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# Students' Perceptions of Careers in Ghana's Hospitality and Tourism Industry

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to explore students' perception of careers in the hospitality and tourism industry and their intention to pursue careers in Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry. This study used a sample of 441 students studying hospitality and tourism management at University of Cape Coast. The results indicated that, overall, the perceptions of students toward careers in the hospitality and tourism industry were unfavorable. It was also observed that: opportunity to care for others, establish own jobs, gain transferable skills, further training and education are important factors students consider in their choices of careers but they believe the hospitality and tourism industry offers something else. The study, therefore, has some implications for career counseling, guidance, and reorientation of students toward careers in the industry.

## Introduction

Tourism has grown to become one of the world's major international trade categories. It provided about 7% of the overall number of jobs (directly and indirectly) in 2014 (UNWTO, 2015) and contributes one in every eleven jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2016). The industry contributed almost 7% of the total employment in Africa. According to WTTC (2016), Ghana is among the five top tourists' destinations in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is also known to be one of the most popular tourist destinations in Africa where Western tourists especially African-Americans visit the country due to the significance of heritage tourism which is in connection with the Pan-African slave trade (Teye & Timothy, 2004). The country is endowed with many tourist attractions such as the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, Mole National Park, Manhyia Palace, serene beaches, diverse festivals among others.

The hospitality and tourism industry in Ghana has experienced considerable and consistent expansion since the middle of the 1980s. It is currently the fourth highest foreign exchange earner and the most important and fastest growing sector of the Ghanaian Economy (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2016). The sectors' total contribution to the country's' GDP as of the year 2014 stood at 6.7%, supporting about 122,000 direct employments and this is projected to increase to

170, 000 jobs (2.5% of total employment) by the close of 2015 (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2015). International tourist arrivals reached 827,501 in 2011 with corresponding receipts of US$1634.3 million (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Arts [MTCA], United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [EUNECA], and United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO]), (2015). The accommodation sub-sector has seen remarkable growth between 1986 and 2013. The number of accommodation facilities in the country has increased from 420 units with 2,321 rooms as of December 1986 to 2, 228 licensed units with 39,752 rooms at the end of 2013 (Ghana Tourism Authority [GTA], 2014).

The growth of the tourism industry has resulted in the need for higher education in tourism and hospitality. Some polytechnics responded to this by introducing Higher National Diploma (HND) programs in tourism and hospitality Ghana. The University of Cape Coast (UCC) in 1996 also introduced degree programs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in tourism. Currently, there are a growing number of public and private institutions offering degree programs across the country. Researchers have found out that many Hospitality graduates either never entered the industry, or left the industry with no intent to return (Blomme, Van Rheede, & Tromp, 2009;

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Hedley, 2013; King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003; Nair, Choudhary, & Prasad, 2017; Stalcup & Pearson, 2001; Walsh & Taylor, 2007).

In addition, Blomme et al. (2009) found significant differences in pre- and post-entry expectations of Hospitality graduates. Though the tourism industry creates new employment opportunities, it is often criticized as generating low-skilled and low-paying jobs that offer little job satisfaction (Roney & Öztin, 2007). In the tourism and hospitality industry, having a skilled, enthusiastic and committed work-force is seen as vital to the success of firms in the industry (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). The hospitality industry acknowledges the importance of Hospitality graduates if services are to be delivered efficiently (Hedley, 2013). The education, training, skills, and motivation of staff play a key role in an organization gaining a competitive advantage (Aloudat, 2017; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). An employee's commitment to any industry is determined by their perceptions and attitudes toward working in the industry as well the types of jobs available in the industry. Therefore, it is important to understand potential employees' perceptions of careers in the industry.

There is a growing concern that the proportion of workers in the Hospitality and Tourism (H & T) industry who have tertiary qualifications is much lower than most other industry sectors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). There are reports of many H & T Management graduates leaving the industry or even failing to enter the industry upon graduation due to low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors resulting in high staff turnover and wastage of trained and experienced personnel (Amoo & Neequaye, 2014; Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley, & Lockwood, 2001; Jenkins, 2001; Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Zacarelli, 1985). Sibanyoni, Kleynhans, and Vibetti (2015) indicated that to attract and retain graduates in the industry, attention should be paid to the factors that influence graduates to leave or not to enter the industry. This raises the issue of finding out and explaining the perceptions of individuals who are likely to enter the tourism and hospitality work-force to explore whether the industry will meet their expectations.

Although there is substantial literature about tourism and hospitality employment, such as the works of Amoo and Neequaye (2014); Brown and Arendt (2011); Richardson (2010); Tan et al. (2016); Wang and Huang (2014), Nair et al. (2017) as well as Lee, Lee, and Dopson (2018) which highlight students' perceptions of careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, these studies did not consider students' intention to pursue a career in the industry whilst still in school which we think can be a very important factor in influencing their career choices in future.

This means that more empirical studies focusing on students' perceptions of the industry are needed in order to have a better understanding of their perceptions in the industry and make some recommendations. According to Airey and Frontistis (1997), as well as Wang and Huang (2014) undertaking this type of study is needed to address unanswered questions about the attitudes of students toward hospitality and tourism careers. At a time when tourism is held out as one of the world's major industries and sources of employment, it would be timely to know more about what potential recruits think about it, in order to provide a basis for attracting the best possible work-force. This leaves us with the problem of trying to understand what factors students believe are important in influencing their choice of career in the industry and the extent to which they think tourism and hospitality as a career offer these factors.

Though studies have been conducted on students' career perceptions (Amoo & Neequaye, 2014; Brown & Arendt, 2011; Nair et al., 2017; Richardson, 2010; Tan et al., 2016), however, few have attempted to measure students' various career perceptions according to their individual characteristics such as gender, years of study in college, work experience and their willingness to pursue a career in the industry (Wang & Huang, 2014). The purpose of this study, therefore, responds to Jackson and Wilton (2016) and Rospigliosi, Greener, Bourner, and Sheehan (2014) call by examining students' perception of careers in Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry and their intentions of following a career in the industry. And also, to apply the findings of this study to students as recommended by Jackson and Wilton (2016). Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(i) What factors do students consider to be important in choosing a career?
(ii) Does the Hospitality and Tourism (H &T) industry offer the factors students consider to be important when choosing a career?
(iii) What are the differences in career perceptions across students' socio-demographic background (gender, year of study, experience, and program of study)?
(iv) What is the relationship between students' perception of H & T and their intentions to pursue a career in the industry?

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Review

Researchers have defined the term "career" differently in existing literature. Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) stated

that all the definitions of career are centered on the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time. Other definitions include the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person's life (Robbins, Bergman, Stagg, & Coulter, 2006). According to Riley and Ladkin (1994), a career is a series of jobs arranged over time. It can also be viewed as an individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors related to work experiences and activities over the span of a person's life (Kim, Chun, & Petrick, 2009). Inkson (2004), Cappellen and Janssens (2005) posited that a career is the path that explicitly embraces an evolution over time as a series of career moves.

According to Ghuangpeng (2011), in recent years, there have been further developments in the theories of career decision-making. Parsons' theory of vocational choice, however, has remained extremely influential and his ideas became the foundation for later career development theories which focus on the relationship between individuals and jobs or work environments (Sharf, 2016). The importance of Parsons' (1909) three broad factors is that they help individuals to gain a better understanding of themselves and their career alternatives and therefore enhance an individual's ability to make effective career choices. These factors continue to form the foundation for the current theoretical approach to career decision-making.

Theoretical approaches to career decision-making are based upon two major theoretical perspectives of career choice and development: psychological and sociological (Brown, 2002). Psychological approaches seek to describe or explain the way individuals make career decisions based on individual factors which include personality, interests, abilities and job satisfaction because these factors significantly influence the way individuals behave, think, and respond to making career choices.

On the other hand, sociological approaches seek to develop a career decision-making process that allows individuals to consider the relevance of a variety of factors prior to their career decision-making. Sociological based theories focus on two major factors; demographic and environmental (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002). Demographic factors refer to gender, ethnicity, and the socioeconomic status of the family. Environmental factors refer to social influences, such as the impact of family members, school friends, community values and practices, the work environment, family connections, the labor market structure and the economic environment (Ghuangpeng, 2011).

The study adapted the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994). SCCT was developed to understand (a) the ways in which career interests are formed, (b) the ways in which academic and career choices are selected, and

(c) occupational persistence and performance. Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizes several cognitive variables, including self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and choice goals, which are associated with academic performance, as well as persistence behavior. Super (1957) stated that both internal (personal attributes) and external (environmental and social context) factors within the transition stages will influence individuals' career choices and decisions as well as their career/vocational behaviors.

One component of SCCT is self-efficacy, which was defined by Bandura (1986) as individual's ability to judge his or her capabilities to perform specific actions or designated functions. Outcome expectations are described as an individual's belief concerning the consequence or outcome from completing a specific action (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). According to Lent et al. (2002), individuals who have a higher self-efficacy and anticipate positive outcomes will support higher goals, which in turn will also promote and sustain positive performance. The variable of career exploration and commitment is about the courage of individuals to test, explore, and attach to career choices based upon career preferences (Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis, 1989).

## Factors Considered in Choosing Careers in Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Studies have found out that there are varied factors that students consider when choosing a career in the industry. A study conducted by Tan et al. (2016) using 70 final year diploma students majoring in Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM (Pulau Pinang) revealed that social status and pay were significant factors when considering careers in the industry. Wan, King, Wong, and Kong (2014) have also ranked the following as the greatest factors that influence graduate's decision to work in the tourism and hospitality industry: interesting work, advancement potential, secure future, good salary, opportunity for service to society; and social prestige.

Domingo, Goh, Richardson, and Hui (2016) found out that students pay attention to the following when choosing a career in H & T industry: pay, promotion opportunities, career prospects, job security, and the working environment.

Maxwell, Ogden, and Broadbridge (2010) also found that H & T undergraduate students in Scotland valued career factors including promotion, good pay and job security. A research by Xu (2013) came out that all college graduates consider pay, job status, and

satisfaction with promotion opportunities as dominate career choice factors. Another study by Amoo and Neequaye (2014) in Ghana revealed that industry-person congeniality, social benefit factors, opportunity for professional development and job competitiveness were crucial in determining students' choice of career options. They concluded that career opportunities in H & T industry were more easily attainable than in many other sectors of the economy because remuneration in the industry is grossly inadequate.

Researchers alluded that H and T industry factors do not offer students and graduates the important factors students consider in choosing careers in the industry. Studies have found out that students have both positive and negative perceptions of careers in the industry. For instance, the study conducted by Robinson, Kralj, Solnet, Goh, and Callan (2016a) found that, the factors which accounted for the negative attitudes of students toward careers in tourism included, stressful jobs, lack of family life due to the nature of work, long working hours, exhausting and seasonal (unstable) jobs, low social status of jobs, unsatisfactory and unfair promotions, low pay and insufficient benefits, unqualified managers, poor attitudes and behavior of managers toward employees, unqualified coworkers and poor attitude and behavior of coworkers and physical working conditions for employees. While Barron, Maxwell, Broadbridge, and Ogden (2007) highlighted some positive perceptions as; its' exciting, enjoyable nature, perceived prospects for career opportunities and interesting experiences via the rapidly changing sector.

Wijesundara (2015) conducted a study to evaluate graduates' perceptions of employment in the H&T industry. In his study, the perceptions of 120 fresh graduates from four government universities in Sri Lanka were evaluated and it revealed that, 66% of the respondents were working in the hospitality and tourism industry with positive perceptions due to four main factors; position received, compensation package, relevant knowledge and skills and available opportunities for carrier development while 34% of the respondents were with negative perceptions due to working schedules, job environment, and personal attitudes. Further, Aloudat (2017) presented a picture of the perceptions of undergraduate students enrolled in the four-year degree course in tour guiding, drawing on the case of Yarmouk University in Jordan. Generally, the results indicated positive perceptions toward the tour-guiding career. Much of the students preferred to study tour guiding and it was their first choice. They believe that tour-guiding career is an interesting career that offers freedom and the opportunity to learn new things and meet foreign people. They also think that such a career

is highly regarded by their families and the wider community in Jordan. However, the students' perception of the tour-guiding career had some negative aspects. They believe that the career is stressful, exhausting, has unstable income, relatively has a low social status if compared. A study conducted by Wen, Li, and Kwon (2018) revealed that compensation, benefits, and promotion opportunities in the hospitality industry were below students' expectations and in need of improvement.

## Students Perception of Careers in Hospitality and Tourism

While Chan (2017) concludes that students in New Zealand had positive image of the industry, Nair et al. (2017) found that students in India possess a negative image of the hospitality industry, especially toward hotels. Akış Roney and Öztin (2007) surveyed 450 Turkish students studying Tourism at university level in order to analyze their perceptions toward tourism careers. Their results showed that, overall, the respondents' perceptions are neither favorable nor unfavorable. The findings also indicated that: willingness to study tourism; willingness to work in tourism after graduation; and work experience; are important factors in shaping their image of tourism careers.

## Socio-demographics and Career Factors/Perceptions

Studies have established the relationships between individual factors and career perceptions.

### Gender
A study in UK by Lambert, Smith, and Goldacre (2018) revealed gender differences in career factors. The study found out that financial prospects was of less importance to females than to males with regards to factors influencing doctors' choice of specialty. Wu, Low, Tan, Lopez, and Liaw (2015) also indicated gender as one of the top four factors that influence choice of career among healthcare workers. Again, Igbinedion (2011) reported that there were gender differences in the choice of secretaryship studies. And Agarwala (2008) alluded that competence was the most important factor influencing career decisions of females whilst financial rewards were rated as the most important by males. Contrary, Korir and Wafula (2012) examined the influence of personal factors on the career choice of undergraduate students in Kenya and found out that gender had no significant influence on students' career choice.

## Industry Experience

A study by Robinson, Ruhanen, and Breakey (2016b) showed it that, through exposure to the industry, hospitality and tourism students become considerably less interested in selecting hospitality as their career of first choice. This was consistent with the findings by Nachmias and Walmsley (2015), who also established that, students who have work experience in the industry see the industry as a poor employer.

Bamford (2012) examined the perceptions of hospitality and tourism students from three universities in New Zealand toward careers in the industry. In this study, the students from the different universities all had negative perceptions of the hospitality and tourism industry. However, their work experience, whether part of their curriculum or not, had a much greater influence on their perceptions. Yet, these experiences seemed to have little overall impact on their decisions to enter the industry upon graduation. Datta, Biswakarma, and Nayak (2013) recorded a difference in expectation between senior students who had completed internship and juniors who were yet to undergo industrial training. The hotel management students who have undergone their training had a more negative perceptive toward the hotel industry than those who are yet to go on an industrial training.

A study conducted by Datta and Jha (2015) about the consequences of industrial training on students' career perception revealed the students have positive perceptions about the hospitality and tourism careers. In their study, the students expressed that the hotel job itself has a lot of positive sides like being attractive, interesting and has a lot of things to learn every day. Overall, the study revealed that, the students with no industrial experiences have more positive view toward the industry than those who have completed their industrial training. Also, while Chan (2017) found that most students in New Zealand were positively influenced by their work experience, Mooney and Jameson (2018) intimated that work experience negatively influences students' intention to work in the industry. Another study by Brown, Arendt, and Bosselman (2014) in the US revealed differences between Hospitality graduates' experiences and what they perceived to be important when selecting a career.

## Year of Study/Academic Level

According to Barron and Maxwell (1993), fresh and continuing tend to have different perceptions toward careers in the industry. He asserted that freshmen and women have positive image of the industry than continuing students. Kumar (2013) researched on the changing perceptions of students toward the hospitality industry. In this study, the difference between perception of the first year and final year hospitality management students were examined. It was revealed that the first-year students have a positive perception toward the hospitality industry while the final year students had negative perceptions.

Pol and Patil (2015) also in their study to understand the perceptions of final year hotel management students toward working in the hotel industry surveyed 74 final year students from Pune and indicated that there was a major change in the attitudes of students toward the industry after their industrial attachments. Also, they identified an 8% margin between the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction toward the hotel industry works and a mixed opinion about the willingness to join the industry after graduation. However, Robinson et al. (2016b) opined that after internship, Australian students align their aspirations to work in different segments of the industry rather than neglecting the industry.

## Career Perceptions and Intentions to Pursue Career in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

A number of studies have been done to look at the relationship between career perceptions and intention to pursue a career in the hospitality and tourism industry. However, there have been mixed findings with regards to students' intentions.

A study by Anandhwanlert and Wattanasan (2016) in Thailand investigated career perception of undergraduate students in H & T industry. The results revealed that 70.9% of the respondents have their intentions to work in tourism industry after graduation while the remaining percentage did not have any intention to work with a tourism related industry. This is in consonance with Kipkosgei, Kivuva, and Muiruri's (2015) study, where the findings revealed that Kenyan students' are more willing to work in the industry after graduation. El-houshy (2014) also examined the perceptions of hospitality students at the faculty of tourism in Alexandria University toward the industry as a career choice. Results indicated that, despite the unfavorable image of the industry held by students, the majority (70.6%) of the students indicated that they would work in the hospitality industry after graduation. Another study by Chellen and Nunkoo (2010) indicated that over 80% of respondents were pleased to

have chosen to study tourism and that they would like to work in the industry, with 61% of respondents not planning on working in any other industry.

However, the following studies also found contradicting views from students. Robinson et al. (2016b) found out that students and graduates of H & T programs have no intentions of entering the industry upon graduation. Another study conducted in Malaysia by Richardson (2010) using undergraduate tourism and hospitality students came out that students generally do not believe that a career in tourism and hospitality do not have any intentions of working the H & T industry.

## Methods

### Data and Sample

The study adopted a quantitative approach which utilized the descriptive survey design involving the use of questionnaires. Survey method was used because of its usefulness in reaching a large population. Data were collected from all undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The census sampling technique was employed to use all students in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

### Survey Instrument

Students' perception was measured using adapted questions from some previous studies (Aksu and Kӧksal, 2005; Airey & Frontistis, 1997; Amoo & Neequaye, 2014; Birdir, 2002; Jenkins, 2001; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). The questionnaire was made up of 31 items which was divided into three sections. Section A of the survey was used to obtain demographic information about the respondents. Section B sought for factors students found important when considering a career in the industry and Section C examined how well students think the tourism and hospitality industry will offer the factors in section B.

### Pre-testing of the Instrument

Prior to data collection, the instrument was pre-tested on a group of 50 undergraduate Tourism and Hospitality students at the Cape Coast Polytechnic in Ghana. The purpose of this pre-test was established the validity and the reliability of the survey and also to find out the relevance and applicability of the instrument in the Ghanaian context and to also test whether the 31 factors were relevant to a career in tourism and hospitality. Based on their comments and the results, the

survey items were modified and reduced in order to improve the psychometric properties of the instrument. Next, the face and content validity of the items were reviewed again by three lecturers have an expertize in research on organizational behavior and H &T education. Based on the result from the pilot study and the comments and suggestions from the panels, the final instrument was refined. The pre-test reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 which means that the scale has high internal consistency and reliability.

### Data Collection and Response Rate

Researchers sought approval from the institutional review board at the university in order to protect human subjects. The researchers sent a pre notification describing the purpose of the study and the upcoming study schedule and encouraged the participation. On the scheduled dates, researchers went to lecture rooms, sought permission from lecturers and administered the instrument which included informed consent, assurance of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. In all, a total of 462 questionnaires were administered and retrieved (representing 100% response rate) and 11 were discarded because they were incomplete. The remaining questionnaires (441) were used for data analysis.

### Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were computed Paired-sampled $t$-test was used to test the difference between the factors students consider important in choosing a career and the extent to which the hospitality and tourism industry will offer the factors while independent sampled $t$-test and ANOVA were used to test for differences in perceptions across students socio-demographic background and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to measure the association between students perception and their intention to pursue a career in the hospitality and tourism industry. The results and discussions are presented below.

## Results and Discussion

### Students' Demographic Details

Results from the study, shown in Table 1 indicate that more than half (58%) of the students were females and the majority (82%) of them were between the ages of 21 to 30. Also, 85% were single. The population was found to be proportionate of the student enrollments per year

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

| Profile of Respondents | | Frequency (Valid Percentages) N = 441 |
|---|---|---|
| Sex | Male | 175 (41.6) |
| | Female | 246 (58.4) |
| Age | Below 20 | 28 (6.4) |
| | 20–25 | 282 (64.0) |
| | 26–30 | 77 (17.5) |
| | Above 30 | 35 (8.0) |
| Marital status | Married | 45 (10.5) |
| | Single | 370 (87.5) |
| | Divorced/ separated | 8 (2.0) |
| Mode of entry | Senior High | 338 (83) |
| | High Diploma | 40 (9.7) |
| | Mature | 31 (7.6) |
| Programme of study | Hospitality | 261 (62.2) |
| | Tourism | 159 (37.8) |
| Year/level of study | 100 | 98 (23.2) |
| | 200 | 43 (10.2) |
| | 300 | 182 (43.0) |
| | 400 | 83 (19.6) |
| | Post graduates | 17 (4) |
| Industry work experience | Yes | 179 (40.6) |
| | No | 262 (59.4) |
| Career intention in industry | Yes | 146 (33.0) |
| | No | 295 (67.0) |

of study with the exception of the post-graduate students who were in the minority (6%). On the mode of entry, those who came straight from secondary school represented 80% of the total number of students. Fifty-nine percent of them had not had any work experience in the hospitality and tourism industry. Only one-third (33%) had intention of following careers in the industry after graduation.

Table 2 presents the means of each of the career factors based on importance, perception and the differences.

Results in Table 2 depict that on the average, the five highest rated career factors that students considered as important were 'a career where they can care for others' ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 2.258$). The next career factors were 'a career that gives them the opportunity to establish their own jobs' ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.212$), 'a career where they can gain transferable skills ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.896$), a career that offers opportunities for further training/education ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.011$) and a career that gives opportunity for network and the use of high quality and resource equipment. ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.962$). This brings to light the implication that most students do not see a future for themselves in the industry and therefore, might not stay longer in the industry. This supports the findings of Gu, Kavanaugh, and Cong (2007) that many graduates aspire to find employment in other better paying industries on graduation, or soon after. However, these findings are in contrast with the findings of Richardson (2009), Richardson (2010) and Brown and Arendt (2011) who

found that the most important factors to students were having an enjoyable job in a pleasant working environment.

The lowest rated factors that are considered important by the students were a "career that they can get along with colleagues" ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.404$), "reasonable work load" ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.197$), "opportunity to travel abroad" ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.140$), "enjoyable job" ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.259$), "where they can use their degrees" ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.182$), and "a career that can easily be combined with parenthood" ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.131$).

Interestingly, some of the least rated factors in this study were rated very high in similar studies. For instance, "enjoyable job" and "colleagues that I can get along with", rated first and second highest in a study by Brown and Arendt (2011) in the USA and also "enjoyable work" was the most important factor in Richardson's (2010) study in Australia. This may be due to the difference in conditions of service and the work environment. Workers in the advanced countries have access to certain services and facilities that workers in the Ghana do not have. These include internet, childcare services, among others. Respondents for the current study, therefore, may not enjoy the work as those in Richardson's (2010) study as well as Brown et al.'s (2014).

## Perception of Careers in Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Students were also asked to indicate the extent to which they perceive hospitality and tourism industry will offer them the factors they consider as important in their career choice. Perception was measured by subtracting the mean score of the industry offers those factors (P) from the mean score of the factors students consider as important when choosing a career (I). The results are presented as perceptions of the industry in Table 2.

Evidence from Table 1 also shows that the highest rated factor that the students believe the industry will offer was "a career which gives opportunity for networking" ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.912$), followed by "a job where I can contribute to society" ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.976$), "a job where I can gain transferable skills" ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.912$), "a career which exposes me to other career avenues" ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.026$) and "a job that offers good promotion prospects" ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.902$). This finding buttresses Sibanyoni et al. (2015) but contradicts the findings of Brown and Arendt (2011), Richardson (2010) as well as Amoo and Neequaye (2014). It is also in direct contrast with

**Table 2.** Results of paired-sampled *t*-test.

| Factor | Important Career Factor (I) | Perception of the Industry (P) | Mean Difference (I-P) | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A job that I will find enjoyable | 4.14 (1.156) | 3.99 (1.156) | 0.154 (1.047) | 2.882** |
| 2. Colleagues that I can get along with | 3.51 (1.345) | 3.67 (1.292) | −0.162 (1.302) | −2.436* |
| 3. Pleasant working environment | 4.22 (0.999) | 4.12 (0.997) | 0.108 (0.928) | 2.273* |
| 4. A secure job | 4.21 (1.118) | 4.05 (1.316) | 0.158 (1.250) | 2.480* |
| 5. A career that provides intellectual challenge | 4.10 (1.178) | 4.13 (1.007) | −0.023 (1.148) | −0.386 |
| 6. Good promotion prospects | 4.27 (1.101) | 4.16 (1.912) | 0.102 (2.011) | 0.991 |
| 7. A job which gives me responsibility | 4.20 (1.080) | 4.12 (0.980) | 0.076 (1.060) | 1.402 |
| 8. High earnings over length of career | 4.10 (1.153) | 4.15 (1.770) | −0.046 (2.874) | −0.317 |
| 9. A job where I can contribute to societ | 4.20 (1.044) | 4.23 (0.919) | −0.037 (1.053) | −0.679 |
| 10. A job where I can use my university degree | 4.02 (1.207) | 3.97 (1.199) | 0.049 (1.098) | 0.881 |
| 11. A job where you can gain transferable skills | 4.36 (0.904) | 4.22 (0.979) | 0.141 (0.948) | 2.939** |
| 12. A job that is respected | 4.17 (2.287) | 4.03 (1.168) | 0.136 (2.332) | 1.151 |
| 13. Reasonable workload | 3.79 (1.194) | 3.69 (1.234) | 0.097 (1.100) | 1.750 |
| 14. A job with high quality and resource equipment | 4.24 (0.973) | 4.08 (1.043) | 0.167 (1.006) | 3.248** |
| 15. The opportunity to travel abroad | 4.03 (1.082) | 4.04 (1.161) | −0.018 (1.164) | −0.306 |
| 16. Job mobility-easy to get a job anywhere | 4.18 (1.044) | 4.06 (1.154) | 0.123 (1.051) | 2.312* |
| 17. A job that can easily be combined with parenthood | 4.04 (1.145) | 3.91 (1.244) | 0.128 (1.164) | 2.170* |
| 18. Good starting salary | 4.09 (1.222) | 3.90 (1.281) | 0.186 (1.168) | 3.127** |
| 19. A job where I can care for others | 4.33 (0.953) | | 0.434 (1.350) | 6.345*** |
| 20. A job that offers opportunities for further training/education | 4.31 (1.038) | 4.16 (1.026) | 0.155 (1.043) | 2.929** |
| 21. A job that improves my social life | 4.24 (0.951) | 4.15 (1.004) | 0.092 (0.974) | 1.873 |
| 22. A job that does not conflict with my personal values | 4.22 (1.023) | 4.08 (1.113) | 0.143 (1.207) | 2.323* |
| 23. It exposes me to other career avenues | 4.08 (1.060) | 4.16 (1.028) | −0.076 (1.159) | −1.276 |
| 24. Opportunity for networking | 4.23 (1.021) | 4.20 (0.916) | 0.028 (1.070) | 0.523 |
| 25. Working conditions are generally good in the industry | 4.08 (1.061) | 3.91 (1.248) | 0.164 (1.177) | 2.731* |
| 26. Work environment is very clean | 4.18 (1.017) | 4.01 (1.157) | 0.176 (1.067) | 3.245** |
| 27. Jobs are readily available | 4.15 (1.137) | 3.82 (1.221) | 0.335 (1.155) | 5.713*** |
| 28. A job that guarantees career development/progression | 4.15 (1.150) | 4.14 (1.063) | 0.008 (1.277) | 0.118 |
| 29. It gives opportunity to establish my own job | 4.42 (1.220) | 4.06 (1.131) | 0.364 (1.427) | 5.038*** |
| 30. It is most suited for my natural career | 4.21 (1.069) | 4.11 (1.092) | 0.108 (1.059) | 2.010 |
| 31. It will be a dream come true to work in the industry | 4.15 (1.147) | 3.88 (1.365) | 0.272 (1.296) | 4.089*** |
| 32. Overall | 4.14 (0.735) | 3.89 (0.773) | 0.24 (1.232) | 3.308*** |

*(significant) *t*-test two-tailed probability *≤ 0.05; **< 005; ***< 0.000; standard deviations are in parenthesis; a positive gap indicates students perceive that the hospitality and tourism industry would not offer them those important career factors (unfavorable) whiles a negative gap indicates that they perceived that the industry can offer them those factors (favorable). Perception scores are measured on a 5-point scale on which the higher the number, the higher that factor is considered in career decisions.

Maxwell et al. (2010) and Xu's (2013) claim that students value pay and job security in careers.

However, the lowest rated factors were "colleagues that I can get along with" (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 1.286), "reasonable workload" (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = 1.231), "readily available jobs" (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = 1.212), "a job that can be easily combined with parenthood" (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = 1.256) and "it will be a dream come true to work in the industry" (*M* = 3.39, *SD* = 1.354). This result is not in consonance with Sibanyoni et al. (2015), Xu's (2013), Brown and Arendt (2011), and Richardson (2010). Because the importance of "colleagues that I can get along with" (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = 1.404) and "reasonable workload" (*M* = 3.67, *SD* = 1.197) were also low, they may not be worth considering for some students in relation to hospitality and tourism careers.

## Differences in Important Career Factors and the Perceptions of the Industry

Paired-samples *t*-test was then conducted to examine the difference between the factors students consider important in choosing a career and the extent to which the hospitality and tourism industry will offer the factors. Table 2 presents the results.

As many as 25 out of the 31 career factors had positive gaps indicating that students perceived the hospitality and tourism industry would not offer them those important career factors while only six obtained negative gaps which means that students perceived that the industry can offer them those factors. For example, they perceived that the industry can offer them only these factors: "colleagues that I can get along with" (*M* = −0.162; *SD* = 1.302); "a career that provides intellectual challenge" (*M* = −0.023; *SD* = 1.148); "high earnings over length of career" (*M* = −0.045; *SD* = 2.874); "a job where I can contribute to society" (*M* = −0.037; *SD* = 1.053); "the opportunity to travel abroad" (*M* = −0.018; *SD* = 1.164) and "it exposes me to other career avenues" (*M* = −0.076; *SD* = 1.159).

To further establish if there are statistically significant differences between important career factors and students' perception of the industry offering those factors, the Paired-Sampled *t*-test was used. It is also evident from Table 1 that a number (17) of factors have been identified as being significantly different.

From the results, it is clear that students generally do not believe that a career in tourism and hospitality will offer them the factors that they find important. For example, at a 100% (sign = 0.000) confidence level, they perceived that the industry will not provide them the opportunity to care for others and establish their own jobs, unavailability of jobs as well as not helping them to fulfill their dreams.

Overall, there was a statistically significant decrease in students' perceptions from important career factors ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.735$) to what they believe the industry will offer ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.773$, $t = 3.308$, $p = 000$). This finding buttresses Wen et al. (2018), Brown et al. (2014) as well as Richardson's (2009) assertions that students do not trust that the hospitality and tourism industry will offer them the career factors that are of importance to them. Again this study is in direct consonance with findings by Roney and Öztin (2007) that overall, Turkish students' perceptions are somehow unfavorable to the industry.

### Differences in Career Perceptions across Students' Socio-demographic Background

Regarding gender, it was revealed that there was a significant difference ($t = 2.492$, $p = .01$) between males' ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.741$) and females' ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.77$) career perceptions. Meaning female students' perception score was higher than that of their male counterparts. This suggests that female students have a favorable perception than males. This finding further strengthens the Social Cognitive Career Theory. However, it is incompatible with the finding of previous survey conducted by Kozak and Kızılırmak (2001) and Akış Roney and Öztin (2007) among undergraduate Tourism students in Turkey. The eta square value of 0.013 indicates that the magnitude of this difference is small. In other words, only 1.3% of the variance in students' career perception is explained by gender.

Program of study, on the other hand, did not have any role in students' perception of careers in the industry. The independent-sample $t$-test result showed that there was no significant difference ($t = 0.19$, $p = .98$) between the perceptions of Tourism students ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.778$) and that of Hospitality students ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.751$). This finding is not in line with Wang and Huang (2014). Though students who had work experience in the industry obtained a higher mean score ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.725$) than those without any work experience ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.841$), there was no statistically significant difference ($t = 1.534$, $p = .13$) between the two.

This reaffirms Chan (2017), Wijesundara (2015), Datta and Jha (2015) as well as Richardson's (2010) assertions that students who experience the hospitality and tourism industry through internship and part-time jobs are more likely not to enter the hospitality industry but not harmonious with Akış Roney and Öztin (2007) study that found a statistically significant relationship between work experience and perceptions of tourism careers. They, however, concluded that students with work experience tend to have negative attitudes toward tourism jobs. It is also contrary to Barron and Maxwell (1993); Getz (1994); Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000); Kozak and Kızılırmak (2001); Jenkins (2001) and Aksu and Ko¨ksal (2005) studies which show that the role of experience in forming perceptions is important. It can be claimed that as students gain more experience in the sector, their image of the industry changes for the best.

### Students' Perceptions and Their Intention to Pursue a Career in the Industry

The relationship between students' perception of careers in the hospitality and tourism industry and their intention to follow a career path in the industry was explored using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Preliminary analysis was performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a strong, positive association between the two variables ($r = 68$, $n = 401$, $p = .01$), that is, favorable perceptions correlated with intention to follow a career path in the industry. This finding is in contrast with Pol and Patil (2015) assertion that students have mixed opinion about the willingness to join the industry after graduation.

### Conclusion and Implications

The study revealed that Hospitality and Tourism students in Ghana perceive the following indicators to be important when choosing careers in hospitality and tourism: a career that gives them the opportunity to care for others, establish their own job, gain transferable skills, further training/education, network and use of high-quality equipment.

It was further revealed that the hospitality and tourism industry in Ghana does not offer students the factors indicated above. This implies that when students' career aspirations are not met, it can create disappointment and subsequently affects one's job satisfaction and turnover intentions. In order to retain qualified staff, hospitality and tourism managers need

to better understand what their potential employees' career aspirations are and try as much as possible to provide jobs that match their aspirations especially in areas such as gaining transferable skills, opportunities for further training/education, opportunity for networking and the use of high-quality equipment. Managers should also offer guidance on personal and career growth to students when they work with then during internships.

Overall, the perception of students toward careers in Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry tends to be very unfavorable. This explains why most of them were not sure of their intention to stay or follow a career path in the industry and eventually will seek for career opportunities in other industries. If this problem is not addressed, the shortage of skilled labor within the Ghanaian tourism and hospitality industry will continue to get worse. This has serious implications for students, academics, the tourism and hospitality industry, and other stakeholders.

Firstly, students who have negative disposition to the tourism and hospitality industry may choose not to publicize, convince or introduce others to study the program. This calls for reorientation of students on careers in the industry. Thus, they should be made aware of the career opportunities and career development opportunities available. Academics should also introduce students early enough to real-life industry experiences in their curriculum to project a more realistic picture of the industry in the classroom. As such they should give all potential H & T students (both males and females) an extensive overview of the types of careers available in the industry and the working conditions it offers, including pay levels, promotion opportunities and career paths on offer. Students on the other hand should see industrial training as a learning opportunity to gain experience and skills. They should also understand that industry work is different from classroom learning. As Chuang, Walker, and Caine-Bish (2009) intimated, universities must provide one of the best environments for such assistance in students' career development and in promoting their cognitive competence in career decision-making skills, career exploration, and career planning.

Again, if the industry is not providing the factors considered to be important by students in choosing their careers, they may lose their motivation and change or abandon their jobs. This implies that academics must bring on board practitioners to the classroom as guest speakers and as well enhance internship programs for these students in the H & T industry.

From the perspective of the industry, given the unfavorable career perceptions, prospective employees will neither enter the industry or those who may enter will leave with no intent to return. This study emphasizes the need for provision of more accurate information and awareness of the tourism and hospitality industry, as well as making attractive career opportunities available to Hospitality and Tourism students in Ghana. Industry practitioners should also work closely with academics and other stakeholders in establishing a more favorable image of the industry by providing reliable and positive information when students are on internship programs with these hospitality and tourism establishments. Industry needs to provide more opportunities such as field trips, internships, vacation and part-time jobs for students to directly experience real industry job. By so doing, students will develop a clear image of what to expect from the industry or what awaits them following graduation. This would help in aligning their career outcome expectations and thus encourage them to join the industry as posited by Chan (2017). In short, industry must focus on, to ensure students are receiving positive experiences and obtaining positive perceptions of the industry.

It was also revealed that female students have a positive disposition of careers in the industry than their male counterpart. This could explain why there are more female employees in the industry. In addition, separate attention should be paid to male and female students as each gender has its unique problems. Consistent with the findings of Chuang and Jenkins (2010), our results also revealed that female students have stronger intentions to work in the industry upon graduation than male students.

According to Social Cognitive Career Theory, personal inputs (e.g., gender, race, and personality), contextual factors (e.g., social/academic status, culture and family), and learning experiences (e.g., work experiences) influence career perceptions and behaviors in important ways. Career choices are formulated through different processes and can be influenced by various factors or associated with different variables (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Relating this study to the SCCT by Lent et al. (1994), only personal inputs (gender) influence students career perception which will eventually influence their behaviors. Others factors such as contextual factors (academic level, mode of entry, program of study) and learning experiences (work experiences) were found not to be significant.

## Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the strengths of this study, there are some limitations for other researchers to take note. The data were

collected from students in only one institution and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all Hospitality and Tourism students. Due to this, future studies should expand this study and involve students from other Hospitality and Tourism institutions across the country in order to generalize these findings.

Looking at the socio-cultural values that are held in high esteem in Ghana it will be very appropriate for other researchers to investigate the impact it could have on students' career decision-making. It would be interesting to explore whether university and polytechnic students perceive the industry differently in Ghana. Further studies could probably look at where Hospitality and Tourism graduates work and in what capacities. Future studies in this area could also take a qualitative approach to uncover the contextual reasons why students do not believe a career in tourism and hospitality offers them the factors that they consider important in choosing future careers.

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