

The Limited Hospitality Career Knowledge of Learners in Township High Schools, Cape Town

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Abstract: The hospitality sector contributes positively towards the SDG's by addressing youth employment and economic challenges, specifically in South Africa. Therefore, awareness and knowledge regarding careers and opportunities that are available within the hospitality industry are vital. As a result, high schools are encouraged to incorporate the relevant knowledge about careers within the curriculum. Hence, this paper reports on the level of hospitality knowledge of high school learners in Cape Town townships. This was a cross-sectional study that followed a quantitative approach, whereby data was collected using questionnaires. Respondents were 720 pre-matric (Grade 11) learners who attended school in townships. Data were analysed using the Number Cruncher Statistical System (NCSS) 9. Thirty-seven per cent (37,2%) of the learners indicated that they received information about the hospitality industry through various platforms. The findings above are substantiated by the results that indicate that most learners (67.2%) know nothing about the hospitality industry. Furthermore, a few learners (28,5%) indicated to know about the industry. To support this statement, 8,8% mentioned available careers to be within the medical field. The present findings showcase the knowledge gaps that exist at the high school level, and this has a negative effect on the career choice and employment opportunities the hospitality industry offers. This calls for an intervention from higher education and industry to address identified gaps. The findings of the study share valuable insights regarding limited access to hospitality careers. This is a challenge because it hinders knowledge of career and employment opportunities.

Keywords: Hospitality Industry Knowledge, High School Learners, Cape Town Townships

1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry are one of the economic drivers globally. Aksoy (2022) highlights that the tourism sector has made a significant contribution to the creation of jobs and the provision of employment opportunities. Quinn and Buzzetto-Hollywood (2019) confirm the significance of the tourism and hospitality industry to have a vital role in economic development and job creation globally, stating that the tourism and hospitality industry contributes "2.5 trillion dollars to the global economy, which is 10,4% of global GDP". In 2020, the tourism and hospitality industry was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, its contribution to the economy halted for a short period. Currently, the tourism and hospitality industry are still the critical sector that is boosting the global economy (Aksoy, 2022). Sisa Ntshona (who was the South African Tourism CEO) commended the tourism sector for its contribution towards employment in March 2018 at the International Trade Show in Germany, stating that "the tourism sector is vitally important and should be nurtured for sustained and inclusive growth and inclusivity" as it contributes greatly to the economy of South Africa (StatsSA, 2018). The contribution towards employment was further alluded to by StatsSA (2023), stating that the tourism sector employed 492 561 people in 2021, and Nyambuya et al (2022) recorded that the hospitality industry of South Africa employs 5% of the working-age workforce. Van der Merwe et al (2019) and Sucheran (2021:115) stated that the hospitality industry is consistently expanding and contributing towards job creation which encourages "underprivileged development, economic growth and employment generation", which substantiates the above statements.

Although the literature shows tourism and hospitality's contribution towards employment in South Africa, the hospitality industry requires a wide range of skills to meet the needs of the industry, so one needs to possess these to access employment opportunities (Van der Merwe et al, 2019). Potential employees are required to have certain knowledge and skills for the hospitality industry. Nyathela et al (2021) mention that the tourism industry offers employment opportunities to a range of people, including the youth. The tourism industry accounted for 3.4% of jobs in 2021 of the total labour force, which shows that the industry absorbs a large workforce (StatsSA;2023). Therefore, the tourism and hospitality industry could assist in alleviating the youth unemployment rate in South Africa, which is relatively high, at 32.9%; furthermore, "youth aged 15-24 and 25-34 years recorded the highest unemployment rates of 62.1% and 40.7% respectively" (StatsSA;2023). Further, adding to this, "approximately 3.7 million (36.1%) out of 10.2 million young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training".

Olowoyo et al (2021) refer to Maumbe and van Wyk (2011), Saayman (2013), and Olowoyo and Maile; (2019) who highlight that there is a skills shortage problem and a lack of knowledge about the hospitality industry in South Africa and other countries. It is then essential for learners to know about this industry at high school level; as Booyens (2020:825) clearly states, “tourism is routinely promoted as a strategic labour absorbing sector with low entry barriers.” This will enable learners to make informed decisions before embarking on a career in this field, as this industry also alleviates the issue of unemployment in the country (Young, 2023). The economic and employment contribution presented above suggests that skilled employees are required for continued economic growth and to remedy unemployment challenges, especially among youth. To fix the career knowledge gap that exists regarding hospitality and other careers, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa introduced subjects such as Hospitality Studies, Tourism, and Consumer Studies at the high school level in 2006 (Umalusi, 2014) and the subject Life Orientation (LO) was also introduced by the DBE in 2006 (Fatoba et al, 2022) which has a career guidance component in it to inform learners about all the careers. However, to date, learners still have limited knowledge of careers, therefore, it is important to investigate the knowledge level of learners (youth) regarding the careers available. Hence the purpose of this study is to ascertain the township school learners’ knowledge level about the hospitality industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of Education about the Hospitality Industry

Conradie (2012) elaborates on hospitality education as having a ‘close and strong link with the industry and enables the students to be educated and keep abreast with the current industry trends’ and states that the hospitality industry suffers from a shortage of skills and specialised labour. This definition corroborates Booyens’ (2020) observation, saying that the hospitality industry requires a wide range of skills, and not having the relevant skills, knowledge, and formal qualifications for the hospitality industry contributes to the shortage of quality employees (Olowoyo et al, 2021). Cesario et al (2022) add that the tourism and hospitality industry plays a vital role in economic activity, outlining the staff shortage and limited supply of labour.

The skills and knowledge acquired through education are essential as they elevate the standard of service, which by default leads to the success of the organisation, hence Olowoyo et al (2021) emphasise that education should attend to the needs of the hospitality industry since the world is constantly evolving, noting the importance of attracting young people into the tourism and hospitality sector and training them to bridge the skills gap that exists (Cesario et al, 2022).

2.2 Addressing the Knowledge Gap and Shortage of Skills Within the Hospitality Industry

Olowoyo et al (2021) and Cesario et al (2022) highlighted the hospitality industry's lack of skills, knowledge and qualification. To remedy this, Quinn and Buzzetto-Hollywood (2019) recommend that institutions work closely with the industry to produce skills desired by the hospitality industry and bridge the existing gap (Francis et al, 2019).

In South Africa, specific interventions were introduced to bring awareness and remedy the skills gap within the hospitality industry. As previously mentioned the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced subjects such as Hospitality Studies, Tourism, and Consumer Studies at the high school level (Umalusi, 2014). Some schools already had the subject of Home Economics, which made the introduction of Hospitality Studies easy. In 2013, Umalusi (2014) records that 389 schools offered this subject to Grade 12 learners. Although these interventions were introduced, other challenges emerged such as lack of infrastructure, as the school needed stoves, fridges, to name a few (Gumede, 2010). The lack of infrastructure resonate with the challenge of limited resource in townships (Gala, 2017). The purpose of introducing Hospitality Studies was to equip learners with knowledge and skills about the “food and Beverage industry” (DOE,2003:9). Judging from the purpose of introducing Hospitality Studies as a subject, this will then benefit the learner who ends up not going to further their education to at least know what the hospitality industry is about and what it can offer. Chili (2014) details the objectives of including Tourism as a subject, stating that it addressed the skills shortage suffered by the industry and “fight unemployment and alleviate poverty among the poorest of the poor”. Concerning the subject LO, Adewumi and Adendorff (2014) detail that LO aimed to equip learners to “solve problems, make informed decisions and choices” and be responsible citizens. The intervention by the DBE clearly shows the significance of the hospitality industry and what it has to offer in terms of employment opportunities.

Booyens (2020) records that the number of schools that offered hospitality as a subject in 2015 was 339, which decreased from 387 in 2011. This is a concern as it means that fewer schools are offering knowledge about the hospitality industry.

2.3 Career Guidance Implementation Challenges

Underprivileged schools face challenges in “financial resources, guidance and counselling knowledge, information technology and staff shortage” (Mahlangu, 2011; Rungqu, 2019). Furthermore, Rungqu (2019) adds that these schools cannot afford to hire qualified professionals to assist with career guidance, supporting the above mentioned statement. This then puts the learners at a disadvantage as their chances of getting knowledge about the hospitality industry or any industry are limited. Albien and Naidoo (2018) highlight the challenges faced by township high schools, pointing out “overcrowded classrooms, broken equipment, lack of computer facilities and limited teachers - student interaction”. All these challenges have a direct impact on career guidance.

Turok et al (2021) comment on the difference in the education systems between black and white schools, highlighting that white schools’ education system is far superior to black schools, adding that white schools have teachers who are well equipped, with smaller classes and an advanced curriculum. On the other hand, LO teachers must be equipped with sufficient knowledge to conduct career guidance (Modiba and Sefotho, 2019). Mokodutlo et al (2019) stated that LO is usually allocated to an unqualified teacher who does not have adequate knowledge or is not up to date with the trends in the labour market (Modiba and Sefotho 2019).

Mokodutlo et al (2019) note that the time allocated for LO, specifically in township schools, is insufficient to cover the relevant information. This mindset about this subject already puts it at a disadvantage as some critical aspects may be missed due to time limitations.

Township high schools are experiencing low-quality education regardless of the many interventions implemented. The same applies to LO, which seems to be neglected yet could assist and usher learners into their future careers. Van Zyl et al. (2021) highlight the significance of LO by pointing out that this subject covers a variety of topics which require resources for implementation, noting that the unequal distribution of resources in fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools does hinder the successful implementation of LO, which has a direct impact on learners as they are less exposed to information that is of benefit to their lives. This is a concern as it means that the learners make career decisions without adequate knowledge about careers, which impacts tertiary institutions. These students deregister from courses as they suddenly realise a mismatch between the course and what they want.

3. Research Methodology

This section outlines the method used to conduct the research study, discussing the population, sample, and how data was collected and analysed. The research method section discusses the research paradigm adopted for the study, further detailing the quantitative research approach, the population and sampling, and the education districts chosen and their relevance. Furthermore, this section narrates how data was collected and analysed.

3.1 Methods

The research paradigm adopted for this study is the positivist approach, described as an approach that seeks an understanding of the social world, often producing numerical data, which is the case for this study (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). The empirical research design was adopted for this research using the quantitative research approach detailed to analyse data using numbers and statistics to prove whether a theory is true or false (Abawi, 2008) and measuring quantity (Goundar, 2012). Therefore, this approach was regarded as appropriate for this study as it sought to establish how much knowledge the learners have about the hospitality industry, and that was translated into numerical terms. This method is also appropriate because the population was relatively large, and a quantitative approach is more appropriate in such instances.

3.2 Population

The Western Cape Department of Education (WCDE) has eight education districts, namely the Cape Winelands, Eden and Central Karoo, Metro Central, Metro East, Metro North, Metro South, Overberg, and West Coast, categorised into urban and rural districts. Metropolitan districts were chosen for this study as the focus is in

Cape Town, namely Metro East, Metro Central and Metro South. The townships chosen were Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and Langa. Grade 11 learners were chosen for the study as they are in a better position to know their career path, with 720 learners.

3.3 Sample

This study adopted a probability sampling approach, which is an approach where each person in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the study, with the sampling classification being cluster sampling (Acharya et al, 2013). Acharya et al (2013) explain cluster sampling as “a two-step process in which the entire population is divided into clusters or groups, usually geographic areas or districts like villages, schools, wards, blocks, etc”. In relation to this study, eight high schools from Khayelitsha, Langa, and Gugulethu townships participated in the study, with Grade 11 learners chosen for the study.

3.4 Data Collection

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional Ethics committee before data collection. Permission was granted for the study; then, the WCED was approached to grant permission to conduct research in the high schools, specifying the districts selected, followed by asking permission from the high school principals in the chosen districts, which was also granted. Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Ajayi (2023) explains primary data is data collected for the first time by the researcher for a particular study. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and a few open-ended questions to get more information from the learners, especially with the open-ended questions covering career knowledge and known career opportunities. The questionnaire was in English and also translated into Xhosa to eliminate the language barrier.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data was captured on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analysed using the Number Cruncher Statistical System 9 (NCSS 9). After that, the data was presented using descriptive statistics in the form of graphs and tables.

4. Results and Discussion

The respondents in this study were Grade 11 learners from Cape Town's township high schools. Booyens (2020) reports on the education level of employees in the hospitality industry, stating that 56% of the employees have Grade 11 to a diploma, which highlights that Grade 11 learners are in a position to occupy employment as the tourism industry has “low entry barriers”. A total of 720 learners from high schools participated in the study. The results and discussion section covers the background information about gender, career guidance and hospitality career knowledge.

4.1 Background Information

Table 1 shows gender distribution, with more females than males participating in this study.

Relating to career decidedness, most (71,25%) learners had decided on their career path, which is the expectation in Grade 11. The learners were asked to specify the chosen careers, different careers chosen. As much as 71,25% had confirmed to have chosen a career path, only 30,13% specified their career of choice. Law was famous amongst the learners as most (6,8%) of them chose it as a career path out of the 9-career paths presented in Table 1. Hospitality (3.33%) as a career was among the least popular, one level higher than tourism (2.64%) which is related to hospitality.

Table 1: Background information

Gender		
Variable	N	%
Female	424	58.8
Male	255	35.7
No response	41	5.6
Total	720	100

Career decidedness		
Variable	N	%
Yes	513	71.25
No	190	26.39
No response	17	2.36
Total	720	100
Learner career choices		
Career	N	%
Accounting	25	3.47
Business Management	26	3.61
Education	12	1.67
Hospitality	24	3.33
Information Technology	14	1.94
Law	49	6.80
Medicine	21	2.91
Social Work	27	3.75
Tourism	19	2.63
Total	217	30.13
No Response	503	69.86
Total	720	100

4.2 Knowledge about the Hospitality Industry

Table 2 presents results on knowledge about the hospitality industry, with learners (37.2 %) confirming they have received information about the hospitality industry. In comparison, 56% noted that they did not receive information about this industry. Furthermore, learners (67,2%) confirmed they did not know about the industry, while 28.47% confirmed they understood what the industry is about. Other learners did not respond to this question (4.3%). Learners were asked if they knew of any career opportunities within the hospitality industry, and 70.6% of the learners confirmed they did not know of them. A few learners (25,6%) confirmed they knew of the opportunities in this industry.

Table 2: Hospitality career guidance

Confirmation of receiving career guidance in hospitality		
Variable	N	%
Yes	267	37.2
No	403	56
No response	50	7
Total	720	100
Knowledge about the hospitality industry		
Variable	N	%
Yes	205	28.47
No	484	67.22
No response	31	4.31
Total	720	100
Knowledge about hospitality career opportunities		
Variable	N	%
Yes	185	25.69
No	509	70.69
No response	26	3.61
Total	720	100

4.3 Known Careers in the Hospitality Industry

The learners who indicated to know the career opportunities in the hospitality industry were further asked to list the opportunities they know of in the hospitality industry, with 11.8% relating the sector to being a Chef, bartender, or waiter with 0.42 % relating it to tourism and interestingly 8.75 % related the industry to the medical field which could be that the learners related the word “hospitality” to “hospital” in line with Venturini and

Terrier (2021) who stated that hospitality and hospitals are close concepts which both refer to care and attention with the end goal of meeting guest or patient’s needs. Figure 1 presents the results.

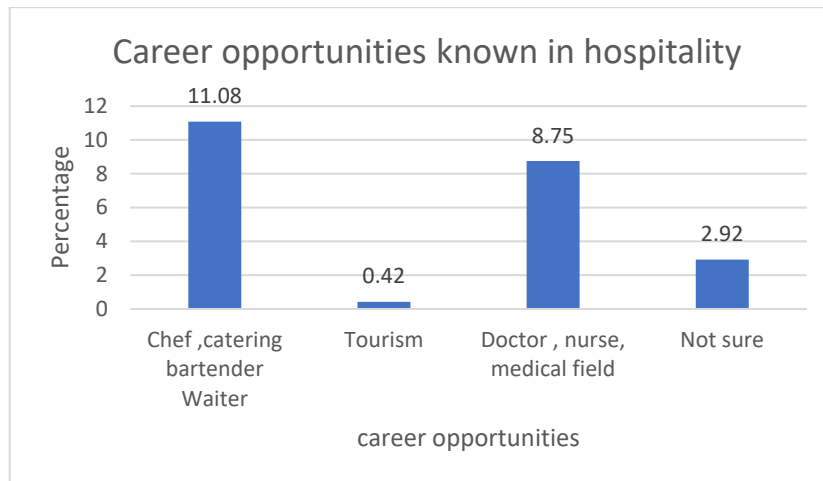


Figure 1: Known careers in hospitality

4.4 Resources Used to Provide Knowledge About the Hospitality Industry

The learners were asked which resources were used to access knowledge about the hospitality industry. Learners mentioned that most (31.39%) got information from books, and some said that guest lecturers (13.75%) from the hospitality industry came to give them information. Some learners (16.67%) said that they were not aware of these resources.

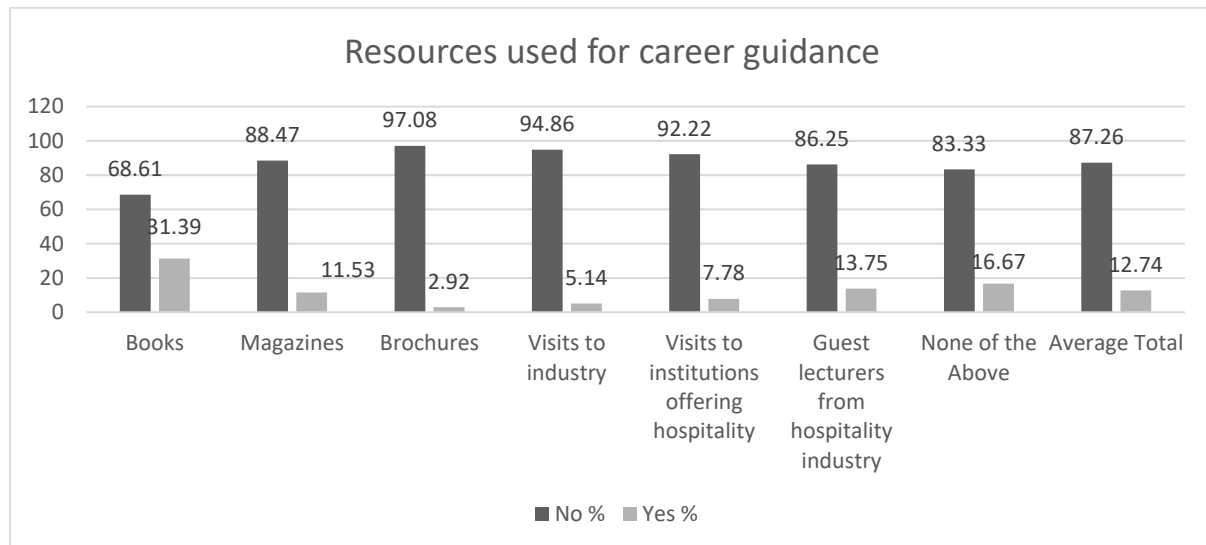


Figure 2: Resources used for career guidance

5. Discussion

Background information showed that there were more female respondents than males, similar to a study conducted by Miles and Naidoo (2016), who reported that two-thirds of the sample were females compared to males. Minimal career knowledge (28.47%) was observed in this study, specifically regarding hospitality career knowledge. These findings were corroborated by Van Niekerk and Saayman (2013), whereby few learners knew about the tourism industry trends. And also, Chinyamurindi et al (2021) note that learners in South Africa encounter several frustrations, one being the lack of knowledge about careers, which is a result of a lack of preparation concerning careers.

Learners confirmed several resources utilised for career knowledge in hospitality, highlighting books at 31.39%, followed by guest lecturers at 13,75. Blomerus (2016) highlights that limited resources hinder career knowledge,

supporting the findings mentioned above. Apart from the inadequate resources, the study also found minimal engagement with the external stakeholders as only 13,75% of the students indicated that they had guest lecturers visiting the school, visits to institutions at 7.78% and visits to the industry at 5.14%. Nweze and Okolie (2014) highlighted inadequate resources, a negative attitude from both teachers and learners, lack of engagement from stakeholders and insufficient training for teachers, which proves to be the case in this study in relation to stakeholder engagements with minimal industry and school engagements.

Blomerus (2016) noted that learners made unrealistic career choices, for example, being a “doctor or engineer” without knowing that their decisions on subjects had an impact on their future already. The above-mentioned could be the reason why only 3.33% of the learners considered hospitality as a career path, and the rest chose traditional career paths. More than 50% of the learners indicated not to have received career guidance in hospitality. Nwenzwe and Okolie (2014) found that there were no structured career services to assist learners with career decision-making, which may support the findings of the study mentioned above.

6. Conclusions

This study highlights the knowledge gap amongst high school learners in townships concerning career opportunities and knowledge about the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the results on the careers chosen by learners may imply that there is not much emphasis on the significance of the hospitality industry and the career opportunities it offers, only on traditional careers.

Although this study focused on hospitality career knowledge in townships, the literature identified several factors that contribute to the inadequate knowledge: LO teachers lack knowledge about the subject matter (Modiba and Sefotho 2019), do not have the relevant qualification (Mokodutlo, 2019) and the schools cannot afford to hire qualified career counsellors (Rungqu, 2019). These factors hinder learners’ access to knowledge (Shumba and Naong, 2012), which results in a realisation of career misfit and restricts access to employment and tertiary-level opportunities. With these gaps highlighted, an opportunity arises for interventions to be considered that could bridge the existing gaps. This calls for the Department of Basic Education and the institutions of higher learning to develop hospitality career knowledge materials, offer more career expos in townships and collaborate in community engagement activities. The lack of literature suggests that more studies should be conducted by enhancing the limited literature on this crucial research phenomenon.

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