

An Assessment of the Hospitality and Tourism Talent Cultivating Mode in Nigerian Federal Polytechnics

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Abstract

In response to increasing demand for hospitality and tourism talents by the industry employers, a number of Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria offer National and Higher National Diploma programs in both hospitality and tourism management options. The talent cultivating mode of these institutions is inclined to technical and vocational education. However, the desired skills sought by the enterprises – the lodging, catering and leisure and travel firms are hardly met. This paper reviews the various hospitality and tourism talent cultivating models and examines and analyses the training system by the Polytechnics in the light of competency and performance on the real jobs. A blend between theory and practice with innovation has been discovered to be the best strategy for constructing and cultivating talents in hospitality and tourism management.

Keywords: Hospitality, Tourism, Talents, Cultivating mode, Skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry in Nigeria is rapidly growing in the recent times. The industry has been discovered to provide a soft entry for many entrepreneurs as it requires low capital base and less stringent legal restrictions. Both the public and private sectors are heavily investing in the industry by building mega and medium hotels, restaurants, fast food centers, guest houses, hostels, IDP camps, parks, game reserves, art galleries, historical monuments, just to mention but a few. Despite this wave of development, the availability of skilled labour to meet the diverse needs of the industry remains a mirage. It is apparent that most managerial and technical positions are manned by non-professionals from different disciplines and career lines. This is a serious challenge to the industry, especially with the fierce competition faced by practitioners and operators as a result of proliferation and globalization. In this situation, it is the talent acquisition that gives competitive edge

The statutory mandate of the Polytechnics in Nigeria, according to the Polytechnic Act 1979, is the

promotion of technical and vocational education and training, technology transfer and skills development to enhance the socio- economic development of the country. They are also allowed to develop programmes that meet the esteem and value of professions the society requires for economic and social development. Hospitality and tourism is one aspect that is covered by the Polytechnic Act for training in technical and vocational education.

Out of the 28 federal polytechnics presently operating in the country, less than 50% of them run accredited programs in hospitality and tourism management at National and Higher National Diploma levels. On annual basis, less than 400 students are graduated at HND level. With this scenario, the specialized talents required for meeting the needs of the hospitality and tourism enterprises can hardly be realized. This is more so because, apart from the small number, most graduates from hospitality and tourism majors prefer working in other industries like advertising, transportation and educational institutions where they hope to earn more pay rather than in establishments such as hotels or travel agencies. Also, even those who

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choose to work in the industry related enterprises are often complained as not having the requisite working skills and not able to adapt to the working environment

Ideally, it is required that the graduates of hospitality and tourism education should take pride in their profession at whatever level but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This is a matter of concern, not only to the industry but also embarrassing to the training institutions and the students. Where is the missing link? Are the graduates suffering from disillusionment as a result of poor working conditions offered by the industry employers? Are the traditional training philosophies of the Polytechnics inadequate to bridge the gap between theory and practice? Does the talent cultivation mode for the hospitality and tourism programs meet the needs of the industry? Does the supply of the talent by the Federal Polytechnics equate the demand by the employers?

Adopting the Four-Wheel talent-cultivation mode of Ma, Wei and Deng (2005), this study sought specifically to

- (i) Review the cultivating mode of hospitality and tourism talents available in extant literatures
- (ii) Examine the talent cultivation mode of the Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria
- (iii) Assess the performance of the cultivating mode of hospitality and tourism talents constructed and practiced by the Federal Polytechnics

2. TALENT CULTIVATION

Talent cultivation is an organized process of creating and imparting high level skills that meet operational goals and objectives of a set of organisations (Hu, et al (2018). It is designed to attract, develop, motivate and retain a crop of productive and competent hands that satisfy the demand of an industry for efficient labour (Si, Hu, Yang 2018). Known also as talent development, talent cultivation is aimed at creating high- performance potential employees. Labour power is the most important asset any industry will crave for and this explains the reason why successful companies emphasize personnel training policy that is based on both internal cultivation and external introduction.

Educational institutions, especially the Polytechnics remain the best vehicle for providing the requisite talents and skills needed by the hospitality and tourism industry. The federal Polytechnics offering programs in Hospitality and Tourism are expected to tailor their curriculum with the aim of graduating students that fit into the industry when they finally take up employment and are engaged in real life situations

2.1. Talent Cultivation Mode

Talent cultivation mode is described as a model of the construction and operation of the cultivation process adopted by an educational institution to achieve its cultivation objectives. Following development of science and technology, several contributions have been made in an effort to cultivate specialized talents based on the classification of disciplines and specializations. Consequent upon this, a good number of researchers added to discussions on hospitality and tourism talents cultivation. The hospitality and tourism industry in Nigeria is rapidly growing and is in need of well trained and qualified professionals to man its affairs. This becomes more necessary as the country has full desire to adopt tourism as a richer alternative to oil as a means of economic emancipation (Fada&Adejoh 2015). In their contribution, Zhang, Zhao & Shi (2004) systematically summarize the training mode and educating methods in higher tourism education into a complete set of education and teaching programs that combine theory with practice

Zheng (2005) and Wang (2010) carried out analysis of talent cultivation models for vocational and technical education and identified four models of talent cultivation which include

1. Dual-Script System, where both the industry and the school take joint commitment of talent cultivation, enabling the students to learn in school the skills that would be demanded at their future posts
2. Competency-based Education (CBE) Model, based on capacity building where the committee of the industry and the school identify the actual capacities required at the duty posts and include them in the curriculum or course contents at the school training level.

3. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Model, a comprehensive model involving a multi independent levels where government, industry and schools combine to design teaching activities that impart on students right from the middle education level,
4. Modules of Employable Skills (MES) Model, where functions and tasks required on the job are built into modules and form the basis of training curricula at the college level

2.2 Hospitality and Tourism Talent Cultivating Mode

Hospitality and Tourism Education is an aspect of technical education pursued by the Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria.. Therefore, a review of tourism cultivating mode will be relevant in this perspective. Zhao (2005) in his model of tourism talent cultivation suggests at least eight (8) principles by which higher institutions take part in constructing the cultivating model of specialized tourism talents. These essential considerations include:

- i. responsibility for the students' sustainable competitiveness in job-hunting;
- ii. consideration for the peculiarity of hospitality and tourism discipline in the program design and the allocation of educational resources;
- iii. respect for freedom of students' choice of courses and profession giving necessary guidance;
- iv. cultivating the students' travel service skills, service awareness and professional dedication;
- v. attaching great importance to the formation of students' scientific research consciousness;
- vi. adapting to the development of tourism and having certain forward-looking consciousness;
- vii. cultivating students' general managementskills; and

- viii. constantly updating knowledge, theories and ideas

In China, Ma, Wei & Deng (2005) propound "four driving-wheel type" talent-cultivation mode in the major of tourism management which is relevant to Nigerian situation. The emphasis of this model is on practice demand, teaching resources, teaching means and quality assurance. The practice demand relates to social demand, teaching practice, internship feedback and employment feedback. The teaching resources refers to the emphasis on teaching syllabus, building of teaching materials, team of teachers, quality of students, experimental facilities and practical consumables. On the other hand, the teaching means comprises teaching modes, teaching methods, teaching techniques and teaching software; while quality assurance has to do with teaching management system, teaching files, control of teaching process, teaching evaluation system, internship feedback and employment feedback mechanism. Actually, a curriculum driven on this 4-wheel design has the capacity to cultivate endurable talents. However, the educational institutes must be allowed by government and enterprise to cultivate qualified talents for the tourism industry

In another development, Zhang, Sun, & Shi (2006) opined that the focus of higher hospitality and tourism education should be on cultivating talents with innovation which involves knowledge training system characterized by "wide knowledge, strong comprehensive nature, large selection and course module", "double channel" training system of practical competence and innovative educational quality administrative system". By implication, a synergy between theory and practice is capable of overcoming low ability of transforming knowledge by students, lack of professional moral and disequilibrium between supply and demand. This supports the position of Wang, (2006) who is of the opinion that innovative talent-cultivation pattern through experience type of teaching can mediate students' inefficiencies and also develop a basic pattern of cultivating "compound, applied and open-type" talents based on the principle of putting into practice, construction of teaching environment, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching organization. Similarly, Guo (2010)

advocates effective forms of training for applied talents of tourism management through critical analysis of present training modes in relation to the industry and social demands.

In recognition of the importance of innovation and marrying theory with practice to build a strong foundation for hospitality and tourism talents cultivation, , Zou, Liu & Wang (2009) propose a “diamond-type” model of tourism personnel training which requires government support and the society’s approval with consideration for open internship, integrated curriculum, scientific research and international cooperation.

Other models of cultivating hospitality and tourism talents include work-integrated learning model of Chen and Lu (2011) and career guidance model of Men (2013). Both the models rely on employment experience and professional practice to cultivate a background that improves the employability of hospitality and tourism graduates.

2.3 Hospitality and Tourism Cultivating Modes of Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria

The Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria operate a training system that is based on the curriculum developed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) as the regulatory agency of government. From 1979 to date, the curriculum has been reviewed up to three times for the hospitality and tourism programmes

Presently, the institutions offering majors in hospitality and tourism management do so at National and Higher National Diploma (ND & HND) levels. They operate a mixed version of different models of hospitality and tourism talent cultivating modes.

Similar to the “four driving-wheel type” talent-cultivation model of Ma, Wei & Deng (2005) and TAFE Model of Wang (2010), the talent cultivating mode of the Federal Polytechnics is such that

- the curriculum is jointly drafted by the NBTE as agency of government, industry representatives as the direct beneficiary of the training outcome and representatives of the institutions as the providers of the training

- double channel training system is adopted where theory and practice are made complementary. In most cases, more importance is attached to practical for core courses as practical skills are weighted more than theoretical classes.
- a mechanism for quality assurance is instituted by emphasizing and enforcing Student Industrial Work Experience

To some extent, the tourism talent cultivating mode of the Federal Polytechnics is related to the applied and open type model of Wang (2006) by encompassing construction of teaching environment, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching organization

3. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the hospitality and tourism talent cultivating mode of the Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria reveals a mixture of similarities and dissimilarities when compared with global best practices.

By involving the education ministry, regulatory bodies, the industry and the institutions in the drafting of the curriculum for training and development of skills and talents in hospitality and tourism management, the Federal Polytechnics comply with the theories of dual script, CBE, and TAFE models of Zheng (2005) and Wang (2010). In this regard, talent cultivation is seen as a joint project, with government providing the support and the enabling environment, the industry contributing the training content and the institutes organizing and delivering the desired skill training.

The talent cultivation mode of the polytechnics also partially coincides with the ‘four driving wheel’ model of Ma et al (2005) as it emphasizes teaching resources, teaching means and quality assurance. The mechanism put in place for quality control is the regular accreditation and re-accreditation of programs by the National Board for Technical Education, and the students’ mandatory industrial training during and after the National Diploma (ND) as pre-requisite for Higher National Diploma (HND). However, the question that comes to mind is how effective are these processes. In most cases, the institutions stage manage

conditions only to meet reaccreditation requirements and the students lack commitment to industrial training as they are left to undertake such training in mushroom hospitality and tourism organisations. Comprehensive teaching module is formulated without provision for adequate skilled personnel and teaching software

On the other hand, the cultivating mode of hospitality and tourism talents of the Polytechnics does not satisfy the requirement of Guo (2010) for effective and applied talents cultivation by critically analysing the present training modes in relation to the industry and social demands.

In another development, the present hospitality and tourism talent cultivating mode as obtainable in the Federal Polytechnics does not give room for tenets of the Modules of Employable Skills (MES) advocated for technical education by Wang (2010). This is a situation where actual functions and tasks on the life jobs form the basis for curriculum development in order to adequately train graduates for the industry.

In the similar vein, the work-integrated learning model of Chen and Lu (2011) and career guidance model of Men (2013) are two good approaches for cultivating hospitality and tourism talents which are not fully incorporated by the Federal Polytechnics. These models are effective because they depend on practical work experience in the quest to impart knowledge.

4. CONCLUSION

The hospitality and tourism talent cultivating mode obtainable in the Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria is a mixed grill of various models. Though the industry and government contribute to curriculum development with the help of such agencies as the Ministry of Education and National Board for Technical Education, the implementation process is characterized by ineptitude and poor resource commitment.

Hence, a number of recommendations are made here to strengthen the current status of the institutes for improved talent cultivation in hospitality and tourism management.

1. The quality of hospitality and tourism talents acquired by students depends on the skill and experience of lecturers and instructors. Hence, the Federal Polytechnics as the conveyor of

the desired talents should engage the services of those who are versed in research and capable of introducing innovative ideas into the whole process.

2. The process of quality assurance should be re-invigorated and made more practical than ceremonial. A system of feedback where students' experience from internship and industrial attachment are incorporated into the training modules should be encouraged. In the same way, there should be constant contact between the institution and the enterprise in order to keep abreast of the current trends in the industry so as to include such and update the training modules regularly.
3. Early involvement of students in research is an important way to cultivate innovative talents, promote the development of the hospitality and tourism industry and enhance the level of scientific research.
4. In order to acquaint with the divergent nature of the hospitality and tourism industry, both the hospitality management and tourism management options should adopt a teaching plan that encompasses scientific, moral and humanistic courses as well as professional knowledge and skills training courses. A course combination of this type allows for general education curriculum and professional training target of senior specialized talents.
5. It is necessary to consider the existing educational resources in each Polytechnic in the course of constructing the cultivating mode of HND talents in hospitality and tourism management.

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