the-job training.

All the interviewees with only Grade 12 (matric) reported that they had gained most of their experience and relevant knowledge and skills through on-the-job/work-integrated training and observation, while 58% of the interviewees had acquired a qualification after entry-level employment in the industry and worked themselves up to the position of general manager. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of the interviewees stated that they had completed a tertiary qualification prior to employment in the industry, while 41% of the interviewees employed in the position of general manager had only a Grade 12 qualification and service years' experience. One interviewee had started as a deputy financial manager, and at the time of the research was the general manager for the hotel, with no hospitality industry qualifications added to their portfolio.

It is therefore safe to deduce that each of these interviewees' background and career path toward a general manager's position had an influence on the way in which they perceived the industry, and that it had an effect on their perception regarding employing an individual in an entry-level position in the industry.

## **Perception of the industry regarding employing an individual in entry-level positions**

The results of the in-depth interviews indicated that the respondents were of the view that hiring an individual for entry-level employment in the industry did not depend on a formal qualification. The responses indicated that qualifications in higher education were not important for entry-level positions, whereas long service or exposure in or to the industry is more important to secure employment in the industry. Grade 12 was the basic required qualification.

According to the following respondents, a qualification is not important for entry-level employment:

- D6: *“... diploma is not a guarantee and not going to teach you how to do the job ...”*
- D3: *“... a qualification only shows that the employee will have the ability to grow in a position in the industry and is committed to the industry.”*

As shown by the results of this study, most of the interviewees had been employed although they possessed only a Grade 12 qualification, following which they worked themselves up with only some of them obtaining a qualification in order to be promoted to a senior management position. Personality skills were the main focus point for entry-level employment. The attitude and values of the individual will have a significant influence on employment, as indicated by the interviewees. It was reported that the individual must have a willingness to work, and that customer satisfaction was important.

Prior exposure to the industry was an advantage for employment, and service years were required by the industry as it would provide a basic understanding of the day-to-day running of the hospitality establishment. In-house training is provided by every company for all employment levels to educate the individual on the daily operations of such company. As service years are important, all employees, with or without a qualification, will start at the bottom of the hierarchy and work themselves up to a more senior position.

During the interviews it was found that all employees would start in an entry-level position and receive training on all the departments of the hotel. In-house training and cross-departmental training are part of their skills development criteria and are done on a weekly basis so that the employee will learn about the various departments' operations.

## **Curriculum-specific skills needed for an entry-level position that are related to the perception of industry role players**

The Hospitality Studies curriculum is very closely related to what the role players view as “basic skills” in the industry. As regards the food and beverage department, the interviewees indicated that only “basic skills” were required. The Hospitality Studies curriculum provides such basic information on the industry. In this way, Grade 12 students will have acquired the basic skills and abilities to enter the industry.

The respondents stated that the following skills are needed for an entry-level position in the industry, which are relevant to the curriculum-specific skills of Hospitality Studies:

- D2: *“... have an idea on how to open and serve a bottle of water or wine. This forms part of basic skills. Must know how to serve food and clean up.”*
- D4: *“must have basic knowledge on guest service and basic hospitality behaviour that is needed in the industry.”*
- D5: *“... will need chefs with experience, ... can't have a chef without experience ...”*
- D7: *“Basic skills are important ... know how to use a knife, kitchen hygiene ... know how to serve tea.”*

As regards the accommodation department, most of the employees are outsourced and trained according to the company's expectations. As the accommodation department's criteria are not fully covered by the curriculum, basic skills on how to make a bed and clean a bathroom are seen as basic skills learned at home.

In the front office department, some level of training is needed to be familiar with working with the public. As training is provided by all the hotel groups, some previous exposure to the industry will be an advantage. As the Hospitality Studies curriculum makes provision for theory on the front office department in the industry, hands-on training is not provided, but basic information is provided. One respondent stated the following about entry-level employment in the front office department:

*D8: "For reception, we expect to have some sort of qualification. But the person that is employed will take two weeks to work in each department, will work in housekeeping, will work in food and beverage, will work in front office to learn the hotel and see how the different departments work together and how they function."*

### **The knowledge, skills, and abilities the industry role players expect an entry-level employee to have**

Knowledge is not as important as personality, skills and abilities to be appointed in an entry-level position. The study found that the industry does not expect a hospitality qualification. Basic knowledge is important for the position the individual applies for. As years of service in the industry are an advantage for the individual, all the hotels provide the relevant knowledge that is required for the industry as all employees start at the bottom of the hierarchy to learn about every department and the daily running of the hotel.

The individual must be able to apply the basic knowledge that was learned in the school's Hospitality Studies curriculum. A rudimentary knowledge of the position applied for in the industry regarding guest service and basic hospitality behaviour is required by the industry. The skills that are expected for the job can be learned and taught on the job. Grade 12 and basic abilities are a must for an entry-level position in the industry. The respondents stated the following about knowledge, skills and abilities for entry-level employment in the industry:

*D2: "The employee must have matric and basic abilities to do the work."*

*D3: "... the finer details can be learned and taught on the job ..."*

The top 10 abilities the industry requires from an individual are as follows:

- 1) **Communication skills** are important as the individual must be able to communicate well so that the guests can be understood by the employee in order to deliver a satisfactory service (*D1, D4, and D7*).
- 2) **Self-motivated** employees who can do and complete the job at hand (*D1 and D6*).
- 3) **Time management**, as the individual must not be a "time watcher" and is expected to do the job until the work is done (*D1, D6, and D7*).
- 4) **Ability to work under pressure** - must be able to face a problem "head on" and sort it out to the guest's satisfaction (*D1, D6, and D7*).
- 5) **Passion and eagerness** to learn and to grow in the industry (*D1, D2, D3, D5, D6, and D8*).
- 6) **Common sense** is important for any position in the industry (*D2, D4, and D6*).
- 7) **Basic manners and values** are important for any position in the industry as guest satisfaction is important (*D2, D3, and D6*).
- 8) **Personality** of the individual - the person must be an extrovert to succeed in the industry (*D1, D5, and D6*).
- 9) **A punctual and energetic person** is important as this is "366-day-a-year" employment (*D2 and D6*).



- 10) **Adaptability to learn** between the different departments to grow as an employee in the industry (D1, D3, D5, and D8).

The top seven skills the industry requires from an individual are as follows:

- 1) A **positive attitude** (D3, D4, D5, and D6).
- 2) Excellent **writing and verbal communication** skills (D1, D4, and D7).
- 3) Proficiency in **computer skills** (D4 and D7).
- 4) **Critical thinking skills** - problem-solving and decision-making skills to the guest's satisfaction (D1 and D6).
- 5) **Basic skills of the industry** are important for the position applied for (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, and D8).
- 6) **Passion for the industry** and the position the individual is employed in on a daily basis (D1, D2, D3, and D6).
- 7) **Willingness to learn** and to grow in the industry, as well as to perform the job (D1, D4, D5, and D8).

From this summary, passion and eagerness for the position and the industry are the main abilities required from an individual. Basic skills of the industry are the main skill highlighted for employment in the industry.

### **What the industry role players expect from an individual with a qualification and one without a qualification.**

By comparing the industry's expectations of an employee with or without qualifications, it was found that a qualification was not as important for employment as long service and exposure to the industry.

The response was that an individual with a qualification expects more from the position and believes they should be in a more supervisory position due to the academic qualification(s) achieved. However, such an individual does not have the years of service to undergird the theory learned in higher education. Basic skills are required, i.e. the individual only needs a rudimentary understanding of and skills required by the industry. An individual with a formal qualification may understand the theory regarding the industry and the theoretical concepts of what is expected in the industry, but generally has limited practical exposure to the industry as such.

As one of the interviewees reported, an employee with a post school qualification would be a better choice for employment, because this individual would have a basic or general understanding of the industry. Such an individual would have a better understanding of the business and would be able to function better as he or she knows what the industry is about and what to expect, leaving the individual better prepared than the one without a qualification, albeit lacking practical experience. Grade 12 Hospitality Studies provides such basic understanding of the industry. Some of the respondents stated the following regarding what they expected from an individual with a qualification and one without a qualification:

- D5: *"... but if you go and speak to people that have done the three years of hospitality diploma, and they get here, and they don't have that experience of dealing with guests ..."*
- D8: *"... we found that a lot of the hospitality students with qualifications will do the theory and everything, but they are not necessarily built for the industry ..."*

An individual without a qualification is eager to learn, and does often not mind starting at the bottom of the hierarchy to be trained in all the departments and work himself or herself up to a more senior position. In one interview, it was found that employees without qualifications are not eager to study

further and grow in their careers, which would have an influence on their appointment in the industry. As one of the interviewees reported:

D6: *“This is an industry where opportunities open and not your qualification is going to help you get to the position, but then you need to walk. It is the output of the walk that will get you up, not just a diploma anymore ... Diploma can help you start the job ...”*

Entry-level qualified employees need exposure to the industry. They might have a grasp on the theory of the industry and how it is supposed to be, but do not have the actual experience of the daily running of a hospitality establishment. The relevant knowledge can only be obtained through first-hand experience in the industry. This has an influence on the practical capacity of the individual with a qualification, as such individual would then have the same exposure to the industry as the employee without a qualification.

## Discussion

Although the aim of a qualitative approach is not to report data in a numeric format, it is still of interest to express a summary of the main findings. As this is a small data sample, this data cannot be considered as the ultimate findings. More studies must be conducted to arrive at more accurate and comprehensive findings. As regards this study, it is safe to report that the following findings were made from the interview respondents on “The perceptions of role players in the hospitality industry regarding their expectations of entry-level employees”:

- 17% required a **tertiary qualification** for entry-level employment in the industry;
- 83% required only a **Grade 12 qualification** for entry-level employment in the industry;
- 75% required **years of service** or exposure to the industry for entry-level appointments in the industry;
- 25% required **no service years** or exposure to the industry for entry-level appointments in the industry;
- 75% viewed **attitude** as the main personal trait for employment;
- 33% stated that the **Hospitality Studies curriculum at school level** had an influence on appointment, as basic skills, knowledge and abilities were studied at school level for employment in the industry (these role players were familiar with the curriculum);
- 67% stated that the **Hospitality Studies curriculum at school level does not** serve as indication of abilities, although it provided basic knowledge, skills and abilities (these role players were not familiar with the curriculum);
- 67% indicated that all the required skills and knowledge and abilities for entry-level positions can be **learned on the job**;
- 75% **made appointments only from within the company**, as cross-training took place between service departments;
- 50% of the companies **made internal or external appointments**; and
- 42% of employers expected employees with or without formal qualifications to start at the **bottom of the hierarchy** and work themselves up.

It was originally expected that the industry would be able to provide specific skills required from the Hospitality Studies curriculum for entry-level positions in the hospitality industry. Unfortunately, the responses of the respondents were very vague regarding specific skills, as only general skills were discussed.

Zagonari (2009) suggests that the Hospitality Studies curriculum should provide a balance between elementary knowledge, specialised skills and particular abilities required by the industry. This applies in particular to the skills and qualities required by the industry for entry-level employment, and theoretical and practical information thereon would assist students and enable them to contribute more effectively to the industry.

## Limitations

This study was based on the perceptions of the employers in the industry in the City of Tshwane, and the findings of this study can therefore not be extrapolated to other parts of the country. This study was only based on the perceptions and personal experience of the indicated participants. The participants who were interviewed were mainly employees in senior/executive management positions, and junior management positions were not included in this study. However, it might be beneficial to apply this study to a larger population.

The low response rate could indicate that the employers in the hospitality industry were not interested in completing the survey as it could have a negative effect on the perceptions and expectations of hiring entry-level employees in the hospitality industry. The results and conclusions should be interpreted with caution due to the small participant sample size. Any statements or predictions made on these findings are based on a limited sample size and should not be assumed to reflect the whole hospitality industry. Data should also be interpreted with circumspection due to the low number of responses.

The researcher initially planned to conduct interviews regarding the perceptions of food and beverage managers, accommodation managers and human resource managers. It was found that general managers did not want to give consent for interviews with said departmental managers, but they were more than willing to take part in the interviews themselves.

## Conclusions

The main purpose of the study, which was ultimately aimed at determining the perceptions of role players in the hospitality industry regarding their expectations of entry-level employees, was achieved.

This study found that a Grade 12 individuals with or without Hospitality Studies can enter the hospitality industry for employment. The only entry-level requirements the role players (interviewees) in the industry had, were that entrants must have the correct attitude and some practical experience of the daily running of hospitality establishments. As the subject Hospitality Studies' curriculum only provides students with the basic skills, it will clearly become necessary for an individual to undergo practical training in the industry, in for example inter alia, a hotel, motel or guest house as this practical experience is currently not part of the local curriculum.

Criteria that could have an influence on the appointment of entry-level individuals, were highlighted and discussed. These criteria can be summarised as the attitude of the individual and experience in the sector, which influences appointments in the hospitality industry. If these criteria could be incorporated at a school level, they could have a positive impact on the unemployment statistics of South Africa. Secondary educators can learn from the higher education experience where internships are a mandatory requirement and are common among tertiary hospitality programmes. To accomplish this, all industry sectors should provide where possible, suitable internship opportunities, which often result in job offers for high performers. It is critical that there be regular meetings between relevant stakeholders such as, for example, potential employers in the industry and the relevant educational institutions, which take the form of workshops on curriculum development, so as to effectively gauge and ascertain required industry needs. Such workshops should be at least annual events.

There is also a need to replicate this profile analysis in different samples in different parts of the country in order to verify if the same profile data would emerge in other areas, or whether there are other configurations for different samples or contexts that need to be considered?

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