

## Lesotho Students Career Perceptions in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Dr. Regina M. Thetsane<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Motšelisi C. Mokhehi<sup>2</sup>, Mr. Mpheteli J. Malunga<sup>3</sup> & Prof. Tiisetso Makatjane<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to examine the career perceptions of students currently studying a Diploma in tourism, hospitality and hotel management in Lesotho and to identify if differences occur in the perceptions of students at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and Integrated Business Consultants College. A non-probability judgmental sampling was used and the sample was representative of the population of student's years 1, 2 and 3 at Lerotholi Polytechnic College, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and Integrated Business Consultants College. A number of factors considered to be very important when choosing a career in tourism and hospitality management were revealed where the main one was the pleasant experience of meeting new people in tourism industry. There were some noticeable differences between the views of the students in the two institutions compared. Integrated Business Consultants College students perceived tourism career more positively than Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. A collaborative effort between Higher Learning Institutions, Vocational Education Training and the government is required to improve the working conditions in the tourism industry and to enhance the attractiveness of the industry to current and future tourism students.

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**Keywords:** Tourism, Hospitality, Hotel management, Career perceptions

### 1. Introduction and problem statement

Tourism industry is considered as the second largest employer amongst other significant sectors contributing to economic growth and employment (Amalu, Ajake, Okpara, 2012; Dale, 2013). It is among the world's top creators of careers requiring varying degrees of skills and allows for quick entry into the workforce for graduates, especially, in countries where unemployment is high. It creates many employment opportunities in different sub-sectors within the tourism and hospitality industries, such as, accommodations, transportation, attractions sites, entertainment, eating and drinking establishments, business and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups travelling away from home (Brida & Risso, 2009). In many countries, the contribution of tourism to employment is indispensable. Therefore, the availability of skilled and trained work force is a crucial element in the success of any tourism and hospitality development.

In Lesotho, tourism is considered as one of the four priority sectors in the national economy, which can leverage growth, reduce poverty as well as absorb many low or semi-skilled labourers (International Monetary Fund report, 2012). It has immense employment potential, much of which still awaits exploitation. For instance, in 2016 tourism directly and indirectly contributed 11.4% of the total employment (Government of Lesotho, 2016). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the employment generation in proportion to investment is very high in tourism industry (Roney & Oztin, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> B.Ed. MBA. PhD Business Admin. Faculty of Social Sciences. National University of Lesotho. P.O. Roma. 180. Lesotho.

<sup>2</sup> B.Ed. MBA. PhD Entrepreneurship. Faculty of Social Sciences. National University of Lesotho. P.O. Roma. 180. Lesotho.

<sup>3</sup> B.A. MSc Statistics. Faculty of Social Sciences. National University of Lesotho. P.O. Roma. 180. Lesotho.

<sup>4</sup> B.Sc. Maths & Statistics, Graduate dip., & Masters in Population Studies, National University of Lesotho P.O. Roma. 180. Lesotho.

Consequently, tourism and hospitality can lead to the reduction of poverty and to the promotion of socio-economic development and decent work. This is particularly important for Lesotho with youth unemployment rate beyond 50% (Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The tourism and hospitality industry employs a large number of skilled and unskilled, women, educated and uneducated people. For instance, the sector is shown to account for 10.4% of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 313 million jobs or 9.9 % of total employment in 2017 (Travel and Tourism Economic Impact Report, 2018). In addition, employment in the accommodation subsector increased by 3.7%, with 2 695 employees hired in 2017 against 2 597 in 2016 (World Economic Forum, 2013). This figure underlines the tourism industry's positive contribution to the economy.

Although, it is universally agreed that tourism contribution to employment creation is significant, previous research has found that tertiary students, seen as the next cohort of management level employees for tourism and hospitality industries, tend to share the perception of some negative characteristics of tourism careers. Such negative characteristics are, low wage (Roney and Oztin, 2007), low job satisfaction (Jenkins, 2001) seasonal working and low status (Riley et al., 2002).

The provision of quality service in the tourism and hospitality industry depends largely on the employment of well-educated, interested, dedicated, and enthusiastic people (Thetsane, 2010). Within the tourism and hospitality sector in Lesotho, tertiary education is a major workforce provider for local enterprises, with students prepared through Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) and Higher Education (HE) institutions. In Lesotho, there are currently three tertiary institutions offering tourism and hospitality programs that prepare learners for tourism and hospitality careers through practical learning and relevant theory to equip them to be competent to perform in their respective occupations in the labour market. These institutions are Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUCT), Leretholi Polytechnic (LP) and Integrated Business Consultants (IBC).

Given the three different pathways to tourism and hospitality careers taken by Lesotho tourism and hospitality students, it is interesting to understand how they view the tourism and hospitality as their future career. Such perceptions have the potential to inform our understanding on the refinement of education, training, job and labour market strategies to gain most for the promising industry. This study will contribute to the discussion on whether the tourism and hospitality industry in Lesotho is perceived as an industry which tertiary students are looking forward to join or not. As far as researcher's knowledge is concerned most of the career-perception studies have been focused on students studying tourism and hospitality management in the other parts of the world. It would appear that Lesotho has not yet attempted to assess and compare students' perceptions of careers in tourism and hospitality management.

The purpose of this study is to examine the career perception of students currently studying a tourism, hospitality and hotel management in Lesotho and to identify if differences occur in the perceptions of students enrolled at LUCT and IBC institutions offering the programme. Understanding student's perceptions with regard to career perception in tourism and hospitality industry while they are in the process of learning is fundamental in order to create a positive attitude to work in the industry. This will lead to provision of quality service in the tourism and hospitality industry, as sustainable tourism development in any country needs highly competent and trained work force. Again, the knowledge of similarities/differences in perception of the students in two institutions is imperative in order to attract the right people for the right jobs. These issues include identifying the factors that students find important in selecting a career, and the extent to which they believe tourism and hospitality offers these factors. Hence, the importance of understanding the student's perceptions of career in tourism and hospitality industry is underscored as precautions can be taken to manage student expectations prior to and during the course of studies to encourage them to stay and develop the industry that has the potential to grow.

## **2. Perceptions towards tourism and hospitality Careers**

Studies on perceptions of tourism as a career have widely reported that students perceive the industry as having inadequate wages, long working hours, which are not at par with pay (Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; Aksu & Koksul, 2005). Casado (1992) found that although students tend to be fairly realistic before graduation, their turnover seem to be high while Barron and Maxwell (1993) discovered that in general newly admitted students have positive perceptions of the tourism industry whereas the students who are from internship were much less positive about tourism jobs. Furthermore, evidence shows that tourism and hospitality students have little or no intention of entering the industry upon graduation (King, McKerracher, & Waryszak, 2003). They further found that in Melbourne and Hong Kong tourism and hospitality students never entered the tourism sector upon their graduation, even those few

who entered the industry left within a year. The reason may be that students pursuing tourism enter the industry without an accurate understanding of the industry (Teerti & Chaipat, 2016).

Lam and Xiao (2000) found that in China students who entered the tourism industry experienced stress, poor working conditions and a different experience of the work than what the institution has taught them. Reports also indicate that many hospitality and tourism management graduates fail to enter the industry upon graduation due to low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions, and absence of motivating factors. This results in high staff turnover and waste of trained and experienced personnel (Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley, & Lockwood, 2001). Jenkins, (2001) observed that over 70% of students in their first year of studying tourism and hospitality degree level look for work in the industry but as students' progress into finalization of their degrees, only 13% look for the job in the industry. This is an indication that the positive perception of the majority of students towards tourism career declines (Richardson, 2010b) whereas (Sibson, 2011) argued that tourism is interesting, fun and is pleasant job. This is consistent with Kusluvan, S and Kusluvan, Z. (2000) who observed that the majority of undergraduate tourism students found jobs in the tourism industry very interesting and not boring and worth doing. However, female students in tourism, do not want to work in tourism industry due to heavy work, lack of skill in tourism, too long working hours and no time for family commitments (Wijesundrara, 2014; Scott, 2011). However, Sibson (2011) argued that jobs in tourism and hospitality industry are seen as providing the opportunity for using personal authority and learning new things every day.

On the other hand, Baum, (2006) found that most of students would like to pursue career in tourism sector; however, the working conditions in the sector are negative. Some of the factors, which seemed to account for negative perceptions towards careers in tourism, are stressful jobs, lack of family life due to the nature of work, long working hours, exhausting and seasonal unstable jobs, low social status of tourism jobs, unsatisfactorily and unfair promotions, low pay and insufficient benefits. Unqualified managers, poor attitudes and behavior of managers towards employees, unqualified co-workers and poor attitudes and behavior of co-workers and poor physical working conditions for employees are also identified as dimensions that account for negative perceptions towards careers in tourism and hospitality (Kusluvan, S. & Kusluvan, Z.2000). The immediate and most obvious consequences of this situation is the difficulty of recruiting suitable staff and high staff turnover, these are costly to the success of the industry. In some countries, such as, Mauritius, Australia and Turkey students are interested in entering the industry (Petrova& Mason, 2004) and their perceptions of the career in tourism and hospitality is positive.

However, literature has shown that student's career perceptions of tourism and hospitality industry are not the same per sub-sectors. Ross (1997) examined travel agency employment perceptions and preferences among secondary college leavers and found that travel agency employment is favoured among potential tourism/hospitality industry employees, particularly among female respondents. Similarly, Airey and Frontistis (1997) compared the attitudes of secondary school pupils towards careers in tourism in Greece and the United Kingdom (UK). They revealed that the UK pupils had a better-established career support system and that they have a less-positive attitude towards careers in tourism than their Greek counterparts, presumably due to a more realistic view of the nature of employment conditions in the tourism/hospitality industry.

### **3. Methodology**

The study used the descriptive research design to examine and compare student's perceptions of tourism and hospitality careers in Lesotho. Three institutions, which offer a three-year programme in tourism, hospitality and hotel management, were surveyed. A sample was obtained from a population of students who at the time were in years 1, 2 and year 3, at LP college, LUCT and IBC. The three tertiary institutions were selected because they offer tourism and hospitality management programmes at the diploma level. However, for comparison purposes LUCT and IBC student's perception of tourism and hospitality careers were compared. A non-probability judgmental sampling was used, the sample was representative of the population of students from all the years 1, 2 and 3. Dividing the population into series of relevant strata (Year 1, 2, and 3) means that the sample is more likely to be representative and ensures that each of the strata is represented proportionally within the sample (Kothari, 2004).

The survey instrument was developed based on a literature review. The instrument was divided into two sections, where section A was related to demographic profile of respondents while section B tested the student's perceptions using the 13 items adapted from Kusluvan, S. & Kusluvan, Z, 2000; Aksu & Koksul, 2005 and Richard, 2010a & 2010b measurement scales. Responses to the 13 items were measured with a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = strongly agree. For analysis purposes, negative statements were transformed into positive statements when scoring (1 become 5, 2 become 4 etc). Permission was requested and granted to carry out a survey in the first semester of 2019 in the three institutions.

Five hundred questionnaires were distributed and after eliminating partially completed questionnaires, 421 questionnaires remained for analysis. The response rate was 84% high because the survey was conducted in a class setting.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Table 1.1 reflects the profile of 421 respondents. Among the respondents, 59.6% were LUCT students, 27.8% were LP students and 12.6% were IBC students. The majority of these students (52.0%) were pursuing diploma in tourism management, followed by those pursuing diploma in hotel management (26.8%) and the least (21.1%) were those who were doing diploma in hospitality management as their major. The table also shows that the greatest number of respondents (71.4%) were aged between 20 and 24 years and the least (12.1%) were aged 25 years and above. With regard to gender, 78.4% were males and 21.6% were females. The majority of the respondents (42.2%) in this study were in their second year of study and the least (27.0%) were in their first year of study. The results also reveal that 84.6% of the students chose their major programmes willingly. Finally, the table shows that the majority (80.6%) of the respondents had no friends or relatives working in tourism industry.

**Table 1.1: Respondents profile (N= 421)**

Characteristic	Category	%	N
Name of institution	LUCT	59.6	251
	LP	27.8	117
	IBC	12.6	53
Programme of study	Diploma in Hospitality Management	21.1	89
	Diploma in Tourism Management	52.0	219
	Diploma in Hotel Management	26.8	113
Age	<20	16.4	69
	20-24	71.4	300
	25+	12.1	51
Sex	Male	21.6	89
	Female	78.4	323
Year of Study	Year 1	27.0	112
	Year 2	42.2	175
	Year 3	30.8	128
Programme chosen willingly	Yes	84.6	351
	No	11.1	46
	I was not very much willing	4.3	18
Any friends/relatives working in tourism industry?	Yes	19.4	81
	No	80.6	331

Table 1.2 shows the average scores for each item with regard to students' career perceptions towards tourism. Students strongly agreed that meeting people is a pleasant experience for them ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 0.798$ ). The results further show that students agreed that to study tourism management is a correct investment in career development ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.081$ ), one can make good money by working in tourism ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.069$ ), working in the tourism industry outweigh disadvantages ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.185$ ). Students also disagreed with the view that working in tourism does not provide a secure future ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.197$ ) and that it is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.413$ ). The results also indicate that students neither agreed nor disagreed that promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.380$ ), irregular working hours affects their job negatively ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.288$ ), tourism related jobs pay minimal salaries ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.175$ ). It is also revealed in Table 1.2 that students also neither agree nor disagree that since many of the managers in tourism do not have a university degree, they are jealous of university graduates entering the industry ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.450$ ). Students were also unsure whether there is no sexual discrimination in tourism ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.309$ ) and whether it is hard to find a job security in tourism ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.236$ ). As can also be seen in the same table that students disagreed that tourism related jobs are more respected than other jobs ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.121$ ).

**Table 1.2: Students' Career Perception towards Tourism**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry	2.85	1.380
Tourism related jobs are more respected than other jobs	2.37	1.121
To study tourism management is a correct investment in career development	4.13	1.081
One can make good money by working in tourism	4.17	1.069
Meeting new people by working in tourism is a pleasant experience	4.64	0.798
There is no sexual discrimination in tourism	3.31	1.309
In general the advantages of working in the tourism industry out way the disadvantages	3.67	1.170
Working in tourism does not provide a secure future (R)	3.97	1.197
Irregular working hours affects my job negatively (R)	2.71	1.288
It is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry (R)	3.59	1.413
It is hard to find a job security in tourism (R)	3.21	1.236
Since many of the managers in tourism do not have a university degree, they are jealous of university graduates working (R)	2.54	1.450
Tourism related jobs pay minimal salaries	3.42	1.175

***R indicates that negative statements are transformed into positive statements when scoring (1 becomes 5, 2 becomes 4, etc.)***

Table 1.3 shows the mean scores of career perceptions for LUCT and IBC students. The results indicate a significant difference in the mean scores on the perception that “there is no sexual discrimination in tourism” between LUCT (M=3.11, SD=1.296) and IBC (M=3.51, SD=1.382),  $t=-2.030$ ,  $p=0.043$ . These results indicate that students from IBC believed that there is no sexual discrimination in tourism while LUCT students were neutral about the matter. There was also a significance difference in the mean scores on the perception that “working in tourism provides a secure future” with IBC students reporting higher, mean score (M=4.32, SD=0.956) than LUCT (3.85, SD=1.293) students,  $t=-3.018$ ,  $p=0.013$ . These results suggest that IBC students have higher perception that working in tourism provides a secure future than LUCT students. Finally, there was also a significant difference in the mean scores on the perception that “tourism jobs pay minimal salaries” with LUCT student reporting higher mean scores (M=3.59, SD=1.144) than IBC students (M=3.06, SD=1.227),  $t=-3.024$ ,  $p=0.003$ . These suggest that LUCT students believed that tourism jobs pay minimal salaries.

**Table 1.3: Career perceptions for LUCT and IBC students**

Statements	Name of Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P -value
Promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry	LUCT	244	2.70	1.369	-1.244	0.215
	IBC	52	2.96	1.508		
Tourism related jobs are more respected than other jobs	LUCT	246	2.35	1.077	1.669	0.096
	IBC	53	2.08	1.207		
To study tourism management is a correct investment in career development	LUCT	248	4.08	1.108	-0.853	0.394
	IBC	53	4.23	1.050		
One can make good money by working in tourism	LUCT	247	4.06	1.171	-0.546	0.586
	IBC	53	4.15	0.988		
Meeting new people by working in tourism is a pleasant experience	LUCT	246	4.59	0.856	-1.538	0.126
	IBC	53	4.72	0.455		
There is no sexual discrimination in tourism	LUCT	247	3.11	1.296	-2.036	0.043*
	IBC	53	3.51	1.382		
In general the advantages of working in the tourism industry out way the disadvantages	LUCT	246	3.60	1.131	-0.895	0.371
	IBC	53	3.75	1.285		
Working in tourism does not provide a secure future	LUCT	243	3.85	1.293	-2.494	0.013*
	IBC	53	4.32	0.956		
Irregular working hours affects my job negatively	LUCT	246	2.75	1.349	-0.195	0.846
	IBC	53	2.79	1.459		
It is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry	LUCT	244	3.52	1.416	0.396	0.692
	IBC	53	3.43	1.551		
It is hard to find a job security in tourism	LUCT	241	3.21	1.265	-0.077	0.939
	IBC	53	3.23	1.281		
Since many of the managers in tourism do not have a university degree, they are jealous of university graduates working	LUCT	243	2.40	1.379	-2.120	0.054
	IBC	53	2.85	1.562		
Tourism related jobs pay minimal salaries	LUCT	239	3.59	1.144	-3.024	0.003*
	IBC	52	3.06	1.227		

## 5. Discussions

The research was undertaken to examine Lesotho student's perceptions of career in tourism and hospitality management based on the survey of three institutions in Lesotho. The important findings of this study was that the three top factors that students revealed to be very important to them when considering a career in tourism and hospitality management were the pleasant experience of meeting new people in tourism industry. They also believe that studying tourism management is a correct investment and as a result, one can make good money by working in tourism industry. Although students show positive perception in the above stated factors, this may suggest that Lesotho tourism and hospitality students may have a positive perception of career in tourism because of lack of job choice and high unemployment in Lesotho estimated at approximately 23.6% (World Bank Group Report, 2018). The respondents furthermore believe that they can make good money by working in tourism meaning that working in the tourism industry outweighs disadvantages. They also disagreed with the view that working in tourism does not provide a secure job and that it is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry. However, the respondents were certain that tourism related jobs are not respected than other jobs. This result is consistent with the view that tourism and hospitality management careers offer low pay and few benefits and unsociable working hours.

As a result, jobs in this industry are not respected than other jobs, all of which have collectively formed a negative perception of tourism as a career (Arasli, Bavik & Ekiz, 2006; Baum, 2007; Brien, 2004; Deery & Shaw 1999; Freeland 2000; Kusluvan, S. & Kusluvan, Z. 2000; Richardson, 2010a; World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2009).

The respondents were neutral about the perception of the career in tourism with regard to the view that tourism promotion opportunities are satisfactory. They were also unsure about whether irregular working hours affects tourism job negatively, tourism related jobs pay minimal salaries, and that managers in tourism do not have a university degree and as a result, they are jealous of university graduates entering the industry. Students were also uncertain whether there is no sexual discrimination in the tourism industry. The neutrality tendencies from student's responses may have been influenced by lack of experience with the tourism industry. Their opinions were mainly derived from observations and rumours. In spite of the effect of unfavourable working condition on the respondent's perceptions, attention may be paid to high mean scores of agreement of students on the perception that the industry offers pleasant experience of meeting new people, making good money and making a correct investment in career development. Generally, students from the two institutions compared share some positive career perception in tourism and hospitality management, as the majority of the students chose their program of study willingly.

When comparing the perceptions of students from the two institutions, IBC students expressed positive perceptions with the view that there is no sexual discrimination in tourism, and with the view, that working in tourism provides a secure future than LUCT students. However, previous research indicated that low level of perceived job security is the main stressor in the tourism industry (Lee, Bobko, & Chen, 2006). On the other hand, LUCT students believed that tourism jobs pay minimal salaries.

This results show that there is considerable variation in tourism and hospitality careers and consequently there are different jobs in tourism, some of which are well-paid occupations while other are not. (Riley, Ladkin & Szivas, 2002). Roney and Oztin (2007) also support this results by arguing that managers or professionals who are full-time workers enjoy high earnings while part-time and temporary workers tend to earn little money. This is the nature of employment in tourism industry, which is known to be insecure because of seasonality, fluctuations in demand and high number of part-time jobs (Bull, 1995).

From the findings, noticeable differences between the views of students in the two institutions relates to tourism jobs being respected than other jobs, that there is no sexual discrimination in tourism, tourism does not provide a secure future and the fact that tourism related jobs pay minimal salaries. IBC students perceive tourism career more positively than LUCT students do. Probably these findings may be attributed to the fact that LUCT mainly emphasizes the strategic management aspect of tourism and hospitality while IBC, as a VET institution emphasizes specific operational skills targeted to the immediate needs of the industry. Overall, there are some varying degrees of both negative and positive perceptions between and amongst institutions offering tourism and hospitality management in Lesotho. This also may indicate the differences in views between students at the Higher Learning Institutions and students at the Vocational Education Training, as LUCT is a higher learning institution while IBC is Vocational Education Training provider.

## **6. Recommendations**

In order to attract educated tourism and hospitality employees, it is important to manage students' perceptions towards this industry from negative to positive. Firstly, tourism and hospitality management institutions could assist students foster a realistic perception about careers and working conditions in the industry and teach more problem solving skills so that students can better confront extremely traumatic and ever changing tourism industry. This might be done through influencing the students not to overestimate the challenges in tourism and hospitality industry and more likely, to work through all the problems they encounter during work. Finally, a collaborative effort between Higher Learning Institutions, Vocational Education Training and the government is required to improve the working conditions in the tourism industry, enhancing the attractiveness of the industry to current and future tourism and hospitality management students. The scope of this study is limited to two tertiary institutions in Lesotho. Future research should therefore concentrate on comparing student's career perception in other countries, which may establish cultural similarities and differences among nations or continents.

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