Full Length Research Paper

The hospitality and tourism honours degree programme: Stakeholders' perceptions on competencies developed

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University tourism education is relatively a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe and its multi disciplinary nature poses challenges in the organization of the curriculum. Issues of imbalance, content/competencies developed, employability and the demands of various stakeholders provide a constant tension that has to be diffused through careful curriculum design and evaluation. A survey was conducted to examine the stakeholders' perceptions on structure, relevance, adequacy and balance of the courses, quality of lecture delivery and graduate employability. The results revealed that stakeholders had moderate perceptions on competencies developed by the degree programme. The study also identified some gaps in the curriculum that need to be addressed. These gaps could be filled by developing a graduate competency framework which can be used by all stakeholders. This framework could also help to reduce misconceptions about stakeholders' expectations and subsequently increase the chances of graduate employability.

Key words: Stakeholders' perceptions, competencies, curriculum, employability, hospitality and tourism education.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is defined as a whole educational experience packaged as a degree / diploma/ certificate programme and consists of various modules or courses filled with knowledge, skills/ competencies, and attitudes (Tribe, 2002). Tourism education and curriculum design at whatever level are embedded in a complex construct of influences of stakeholders, with students, employers (or the industry) and government funding bodies being the most important ones (Tribe, 2002; Smith and Cooper, 2002; Morgan, 2004). Literature review shows that there is an increasing discussion among hospitality and tourism scholars on the effectiveness of the hospitality and

tourism curricula more so at university level (Sheldon et al., 2008). It is frequently said that university tourism education, which in most cases has emerged from purely vocational training courses has not yet overcome its vocational focus (Busby and Fiedel, 2001; Tribe, 2002; Busby, 2003; Airey, 2005). The vocational thrust could be better explained for technical colleges but with the embedment of hospitality and tourism education at university level, the need for balancing vocational and liberal aspects in the curricula is becoming increasingly important (Tribe, 2002; Morrison and O'Mahony, 2003; Inui et al., 2006). Students have to be educated to think critically, be analytical and be able to use creative and new ways of thinking to solve problems and adapt easily to changes. Above that, they have to actively participate in creating and shaping the future of hospitality and tourism. This includes a strong focus on generic skills, which are described as "those transferable skills which are essential for employability at some level" (Raybould and Wilkins, 2005; Ring et al., 2009).

According to Barrows et al. (2008), any hospitality and

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Non Standard Abbreviations: BTHT, Bachelor of Technology in Hospitality and Tourism.

tourism management curriculum should deliver the skills and competencies needed in the workplace and the institutional demands for academic rigor. The common concern among these stakeholders is that the degree of actual "fit" between the university education provided and the demands of industry employment may be a poor one (Hearns et al., 2007). The forefront of this dissonance is the industry assertion that education providers are producing poorly prepared graduates with unrealistic expectations of an industry where operational competence is of vital importance (Barrow et al., 2008). A number of studies looked at various aspects of the hospitality curricula including the rationale for competency based education, the inclusion of work based training (Inui et al., 2006; Acolla, 2006; Pearce, 2006). Other studies focused on industry expectations of graduate skills and the actual skills held by graduates, (Perdue et al., 2000; Kay and Russette, 2000; Raybould and Wilkins, 2005). Most research in graduate skills has focused on management expectations and has been criticized for adopting a one-sided perspective that ignores student/graduate perceptions. Hearns et al. (2007) and Christou (2000) argued that students' perceptions on the degree programme may help the educators to understand their motivation to pursue the degree programme and employability prospects.

University tourism education in Zimbabwe is relatively new as the first undergraduate degree was launched in 1996. Currently, there are only undergraduate hospitality and tourism management programmes in the country. The focus of each degree programme depends on the mandate of its university. With the embedment of tourism education at universities, the need for balancing vocational and liberal aspects in curricula is of paramount importance as highlighted in tourism education studies (Tribe, 2002; Morrison and O'Mahony, 2003; Inui et al., 2006). Furthermore, they emphasized that meeting the industry's requirements and expectations is still a basic aim of tourism curricula.

The degree under study the Bachelor of Technology in Hospitality and Tourism (BTHT) is a four year programme including a year dedicated to industrial attachment. Its conceptual framework was guided by the vision of the School; which is "To be the center of excellence in Hospitality and Tourism training in the region and internationally". This framework is closely aligned with the University vision and mission; "Technology, Innovation and Wealth". The theme reflects and guides how specific skills and competencies should be developed and nurtured in preparing students as future leaders and managers for the hospitality and tourism industry. The degree programme focuses on developing a clear understanding, appreciation and application of technological competencies and innovations in the hospitality and tourism industry. Both hospitality and tourism specific knowledge as well as business related course are embedded in the degree programme.

Tourism employers often recruit and promote diploma holders and non-tourism than degree graduates (Dale and Robinson, 2001). This highlights gaps between the industry and higher education institutions and such a phenomenon indicates a waste of human and educational resources. A study from a study by Mayaka and King (2002) in Kenya, indicate considerable convergence between the perceptions of industry operators and education providers concerning quality gaps in the development of skills. A number of systemic training shortcomings are identified including curriculum deficiencies and the inadequate development and enhancement of workplace skills. Zimbabwe and Kenya (both developing countries) could be facing similar imbalances in the scope of tourism education and its relevance to the tourism industry and graduate expectations. There has also been scarcity of empirical evidence on Zimbabwean tourism education in general (and in particular the BTHT programme) on the extent to which their content and delivery has been effective in developing graduates competencies for the workplace and to enable them to instigate change. It is against this background that this paper explored the perceptions of major stakeholders mainly the employers, academics as well as the students/graduates of the BTHT degree programme in order to:

1. Determine the relevance, adequacy and the balance of the courses in the degree programme.
2. To Compare stakeholders perceptions on competencies developed.
3. Establish students' perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery.
4. Examine the employability of the graduates of this degree programme.

The results of this study could help to detect programme defects and take corrective action towards improving the BTHT curriculum which subsequently may, increases the chances of graduate employability.

Tourism education: Curriculum planning and development

The relative youth of the subject area renders the educator's task of developing a curriculum difficult in comparison to more established fields (Cooper, 2002). He further explains that issues of balance, content and the demands of varied stakeholders provide a constant tension that has to be diffused through careful curriculum design. In fact, the very nature of tourism, segmented and multi-disciplinary, creates conflicting views for the development of undergraduate tourism programmes (Acola, 2006; Cooper, 2002).

The development of tourism programmes has been influenced by a number of factors including the way in

which the study of tourism is defined and the needs met by the tourism programme (Acola, 2006; Makaya and King, 2002). The most important issue regarding the nature and purpose of the hospitality and tourism management degrees is the relevance of the curriculum to meet both the students' expectations and needs of the hospitality and tourism industry. Makaya and King (2002) posit that given the increasing emphasis on accountability and the prevailing climate of funding cuts (especially in developing countries like Kenya), there is an argument that tourism education providers should keep their programmes responsive to the needs of the industry as well as the expectation of their students. Sensitivity to stakeholder needs is particularly important for curriculum design and for tourism education provision in less developed countries (like Zimbabwe) where resources are scarce.

Kelly–Patterson and George (2001) emphasized that higher education institutions play a critical role in preparing graduates for the world of work and in forming and bridging expectations between graduates and employers. They further report that there have been concerns and indeed dissatisfaction, expressed by education providers, industry representatives and graduates in hospitality and tourism regarding the education experience. According to Jenkins (2001) education providers have criticized the industry for its old-fashioned attitudes and amateur human resources management approaches he further stated that higher education programmes may actually produce graduate disillusionment with the hospitality career path leading to many graduates seeking employment outside the industry altogether. Christou (2000) in his studies of industry expectations of competencies highlighted that hospitality and tourism graduates need a range of competencies such as decision making and problem solving ability, teamwork, initiative and interpersonal skills to enable them perform effectively at the work place. Malone (2007) also found that teamwork, basic ICT knowledge, oral communication, presentation skills and time management were considered to be well developed transferable skills through academic programmes. In relation to the Irish system, O'Connor (2002) reports that undergraduate hospitality management degree programmes build students' management skills and encourage awareness of the external environment within which hospitality organizations operate. However, he criticizes the programmes for failing to promote innovation, creativity and entertainment to a sufficient level. Velo and Mittaz (2006) examined the competencies needed by hospitality management graduates to cope with challenges facing hotel chains engaged in international expansion. The skills found to be most critical to the ability to break into emerging international markets were flexibility, openness and cultural awareness. These authors also draw attention to the vital role played by hospitality management educators in the

development of these competencies.   Ring et al. (2009) contends   that   the cultivation of these generic managerial   competencies   is   assuming   greater importance within the industry. Continuous research and stakeholder consultations have to be done for the curriculum to remain abreast of the industry changes and norms (Velo and Mittaz, 2006).

Most studies consider the inclusion of industrial attachment/internship as an integral part of a tourism and hospitality degree programme (Heaton et al., 2008; Archer et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2010). Work placements can provide the 'bridge' necessary for new graduates even before they have completed their degree course whilst at the same time making a significant contribution to the employing organization (Heaton et al., 2008). Work based learning also provides graduates with comprehensive skills desired by potential employers, in particular the development of behavioral 'people skills' such as self confidence, communication, understanding work culture, work ethics, customer relationship, time management, initiative and relationship building and developing a sense of professionalism (Archer et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2010). At best, industrial attachment only "adequately prepare" graduates for the realities of hospitality and tourism management provided both supervisors (academic and industry) effectively facilitate the integration of learning (Whitelaw, 2003; Martin et al., 2010).

Employability of graduates

Increasingly, the content of the degree and the vocational opportunities it offers are imperative when the graduates make their own final career/ destination choices (Dale and Robinson, 2001). The authors further argue that career paths within the tourism industry are not clearly defined and this can demotivate and discourage graduates from entering the industry. Most researchers found that most tourism employers often recruit non tourism graduates (Dale and Robinson, 2001; Dewar et al., 2002). The higher education institutions continuously develop pools of tourism graduates every year to meet the overwhelming demand by the expanding industry. Unfortunately, few graduates are dedicated to the industry and committed to their jobs. Industry managers comment that young tourism graduates seem to have unrealistic career expectations. For example, they expect to get promotion from operative to managerial levels within two to three years in the hotel industry (Dewar et al., 2002).

The generic skills framework

The generic skills framework was developed in an educational context and has been used widely in the UK, USA and Australia in curriculum analysis and design

(Australian National Training Authority, 2003; Kearns, 2001). The framework describes generic skills as those transferable skills which are essential for employability at some level. Australian National Training Authority (2003) also refers to generic skills as "core skills", "key competencies" and recently as "employability skills". These generic skills include; skills, abilities, and personal attributes that can be used within the wide range of working environments that graduates operate in throughout their lives (Kearns, 2001; Fraser, 2001; Ring et al., 2009). They grouped the generic skills as:

1. Foundation skills of literacy; numeracy and information technology.
2. Self-awareness and interpersonal skills; including the capacity for self-management, collaboration and leadership.
3. Communication skills for effective presentation and cultural understanding; critical analysis skills to evaluate, synthesize and judge.
4. Problem-solving skills to apply and adopt knowledge to the real world.
5. Creative skills to imagine invent and discover.

This broad focus of these generic skills acknowledges the dynamic and unpredictable nature of employment and the need for workers to be able to hold and continually upgrade sets of generic skills that can be transferred across different settings (Curtis and McKenzie, 2001). The focus of the generic skills approach is on broad learning outcomes for students rather than on the narrower management activities or competencies identified by Sandwith (1993). It also acknowledges the role of higher education in preparing students for lifelong learning. Studies by Nolan et al. (2010) and Raybould et al. (2005) point out that, there are numerous competencies which span into eight overarching areas: professional knowledge / operational skills; interpersonal skills; communication; information technology; human resources; finance; sales and marketing. Acquiring these skills will ultimately result in graduates having the necessary competencies to perform their roles effectively (Raybould et al., 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on establishing stakeholders' perceptions on the competencies developed by the BTHT degree programme. The authors developed a dual conceptual framework by adapting the frameworks by Dunne et al. (1999) and Sandwith (1993). It is a combination of generic skills model developed in an educational context to aid curriculum design by Dunne et al. (1999) and the management competency framework developed by Sandwith (1993). This adaptation was necessary as it reduces the limitations of the generic skills model which Raybould and Wilkins (2005) observed that it gives limited value in curriculum design as it describes a narrow range of relatively advanced management skills that one would not expect to find in an undergraduate or recent graduate. The dual conceptual framework has a cluster of seven broad competencies which are: professional knowledge,

operational skills, communication skills, ICT, human resources management and business acumen related skills (accounting, finance, sales and marketing) are illustrated in Figure 1.

A survey was conducted to find out the stakeholders' perceptions on competences developed by the BTHT programme. The study was conducted at a state university in Mashonaland West Province and in hospitality and tourism institutions where third year students were on industrial attachment. The study was conducted from August, 2009 to December, 2010. The interpretive framework employed, permitted the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions relating to the tripartite partnership between the students, academics and the industry supervisors. The thrust was to explore meaning from a number of angles as illustrated by Sovilla and Varty (2004). The use of quantitative and qualitative data analysis in this case study aimed at communicating the perceptions of different stakeholders.

Population and sampling

The population of the study comprised of 96 (44 fourth/final year and 52 third year) BTHT students, 175 BTHT graduates, 25 lecturers, and 40 hospitality and tourism managers (30 hospitality and 10 tourism). The third year students were on a 10 month supervised industrial attachment in hospitality and/or tourism establishments. To assist in sampling, information from departmental student records including industrial attachment records were used. These records assisted in selecting hospitality and tourism institutions that had continuously engaged students for internship since 2004 when the first group of students of this programme went on industrial attachment. Simple random and convenience sampling techniques were used to select students/graduates and lecturers respectively. The sample was 70 students, 20 graduates, 20 lecturers, and 10 hospitality and tourism managers.

Data collection and analysis

Three different questionnaires were designed for the students, lecturers, and industrialists respectively. The questionnaires were distributed and the response rate was 100%. Both telephone and face to face interviews were conducted with the graduates. Secondary data was also used and this was collected from departmental records. Content analysis of relevant documentation such as industry supervisors' reports, degree regulations and lecturer evaluation forms was intended for data triangulation. According to Yin (2003), triangulation of data from different sources (in this case from students, lecturers and industrialists) enhances credibility and dependability.

Stakeholders' perceptions on various aspects of the BTHT programme were assessed using different five point likert scales and weighted mean scores. The weighted mean scores were then compared using the t - student test. This interpretation is considered to be appropriate since the measurement of perceptions is continuous rather than discrete. The data on employability of graduates was analyzed for content thematically to elucidate a picture of graduate employment experiences and reflections of graduates on their educational experiences / competencies acquired.

RESULTS

Lecturers strongly agreed on all attributes (mean values of 4.5 to 4.8) as shown in Table 1. Students on the other hand strongly agreed on adequacy of entry requirements
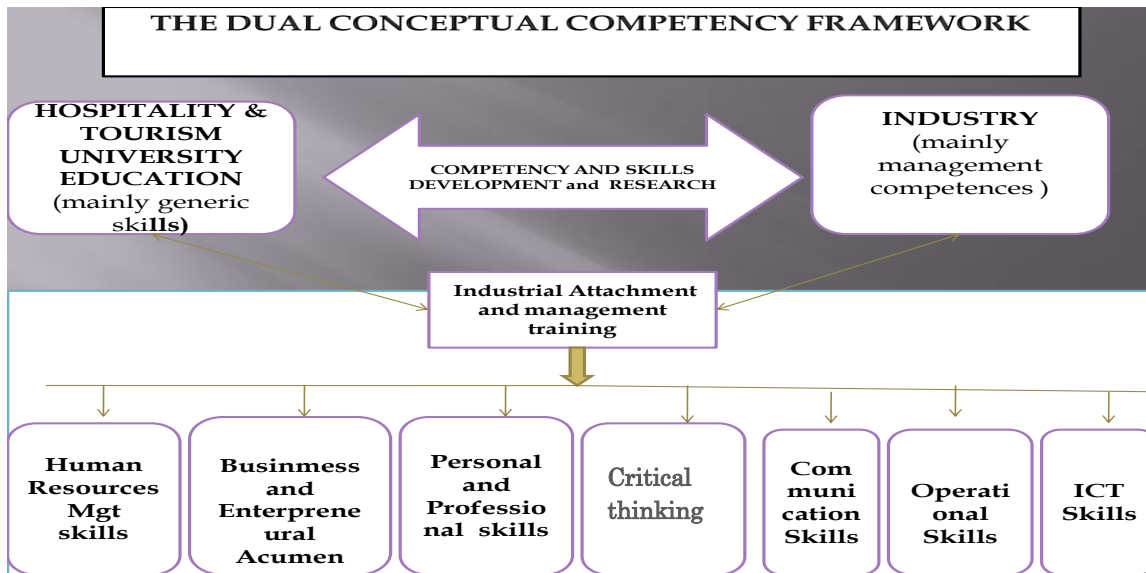
THE DUAL CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Figure 1. The Dual Conceptual Competency Framework. Adapted from Sandwith (1993), Dunne et al. (1999) and Raybould and Wilkins (2005).

Table 1. Stakeholders' perceptions on the relevance, adequacy and balance of BTHT programme structure.

Variable	Students perceptions		Lecturers perceptions	
Programme attributes	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Courses logically sequenced	3.7	1.216	4.6	1.354
Relevance of courses offered	3.8	1.155	4.7	1.73
Adequacy of courses offered	4.1	1.06	4.8	1.734
Balance of courses offered	3.1	0.45	4.5	1.273
Adequacy of entry requirements	4.5	1.48	4.7	1.522

t test p = 0.0001365; Level of stakeholders' perception on programme attributes: 1-5 point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Indifferent, 4 = Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree.

(mean = 4.5) while all mean scores for other attributes ranged from 3.1 to 4.1 indicating perception responses between average and good results of the t test revealed that there was very high significant difference (p = 0. 0.0001365) between the perceptions of the two stakeholders on the adequacy, relevance and balance of the BTHT programme. Presented is a summary of comments made by the stakeholders.

"Practical courses (such, as food preparation, professional cookery, pastry etc) give us a competitive advantage in the job market."

"Practical courses prepare us for industrial attachment as well as our own entrepreneurial activities."

"Industrial attachment is important in developing work related competencies."

"Business courses develop our financial management skills and groom us for entrepreneurial activities."

"Business courses are too many overshadowing the hospitality and tourism courses."

"Just one ICT course which is really introductory is not adequate to give us the competencies needed in the work place."

"The programme does not provide any specialization."

A comparison of the stakeholders' perceived levels of students' competencies are presented in Table 2. The t test (p = 0.051523) show that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of lecturers and industrialists on the level of competencies developed. The level of students' competency on professional skills and operational skills was perceived as high by the both stakeholders (mean scores closer to 4) while on the other

Table 2. Comparison of Stakeholders' perceptions on competencies developed.

Variable	Lecturers		Industrialists	
Competencies developed	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
Professional knowledge	3.9	0.736	3.8	0.607
Operational skills	3.8	0.792	4	0.99
Communication skills	3.1	0.694	2.4	0.46
Information technology	2.4	0.37	2.5	0.5
Human resources management	3.3	0.527	3.1	0.438
Accounting and finance	3.1	0.438	2.5	0.458
Sales and marketing skills	3.4	0.606	2.3	0.313

t test p value = 0.051523; Perceived level of students' competencies: 1-5 point Likert scale: 1 – Very low competency, 2 = Low competency, 3 = Average, 4 = High competency, 5 – Very High competency.

hand they perceived ICT competences as low (2.4: lecturers and 2.5: industrialists). However, industrialists' perceptions on the level of students' competency on all other attributes ranged from low to average (mean score values between 2.3 to 3.1) while those of lecturers indicated average levels of competency on same attributes (mean scores from 3.1 to 3.4). Of all the attributes, professional knowledge competences were perceived as highly developed (60%) (Figure 2). All other competencies were perceived as developed (50 to 70%) except for ICT which was perceived as lowly developed (40%). It is worth pointing out that the attributes of communication and ICT skills had the highest number of respondents who were indifferent (20% compared to 10% in the other attributes). Some of the comments by the graduates were:

'' most of the skills, competencies and knowledge that I learnt from the university only became meaningful when I was faced with the realities of the work world".

"Industrial attachment is an important component of the degree programme. I was exposed to real work environment and gained a variety of skills.

"High managerial competencies are developed gradually a couple of years after graduation at the workplace".

"Graduate management trainee programmes polished my managerial skills".

"I did not benefit a lot from the industrial attachment as some industrial supervisors perceived me as a threat after graduation."

Students' perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery

The mean scores of students' perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery are presented on Table 3. The

students perceptions on lecture delivery ranged from average to good (weighted mean scores: 3.2 to 3.63, with an average of 3.406). Student's comments were summarized as follows**:**

1. Large classes hinder effective development of operational skills.
2. Inadequate supply of commodities and stationery Limited use of latest technologies in lecture delivery
3. Business courses are housed in a different School.

Perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery measured using a 5 - point Likert scale with a value of 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 – average, 4 = good and 5 = very good.

Stakeholders' perceptions on the employability of graduates

An analysis of departmental records shows that about 70% of graduates get employed within the first year of completing their degree programme although the majority is employed in lower positions. Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents (90%) have their first jobs in the different tourism and hospitality establishments whereas only 10% have diverted to other sectors. Twenty five percent of the respondents reported entering the job market at managerial level while 40 and 10% entered at supervisory and operative level respectively. Ten percent of the respondents were first employed outside the scope of their qualification.

Summary of graduates' comments on employability

1. The BTHT programme provided me with good intellectual knowledge, good theory but not enough reality or practical applications. However more job experience in the industry would have helped.
2. There are no strong links/ partnerships between the department and industry and employers do not seem to
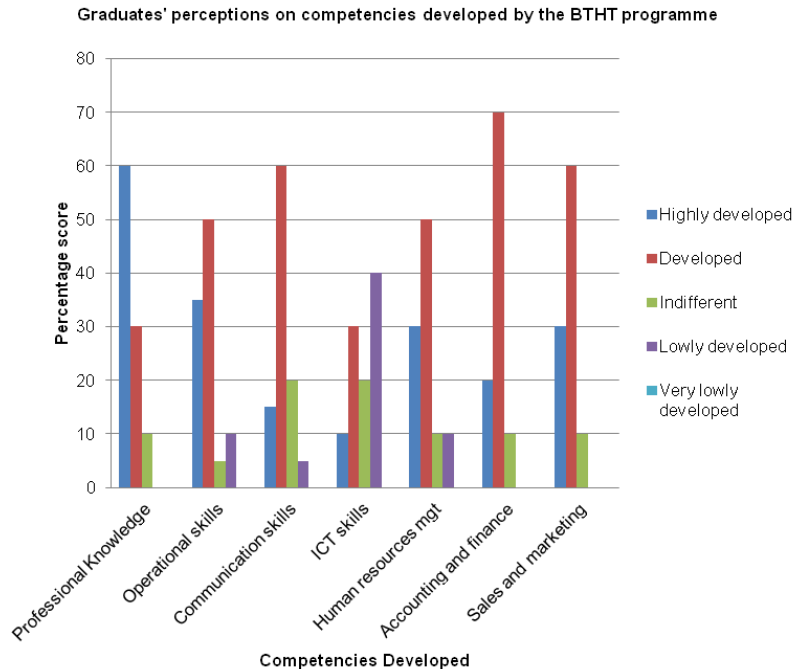
Graduates' perceptions on competencies developed by the BTHT programme

Figure 2. Graduates' perceptions on level of competencies developed by the BTHT degree programme.

Table 3. Students' perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery.

Lecture delivery ATTRIBUTES	Mean	SD
Knowledge of subject matter	3.54	0.558
Thorough lecture preparation	3.63	0.607
Effective teaching methods	3.41	0.485
Objective marking of assignments	3.41	0.508
Availability for consultations	3.41	0.391
Professional commitment	3.2	0.393
Effective communication with students	3.33	0.48
Encourages critical thinking	3.32	0.467

Average mean = 3.40625.

have confidence and goodwill in BTHT students.
3. Although, not employed in the industry of my choice, my [tourism tertiary qualification] has proven to have been extremely relevant to my position as sales coordinator for a freight company.

Employers' Comments on graduate employability

"Your graduates have the basic competencies needed by the industry though we require them to pursue graduate management trainee programmes so that they are acquainted with the systems."

"We like to employ your students because they are hands on as compared to their counter parts from other universities."

"I want to employ diploma than university graduates. Diploma graduates perform better."

DISCUSSION

Perceptions on the relevance, adequacy and balance of the programme structure and content

The researchers concluded that the lecturers' comparatively very high perceptions on the adequacy, relevance and balance of BTHT courses (Table 1) could have been as a result of them being designers and implementers of the BTHT curriculum. This result need to

Table 4. Graduate job entry statistics.

Sector of employment N = 20	Managerial level (%)	supervisory level (%)	Operatives (%)	Other levels	Total (%)
Hotel industry	15	25	10	0	50
Travel trade	10	0	0	0	10
Tourism education and training	0	0	0	15	15
Non commercial sector	0	15	0	0	15
Other (entrepreneurial)	0	0	0	10	10
Totals	25	40	10	25	100

be taken with caution as an analysis of the qualitative comments show that stakeholders perceived the BTHT curriculum as lacking adequacy of ICT courses and the content does allow for specialization (considering that it is an Honors degree). This high significant difference in stakeholders' perceptions therefore gives a strong indication for the need to review and upgrade the BTHT curriculum.

Stakeholder qualitative comments on the industrial attachment reflect the importance they attach to this component of the programme. The researchers believe that industrial attachment gives students a competitive edge in the industry. This result concurs with a number of studies (Tas, 1988; Walo, 2001; Heaton et al., 2008; Archer et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2010) who strongly support the inclusion of an experiential learning component in the hospitality curriculum since such training develops students' managerial skills.

While students acknowledged the importance of industrial attachment they believed that the department needs to network and establish strategic alliances/ partnerships in order to improve the placement and their welfare while on attachment. Failure to negotiate improved students' welfare while on industrial attachment, may lead to a number of misbehaviors that include cheating or stealing from the employers which impacts negatively on the image and quality of the graduates of this degree programme.

Stakeholders (students) reported an imbalance in the number of business related and tourism courses and recommended the reduction of business courses so as to give room for the development of operational and professional competencies in hospitality and tourism. This perception is however contrary to studies by Breakey and Craig (2007) who assert that there are more business core courses in hospitality programmes worldwide especially in Australia where they constitute 50% while hospitality and tourism courses constitute 25% of the degree programme. They further argued that there should be greater emphasis on marketing, industrial relations, managerial finance and international business courses in hospitality degree programmes. Agut and Grau (2002) also posit that competency in the area of financial management has been found to be essential for hospitality managers. They also reported that the ability

to demonstrate financial management skills actually surpassed those relating to human resources management, marketing and information technology. Despite the conflicting views, the balance and sequencing of content are vital considerations in curriculum planning as alluded to by Pearce (2005). He also suggests that hospitality education and training institutions must provide a curricular balance between tourism and hospitality- specific knowledge and general managerial competencies. Crosscutting concepts must be embedded in the curriculum, such as an understanding of customer satisfaction together with knowledge of technical operations. Pearce (2005) further posit that a more widespread trend across the world has given attention not just to the balance/content of hospitality and tourism degrees but also to the qualities (generic skills) of graduates.

Comparison of stakeholder' perceptions on competencies developed

The similarity in the stakeholders' perceptions on students' levels of competency on operational skills and professional knowledge (Table 2) may indicate the importance placed on these attributes in the curriculum. The operational skills are developed through the practical courses in the programme to include Food Preparation, Food Production, Food Service, Pastry and Professional Cookery. This result concurs with studies by Busby and Fiedel (2001), Tribe (2002), Busby (2003) and Airey 2005) who posit that university tourism education, which in most cases has emerged from purely vocational training courses has not yet overcome its vocational focus. Nolan et al. (2010) further emphasized that the inclusion of specific courses in a programme should ensure the development of specific competencies in preparing students for careers in the industry. In his study, Ladkin (2000) found that professional knowledge and operational skills form a solid foundation in operations and this is central to student career progression in industry. While the BTHT degree programme also attempts to develop conceptual and analytical skills, Connolly and McGing (2006) argue that these "higher order" skills are more likely to be applied, developed and tested in real working environments through

experience of working in the operational side of the business.

The researchers strongly believe that lowly developed ICT competencies (Table 2, Figure 2) hinder students from effectively performing computer related tasks and understanding of software packages used in the hospitality and tourism industry. Malone (2007) posits that basic IT knowledge and teamwork should be well developed transferable skills through academic programme. The single IT course that the students are taking is more theoretical than hands- on thus inadequate in developing the students' competences in computer skills. The importance of ICT is supported by Agut and Grau (2002) who found that managers (graduates are future managers) operating in the Spanish tourism emphasised the need for computer and language skills to perform their roles effectively.

The differences between lecturers' and industrialists' perceptions (Table 2) on the level of competencies developed may be attributed to the absence of a competency framework between industry and academics for benchmarking these competencies. This result is not unusual as studies by (Dale and Robinson, 2001) show that the quality of the curriculum, lecture delivery and the value attributed to the qualification by key stakeholders can vary greatly based on their perceptions and expectations. Development of a competency framework and industry partnerships may serve as a viable means to reduce misconceptions on these quality gaps. An identification of the pool of skills and competencies required in various tourism industry sectors; the formulation of national standards and linkage of these to the curriculum are issues that can be included in the framework.

Students' perceptions on the quality of lecture delivery

The development of graduate competencies is not focused only on the inclusion of specific content areas in the degree programme but also on how well they are delivered (Curtis and McKenzie, 2001). The qualitative comments on the quality of lecture delivery seem to point out that the size of the classes is a hindrance to good lecture delivery. Researchers concluded that there are a number of areas to be addressed to improve lecture delivery and consequently the level of competence in graduates. However, the students' moderate perceptions on communication and critical thinking competencies imply a constrained interaction between the lecturers and students. This is not surprising considering the large numbers of students enrolled for a programme making effective interaction and communication extremely difficult. These attributes, however, are critical elements in the development of management competencies and other generic skills as alluded to by Raybould and Wilkins

(2005) and Ring et al. (2010)

Employability of BTHT graduates

Results in Table 4 indicate that the majority of stakeholders perceived that the BTHT graduates were highly employable considering the comments passed by the industrialists who are the employers. Results show that the competencies developed by the BTHT degree students seem to be in line with industry expectations hence their level of employability within the first year of graduation in tourism related establishments (Table 4). However, statements like "I want to employ diploma than university graduates. Diploma graduates perform better" and ….. Though, we require them to pursue graduate management trainee programmes "imply that employers did not place much value on the degree programme. Raybould and Wilkins (2005) found that managers' perceptions regarding the value of a degree qualification are influenced by their own experiences as they may not value what they do not experience. These differences in perceptions imply that gaps exist in the BTHT curriculum. These results are similar to those by Mayaka and King (2002) who examined the human resource skills needed by Kenya's tour-operating sector and the extent to which the then training provision was adequate. The results show that experts (employers) are dissatisfied with skills displayed by employees at the supervisory and management levels. From the findings it is inferred that the existing tourism education is system deficient in meeting skill requirements at these higher occupational levels.

Limitations of the study

It is important to note that the study is based on perceptions and does not measure the actual competencies. Perceptions are subject to change from individual to individual and time to time. However the results give indications on gaps that should be addressed in order to improve the curriculum in line with stakeholders' expectations. It also forms a basis for further research on a wider scale.

Conclusion

The study under discussion provides a snapshot of the stakeholders' perceptions on the competencies developed by the BTHT programme. Gaps and strengths of the BTHT programme with regard to the relevance, adequacy and balance of its courses as well as graduate employability have been identified. The results show that the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the delivery and the value attributed to the product or qualification can

vary greatly based on the stakeholders' perceptions and expectations. The researchers recommend the development of a competency framework that spells out expected graduate competencies by both employers and academics. A stronger tripartite relationship among the stakeholders (educationists, graduates and employers) is vital for positive outcomes which add value to the curriculum. Changes in the BTHT degree structure and content should be seen as a continual process of modification and revitalization. Continuity in producing competent graduates for the hospitality and tourism industry is therefore an ongoing challenge for both educationists and industrialists.

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