ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNSHIP IN TOURISM EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN GHANA

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Abstract

Internship for students is crucial for demonstrating the use of skills learnt in the classroom. This paper, based on a study conducted by using mixed methods in 2011, examines the effectiveness of internship in tourism education and training. A sample of 205 Tourism graduates of a polytechnic in Ghana, selected using snowball sampling method, was used for the study. A major challenge identified in the implementation of internship for students was how to find industrial placement for the teeming tourism and hospitality students to ensure that they acquired the appropriate on-the-job skills. This paper argues that for polytechnic students to meet the needs of industry and be employed after graduation, internship should be given priority in the design of the curriculum. The paper concludes that innovative ways should be found to ensure that sufficient periods of internship are undertaken by tourism students to give them hands-on training for ready employment with industry after graduation.

Key Words: industrial attachment, curriculum, polytechnic education, industry collaboration

1.1 Introduction

A number of studies have been conducted on the importance of internship in the acquisition of skills for students in tertiary institutions. However, these studies have mostly been concentrated on international internships in the advanced countries, to the neglect of local ones especially in tourism education in developing countries (King, McKercher, & Waryszak, 2003; Litvin, 2005; Sangpikul, 2009). Internship is an educational policy that allows students to be attached to
master craftsmen to be mentored in an industry or business for the acquisition of skills that will be beneficial to the students on completion of their studies. Internship is sometimes referred to as industrial attachment.

Internship or industrial attachment is a very crucial component of most curricula for tertiary education especially in the polytechnic, where the graduates are expected to demonstrate the ability to perform at the workplace, with little or no supervision. Various institutions have different policies on internship. Whilst internship is mandatory in most institutions, it is voluntary in others (King et al., 2003; Mayo, 2008). At Cape Coast Polytechnic, internship is mandatory in some academic departments, but as of the time of this research, internship was voluntary in the Department of Tourism, where this study took place.

In Ghana, polytechnics have been mandated by Act 745 (Government of Ghana (GoG), 2007) as tertiary institutions, to produce career-focused graduates with Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Technology and even Master of Technology degrees in various courses. Opportunities for internship for all these students before they graduate, will be necessary in order for the polytechnics to successfully achieve their aim of producing career-focused graduates. This makes internship a matter of priority for education and training by polytechnics as tertiary institutions in Ghana.

1.2 Literature Review

Some recent studies have asserted the growing importance of developing the tourism curriculum to meet the needs of industry as well as employment of graduates that will be produced by the curriculum (Churchward & Riley, 2002; Livanos, 2010; Major, 2004; Major & Evans, 2008). Meeting the needs of industry and preparing students for employment have been two important challenges for tertiary institutions offering education and training especially in the field of tourism and hospitality.

While training has to do with the acquisition of practical skills (Rutter, 1993), education is mostly concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to identify societal problems and provide solutions to them (Christou, 1999). Tourism as a labour-intensive activity requires students undergoing education and training to acquire some practical skills that are needed by industry. One way to acquire such practical skills whilst students are receiving tourism education and training is by internship. During the period of their internship, students
are given industry placement where they work as apprentices to master craftsmen in order to gain some practical experience. Such industrial attachment, which usually takes place during the holidays or at times in the course of the semester or trimester, is very important in tourism education and training.

According to Gunlu and Usta (2009), internship in the tourism and hospitality industry provides undergraduate students an enormous real world (industry) situational experience, where the students find the opportunity to update their knowledge and improve upon the skills they have acquired whilst at college. Interning is thus a kind of opportunity provided for students to step out of their theoretical-based zone to enter into a different practical learning situation (Harris & Zhao, 2004).

Commenting on the benefits of internship for students and employers, Anakwe and Greenhaus (2000), Harris and Zhao (2004), Marhuenda, Martinez and Navas (2004) and Muskett (1996), have all noted that these benefits range from the potential employees’ stepping into the real work life, meeting with an organisational culture and improving their job-related skills. On the other hand, the employers also enjoy the benefits of meeting and using talented and enthusiastic potential workers, having a new young labour force at the minimum expense and raising the quality of the service with the help of these qualified individuals.

It can also be added that through internship, these young and potential employees may benefit as team players, as they work with older employees, who may be more experienced than them. Moreover, these young workers or interns may later on be employed by the industry that provided them the avenue for internship. While acknowledging the benefits of internship for students, it must also be noted that there are times when managers have tended to overexploit the students on internship by letting them work for longer hours or refusing to give them stipends for the labour expended.

Some of the students receiving tourism education at the tertiary level especially in developing countries may not benefit from internship whilst at college. This may be due to lack of industrial placement for the students as a result of over production of tourism and hospitality students (Cooper et al., 2008), or due to lack of importance attached to internship by tourism and hospitality institutions that do not assign credit hours to students’ industrial attachment, thus making students’ participation internships voluntary. In the long run, therefore, the students
particularly lose without enjoying these benefits, whilst the tourism industry becomes filled with young workers without industrial experience.

1.3 Meeting the Needs of Industry

While some tourism and hospitality businesses are prepared to employ people with tourism education and training certificates, it has been established that some of these businesses are reluctant to accept student trainees for internship and further employment. Their reason for doing so may stem from the fact that such students lack the skills demanded by industry. There appears therefore to be a considerable gap between what education providers offer as management-level tourism education, and the needs as expressed by the tourism industry (Amoah & Baum, 1997). Moreover, due to the fragmented and multi-faceted nature of tourism businesses, industry needs in respect to training and education are divergent and not easily identifiable (Mayaka & Akama, 2007). Nevertheless, designing the curriculum to meet the needs of industry has become a major preoccupation of tourism curriculum designers (Morgan, 2004; Ring et al., 2009).

A solution to this problem lies first in involving industry in the design of the tourism curriculum by providing inputs regarding industry’s expectations; and secondly, in the encouragement of industry to sponsor research by students in tertiary institutions for the results to be used for development of the industry (Sangpikul, 2009). Being important stakeholders in tourism education, involvement of industry in the design of the curriculum would ensure their satisfaction regarding the type of training to be provided to students while they are in school. As industry sponsors research by students, such research projects become the property of industry to be used for the development of their products and services. In the long run, such collaboration would become mutually beneficial to both parties. Although tourism qualifications at the tertiary level are important (Wang et al., 2009), students receiving tourism education are becoming increasingly aware that present day tourism and hospitality businesses are looking for smart graduates, who are career-focused with practical hands-on-training in their specific fields. This is achievable when the tourism curriculum is prepared with competency-based training in focus.
1.4 Problem Statement and Objectives

Internship or industrial attachment is an important component of the polytechnic curriculum that has not been given much attention, especially in developing countries. The relevance of internship in the use of skills learnt cannot be overemphasized. This makes its discussion in polytechnic education very crucial, hence the need for this study. The main objective of this study was therefore to assess the effectiveness of internship or attachment training at the Department of Tourism of Cape Coast Polytechnic, in Ghana.

Specifically, the study examined the importance that past students of the department attached to internship that they undertook at the polytechnic and how it helped them to secure employment after graduation. In detail, the study aimed to provide an understanding of the importance of internship to tourism and hospitality students in the acquisition and use of skills acquired at college; develop innovative ways to ensure that all students undertake the maximum periods of internship while at college, and make recommendations that could be used to improve internship for polytechnic students.

1.5 Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:
1. Did all the graduates undertake industrial attachment at the polytechnic?
2. Should industrial attachment of tourism students be limited to tourism and hospitality facilities alone?
3. Did undertaking industrial attachment at college enhance employability of the graduates?
4. Were the employers willing to accept students for industrial attachment?
5. Were there differences among the graduating year groups on their performance of industrial attachment?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

To find out whether significant differences existed between the graduating year groups and their performance of industrial attachment, the following null hypothesis was tested for the study:

\[ H_0: \text{There are no significant differences between the respondents’ year of graduation and whether they did attachment at the polytechnic or not.} \]
2. Methodology

This paper is one of the findings from data collected by the authors for an evaluation of the curriculum that has been in operation for the past ten years by the Department of Tourism of Cape Coast Polytechnic in Ghana. The study, which employed the use of mixed methods, combined quantitative and qualitative techniques (Arendt & Gregoire 2008; Felizer, 2009). The quantitative method was facilitated by the use of structured, multi-item questionnaires for the data collection and the qualitative method involved an interview of 12 of the past students as well as 6 of their employers.

2.1 Population, Sample and Sampling methods

The target population included 581 past students who had graduated between 2003 and 2008. Structured multi-item questionnaires were administered to a sample of 232 past students and 60 of their employers. The questionnaire was adapted from the Cabeihm Graduate Tracer Survey Questionnaire (Cinches n.d.). Among some of the items on the questionnaire were: Whether the graduates undertook industrial attachment at college, how many times they did attachment and whether the attachment they did help them to be employed after graduation.

The graduates were selected using snowball sampling, but their employers were selected by the use of purposive sampling technique. At the end of the fieldwork that took place between January and July 2011, 205 and 25 questionnaires were retrieved from the past students and employers respectively. This works to response rates of 88% and 42% for the graduates and their employers, respectively. These response rates could be considered as satisfactory, because in a similar study conducted in Botswana by Bolaane et al. (2010), response rates for the graduates and employers were 53% and 58% respectively.

2.2 Instruments used for Data Collection

The main instruments used for collecting data for this study were questionnaires and interview schedules. Essentially, two sets of questionnaires were used to collect data from graduates of the department and some employers of the graduates of the department. The questionnaires were structured and consisted of both close and open-ended questionnaires. Also, the questionnaires employed five-point Likert scales for measurement of opinions and perceptions from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Likert scales have been used with a high degree of success by
researchers to measure opinions of stakeholders in tourism and hospitality research (see Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Sheehan & Brent Ritchie, 2005; Tran & Ralston, 2005).

In addition, multi rating, simple categorical (yes or no,) and semantic differential scales measuring from extremely unimportant to extremely important (Cooper & Schindler, 2001) were also used in the measurement of various data collected from the respondents. The survey was conducted in business organisations and industries all over the country, because the respondents were scattered in businesses all over the country and beyond. Internal consistency calculated via the use of SPSS software, were 0.75 and 0.71 for the graduates and employers, respectively. The questionnaires were pre-tested in two settlements of Elmina and Winneba involving 15 graduates and 3 employers, who were selected using Snowball sampling techniques. This enabled the questionnaires to be slightly modified to make them easily understandable.

For the qualitative aspects of the methodology adopted, a prepared interview schedule was used to interview 12 of the graduates, who were involved in answering the questionnaires. They were selected using systematic sampling, from the list of the three highest occupational groupings of the graduates. In addition, 6 of their employers were selected purposively to be interviewed; two each from the three highest occupational groups of the graduates were interviewed. With the graduates, the investigators personally asked questions such as: how many times they undertook attachment at college; and whether their performance of attachment helped them to get a job of their choice, etc. The employers were also asked questions by the authors regarding how they benefitted from students’ attachment and what they expected from polytechnic tourism students on attachment. Half of the interviews were conducted personally, while the other half was conducted via the telephone. Some of the unemployed graduates were also asked similar questions. With the permission of the interviewees, the conversations were recorded.

3. Discussion

Detailed demographic characteristics of the graduates involved in the study are presented in Table 1. Their socio-demographic characteristics presented here include their ages at graduation, gender, and employment status. The ages at graduation of the graduates ranged between 22 and 40, with an average age at graduation of 25.7 years and a median age of 26 years. It was therefore decided upon to use 26 years as the dividing years for the analysis. The
total frequency of those below 26 years was 125, while those 26 years and above had a total frequency of 80. This shows that most of the graduates involved in the study were relatively young.

In addition, the data show that more males (122) than females (83) were involved in the study. This was a true reflection of the record of students admitted for the tourism programme at the polytechnic since its inception in 2000, because more males had been admitted than females. Regarding their employment status, 174 (84.9%) of them were employed, while 31 (15.1%) were unemployed. The employment rate of the graduates was found to be appreciably high, because in the study in Botswana that covered vocational and technical graduates among whom were certificate, diploma, higher national diploma and first degree holders, the employment rate among the respondents was as low as 50.45% (Bolaane et al., 2010). That study however covered graduates who had completed their vocational and technical education between 2004 and 2008; hence some of them had spent only two years after graduation.

Table 1: Profile of the Graduates (N=205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at Graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 26 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 years and above</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed/Temporary Employed</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 28 39 42 27 32 37
Percentages 13.7 19.0 20.5 13.2 15.6 18.0
The study revealed that the relatively high employment rate among graduates of the department was due to the industrial attachment and the one year National Service that graduates in Ghana are made to do. When compared with the general national unemployment figures of around 30% (UNDP 2010), the 15.1% unemployment rate of the graduates is not too high. However, employment statistics for developing countries like Ghana are sometimes unavailable (UNDP 2007) or highly unreliable, because not much funds are available for undertaking employment research in developing countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

3.1 The Need for Industrial Attachment

Students pursuing tourism and hospitality studies at the tertiary level are expected to undertake industrial attachment locally. In some countries such as Thailand, industrial attachment in the form of overseas internship is used to prepare students for international careers in the hospitality and tourism industry (Black, 2004; Sangpikul, 2009). This is a very effective way of broadening and deepening students’ understanding of the nature and significance of international business, which is a characteristic of the tourism and hospitality industry (Sangpikul, 2009).

The need for tourism industry’s collaboration with education and training has been established. In developing countries such as India, this collaboration is known to be on the increase (Jithendran & Baum 2000) as tourism educational institutions source the tourism and hospitality industry for instructors and resource personnel to design and deliver training programmes for them. One way of ensuring such collaboration in Ghana is by the use of industrial attachment, where students in tertiary institutions are made to do practicum attachment with some tourism, hospitality and other industries.

Although not compulsory, HND tourism students are expected to undertake two periods of industrial attachment during the long holidays, before completion of their programmes. These attachment periods were to last for at least three weeks each. Some members of the group of graduates of the department who were involved in this study also had industrial attachment while they were at the polytechnic, but others did not. To answer the first research question whether all the graduates undertook industrial attachment at college, the information is presented in Table 2 was derived.
Table 2: Graduates who undertook Industrial Attachment at the Polytechnic (N=205)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>Did you take any Attachment training at the Polytechnic?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 2, out of the 205 graduates who took part in the survey, 144 (70.2%) did industrial attachment while as much as 61 (29.8%) did not do any attachment. It can be noted that the graduating year groups of 2004 and 2008 had the highest percentage of graduates undertaking attachment (84.6% and 83.8% respectively) with the 2003 and 2007 year groups with the lowest percentage of the graduates who did industrial attachment (53.6% and 53.1% respectively). For the 2003 group, who were pioneers of the programme, most of their responses were that they did not think that attachment was important as they were not given attachment placement by the institution. On the part of the 2007 group, their responses for not doing attachment was that due to the frequent strikes by polytechnic teachers during that period, holiday periods were so short that there was no time for them to undertake attachment.

3.2 Opinions of the Graduates on Placement for Industrial Attachment

It is commonly admitted that the widespread practice of industrial placement period for students in tertiary institutions, is a very positive one. However, considerable doubts have been expressed whether the system is properly structured and fully exploited for the benefit of both the students and the industry, especially in some tertiary institutions in some developing countries (Christou, 1999), where at times students in college see industrial attachment as a form of punishment. Sometimes students on attachment in these countries are made to work for long hours, while the
regular workers idle about, without effective supervision of the interns. Industry on the other hand may not benefit much, because as the students begin to settle into the working environment, it would be time for them to leave.

Another problem with industrial attachment that happens very much with posting of students for national service in the country, is assigning students to industries for which they were not trained. Divergent views have been expressed on this phenomenon. While some people think that students should be found placement with specific jobs for which they were being trained, others have the view that where students do their attachment was not very important, because after graduation, they may not end up working in a job related to their training. This section is therefore devoted to analysing the views of both the graduates and their employers on this matter. One item on the questionnaire was for the graduates to express their opinions on whether industrial attachment placement for tourism students should be limited only to tourism and hospitality facilities. This item was meant to answer the second research question on whether students’ industrial attachment placement was to be limited to placement in only tourism and hospitality facilities. Figure 1 shows the data on the views expressed by the graduates on this matter.

![Figure 1: Limiting Industrial Attachment to Tourism and Hospitality Facilities](image-url)
It is worth noting that majority of the graduates (a total of 58.5%) disagreed with the proposition of posting HND tourism students only to tourism and hospitality facilities for industrial attachment. Their reasons were that in the first place, a tourism student could end up working in the bank, so what prevents such a student from being posted to a bank to do his/her attachment? Secondly, they were of the opinion that tourism is not the only service industry, where consumer service skills learnt could be practiced. Therefore, tourism students could be sent to industries where quality consumer service delivery is required such as insurance companies, health delivery institutions, banks, community development agencies, etc.

On the other hand, a total of 31.7% of the respondents agreed to the proposition to find placement for tourism students from the polytechnic to only tourism and hospitality facilities such as the Ministry of Tourism and the Ghana Tourism Authority and their agencies, hotels, restaurants, national parks, civil aviation organisations and so on, for their industrial attachment. When asked to give their reasons for this decision, most of them answered that students are able to use the skills learnt, if they are given the opportunity to perform the activities they are studying about in the real work situation. Moreover, to them students acquire the necessary experience needed for employment after graduation, when they are found placement in relevant tourism and hospitality facilities for industrial attachment.

Although 9.8% of the graduates were neutral on the issue, each party that expressed their opinions had their strong points because after graduation, some of them have found themselves not only in tourism and hospitality facilities but in security and other services. The only difference here is that some of those graduates who were posted to tourism and hospitality facilities (such as national parks and accommodation facilities) are managers while it will take one posted to a bank extra studies and effort to become a bank manager.

Another problem with placement of students for industrial attachment in the polytechnic was its voluntary nature in some departments such as tourism. This was not acceptable, because it definitely compromised the nature of the polytechnic as a tertiary institution that provides both education and training to its students. Besides, among the mandate of polytechnics in the country, was to produce students, who are career-focused with practical hands-on-training in their specific fields. How these attributes could be achieved without a well-structured industrial attachment could best be imagined. This makes industrial attachment an important component of the tourism curriculum that must be handled expertly.
3.3 Issues from the Interviews with the Graduates

The third research question was on whether undertaking industrial attachment enhances employability of the graduates. Responses by the graduates interviewed on this issue were mixed. Some of them indicated that attachment helped them to get jobs; others said their employment was not related to their attachment; while others said they have not been employed although they undertook two sessions of industrial attachment. Some of the answers from the graduates are reproduced below:

- “Industrial attachment should be made compulsory, so that every HND graduate can say that he/she has some experience from the industry. The industrial attachment I did helped me to be employed at the Ghana Tourism Authority as a research officer after my service.”
- “Although I did two sessions of industrial attachment at a Three Star Hotel, I was not employed there as I am now teaching in a Senior High School.”
- “I did industrial attachment at a Guesthouse and at the PANAFEST Secretariat, but I am unemployed three years after graduation. I have however not regretted as the skills I acquired from the attachment will be beneficial later when I am employed.”

All these responses attest to the fact that industrial attachment or internship for students in tertiary institutions must be taken seriously by both students and teachers.

3.4 Remarks by some of the Employers on Industrial Attachment

This section addresses the fourth research question on the willingness of employers to accept students for industrial attachment. On the part of the employers who were interviewed for their comments on students’ industrial attachment, the following are some of their comments:

- “Every year, we accept polytechnic students for industrial attachment. We use them for field inspection. Most of them perform satisfactorily. Whenever they come and work hard, we always give them some stipend when they are leaving”;
- “Industrial attachment is an avenue for students at college to acquire practical skills, so it is a very important exercise. We accept students with various backgrounds and let them work in all sections of the hotel; at the front office, back of the house, housekeeping and at the restaurant. This gives them a feel of the work in a hotel. However, we are not able to give placement for all the students who apply to us every year”;
“Heads of educational institutions should screen their students before sending them out for industrial attachment, because some of the students sent to my facility only came there to take advantage of my male clients instead of coming there to sharpen their service skills learnt at college. Such students should be educated to know that the hospitality industry operates within an ethical environment that demands a high level of integrity from its employees”.

Although the employers were willing to accept students for attachment, the last comment by the employer of the hospitality facility was very serious and unfortunate. It therefore calls for serious education of students before they are sent out on attachment as they become ambassadors, not only of their departments, but their institutions. These concerns expressed by both the graduates and their employees about industrial attachment are quite informative. They are very relevant in improving of internship as part of the curriculum to benefit all stakeholders, they cannot be glossed over.

To answer the last research question it became necessary to test the hypothesis on whether there were significant differences among the respondents’ year of graduation and whether they did industrial attachment at the polytechnic or not. In testing this hypothesis, the Chi-square ($\chi^2$) was used (See Table 2).

**Table 2: The Respondents’ Year of Graduation and whether they did Industrial Attachment or not (N=205)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you take Industrial Attachment at the Polytechnic</th>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ Statistic (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you take Industrial Attachment at the Polytechnic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note * p value < 0.05

It can be noted that the calculated Chi-square ($\chi^2$) statistic was 15.756 and at 11 degrees of freedom, yielded a significant p value (p = 0.008 and a significant level of < 0.05). We
therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis. This shows that there were no significant differences between the respondents’ year of graduation and whether they did attachment at the polytechnic or not. From Table 2, it can further be observed that the graduating year groups with the highest percentage of the graduates not doing industrial attachment were the pioneer group of 2003 with 46.4% and the 2007 year group with 46.9% not doing attachment.

For the former group, it could be understood, because they were just starting the programme so they did not know the importance of attachment at the polytechnic, which was not compulsory. For the latter (2007 year group), it was then emerging from the long periods of strikes and demonstrations that characterized Polytechnics Ghana in the mid 2000s (Afeti, 2002), so had very short periods of holidays, which could not be used for industrial attachment. Considering the importance of industrial attachment for acquisition of skills and on-the-job experience needed for employment, there was no excuse even for that graduating year group, with the highest percentage of the graduates not doing any industrial attachment while at the polytechnic.

4. Findings

Four major findings were made from the study. The first was that internship or industrial attachment is very important for skills acquisition in tourism education and training for HND graduates. Secondly, industrial attachment as a major component of the tourism curriculum is very effective in ensuring that polytechnic students get employed soon after graduation. Thirdly, it was realised that not all the graduates undertook industrial attachment and that this was very serious as it undermined the acquisition of skills by the graduates. In addition, it emerged from the study that industrial attachment or internship should be made compulsory and graded so that all polytechnic students undertake internship at least twice in their three-year course. One major problem that may arise would be how to obtain industrial placement for all the students. Finally, for students in tertiary institutions to benefit from internship, stronger collaboration should be built between the institutions and the various industries concerned.
5. Limitations and Future Research

As with all research work, some limitations were associated with this study. However, they were not very serious to affect findings of the study. The use of the snowball sampling technique meant that there would be sampling bias. This problem was reduced by ensuring that initial selection of the graduates was representative of all the various year groups of the alumni. This also helped to prevent undercoverage. Although the use of the snowball technique resulted in obtaining a relatively smaller sample size for the employers, interviewing them in addition helped to reduce this problem. An increased sample size in future research could also take care of non-response bias, associated with such a survey. Future research could include the views of present tourism students on internship placement so that skills needed for those jobs could be taken care of in revising the curriculum being used.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: To enable all polytechnics in the country to find attachment placement for their students, they could at times resort to Virtual Industrial Attachment (VIRA). In this case, industrial attachment is organised on-campus during the long vacations for students who do not obtain placement for their attachment. Seasoned experts and resource persons in business and industry are invited to campus to take the students through major daily activities in their businesses or industries. Elaborate programmes lasting for at least four weeks are prepared for the students to be trained using simulation and case studies in a real-life working environment.

In addition, by the use of audio-visual aids, the students are taken through practical work in industry and business. The students are encouraged to participate fully in discussions and at the end of the period; they are given attachment reports as if they have undergone the regular attachment with those businesses or industries. Although this type of attachment is very expensive, it has been practiced on two occasions at Koforidua Polytechnic, with a very high degree of success (koforiduapoly.edu.gh, 2011). Finally, in order to equip students with the necessary industry knowledge and skills needed for their future careers, tertiary institution administrators should not focus only on hiring full-time staff but also must hire part-time lecturers with some professional or industrial experience. The latter would enable the students to know current practices in industry and business, which the full-time lecturers may not be aware of. Among others, this study has shown the effectiveness of internship or industrial attachment to the acquisition of skills by the students and their application for efficient on-the-job performance. Industrial placement has continued to enhance the students’ awareness of their preferences, strengths and weaknesses in relation to a wide range of job opportunities (Callan, 1997; Kusluvan, 2003). It has also
enabled students to gain an understanding of their employers’ businesses and appreciate operational practices of the wider business environment within which the tourism industry functions (Fidgeon, 2010).

The responses provided by some of the employers, showed that they attached much value to industrial attachment. However, some of them expressed misgivings about students on attachment, regarding how long it took for some of the students to adjust into the work situation so as to be able to do what they were taught do very well, how some of them demonstrated unethical behaviour whilst on industrial attachment as well as the avenues that student attachment created for their permanent employees to loiter around, thereby reducing productivity. These problems notwithstanding, the study has proved that a strong education and industry collaboration could enhance students’ performance in internship at the polytechnic, making it beneficial to the institutions, the students and the organisations involved.

It was realised that most of the graduates had limited practical industrial exposure while at school due to ineffective industrial attachment, which was not compulsory, hence the students did not attach much seriousness to it. This was evidenced by 29.8% of the graduates who did not do any attachment whilst at the polytechnic and the over 90% of the graduates lamenting on the inadequate practical industrial trips and attachment available to them when they were students at the polytechnic. Finally, the study has revealed that the curriculum used at the Department of Tourism of Cape Coast Polytechnic in Ghana, lacks the practical nature and as industrial attachment plays a major role in the acquisition of skills; the curriculum should include assessment of students’ industrial attachment. Considering that none of the teachers has any industrial experience, the need for practical industrial attachment for the teachers should also be considered as a matter of priority. This would make it possible for them to understand what they would be assessing on their students’ attachment reports.
References


