

Tourism and Hospitality Students' Perceptions of Careers in the Industry: A Case Study of Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin

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Abstract: *The tourism and hospitality industry worldwide has been confronted with the problem of attracting and retaining quality employees. If today's students are to become effective practitioners of tomorrow, it is fundamental to understand their tourism and hospitality employment perceptions. Therefore, this study examines the tourism and hospitality students' perception of careers in the tourism and hospitality industry based on three factors: physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits. This study employed a quantitative and single cross-sectional study. A self-administrated questionnaire was distributed, and 201 students responded. The descriptive analysis results revealed that physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits show a high level of students' perceptions of this industry. It implies that focusing on these three factors are critically important to attract students to work at organisations in the tourism and hospitality industry. This study will benefit the students, institution, and tourism and hospitality employers to improve the current situation*

Keywords: Career, student, tourism and hospitality industry

1. Introduction

In recent years, Malaysia's tourism and hospitality industry has shown tremendous improvement (Liat et al., 2020). The industry managed to meet 15.2% in Malaysia's GDP in 2018, surpassing 14.1% recorded for the previous year (Liat et al., 2020). It shows that this industry is well developing and needs qualified and competent employees to continue achieving success. The tourism and hospitality industry is a labour-intensive service industry. Its success depends entirely on the good-quality personnel to deliver, operate, and manage the tourism and hospitality products (El-Houshy, 2018). However, the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide has been confronted with attracting and retaining quality employees (Tuzunkan, 2018). Therefore, if today's students are to become effective practitioners of tomorrow, it is fundamental to understand their tourism and hospitality employment perceptions (El-Houshy, 2018).

Many factors influence students' perceptions of careers in the industry. According to Richardson (2010), the factors are work nature, social status, pay and benefits, industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, promotion opportunities, co-workers, managers, and commitment to the industry. Meanwhile, Mohammed (2018) mentioned physical working conditions, pay and benefits, and promotion opportunities. Tuzunkan (2018) stated factors influencing students' perceptions are commitment to the industry, co-workers, managers,

promotion opportunities, work nature, social status, industry-person congeniality, family life, physical working conditions, pay/benefits, and future. However, this study focuses on three factors only: physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits. According to Mohammed (2018), these three factors are the most rated factors in students' perceptions of hospitality careers.

In this light, previous researchers have studied the tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of careers in the industry globally (Atef et al., 2017; El-Houshy, 2018; Richardson, 2010; Tuzunkan, 2018). However, in the Malaysian context, studies on tourism and hospitality students' perception of careers in the industry are still scarce (Ahmed et al., 2014). Moreover, limited studies have focused on physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits in the Malaysian context (Mohammed, 2018). Therefore, this study investigates the tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of careers in the industry in the Malaysian context. Specifically, the objective is to examine the level of students' perceptions of physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits among Tourism and Hospitality Department students at Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS), Perlis, Malaysia. This study will benefit the students, institution, and tourism and hospitality employers to improve the current situation and attract them to work at their organisations in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Physical Working Conditions

Physical working conditions play a critical role in influencing students' perceptions. According to El-Houshy (2018), it is good for the students to recognise the future working conditions reality because they will form lower and more realistic expectations concerning industry careers. Usually, most people look for employment in industries offering good working conditions (Ariza-Montes et al., 2019). Atef and Al-Balushi (2017) stated that the top motivating factor in committing to a career in tourism and hospitality is encouraging working conditions. Therefore, providing decent working conditions is essential to attract students to work in the tourism and hospitality industry. On the contrary, as Mohammed (2018) pointed out, if the tourism and hospitality industry does not offer decent working conditions, it can lead to low staff motivation and work commitment. El-Houshy (2018) found that many graduates left the industry due to poor working conditions. Meanwhile, Bhalla and Dawra (2019) said interns, who found poor physical working conditions, will refrain from working in the hotel industry after completing their respective courses. Therefore, physical working conditions play an essential role in motivating employees, especially in the students' eyes, to stay in the hospitality industry (Chen & Shen, 2012).

2.2 Co-Workers

Co-workers play an essential element in a work environment (Shum et al., 2019). Co-workers also help the organisation solve the hospitality industry's turnover challenge (Tews et al., 2018). Employees look for co-workers to understand the social environment and deal with uncertainty (Shum et al., 2019). Most jobs involve working with others, teamwork, and cooperation (Tews et al., 2018). For instance, the entry-level employees' work frequently needs to work alongside one another, making interpersonal relationships a defining characteristic of one's work-life (Tews et al., 2018). Working is not always about work, and individuals actively seek out their peers for socialising and friendship. Co-workers are also crucial for the employees because they will reflect the employees' behaviours. The employees are more likely to model co-workers' behaviours when they see co-workers engage in the behaviours and get positive outcomes (Shum et al., 2019). Therefore, students perceive that co-workers have

significant relationships to work in the hospitality industry (Wen et al., 2018). Furthermore, students also perceive that working with co-workers from different cultural backgrounds is one of the most desirable characteristics of hospitality careers (Wen et al., 2018).

2.3 Pay and Benefits

Pay and benefits are a total reward system characterising the compensation structure (Wahab et al., 2020). According to Kukreti and Dani (2020), pay and benefits can affect students' perceptions and preferences towards working in the hospitality industry. Adhoch (2019) stated that the industry's pay and benefits are one of the significant undergraduate students' concerns to work in the industry. Meanwhile, Mohammed (2018) said that pay and benefits could be considered one of the barriers affecting students' intention to continue pursuing a career in the industry. Hence providing a positive image on pay and benefits of the tourism and hospitality industry is critically crucial to attract the current students to work in the industry. Most of the students are concerned about their pay and benefits within the industry (Richardson, 2008). In the hospitality industry, most students undergoing internship training will be exposed to the industry's pay and benefits (Farmaki, 2018). Students show their interest before joining the industry; however, after they know the level of pay and benefits offered, they will be reluctant to work in the industry due to low pay and benefits received (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Hence, if the students can earn good pay and benefits elsewhere, they tend to leave and grab other options as they are not satisfied with the industry's pay and benefits (Mohammed, 2018).

2.4 Research Framework

Figure 1 showed the research framework of this study:

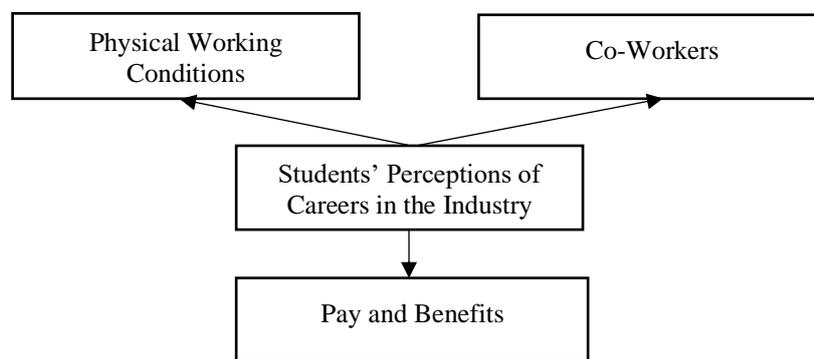


Figure 1: Research framework

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design and a single cross-sectional. This study's population consisted of Tourism and Hospitality Department students at PTSS, and the total number of students was 861 in June 2020 session (Student Affairs PTSS, 2020). The department has four programmes: Diploma in Food Service (Halal Practices) (DHF) with 382 students, Diploma in Tourism Management (DUP) with 227 students, Diploma in Event Management (DEV) with 220 students, and Certificate of Hotel and Catering (KHK) with 32 students from semester one to semester six. According to Raosoft calculation, if the population is 861, the minimum sample is 266 respondents. Since this study employed stratified random sampling, the minimum number of questionnaires needed to be distributed was DHF = 118, DUP = 70, DEV = 68, and KHK = 10, respectively.

The questionnaire was adapted from Richardson (2010) with 17 items and divided into four sections. Section A was related to the respondents' demographic profile with five items, Section B about physical working conditions with five items, Section C about co-workers with seven items, and Section D about pay and benefits with five items. This study utilised a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Since the questionnaire was initially in English, Brislin's back-translation method (1970) was implemented. The English version was translated into the Malay language by two translators then retranslated by the other two translators into English to ensure no variations between the versions and ensure the questionnaire's accuracy reassured. Then, this study employed two content experts to verify all the items and ensure the instruments' validity. Meanwhile, this study used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed that all variables were reliable, ranging from $\alpha = 0.739$ to $\alpha = 0.898$; the value of physical working conditions was $\alpha = 0.739$, co-workers was $\alpha = 0.876$, and pay and benefits was $\alpha = 0.898$.

In terms of data collection, this study employed a survey method, and the researchers used pen and paper to distribute the questionnaires. Before distributing the questionnaires, the researchers attached a cover letter informing the survey was voluntary, and all information gathered will be treated as confidential. This study also utilised the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The analysis used was descriptive statistics analysis, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Profile

Based on the result obtained, females were the highest respondents (58.2%), followed by males (41.8%). In terms of age, 18-20 years old (82.6%) were the highest respondents, followed by 21-23 years old (17.4%). Malay (98.5%) was the majority in this study, followed by Chinese (1.0%) and others (0.5%). In terms of programmes, the highest was DHF (38.3%), followed by DEV (29.9%), DUP (23.4%), and lastly, KHK (8.5%). Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic profile.

Table 1: The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percent	
Gender	Male	84	41.8
	Female	117	58.2
Age	18-20 Years Old	166	82.6
	21-23 Years Old	35	17.4
Race	Malay	198	98.5
	Chinese	2	1.0
	Indian	1	.5
Program	DHF	77	38.3
	DEV	60	29.9
	DUP	47	23.4
	KHK	17	8.5

4.2 Descriptive Statistic of Variables

Based on mean and standard deviation results, the mean values range between $M=3.98$ to $M=4.20$. The highest mean score was co-workers ($M=4.20$), followed by pay and benefits ($M=4.04$) and, lastly, physical working conditions ($M=3.98$). All mean results indicated a high level of students' perceptions. It means that these three factors are significant components of

students perceptions of careers in the industry. The results also showed that students perceived co-workers as the most critical factor making them want to work in the industry, followed by pay and benefits and physical working conditions. Table 2 shows the mean score results of the variables in this study.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
Co-workers	4.20	0.693
Pay and Benefits	4.04	0.835
Physical working condition	3.98	0.651

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Physical Working Conditions

Five items of physical working conditions introduced by Richardson (2010) were analysed. The mean scores were between M=2.94 to M=4.52. The item with the highest mean value was “Working conditions are generally good in tourism and hospitality industry”, followed by “Employee dining halls are in good condition in tourism and hospitality industry” and “There is a high risk of work accidents in tourism and hospitality industry”. Meanwhile, this study’s lowest mean value was “The working environment is very noisy in tourism and hospitality industry”. The results indicated that the mean values were between low perception and high perception. However, most of the students positively perceived the hospitality industry. Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis results of the physical working conditions’ items mean values.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Physical Working Conditions

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Working conditions are generally good in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.52	.729
Employee dining halls are in good condition in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.19	.887
There is a high risk of work accidents in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.11	.996
The working environment is very clean in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.10	.843
The working environment is very noisy in tourism and hospitality industry.	2.94	1.145

4.4 Descriptive Analysis of Co-workers

In terms of co-workers, seven items introduced by Richardson (2010) were also analysed. The mean values were between M=3.47 to M=4.45. It indicated moderate to high perceptions among the students, implying most students perceived co-workers as an essential factor in the industry’s career. Two items showed similar values and were the highest mean value; “There is team spirit in tourism and hospitality industry” and “There is cooperation amongst staff in tourism and hospitality industry”. It was followed by “I can make friends easily with others in tourism and hospitality industry” and “Employees are generally educated in tourism and hospitality industry”. Meanwhile, the lowest was “Employees without degrees are jealous of graduates in tourism and hospitality industry”. Table 4 shows the descriptive analysis results of the co-workers’ items mean values.

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Co-workers

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
There is team spirit in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.45	.865
There is cooperation amongst staff in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.45	.761
I can make friends easily with others in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.30	.944
Employees are generally educated in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.29	.840
Most staff are motivated in tourism and hospitality industry.	4.17	.839
Generally, people with an educational background in tourism and hospitality work in the industry.	3.95	.984
Employees without degrees are jealous of graduates in tourism and hospitality industry.	3.47	1.127

4.5 Descriptive Analysis of Pay and Benefits

Finally, the pay and benefits in which the mean values were between $M=3.91$ and $M=4.33$, indicating a high level of students' perceptions of the industry's career. It noted that the pay and benefits are also essential in making students want to work in the industry. Based on the results, the highest mean was for "Considering long hours worked pay should be higher in the tourism and hospitality industry". It was followed by "Duty meals is an important in the salary package in the tourism and hospitality industry" and "More penalty rates should be paid in the tourism and hospitality industry". Meanwhile, the lowest mean value was for the item "I think the pay is low for most jobs in Tourism and hospitality industry". Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis results of the pay and benefits' items mean values.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Pay and Benefits

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Considering long hours worked pay should be higher in the tourism and hospitality industry.	4.33	.906
Duty meals is an important in the salary package in the tourism and hospitality industry.	4.20	.922
More penalty rates should be paid in the tourism and hospitality industry.	3.97	.982
The level of fringe benefits is low in the tourism and hospitality industry.	3.91	.998
I think the pay is low for most jobs in Tourism and hospitality industry.	3.81	.988

5. Discussion

This study aims to identify the level of tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of a career in the industry in the PTSS students context. More specifically, this study examines the physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits perceptions among diploma students from the Tourism and Hospitality Department at PTSS. Based on the result obtained, students perceived that co-workers are the most important factor, followed by pay and benefits and physical working conditions. Students perceived that co-workers strongly influence their perception based on the team spirit that the co-workers portray. Besides, the students also perceived that good cooperation among staff and easily making friends at work in the tourism and hospitality industry are the major factors influencing their perception. It is in line with Tews et al. (2018), stating that most employees need co-workers not only for work purposes but also for socialising and friendship. The second important factor for the students is the pay and benefits offered by the industry. Students perceived that the industry should pay higher due to long working hours in the industry. The students also perceived that they should receive free duty meals included in their salary packages. Moreover, the students also think that they will get high fringe benefits working in the industry. Therefore, pay and benefits play an essential role in determining satisfaction with students' career choice (Mohammed, 2018).

Finally, the physical working conditions in which students perceived that physical working conditions also significantly influence their perceptions of careers in the industry. They found that working conditions in the hospitality industry are good. It is in line with Atef and Al-Balushi (2017), stating that the top motivating factor in committing to a career in tourism and hospitality is the encouraging working conditions. The students also perceived that the tourism and hospitality industry's working environment is immaculate, including its staff. As mentioned by Ariza-Montes et al. (2019), working conditions determine the individual's psychological well-being. Hence, providing decent working conditions is essential. However, the students also noted that the tourism and hospitality industry is at a high risk of work accidents and not a quiet place. Nevertheless, it is a small matter for them because it is the nature of the industry.

6. Conclusion

This study found that most Tourism and Hospitality Department students at PTSS perceived that physical working conditions, co-workers, and pay and benefits are essential factors in the tourism and hospitality industry's careers. Therefore, enhancing these three factors is critically important to attract these students to work in the industry. It suggests that tourism and hospitality operators' management should consider these elements and improve in the future. Consequently, these students can be attracted to work in their organisations.

This study has a few limitations. Firstly, this study solely focused on Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin; hence it cannot be generalised to the other polytechnics in Malaysia even offering similar programmes. Secondly, this study focused on three variables only; therefore, it cannot be generalised entirely as other variables can also be considered. Thirdly, the analyses in this study were based on mean and standard deviation values only. Perhaps future studies should involve inferential statistical analysis, such as correlation and regression.

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