

CAREER PERCEPTIONS OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS ON THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The Tourism and Hospitality sector is often said to be plagued by the problem of recruiting and retaining quality staff. The present study aims to examine the perceptions of students with regards to Tourism careers as the first step of devising a solution to this problem. As Tourism and Hospitality students represent the talent pool by which the industry must tap in the future, there is rational need to comprehend their attitude and opinion of the industry so that policy makers and educators could then work to project a more positive image to these next generations of workers. The findings of the study, drawn from 300 Malaysian students studying Hospitality and Tourism at the undergraduate level indicate a neutral perspective of being neither too favorable nor unfavorable in the career perception of this sector. Most students appeared to be unsure of the exact working conditions of the industry but exhibit a strong willingness to try working in the Tourism sector upon graduation. It is recommended that academia and employers should cooperate in bridging the expectations of the students and the demands of the industry.

Keywords: *Career perceptions, tourism industry, career management.*

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality and Tourism has often been viewed as an increasingly crucial sector of any given economy given its role as both a contributor to national income and a major source of employment. As a result, Tourism and Hospitality as an industry has experienced phenomenal growth. For instance, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that international Tourism will continue to grow at the annual rate of 4 percent (UNWTO, 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that there exist a strong correlation between Tourism expenditure per capita and the extent of influence countries have in a global context (Juan, 2007). This is a result of not only the economic contribution of the Tourism industry but also as an indicator of the extent whereby global citizens capitalize resources of the globe for the benefit of their local economies. Thus, any projections of growth in Tourism could function as a measure of the relative influence every country can exercise in the future. One of the major reasons driving the tremendous growth of Tourism is linked to the fact the this industry creates huge amount of job opportunities both directly in the sectors by which Tourism expenditure occurs as well as indirectly through related support industries. In Europe, more than 9 million is employed in the Tourism and Hospitality industry, which is equivalent to 4.2 percent of all employment (Eurostat, 2010). Given its purported prominence however, the Tourism and Hospitality sector is often criticized as generating low skilled, low paying and demotivating jobs (Roney & Oztin, 2007, Richardson, 2008). As a result, the Tourism industry is often labeled as one having a bad reputation of high staff turnover and a waste of training and educational efforts (Roney & Oztin, 2007). A recent study by Eurostat on Tourism employment in Europe indicates that on average compared to other forms of employment, Tourism accommodation sector reports high level of turnover and high share of temporary employment (Eurostat, 2010). Studies have provide evidence supporting the claim that turnover in this sector is reportedly high and often cited reason for this discouraging trend is often poor remuneration, unsocial working hours and limited career opportunities (Emenheiser & Palakurthi, 1998). This signifies relative instability employment status among Tourism employees.

In Malaysia, Tourism development can be said to be officially started in 1959 with the formation of the Tourism department which was later upgraded to Tourism Development Corporation (TDC) in 1970's and later to Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1972(Tourism in Malaysia, 2008). In the 1980s, more concentrated effort was given for the development of better infrastructure for Tourism and generally the government begins to provide greater emphasis on this sector, evident by the formation of the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism (MOCAT) in 1990. With MOCAT, the industry then begins to receive full support for its development in terms of funding, planning, coordination, regulation and enforcement (Tourism in Malaysia, 2008). Recognizing the great potential of this rapidly growing sector, MOCAT was upgraded by the government to

Ministry of Tourism in 2004 to coordinate, direct and ensure that all Tourism initiatives and plans will be implemented in accordance to the National Tourism Master Plan that represents the ultimate aim of enhancing the growth of the Tourism industry to lead the growth of the economy (Tourism in Malaysia, 2008).

In terms of national employment, the contribution of the Travel and Tourism industry is estimated to rise from 1,331,000 jobs in 2010 to 1,721,000 jobs in 2020 representing 12percent of total employment (World Tourism Council, 2007).

In an effort to widen the opportunities for higher education to the public and to reduce dependence of this provision on the public sector, the government begins privatizing the higher education sector in the 1980s. As a result of this, Malaysia witnesses an unprecedented and tremendous growth of private higher education sector (Chai & Mei, 2009). Following this wave of privatization of higher education and to meet the needs of skilled employment in the Tourism and Hospitality sector, increasing number of private colleges and universities begin to offer Tourism and Hospitality courses at diploma, undergraduate and even postgraduate level. In response to the growth and relative importance of the Tourism and Hospitality sector to the economy, most of the major private higher educational institutions are offering courses related to this sector, with some providing pure academic programs while others provide more vocational tour guiding courses.

The future of this prospective industry are intricately tied to the employment of well trained, motivated and committed individuals, who must have the passion in developing long term careers in the Tourism sector. Thus, it is imperative to ascertain the attitudes and perceptions of students towards this industry in order to better plan for and project a positive image among youths in order talents for continuing the growth of Tourism sector. Negative perceptions on working in Tourism sector may lead to a failure in retaining and attracting talented individuals to this industry. Since, Tourism and Hospitality is a service oriented industry, it is crucial to develop the correct positive mindset for qualified Tourism graduates as it will directly influence the level of service quality rendered which in turn affects competitiveness of the sector as a whole. In order to achieve this objective, this paper seeks to investigate the perceptions of undergraduate students with regards to Tourism careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Tourism and Hospitality sector is often said to be plagued by the problem of recruiting and retaining quality staff (Andorka, 1996; Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Richardson, 2008; Hjalager, 2003). Problems of high turnover are often reported with major reason for such trend being poor remuneration, punishing working hours and limited career opportunities (Emenheiser et al., 1998). King, McKercher & Waryszak (2003) have found that many of the graduates in their study either never joined the industry or withdrew from it after a few years and suggested that a mismatch of the needs of the industry with the education supplied by higher learning institutes as the main cause of this worrying trend. Richardson (2008) have surveyed literature and provided a summary of reasons for the apparent difficulty in recruitment and retention which includes: a young transient workforce; low pay; low levels of formal qualifications; high levels of female, students, part-time, and casual workers; a high proportion of low-skilled jobs; a large proportion of hours worked outside normal business hours; a negative industry image; poor utilization of student labor and high levels of staff turnover. While all of these factors are in no doubt valid, it is the proposition of this paper to examine the perceptions of students with regards to Tourism careers as the first step of devising a solution to this problem.

As Tourism and Hospitality students represent the talent pool by which the industry must tap in the future, there is rational need to comprehend their attitude and opinion of the industry so that policy makers and educators could then work to project a more positive image to these next generations of workers. There is indeed a significant amount of research being undertaken on Tourism and Hospitality employment, which to its credit has provided a general picture of the status of employment in the industry but to date there are still very limited studies being done on the perceptions of students in this field. More studies therefore, must be undertaken in exploring student perceptions as collectively they represents the future voice and development of this growing sector in Malaysia.

Several studies have been undertaken in investigating the perceptions of undergraduate students in this filed with regards to a career in the Tourism and Hospitality industry. Barron & Maxwell (1993), gathering evidence from the UK, found that there is a distinct difference in terms of career perceptions between those students who have already gain some exposure in the industry from those that did not. Findings indicate that those students which gain exposure to the industry often have more negative views in terms of career

perceptions towards Tourism and Hospitality sector. Similar results were also echoed by Jenkins (2001)'s comparative study on Hospitality students' career perceptions in two different universities in the UK and the Netherlands. It was found that as exposure to the industry and subjects of Hospitality and Tourism increases, there are considerable less interest in selecting this industry as the first choice of career destination. Roney & Oztin (2007) gathering evidence from Tourism students in Turkey have found that career perceptions are generally neither negative nor positive: that is to say it is rather neutral. What they found is that students in Turkey have poor career perceptions of the sector and attribute this mainly to poor empowerment and human resources planning of Tourism employers.

However these negative career perceptions were offset by the willingness of the students to continue studying Tourism and to attempt to establish their careers in this sector regardless of their earlier misgivings (Roney & Oztin, 2007). O'Leary & Deegan (2005) undertook a longitudinal study on the career progression of Irish Tourism and Hospitality students and have found that there is a significant drop out rate amongst those graduates from employment in the Tourism and Hospitality sector and this worrying trend is more apparent with women. Main reasons cited for the unattractiveness of this sector as a career choice by the graduates in this study are poor remuneration system and punishing working hours. Furthermore the authors suggested that this negative trend is caused by the poor mismatch of the programs offered by institutions with those needed by the actual industry and thus more effort is needed to narrow this gap to make career choice in this sector a more viable option (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005).

In a more recent study, Richardson (2008) conducted an online survey of Tourism and Hospitality undergraduate students in Griffith University Australia and found that students that have experience with working in the Tourism and Hospitality industry often have negative perceptions of pursuing a career in this sector. Specifically, it was found that a significant forty six percent of the respondents who have working experience in the sector indicated that they are not eager to establish their careers in this industry. Almost all of these students cite their work experience in the industry as the main reason for this decision. Also, students who have no experience indicate greater preference in their choice of career in the industry.

In a comprehensive review of leading literature on education and career implication on the industry, Barron (2008) conclude that research so far indicate that image of careers in the Hospitality and Tourism industry remains largely unfavorable and advocate that the educational institutions and industry must initiate efforts in changing this negative trend. Barron (2008) pointed out that the prevalent image of the industry is one characterized with menial jobs, poor rewards and limited career opportunities, and this will prevent the younger generation (generation Y) to consider the industry as a viable career option. Narrowing the gap between the younger generation's career expectations in the industry and the actual working conditions is the key to improving general perception of the industry. The author even suggests that educational providers begin to reduce emphasis on Hospitality and Tourism programs in wake of declining demand on part of the students, perhaps indicating deterioration in image among the youth. Raising similar concerns, Richardson (2009)'s study on Hospitality and Tourism undergraduate students in Australia indicate that there is a mismatch in terms of students career expectations and the actual employment conditions of the industry. Such mismatch of perceptions with reality can have a negative impact on the decision of the students in entering this sector.

Furthermore, Richardson (2009) argued that the level of working conditions in this sector need to be significantly improved in order to increase the relative attractiveness of employment compared to other industries competing for young talent. Barron, Maxwell, Broadbridge & Ogden (2007) have conducted a study on the perception of generation Y's experiences and perceptions on a career in Hospitality. The study employs a focus group approach and as such has provided an in-depth look at the perceptions of generation Y students. The findings indicate mixed views from the respondents. While students generally regard the Hospitality and Tourism as a dynamic industry offering a career path that is exciting, interesting and generally enjoyable, it is also being perceived as a career option that requires significant sacrifices in terms of non work activities. The persistent view among this group of respondents, is that the requirement to work on anti social hours present a huge difficulty in achieving work – life balance prompting some not to enter the industry upon graduation or to start up ventures of their own.

Finally, in a very recent study, Weaver (2009) explores how recent graduates of Tourism management program in New Zealand perceive job quality in the Tourism industry. Career perceptions of the graduates surveyed in this study are largely negative. In terms of remuneration some graduates described their pay negatively though it was acceptable at the beginning and that the rewards of other professions advance a faster rate. However, fringe benefits were viewed in positive manner as many are given complimentary tickets to events and travel-related discounts (Weaver, 2009). In terms of employment status, some graduates commented

that employment with the Tourism industry are not as prestigious as other professions as entrance to the sector is rather loose without any little need for academic prerequisites (Weaver, 2009). Turnover rates are high and this largely attributed to the fact that many of the graduates viewed working in this industry as a form of “stepping stone” for future career change or promotion elsewhere (Weaver, 2009). Many graduates are found to be very concern over advancement opportunities in the industry and have opinionated that managerial positions are not readily available for graduates at entry (Weaver, 2009). It would seem therefore that the Hospitality and Tourism industry is not known for adopting highly developed human resource practices, has unstructured training approaches, and low remuneration and reward systems leading therefore to high labor turnover. Maxwell & MacLean (2008) for instance, have found that companies in this industry usually have rather poor working conditions and thus by its nature do not promote the right approach to work-life balance. This in turn has caused much difficulty for the industry in attracting and retaining people as part of its talent management initiative.

A number of researchers have examined the perceptions of secondary and high school students on careers in the Tourism industry. Ross (1994) in his study of Australian High School Students career choices has found generally favorable interest in employment with the Tourism industry. However, Getz (1994) conducted a longitudinal study on this group of students in Scotland and has found that generally attitudes and career perceptions have deteriorated significantly over a period of 14 years. Lewis and Airey (2001) on the other hand have found that high school students do express interest in the Hospitality and Tourism sector but at the same time also demonstrate unwillingness to accept the unsociable working hours and poor remuneration systems.

Based upon the literature reviewed, it is therefore justifiable that a study is needed to determine and understand the career perceptions of the Hospitality and Tourism students. This is because a study such as this could provide the basis where policy makers and educationalists could better promote a positive image and career path of the industry to these students who ultimately would be tasked with developing growth and success of the increasingly vital Tourism sector of the economy.

METHODOLOGY

An established university college in Petaling Jaya was approached to participate in this study. The institution was selected for the following reasons:

- a) The university college is reputedly one of the most renowned and largest private higher educational institutions to offer undergraduate programs in Hospitality and Tourism in Malaysia.
- b) The university college’s School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts have established programs in Hospitality and Tourism since the early 1980s and boast a huge Hospitality and Tourism student population.
- c) All students in the university college were able to complete the questionnaire in English.
- d) The authors have worked in the institution and are knowledgeable on the nature of the programs as well as the students’ characteristics which match the objective of this study.
- e) The authors have been granted permission to administer questionnaires in the institution.

The university college under study was established in 1986 and today offers a variety of programs ranging from professional certificates to master degrees in areas of Hospitality, Tourism, event management and culinary arts. In particular, the school offers a highly successful 3 years undergraduate program in Tourism and Hospitality. The study focuses on year 1, 2 and 3 students that are undertaking this program in January 2014. Only students that are attending classes would be involved in the survey, given the fact that there are students who are away for industrial training and as such will not be able to be participate. This would mean that a total of 350 students are eligible to participate in this study. The questionnaires were distributed on January 2014 and a total of 300 were returned, giving a response rate of 85 percent.

The instrument used was essentially adapted and modified from the questionnaire developed by Roney & Oztin (2007). Their instrument were modified and adapted in order to better suit he local context of Tourism and Hospitality education of Malaysia. The instrument is comprised of two sections with the first part

emphasizing on gathering data on demographics of the surveyed students. The second part is comprised of 11 questions aimed at eliciting the sample's career perception on the Tourism and Hospitality industry. A 5-point Likert Scale was employed in measuring the respondent's extent of agreement with various statements listed in assessing their given perceptions. As in the original study by Roney & Oztin (2007), 5 negative statements were reversed coded to prevent response bias.

The study involves establishing an in-depth profiling of the respondents as well as conducting a frequency analysis with regards to their career perception of the Hospitality and Tourism industry. The study also involve the application of inferential statistics such as ANOVA and T-Test with the purpose of determining whether any statistically significant difference exist in terms of the respondents' career perceptions based upon differences in:

- Work exposure
- Intention to work in the industry
- Willingness to study Tourism and
- The level of study in Hospitality and Tourism

FINDINGS

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Respondent's Profiles (n = 300)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	122	40percent
Male	178	60percent
Level of study		
Diploma / Degree Year 1	36	12
Diploma / Degree Year 2	213	71
Degree Year 3	51	17
Work experience in Hospitality & Tourism		
Yes	91	30
No	209	70
Choice of Hospitality and Tourism study		
Yes	278	92
No	9	3
Not to willing	13	4
Willingness of working in industry upon graduation		
Yes	190	63
No	22	7
Undecided	88	30
Friends / Relative working in the industry		
Yes	215	72
No	85	28
Position Expectancy in 5 Years		
Managerial	260	87
Senior	28	9
Executive	8	2
Supervisory	4	1
Average Working Exposure (In terms of Months)		2 months

Table 1 indicates that the sample chosen were well represented by two genders with 40 percent of the respondents being female and 60 percent being males. Also, the analysis on the level of study indicates that a

great majority of the sample of respondents are represented by Diploma / Degree Year 2 students (71 percent). This is to be expected and is reflective of the actual distribution of students at the University College. The reason being that at the second year, the school attracts students from other colleges and many will opt to go for industrial training after their year 2 studies before continuing for year 3.

Table 1 also indicate that only a small portion of the students surveyed have some experience in the Hospitality sector (30 percent) and the average working experience is about 2 months. A large proportion of the students surveyed (92 percent) actually choose their program willingly, though only 63 percent indicate willingness to consider the Hospitality and Tourism sector as a viable career option. Most of the respondents (72 percent) inform that they have friends and relative working in the sector. Finally, 87 percent of the respondents indicate that they are expected to be in a managerial position in 5 years time upon joining the sector.

Table 2: Types of Hospitality & Tourism Related Business where Respondents are Exposed as Trainees (n = 91)

Type of Business	Frequency
Hotel	45
Travel	36
Airline	42
Food & Beverage	50
Event Planning	15

Please be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive as students could be servicing different business during their tenure of service. Table 2 indicate that a great majority of those respondents having some experience with the Tourism industry seems to be from the hotel sector while very few have exposure to the events planning business.

Table 3: Choice of Career in Specific Hospitality and Tourism Related Sectors upon Graduation. (n = 300)

Categories of Hospitality & Tourism Sector	Frequency
Accommodation	89
Tour Operations	34
Air Transport	54
Food & Beverage	43
Entertainment	56
Events	24

Response categories are not mutually exclusive. Table 3 reveal that **the top three** most preferred career choices of the respondents are firstly being in the accommodation sector (89) followed by Air Transport (54) and finally entertainment (56).

Career Perceptions on Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Table 4: Perceptions of Respondents towards a Career in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry (n = 300).

Extent of Agreement / Disagreement with statement	Strongly Disagree / Disagree (%)	Neither Agree / Disagree (%)	Strongly Agree / Agree (%)
Advancement opportunities are adequate in the tourism industry.	7	35	58
Tourism related jobs are more respected than the other jobs.	19.7	46	34.3
To study tourism management at the university level is a correct investment in career development.	7.6	27.7	64.7
One can make good money by working in tourism.	16.4	44	39.6
Working in tourism does not provide a secure future. R*	38.7	39.3	22
It is hard to find job security in tourism. R*	29.6	47.8	22.6
Irregular working hours in tourism affect family life negatively. R*	10.7	23.3	66
Meeting new people by working in tourism is a pleasant experience.	5	10.0	85
It is not necessary to have a university degree to work in the tourism industry. R*	20.6	35.7	43.7
Since many of the managers in tourism do not have a university degree, they are jealous of university graduates working in the industry. R*	26	39.3	34.7
There is no sexual discrimination in tourism.	22	39.3	38.7
In general, the advantages of working in the tourism industry outweigh the disadvantages.	14.7	50.3	35

R*:- These items are reverse coded

As can be observed in Table 4, a great majority of the respondents (more than 50 percent) agree that advancement opportunities are acceptable in the Tourism industry. However, not many respondents agree that a Hospitality and Tourism career is being viewed as prestigious in the society (34.3 percent) as many appear to be indecisive as to the relative perceived career standing of their industry (46 percent). A majority of respondents (64.7 percent) did perceive that their choice of education in the Hospitality and Tourism courses to be a right investment decision. This is followed by a sizable following of respondents (39.6 percent) who believed that the industry offers good rewards, though 44 percent are unsure of the compensation being accorded in this sector of the economy.

In terms of a secure future, a majority of the respondents seem to be unsure over the state of job security in the industry with 39.3 percent neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement that “Working in Tourism does not provide a secure future”. On a similar note the sample is divided in their response to the statement “It is hard to find job security in Tourism” with 22.6 percent agreeing with it, 29.6 percent disagreeing and the rest being neutral. A great majority of the respondents (66 percent) agree with the statement that “Irregular working hours in Tourism affects family life negatively”. This would be understandable as it could generally be observed that those working in industry are working for relatively longer and more unsociable hours compared to the rest of society. Also, an overwhelming 85 percent of the respondents agree that opportunities for meeting new people afforded by the industry is a pleasant experience, while a many of the respondents (43.7 percent) feel that a degree is necessary for working in the industry.

Finally, the remaining three statements reflect the perceived problems related to possible problems associated with working in the industry. Firstly, a majority of the respondents that is 39.3 percent neither agree nor disagree with the statement that “since the majority of the managers in Tourism do not have university degrees, they are jealous of university graduates working in the industry”. Though still a sizable portion (34.7 percent) still perceive that managers without undergraduate degrees are apprehensive over graduates in this sector. A great portion of the respondents (38.7 percent) seems to agree that sexual discrimination exist in the sector though many still are undecided in this aspect of the industry (39.3percent). Lastly, approximately half of the respondents (50.3) are unsure of whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantage in working in this industry.

Table 5: Comparison of the Mean of Career Perceptions between Genders (n = 300)

		Mean	N	t-value	Sig value
	Male	37.3279	178	-1.137	0.258
	Female	37.9508	122		

As can be observed from Table 5, the t-test conducted does not indicate significant difference in between genders with regards towards the respondents’ perceptions in Tourism careers.

Table 6: Comparison of Mean Scores of Career Perceptions between Respondents With and Without Work Experience.

		Mean	N	t-value	Sig value
	Yes	36.9670	91	-1.322	0.190.
	No	37.8462	209		

Similarly, results in Table 6 indicated that t-test shows no significant difference between the perceptions of respondents with or without experience.

Table 7: Comparison of the Mean Scores of Career Perceptions Based on Respondents' Intention to Work in the Tourism Industry.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	Sig. Value
yes	190	38.1436	4.25970	1.521	0.220
no	22	37.3636	4.89456		
undecided	88	37.2333	4.10001		
Total	300	37.8133	4.26840		

As indicated in Table 7, the ANOVA analysis indicates no statistically significant differences in between those respondents that intend to work in the sector, those that do not and those that are undecided.

Table 8: Comparisons of Career Perceptions based on the Wiliness to Study Hospitality and Tourism.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	Sig. Value
yes	278	37.8165	4.45987	2.120	0.122
no	9	36.1111	3.05959		
Not willing	13	35.6154	4.19401		
Total	300	37.6700	4.43396		

Once again ANOVA analysis results presented in Table 8 do not indicate any significant differences between those respondents who are willing and not willing to study hospitality and tourism.

Table 9: Comparisons of Career Perceptions based on the level of study in Hospitality and Tourism.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	Sig. Value
Year 1	36	37.8165	4.45987	1.769	0.172
Year 2	213	36.1111	3.05959		
Year 3	51	35.6154	4.19401		
Total	300	37.6700	4.43396		

Finally, ANOVA results indicated in table 9 also do not reveal any significant differences in terms of career perceptions based on the respondent's level of study.

INTEPRETATIONS

Based on the findings of Table 4, more than 50 percent of the respondents surveyed indicated that advancement opportunities are acceptable within the Tourism sector and also perceive the choice in Hospitality and Tourism education is a wise investment choice. Also a sizable portion (approximately 40 percent) is quite positive over the remuneration offered by the industry. Table 1 also indicated that the respondents are rather optimistic over their future in this sector given that a high number of them expect to be promoted to a managerial position within a 5 years period upon graduation. A great majority of the respondents (85 percent) also indicate that the opportunity to meet new people afforded by the industry is well received and favored. Approximately 44 percent of the respondents appreciate the need for higher education in progressing in this sector given the rise of competition for talent in the economy (as indicated in Table 4). Finally, it is quite encouraging to learn that more than 60% of the respondents express interests to enter into the industry upon graduation (based on Table 1 findings).

On a more negative side, a great majority of the respondents (66 percent) tend to agree that the punishing unsociable hours required by the industry have a negative impact on their lives. In terms of job prestige, a large number of the respondents (34.4 percent) seem to disagree with the relative social standing of the jobs in Tourism and about 46 percent are neutral in their perception indicating perhaps an element of uncertainty over the prestige of their chosen profession in society.

The level of exposure to the industry and progress of study do not seem to affect the respondents' career perception and this generally is in contrast with prior studies which show otherwise (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; King et al., 2003; O'Leary & Deegan 2005; Richardson, 2008).

Finally as to the general working conditions of the industry, given the limited working experience of the respondents, the majority of them are rather neutral in their opinion in specific issues such as sexual discrimination, job security, etc. Also, approximately half of the respondents surveyed are still unsure that in totality whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages in working within this industry.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is aimed at investigating undergraduate students' career perception of the Tourism industry based on evidence collected from an established School of Hospitality and Tourism of a well known University College in Malaysia. The findings indicate that in general the career perceptions of students in this sector of the economy are neither strongly favorable nor unfavorable. This is in line with the similar study carried out by Roney & Oztin (2007) in Turkish institutions though are largely in contrast to the findings of many previous studies which generally indicate that students are unfavorable in their perceptions towards a career in Tourism and Hospitality (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; King et al., 2003; O'Leary & Deegan 2005; Richardson, 2008). This generally neutral standpoint of the respondents in this study may be attributed to the limited exposure to the industry in terms of their work experience and the nature of the work environment.

In terms of more positive aspects of their viewpoint, students surveyed tend to agree that their choice of education in Hospitality and Tourism appears to be a right investment decision and generally most of them chose the program of study on their own accord. The students also express satisfaction on the opportunities provided by the Tourism industry in meeting with different people as part of their job.

In terms of negative viewpoint, students tend to be more negative in response to the punishing unsociable working hours of the industry and this is consistent with the findings of similar studies (Emenheiser et al., 1988; Richardson, 2008; Barron, 2008).

As a whole, students are generally unsure of the exact nature of the working conditions and prospects of the industry (given their mostly neutral viewpoints in Table 4). This may be a result of the fact that most of the students have limited exposure with the industry, since only 30% of the respondents have some working experience (based on Table 1). However, a great majority (more than 60 percent) are willing to work in this sector of the economy and indicate optimism in terms of their advancement in 5 years time upon graduation.

Based on the results of this study, several implications of study could be drawn. Firstly, it is recommended that educational providers should play a major role in narrowing the gap between students' expectations and the need of the industry's employers. This could be achieved through more industry driven curriculum planning that stresses on skills and knowledge that are transferable and to raise students' awareness of the actual practices and working norms of the industry in order to better prepare them for a career within this sector of the economy. On the part of the industry, human resources practices need to be improved in order to provide better training, support and favorable experience to the trainees and students during their internship. This is instrumental in building a lasting favorable impression and a solid internship experience that could better equip the students to cope with the demands of their future job and to groom them to be effective managers. Thus, it is safe to say that both the academia and the employers of the industry have a significant role to play in supplying well groomed and educated manpower to the growing industry of Tourism which in turns play a prominent role in the development of the national Economy.

LIMITATIONS

Two main limitations can be observed from this study. Firstly, the study is based on a case study on a single private higher educational institution and as such findings derived may not be generalisable to other contexts or institutions. Secondly, the study only gathers data from existing Hospitality and Tourism Students of the institution. More useful data may be obtained from graduates or alumni members who have entered the industry or chose other career paths. Nevertheless, the study still provides useful insights on the perceptions of private higher learning students on a career in the Tourism industry.

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