



Students' perspectives on why they choose to study hospitality management: A South African case study

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Abstract

This article sought to explore why learners choose to study hospitality management at tertiary level. This was accomplished by soliciting perceptions of new hospitality management students in one comprehensive university in South Africa. Understanding why learners choose certain academic programmes at university level is crucial. This phenomenon has been researched widely in countries like the United State of America, Australia, Asia and Malaysia among others. However in South Africa there seems to be a paucity of research on students' motivation of choosing to study hospitality management. It is hoped that this research will fill that gap. A self-completion questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions was utilised to collect data from a random sample of fifty-two (52) new students registered for the national diploma in hospitality management in the comprehensive university under study. Excel was used to analyse the data. The results of this study reveal that learners choose hospitality management for various reasons including that hospitality is a growing industry with job opportunities, it provides travel opportunities, it opens up opportunities to get employment anywhere in the world. In addition, this research showed that hospitality learners have passion for the food industry and the majority of them would like to own hospitality businesses. It is hoped that the results of this evaluation will contribute to literature in students' motives for career choices. It is also anticipated that the findings of this study will be used as input in the hospitality management curriculum development in this comprehensive university. This article ends with recommendations and likely future research.

Keywords: hospitality management, career choice, comprehensive university, perceptions

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is regarded as the largest and fastest growing labour-intensive industry globally (Korpi & Mertens, 2004) that has the potential to make a significant economic contribution to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For this reason more and more skilled workforce is required to meet the needs and expectations of this industry. According to Jooste (2019) Tourism and hospitality sectors are vitally important to the South African economy and that this sector should be developed for sustained and inclusive growth. Ezeuduji, Chibe and Nyathela (2017) posit that Higher Education Institutions are expected to admit appropriate students to study hospitality management and also to prioritise those students who selected hospitality management as their first choice. Their study further revealed that female students show more interest in hospitality management programmes than male students. It is believed for the industry to meet its growth needs more students need to enrol for the hospitality management qualifications. For HEIs to succeed in attracting students to study hospitality programmes they must understand what motivates them (students) to study hospitality and what their needs are. Scholars in the hospitality management field agree that if hospitality management curriculum is student-oriented



hospitality management programs can generate quality learning outcomes and student satisfaction.

This study explores perceptions of new learners in one comprehensive university in South Africa on why they choose to study for the national diploma in hospitality management. They were surveyed to gain insight into their perspectives. Understanding students' perspectives on why they choose certain courses at university will help the higher education institution in reviewing its hospitality academic programme. The following section highlights literature related to students' motivations for choosing to study hospitality management. The rest of this article deals with research objectives, research questions, research methodology, data analysis and findings. The last section concludes this article and makes recommendations and likely future research.

Literature review

A thorough search of the existing literature indicates that student motivation has been researched widely in countries like the United State of America, Australlia, Asia and Malaysia among others. However, in South Africa as far as could be ascertained there seems to be a paucity of research on students' motivation of choosing to study hospitality management. It is hoped that this research will fill that gap. O'Mahony, McWilliams and Whitelaw (2001) in Australia, undertook a study to identify motivations that lead Australian students to choose to study hospitality management. Findings of this study revealed that Australian students chose to study hospitality management because of their desire to acquire more knowledge about hospitality and also to influence their family members to select appropriate career in the future. Moreover it was found that students' positive perceptions of the hospitality industry were the main driving force behind students' choice of the hospitality management program.

The students' positive perceptions of the hospitality industry were attributed to personal observations, personal experience as casual or part time employees, media reports on projected rates of growth in the hospitality industry and from discussions with other referent groups. It must also be noted that students in O'Mahony et al 's research, the role of parents, teachers, school counsellors or peers were not perceived as having influenced students' choice of the program. On the other hand Hjalager (2003) discovered three motives behind students' choice of hospitality management courses in Sweden which were work experience, the value of programs in hospitality industry and passion to work with people, and this supported by Nicolaidis (2015). Kim, Lee and Cohen (2008) mentioned acquiring more knowledge, more chances of finding job opportunities by learning international languages and new ways of doing things as key factors motivating students to study for the hospitality program.

Schmidt (2002) notes four factors that motivate students to choose to enrol in hospitality management namely personal factors, demographic factors (e.g. sex, nationality, age) psychological factors (motives, perceptions, attitudes), and social factors (culture, level of family, reference group). In a Malaysian study undertaken by Mohammed, Hassan and Meng (2016), the results showed the primary reasons behind choosing to study hospitality management were increased job opportunities, field attractiveness, easy entry into hospitality programmes and passion for the practical aspect of the programme.

Much literature reveals that the hospitality industry's attractive employment prospects are regarded as the primary drivers for choosing hospitality management as the studying area (Kim & Park, 2013; Wan Yim King & Kong Weng Hong, 2011). Farmaki (2016) is of the view that international students in Cyprus, select tourism and hospitality management as study area because this industry is emerging in their home countries or they hope to get good employment overseas specifically in France and Italy. Ezeuduji et al., (2017) in a further study they conducted in South Africa reported that 57% of students surveyed did not choose hospitality management as their first choice. This finding is in support of the work by Lu & Adler (2009) who argue that hospitality is not always the students' first choice. Ezeuduji et al.,



(2017) have further noted that female students prefer studying hospitality management more than male students do, as there are more female respondents than there are male respondents in the study sample.

Research aims and objectives

The overall aim of this research was to explore students motivations for choosing to study for the national diploma in hospitality management in one comprehensive university in South Africa. Specific objectives were:

- To identify the major reasons for enrolling in hospitality management
- To establish why students choose to study at the particular comprehensive university
- To determine if hospitality was their first choice
- To establish if students received information that assisted them to choose hospitality

Research questions

This research aimed to address the following questions:

- What motivated the students to enrol for the National Diploma in Hospitality Management?
- What motivated the students to study at the comprehensive university under study?
- Was the national diploma in hospitality management the students first choice?
- Did students receive information before making the study choice that helped them choose hospitality?

Research methodology and design

This quantitative study was conducted in the Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Management Department of one Comprehensive University in South Africa. Self-completion questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to gather data from fifty-two (52) new students who have enrolled for the National Diploma in Hospitality Management in the comprehensive university under study. The researchers believed that self-completion questionnaire was the most appropriate for this research. Self-completion questionnaires are the cheapest method of data collection. More-over they provide anonymity for the respondents and respondents are more likely to answer honestly if they don't have to reveal their identities. The questionnaire was first piloted to three (3) new students enrolled for the national diploma in hospitality management to ensure validity and reliability. Thereafter minor changes were effected. There were fifty-two (52) respondents who agreed to participate in the survey and all of them returned their completed questionnaires. The respondents were requested to hand in the questionnaires immediately after completion. The data gathered was then analysed with the use of excel.

Ethical considerations

Respondents for this study were selected using a simple random sampling technique. However, only those respondents who agreed to participate in the study were recruited for the research. The participants were informed of the purpose of the survey in an invitation letter with instructions provided on completing specific sections of the survey. The researchers assured respondents that their responses will be kept anonymous and that all data obtained during this research process would be used for research purposes only. Learners were also informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that they are free to discontinue participation in this research should they so wish.

Data analysis and discussion of findings

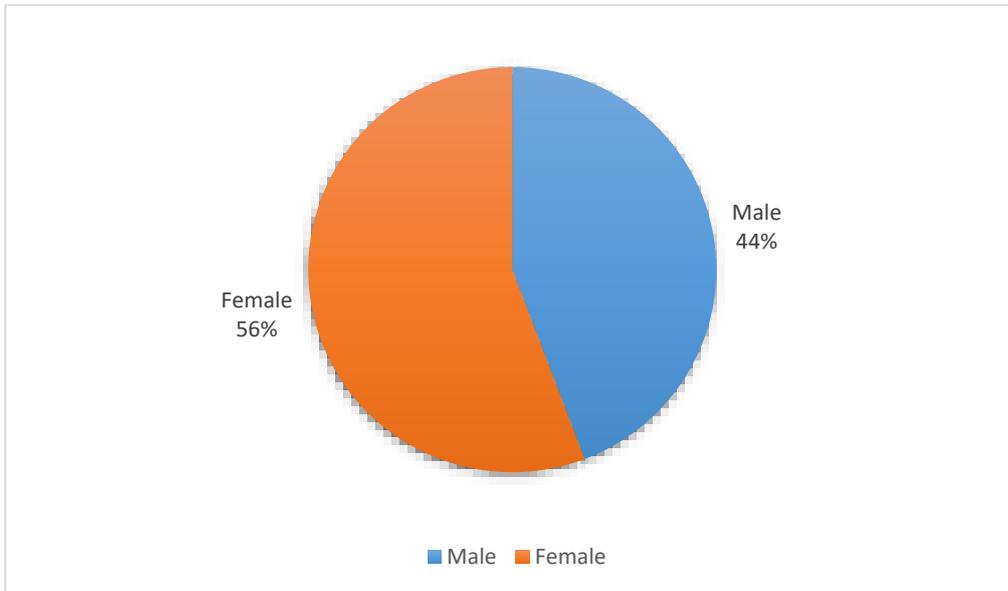
This section presents data analysis and discusses results of this study. The data was gathered from fifty-two (52) new students who had enrolled for the National Diploma in

Hospitality Management who consented to participate in this research is presented below beginning with biographical information.

Demographic findings

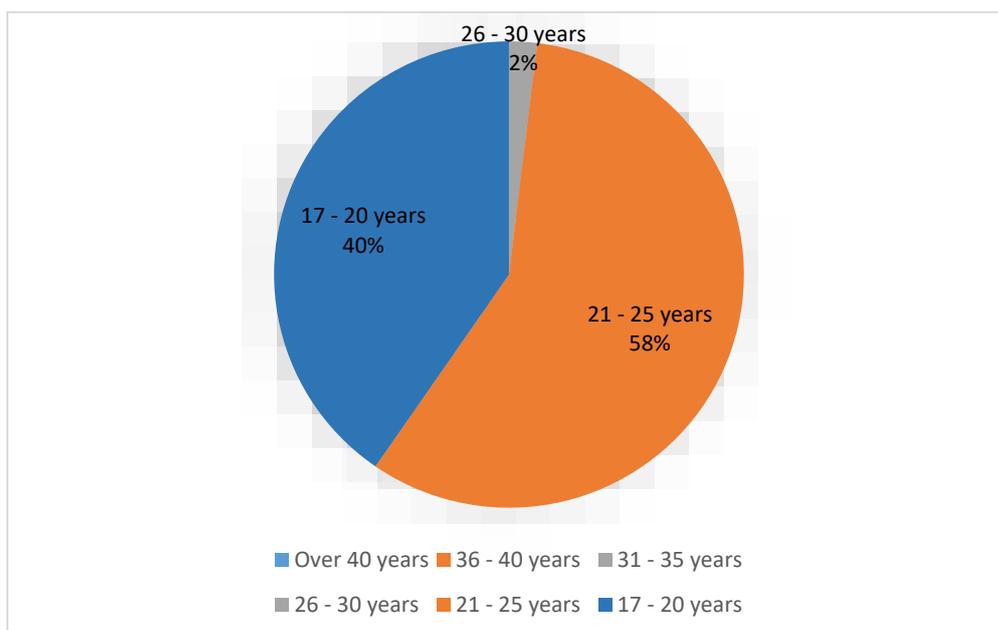
Biographical data collected in this study consisted of gender and age. Existing literature indicates that more females than males chose to study for hospitality management. In terms of gender of the new hospitality management students who participated in this study Table 1, shows that females comprised 56% of the sample while males accounted for 44% of the sample. This gender distribution supports findings of the literature reviewed in this work which reported that female students are more interested in studying hospitality management than male students are (Ezeuduji et al., 2017).

Figure 1. Participants gender



The participants were predominantly aged between 21 and 25 years.

Figure 2. Participants Age





The overall aim of this research was to explore students motivations for choosing to study for the national diploma in hospitality management in one comprehensive university in South Africa. One of the specific objectives of the study was to identify the major reasons for enrolling in hospitality management.

This section presents interpretation and analysis of findings based on data collected from respondents under the four respective objectives of this research paying attention to the questions detailed in the self-completion questionnaire.

Major reasons for enrolling in hospitality management

An analysis of the questionnaire responses from fifty-two (52) new hospitality students revealed six (6) major factors which include; planning to own a hospitality business; like preparing food; hospitality management is related to their career path; job opportunities; enjoy engaging with people; opportunities for travelling abroad.

The majority of respondents (21%) stated that they chose to study hospitality management because they would like to own a hospitality business in the future.

13% of the cohort said they decided to study hospitality management because they like preparing food.

11% chose hospitality because it is related to their career path.

10% stated that they decided to study hospitality because it has job opportunities.

8% said they study hospitality management because they enjoy engaging with people

6% indicated they chose hospitality management because it provides opportunities for travelling abroad.

When a question on whether students chose hospitality management because they were interested in it 85% responded in the affirmative while 15 % said “no”.

Why students choose to study at the particular Comprehensive University

The second objective of this study was to establish why students chose to study at the comprehensive university under study. The majority of the respondents (18%) indicated they decided to study at this CU because it is closest home while 12% stated that they selected the CU because it is a well-known university in South Africa. 9% indicated they decided to study at the CU because most universities do not offer hospitality management. 8% stated they chose the CU because it was recommended to them by trusted sources. 3% indicated they decided to study with the CU because the study fees of the CU were affordable to them.

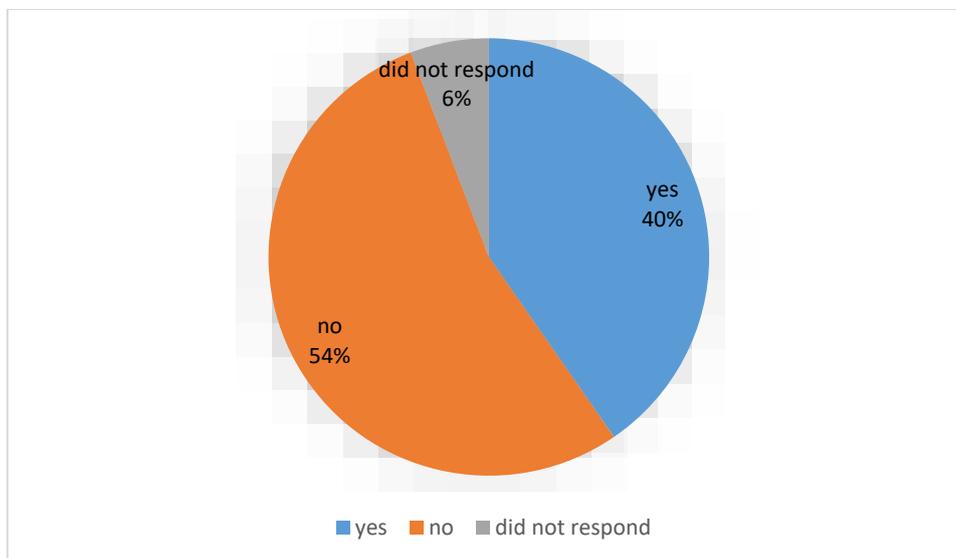
Was the national diploma in hospitality management the first choice

The third objective of the present study was to determine whether the national diploma in hospitality management was the students' first choice. The majority of respondents (83%) indicated the national diploma in hospitality management was their first choice while 9% did not choose hospitality management as first choice and 8% did not respond to this question. This finding contrasts with Ezeudji et al (2017) and Lu and Adler (2009) who contend that hospitality management is always not the students' first choice of study. This is why industry involvement is needed throughout:

The value of industry involvement in learner education is priceless to the welfare of the industry itself. By aiding the education provider, industry will not find any mismatches between what it needs and what education provides. Learners who have 'meaningful' experiential learning encounters are more self-disciplined and self-confident. They also tend to be far more motivated and are realistic in their expectations of the industry.

Their time-management skills are greatly enhanced if they have been provided with a 'meaningful' experiential encounter.(Nicolaides, 2015:9)

Figure 3. Career advice before study choice



Did respondents receive career advice prior to making study choices

The final objective of this research was to establish if students received career advice which led them to choose hospitality management. The majority of students (54%) stated that they did not receive any advice before making their study choices while 40% claimed that they did receive advice before making their choices. The remaining respondents (6%) did not respond to the question.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This article sought to explore learners' motivations of choosing to study for the national diploma in hospitality management in a comprehensive university in South Africa. The findings of this research revealed that there were numerous factors learners considered before deciding to pursue the national diploma in hospitality management at tertiary level and these include: planning to own a hospitality business in future; enjoying preparing food; hospitality management is related to their career path; provides job opportunities; enjoy working with people and provides opportunities for travelling abroad. Determining differences in the study motivations between females and males was not an objective of this study. However the profile of participants reveals that females respondents in this study are in the majority which is in line with other studies reviewed in this research.

Unlike other studies reviewed in this article (Ezeuduji et al, 2017), motivations between females and males was not an objective of this study. However the profile of participants reveals that females respondents in this study are in the majority which is in line with other studies reviewed in this research. Contrasting with other studies reviewed in this article (Ezeuduji et al, 2017; Lu & Adler (2009) who argue that hospitality is not always the students' first choice the results of this research reveal that the National Diploma in Hospitality Management was the first choice for the majority of respondents (83%).

Ezeuduji et al (2017) in a study they conducted in South Africa reported that 57% of students surveyed did not choose hospitality management as their first choice. This finding is in support of the work by in results of this research reveals that the national diploma in hospitality was the first choice for the majority of respondents (83%).



Limitations and future research

This study identified factors that motivate students to enrol for the national diploma in hospitality management in a comprehensive university in South Africa. This research provides valuable insight regarding why students make certain career choices at tertiary level. However this research is limited with regards to generalization of findings because a case study methodology was followed. The study is therefore limited in representativeness. A study including other HEIs offering hospitality management programmes should be considered in future.

Furthermore, a comparative study among the different levels would give a more comprehensive understanding of hospitality management study motivations. Lastly a study that adopts a combination of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research could be undertaken in the future for more understanding of the phenomenon studied here.

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