BEVERAGE LEARNING THROUGH EDUTAINMENT COMPETITIONS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO IMMERSION METHODOLOGYPRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The infusion of edutainment into teaching and learning has altered considerably the instructional strategy of our educational institutions and changed the way the students learn. Beverage competition, a form of edutainment, challenges students to realize their individual potential by engaging them in a fun and self-paced learning environment. Apart from that, competition is a critical motivation component where students are constantly challenged to outpace their own performance in comparison to that of their peers. Students are shown their progress by industry proponents and areas requiring improvement are easily identified. This enables them to self-assess where they can make the most gains. Their competitive natures lead them to focus their studies in those most-critical areas. The competition allows the student to expand their basic knowledge obtained in class by their own research and development in the area that would help them win the competition. This student-centred approach empowers students to construct their own knowledge base and allows them to make a relation between their areas of study with the realities of the hospitality industry. Many studies are conducted in the areas of instructive teaching practices but no such studies have been conducted using beverage competitions as a tool for enhancing student -centred learning. The main objective of this study is to know how the beverage competition can validate the Berjaya University College of Hospitality's (BERJAYA UCH) Immersion Methodology) IM practices. A qualitative study was carried out to find out how effective the edutainment competition could be as a part of IM.

Keywords: Edutainment, immersion methodology, beverage competition.

INTRODUCTION

The trend in higher education (HE) teaching and learning in the 21st century is undergoing a major shift from the traditional theory based teaching and learning methodology to a more student centred learning where the students take ownership of their studies (Arumugam, Choe and George, 2009). In HE institutions where hospitality and tourism studies are offered, time is spent on both theory and practical where services and skills are involved in the three areas of Food and Beverage, Housekeeping and Front Office. This is where the challenge comes in. Hospitality is a complex industry and according to Chapman and Lovell (2006), these three areas constitute the education variables in the Edutainment framework.

Edutainment, as described by Addis (2005), is the convergence of education and entertainment. The purpose of edutainment (Okan, 2003) is to attract and hold the attention of the learners by engaging their emotions. Hospitality is an industry with many kinds of establishments catering to a diverse customer groups. The front-line employee plays a crucial role in ensuring that customer expectations are delivered. Chapman and Lovell (2006) also emphasised that to be able to provide an excellent service, employees must be aware and understand the context in which they work and are well-versed in the specific organisation's strategic objective and culture. These requirements are difficult to achieve provided that hospitality is primarily an industry that employs young people who are more adaptable (Whiteford and Nolan, 2007). Many previous studies done by Harkison, Poulston and Jung-Hee (2010), Helyer (2011), Nolan *et.al.* (2010) and Raybould and Wilkins (2005) have stated that hospitality graduates have different expectations of the hospitality industry and that they cannot fulfil the industry's expectations. This is where Edutainment is very important as it comes under a part of problem-based learning where the participant needs to find a suitable solution for each problem under real-time conditions.

Hospitality Management Programmes and Edutainment

The hospitality institutions providing hospitality education, on the other hand, are more interested in the development of intellectual capital, rather than the development of work-ready skills (Harkison, Poulston and Jung-Hee, 2010). Harkison, Poulston and Jung-Hee (2010), also added that hospitality educators, being academics themselves, have the tendency to challenge particular aspects of the industry rather than explain to the students how they operate it and as a result they create hospitality students with generic skills. Generic skills according to Rimmington (1999) are not good since they can be openly recognised as being so general that they do not distinguish hospitality graduates from those of other disciplines. As a result employers are unsure as to what the graduates know and what tasks they would be able to perform. A misalignment of what the graduates learn in school and the real needs of the hospitality industry is a serious matter (Choe and Arumugam, 2010). The higher education institutions providing hospitality courses must adopt a system of teaching where constant interaction with the industry happens so that the graduates are industry ready. Hynes, Costin and Birdthistle (2011) suggest that the best way to prepare industry-ready graduates is to ensure that the education itself extends outside of the classroom into the industrial arena through interaction with businesses, community groups and government development agencies. Furthermore, the interaction with multiple stakeholders will guide the design of a more relevant educational programme which emphasizes skills and competency development in addition to subject specific knowledge acquisition.

Beverage studies, for example, is one of the subjects normally offered in hospitality courses and one of the purposes of this paper is to see whether students' participation in beverage competitions can help enhance their skills and competencies in this specific subject in Malaysia, beverage competition is fairly new compared to culinary competition. In a culinary competition, the end objective would be to produce a culinary masterpiece that is deemed 'creative', prepared in a professional manner by the competitors with impeccable skills and judged by industry professionals made up of professional chefs, food consultants and food critics. Similarly in a beverage competition, the competing students are judged on their creativity, skills and professionalism. In all cases, students need to have the basic knowledge and skills before taking part in competitions. What this paper wants to explore is

whether students participating in competitions can help validate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning methodology practised by the teacher or trainer. In BERJAYA UCH where IM is being practised, competition is a part of the framework where it engages students to experiment and experience learning itself by placing their learning in the context of the industry requirements and demands (Arumugam, Choe and George, 2009). For the educator or trainer, this allows them to get the necessary feedback from the industry proponents directly after the competition and enables them to go back and evaluate their learning outcomes, curriculum design and teaching methodology to ensure alignments with industry needs. This in turn helps narrow the gap between industry expectation and graduates competency which needs urgent solution as highlighted by Choe and Arumugam (2010), Chapman and Lovell (2006) and Raybould and Wilkins (2005).

IMMERSION METHODOLOGY, EDUTAINMENT AND COMPETITION

As mentioned earlier, IM is the current teaching and learning practices in BERJAYA UCH which has the following central values Arumugam, Choe and George (2009):

1. Industry readiness
2. Student-centred learning
3. Research-informed teaching
4. Generic skills
5. Complementary curriculum

These values as noted by Arumugam, Choe and George (2009) are made actionable using strategies such as conventional classroom learning (assignments, lectures), learning by doing (experiential), reflections (extended learning), industry involvements (through projects, practitioner insights and industrial placements) as well as curriculum development and re-evaluation. In practice, the IM typically progresses in the following manner:
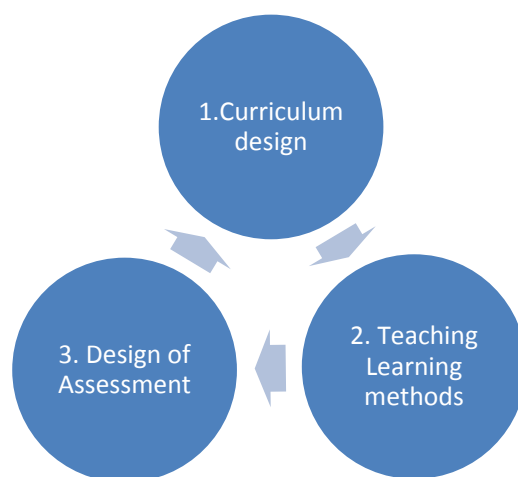
(*Arumugam, Choe and George, 2009*)

Figure 1: Three Phases of the BERJAYA UCH Immersion Methodology

Phase 1 constitutes **curriculum design** to ensure students master a particular body of knowledge in a systematic and focussed manner. Faculty members will examine the existing curriculum by working with industry practitioners, making appropriate changes that reflect current thoughts and practices of the industry. Integrating research-informed learning into their curriculum is also expected of the faculty members.

Phase 2 of IM is the **teaching learning methods** which employs a combination of methods, through the use of problem-based questions, scenarios, games and practical training. Arumugam, Choe and George (2009) recommend inviting guest speakers from across industry and academia to add value to the learning experience.

Phase 3 of IM is the **design of assessment** of assignments which can be case- or problem-based where it engages the students in honing their analytical skills in synthesising ideas and seeking practical applications of what they have learned (Arumugam, Choe and George, 2009).

Entertainment, on the other hand, as defined by Chatterjee (2008), is the act of entertaining, amusing and engaging and he further commented that **engagement** is defined as emotional involvement or commitment to meaningful activities in anticipation of learning outcomes. Based on these definitions, we can assume that entertainment can lead to engagement. Veltman (2004) mentions that this notion of combining entertaining elements into the learning environment is not new. Beverage competitions, which are organised in Malaysia comes in many packages in which there are the *MONIN*® *Cup*, cocktail and mocktail competitions, *The Salon Culinaire of the Food and Hotel Malaysia Exhibition* have categories involving cocktail, mocktail and barista challenges while the *Nestle*® *Milano Coffee challenge*, is a competition involving the creation of signature coffee drinks. In a beverage competition, where it is seen as a form of entertainment, three common criteria have been identified to constitute the notion of entertainment:

1. Professionalism
2. Creativity
3. Skills

Professionalism in competition involves the student's ability to present him/herself in the standards put forward by industry's proponents, namely, in grooming standards, mise-en-place and hygiene practices. **Creativity** involves an ability to create signature drinks that are current and appealing in taste, aroma and colour. **Skills** component of the entertainment framework involves an ability and dexterity in handling bar equipment, selling and presentation in front of the judges. All three components should be entertaining to watch and at the same time engaging because they provide platforms for the audience to learn without the seriousness of a classroom (Veltman, 2004). As mentioned before, in any competition, there would always be judges and in beverage competitions, judges come directly from the industry, professional mixologists, experienced sommeliers, trade professionals, hoteliers and restaurateurs. At the end of the competition, feedback would be obtained **(see appendix 1)** from these industry practitioners when they it highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework for the Edutainment
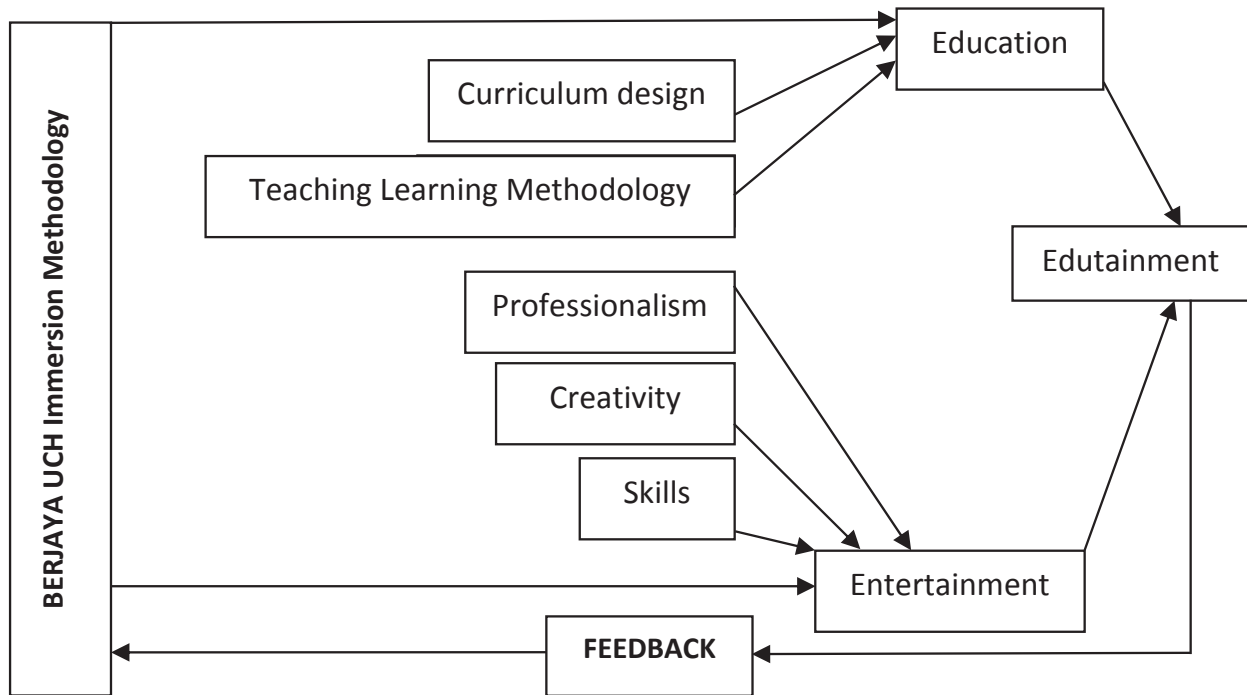
The conceptual frame work clearly defines the relationship between the constructs where it leads to the concrete consequences. The conceptual model reflects the contingent nature of Education and the Entertainment. The moderating variables reflect the outcomes and the path that can be achieved by moderating the effect. The antecedents reflect the immersion methodology practices of the university college .From this proposed model the organisational and personal goals are achieved through professional competency and learning practices. The relationships are explained through propositions. The graduate attributes of the students should reflect immersion methodology practices.

Competition for one gives a competitive edge over others (Walley, 1998) because it involves deploying resources and expertise in activities which are not currently in strength but which should become strength in the future once the proper feedback are obtained. In higher education involving hospitality studies, where in nature, it is more vocational than theory, focussing on the development of essential work ready skills (Harkison, Poulston & Jung-Hee, 2010), competition allows benchmarking of the students with the rest of the other students in the competition. Furthermore Walley (1998) stresses that in competition; you actually gain differential advantage over the rest of non-competitor due to the nature of the competition itself where creativity, showmanship, technical skills, usages of tools and speed are being tested. Moreover, before competition itself, students have to prepare diligently in order to win and this in effect contributes to self-learning. In BERJAYA UCH itself, competition like this allows validation of the existing immersion methodology being practise in the teaching and learning activities. It allows student as well as instructor or trainer to understand critical areas which needs to be improved, added or maintained for future students.

METHODOLOGY

A series of focus group are used to examine the practicality of competition participation. Two sessions of face to face interview were held in which the first session had a group of 6 students which have participated in at least one beverage competition. The other parts of the group were made up of 4 lecturers and F&B trainers which have mentored and accompanied students in at least one beverage competition. In general, all parties interviewed have agreed that competition participation enables them to understand the discipline better through the rigorous training involved as preparation before competition day. Specific technical skills such as bar equipment handling become easier through training. One student commented that

> *"Through training and preparation for competition, I am able to see in a bigger picture how the theory and practical sessions that I have gone through in the class have in relation to the industry that is waiting for me after my graduation. I am able to easily relate this to what I am going to do in the future."*

Educators have also mentioned that they are able to identify areas of weakness in the students through the feedback obtained during competition as well as during training. One trainer noted that

> *"Competitions like this allow me to see where my students are in comparison with other students from other hospitality colleges. In a way, I see that as a form of benchmarking. Whatever I see lacking in my students in reference to the competition standards, I would of course, note it down and evaluate it against the learning outcomes of my syllabus as I want my students not only be prepared for the next competition but also for their benefit after graduating."*

There was also a general feeling among the interviewees that in competition, the standards that were tested have indeed been covered in the subject syllabus and they do not need to learn new skills and competencies. However, all members of the focus group lamented that

> *"Going for competition means sacrificing more time in training and preparation as the end objective is trying to win something out of it and it is an energy draining activity."*

One student has noted that

> *"Sometimes my trainer and i would practise until late at night and by the next morning I feel so tired that sometimes I will skip class. Even if I attend, I would not be able to focus in class because I am busy trying to keep my eyes open."*

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper is very much a work in progress, the indicators and standards in every beverage competition have yet to be fully identified. The Edutainment framework proposed here in support of experimental learning as well as a part of the BERJAYA immersion methodology can be used as a base for further research. Validation in forms of empirical data through quantitative research in testing the independent variables and how much contribution it has given to student should be conducted in measuring the efficiency of this teaching and learning methodology as well as the efficiency of competition in enhancing this method.

CONCLUSION

The edutainment competition can enhance teaching and learning of hospitality students in which it combines academic elements as well as entertainment. Its ability to engage students and encourages them to take ownership of their learning environment must be valued especially when the industry interaction happens. Students as well as hospitality educators would be able to identify areas that need improvements. This research examined the merging and utilization of edutainment and convergence in higher education from the perspective of educators and students. The qualitative approach to edutainment has been adopted to analyse the experience of edutainment practices, even though this trend has been clearly identified. Less training institutions are following this as the part of their teaching methodologies. The convergence of education and entertainment, favoured by the diffusion of technology and its use, will add in lot of professionalism to student learning. The concepts highlighted here will allow a better investigation of the characteristics of edutainment.

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Appendix 1

MONIN® Cup 2011
Cocktail/Mocktail Scoring Sheet
Cocktail / Mocktail No:_____

	Criteria	Score	Marks	Remarks
1	Grooming Standards	/ 05		
2	Mise en place / Setting *Organization, working flow*	/ 05		
3	Hygiene practices *Glasses and general cleanliness, organized, neat*	/ 10		
4	Time Limit *Consider a time of 6 minutes to make the drink*	/ 10		
5	Technical Skills *Professionalism, ability, behaviour*	/ 10		
6	Proper use of Tools *Handling bar equipment, easiness*	/ 05		
7	Presentation *Accessories, simultaneity*	/ 10		
8	Appearance *Colour, appealing*	/ 10		
9	Aromas *Intensity, aromatized, strength*	/ 10		
10	Taste *Flavour, body, balance, temperature*	/ 15		
11	Name *Relevance of the link between the name and the product*	/ 05		
12	Presentation & Show *Costume / General presentation*	/ 05		
TOTAL POINTS		/ 100		

Judges Signature	Total Score

18