



## **Hospitality Students in Select institutions in Botswana and the Nexus between Learning Environment and Learner Motivation**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the learning environment and learner motivation based on the views of a sample of 128 of the 189 hospitality management students from a selected higher education institution in Botswana. The study adopted a quantitative research methodology where data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The study revealed that the learning environment of the selected institution did not motivate learners to put maximum effort in the learning process. It is therefore recommended that the institution should put in place measures that create a conducive learning environment that stimulates learner motivation.

**Key words:** Learner, motivation, learning environment, hospitality management, higher education

### **Introduction: Background to the Study**

Motivation, a critical aspect of effective learning, is the learner's level of engagement in the learning process which comprises two types - intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Usher & Kober, 2012; Deci et al., 2017; Knapper, 2017). The criticality of motivation to learning is reinforced by Rizkalla and Seitz (2017) who aver that it is important to understand what motivates learners in order to retain them since learner retention has become a monumental challenge for most higher education institutions, especially in the third world.

## ***Hospitality Students in Select Institutions in.....***

What makes learner motivation crucial in education is that when learners are demotivated, they tend to play truant, disobey school rules, miss classes, perform poorly and frustrate the effort of the teacher (Usher & Kober, 2012; Knapper, 2017). Studies on learner motivation in African universities have established that most learners have little motivation despite the fact that governments have established massive infrastructure in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Knapper, 2017). It is critical that these institutions establish the reasons why student' motivation has plummeted despite the effort that the governments of various countries have put in making learning in such institutions more attractive. If students are demotivated, they will not learn the required skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and will not make much positive contribution to the socio-economic development of their countries (Tabulawa, 2009; Usher & Kober, 2012).

Understanding learner motivation among hospitality management students in Botswana is vitally important given the centrality of the hospitality and tourism industry to the economic development of the country. The industry accounts for quite a significant fraction of state revenue, total employment and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Mahachi & Shemi, 2014; Weekendpost, 2018). In this regard, the hospitality industry has experienced a proliferation of tertiary institutions that offer training in hospitality and tourism and related programmes in the past decade. The government of Botswana introduced, and financed, hospitality and tourism education in order to stimulate service excellence in this promising and critical sector (Mahachi, 2014; Mahachi & Shemi, 2014).

Some researchers believe that while notable expansion in the tertiary education sector in Botswana, tourism and hospitality included, has been recorded, the quality of both teaching and learning has experienced a steady decline (Tabulawa, 2009; Makwinja, 2017). These authors postulate that while in the past, Batswana students were performing well in tertiary education and obtaining higher grades due to their commitment and engagement in the process of

learning, the current situation is the opposite, and a cause for concern, as teaching in classrooms has been a challenge.

Learners do not seem inspired to learn and appear not to be committed to their studies as evidenced by learners missing classes, being passive during lessons as well as failing to submit assignments on time or not submitting at all (Makwinja, 2017). The author is of the view that the current education system in Botswana is such that learners attend school to complete their grades but not to attain the skills and competencies that are required in a developing country (Makwinja, 2017) because these learners lack the motive to learn effectively.

Several articles have been published over the years in Botswana indicating a sudden decline in the performance of learners in Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE), Junior Certificate Examinations (JC) and the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education Certificate (BGCSE) examinations (Baputaki, 2009; Weekendpost, 2017). The government and all stakeholders have been affected by the crisis in the education system in Botswana particularly this declining performance in the national examinations. A number of scholars have discovered that, despite the learners' capability, resources and facilities in HEIs, learners are still not stimulated to learn and to study voluntarily to the best of their capabilities (Baputaki, 2009; Tabulawa, 2009; Makwinja, 2017). In Botswana, various factors contribute to this lack of inspiration towards learning.

Over the years, there have been serious complaints by teachers of hospitality management at the institution covered in this study about learners who seem not to be taking their studies seriously. The major complaint is that the hospitality management learners appear to be apathetic, unmotivated and unenthusiastic in their studies which make teaching less effective. There is a tendency of learners missing classes; they are passive in class; they are reluctant to participate in practical lessons and group work and some do not submit assignments. A significant number of learners go to the extent of missing major assessments such as final examinations while many

obtain unsatisfactory results. All these issues are the hallmark for demotivated learners who are not keen to learn without a push and are a serious problem as even the sponsor (the government) has expressed displeasure in such a scenario. No known study has been carried out to establish the reason why there is low learner motivation in higher education institutions in Botswana, especially private higher education institutions which appear to be affected by challenges of learner motivation more than their public counterparts. This study therefore sought to determine the role the learning environment has played in the low motivation of hospitality management learners at the HEI in Botswana covered in this study.

### **Literature review**

This section discusses the learning environment and how it contributes to learner motivation.

#### **The learning environment**

A learning environment entails learners' feeling of safety and security, the physical surroundings, institutional buildings, their ability to form positive, courteous and lasting relationships and their capability to build healthy and social connections with others (Hannah, 2013). Usher and Kober (2012) assert that amplified gratification with the institution has been associated with high levels of learner motivation. The more the learners are content and satisfied with their learning environment, the more their academic motivation is boosted because of the passion they develop for learning.

Within the learning environment is the classroom, that is, the environment where learners build their dreams and where they develop the necessary skills and knowledge to accomplish those dreams (Fraser & Pickett, 2010; Hannah, 2013). Literature has indicated that learners spend most of their learning time in the classroom more than any other place (Habibi, Mukminin & Sofwan, 2017; Mukminin, et al, 2017) and therefore whatever happens in the classroom can leave a big impact on learners' lives. To make this lengthy stay in schools more appealing, it calls for a learning setup that makes staying in an environment pleasurable by fulfilling the needs of learners. Scholars, therefore, contend that is vital for

learning institutions to take into consideration critical facets of the learning environment that have a big impact on learner motivation (Urduan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Habibi, Sofwan & Mukminin, 2016). These authors identify aspects of the learning environment with a bearing on learner motivation as school infrastructure, class size, a sense of belonging, security of the learner and prospects for achievements by the learners. These aspects, together with their effect on learner motivation, are discussed below.

### **School infrastructure**

A conducive learning environment calls for the establishment of all the supporting structures and facilities that make the learning institution a joyful place for the learners to look forward to (Clifford, et al., 2012). Institutional infrastructure should not only be limited to classrooms, but should extend to recreational facilities, libraries, playing fields, clinics, cafeterias, student service centers and laboratories to support the learning process (Usher et al, 2012; Tokan & Imakulata, 2019). The authors posit that with these structures in place, the learning process becomes effective as learners are motivated to go to libraries for research or visit recreational facilities for social and recreational activities. The institutional infrastructure, the institution's size and the classroom sizes, the institutional climate and other features can influence the learners' commitment to the learning process (Usher et al, 2012; Suleman & Hussain, 2014). In affirmation, some researchers believe that the provision of sufficient physical facilities and instructional resources, in an appropriate learning environment, has a positive impact on the process of teaching and learning in academic institutions (Suleman & Hussain, 2014; Tokan & Imakulata, 2019).

To confirm the important role that institutions play in learner motivation, Usher et al. (2012) believe that some institutions are a step ahead in issues of motivating their learners. These authors posit that these institutions have engaged social workers to take care of issues that are non-academic like social and health matters that can affect students' motivation - a gap that other institutions have neglected. Institutions that strive harder in making the process of

learning interesting and inspirational to students can assure learners of the value of the institutions hence motivate learners to work harder to become successful (Suleman & Hussain, 2014).

### **Class size**

A disturbing factor in class set up today is the issue of teacher-learner ratio which has serious implications on learner motivation. There is evidence of congestion in classrooms which hinders the process of teaching and learning (Celik, 2014; Furrer et al, 2014). These authors suggest that class sizes that are above the recommended teacher-learner ratio restrict the instructor from accessing all learners in class unlike a reasonable class size which makes teacher-learner interaction effective (Koc & Celik, 2014). A lecturer who has easy access to students and can easily interact with all the learners has a chance of knowing the learners' capabilities and shortfalls hence can assist all the learners with their individual diverse needs hence increasing the learners' motivation to learn.

### **Sense of belonging**

Allen, et al. (2018) point out that all human beings, learners included, have similar fundamental needs - the need for survival, affection, belonging, influence, liberty and fun. To be motivated, learners should find it easier to relate to others within the institution hence the learning environment should be able to instill a culture of social inclusion (Allen, et al; 2018). Other authors indicate that peer relationships have a significant impact on academic motivation as learners collaborate in communication, feedback, solving disputes and creating common educational goals and standards (Furrer, Skinner & Pitzer, 2014). Students who support and listen to each other create an environment that cultivates care and belonging, and this is what motivates students to wake up daily and go to school to participate in the learning process and collaborate with their peers voluntarily. Learners' interaction with peers in a learning environment can contribute to the enhancement of learner motivation (Furrer et al, 2014). If learners relate with each other, it drives them to develop long lasting relationships which make learners' encounter with their peers more like a family set up which makes it easier for them to work

together in their academic work thus increasing their motivation to learn (Furrer et al, 2014; Allen, et al; 2018).

### **Security**

Learners are motivated by the sense of security that they experience in their learning environment (Cohen, Thapa & Ice, 2013). Experiencing a sense of security in the learning environment with no threat of harm motivates learners to go to school and learn effectively. Boosting learners' self-esteem calls for the nurturing of a harmless learning environment and teachers can help cultivate such an environment by allowing students to make choices and treating them with respect (Young et al, 2011; Usher & Kober, 2012). A learning environment which is secure contributes to learner motivation that will increase learner engagement thus performance (Gablinske, 2014). Teachers can help establish a learning environment where learners feel secure psychologically by ensuring that they generate a more relaxed and pleasant classroom environment that stimulates learner autonomy (Young et al, 2011). Doing so enables learners to approach their teachers easily where they feel challenged in the learning process resulting in learners becoming more motivated hence excelling in their studies.

### **Learner support systems**

Fattash (2013) argues that authentic learning has a significant impact on learner motivation and by engaging students in solving real world problems, it gives learners assurance that their input to the learning process can have a big impact on the classroom environment. Learners who have a potential to solve problems believe that they have attained their goals in the learning process and have achieved their purpose (self actualisation). In addition, Young et al (2011) advocate for institutions to offer opportunities for all learners to be recognised and to create an environment that acknowledges and appreciates all learners and embraces social skills, learner collaboration and values. The school atmosphere should provide more appropriate tasks, student centered learning, power, accountability and collaboration and not stressing much on grades and competition which all improve students' intrinsic motivation (Young et al, 2011;

Fattash, 2013). If learners have a sense of ownership of their learning and are given the chance to take the lead in academic decisions that affect their learning, they can have an inspiration to take charge of their academic work and will be internally driven to achieve good results. This motivates them to have courage to learn and to take charge of their education.

An institution that does not have the learners' needs at heart does not put in place effective learner support systems which leaves learners frustrated and torn apart hence it is critical for institutions to ensure that all the supporting measures in the process of learning and teaching are implemented within the learning environment (Fattash, 2013). When the learning environment is unconducive, learners' attrition rates escalate because of an institution's failure to create the supportive environment for learning. The attrition rates are a result of the learners' disappointment with the institution, poor learner-institution fit and frustration with the education system (Young et al, 2011; Fattash, 2013) hence low levels of motivation.

### **Research methodology**

This study adopted a cross sectional survey research design where data was collected at one point in time from a sample that was selected from a population. The design was applied to quantitatively describe specific aspects of a given population. This involved analysing relationships between variables in a population, in this case, the relationship between the learning environment and learner motivation hence the hypothesis that: There is a significant and positive relationship between the learning environment and learner motivation at the selected HEI in Botswana.

In order to satisfy the research objective of this study, a quantitative research methodology was adopted to explore, discuss and analyse the role of the learning environment in facilitating, or otherwise, the motivation of hospitality management learners. The study population comprised of 189 learners in the selected institution's Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism from year one to year four. The researcher employed probability sampling to select the respondents whence the



research participants were randomly selected to give each unit within the population an equal chance of being selected.

The researcher adopted a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that each level among the hospitality management streams at the institution was fully represented. In view of this, the study divided the respondents according to their year of study and picked a random sample within each group. The selected sample was representative of each stratum. According to Research Advisors (2006), sample size determination formula for a study population of 189, which was linked to 190 from the sample size formula gave a sample of 127. However, the researcher distributed 128 questionnaires which became the final sample size.

The researcher collected data on the relationship between the learning environment and the motivation of hospitality learners of a selected institution through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire had both closed and open-ended questions. This study adopted a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items on the Likert scale were assigned values as follows: Strongly Agree (SA)=5; Agree (A)=4; Neutral (N)=3; Disagree (D)=2 and Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. These were summarised using mean values and the Standard Deviation (SD). All the 128 questionnaires that were distributed were collected with adequate information culminating in a response rate of 100% which is quite good.

Validity of the study was determined through factor analysis. To establish the appropriateness of factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) were applied. The KMO test was adopted to establish sampling adequacy to determine if factor analysis was appropriate. The BTS helped to extract the maximum common variance for all items and to identify them with a common score or factor. Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma (2003) suggest that a KMO correlation between 0.60 - 0.70 is considered acceptable for factor analysis and that the matrix should

be significant at the value of ( $p < .05$ ) and the BTS should be significant at  $\alpha < .05$  to assume factorability of the correlation matrix.

To establish reliability of the study (examination of trustworthiness), the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used where Cronbach alpha values starting from 0.6 are acceptable though the higher the values, the higher the reliability of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

After collection of the completed questionnaires, the data was cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, percentages, correlation) and inferential statistics (regression analysis). Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the extent and level of association between the learning environment and learner motivation while regression analysis was meant to determine the association and the strengths of associations of these two variables.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test for the reliability of the instrument and the results of the internal consistency reliability test revealed a value of 0.887 which is much higher than the threshold of 0.6. This means that the results of the study are quite reliable.

a) The role of the learning environment on learner motivation  
The purpose of this section is to present the findings on the relationship between the learning environment and the lack of motivation among the hospitality management learners at a selected HEI in Botswana from the perspective of the selected learners. To determine the validity of the questions used in the questionnaire, the factor loadings, the KMO, the BTS and the AVE were used. The mean and the SD were used to summarise the values of the individual scale items from the questionnaire. Table 1 below shows the results of the psychometric properties of the role of the learning environment on learner motivation based on the responses of the learners who participated in this study.

**Table 1: Psychometric properties of the role of the learning environment on learner motivation**

	K M C	Ba r t l e t t's	M e a n	S D	A V E	Fa c t o r M
Statements	0.59	49.621			72.57	
I am happier learning in bigger classes than in small classes.			1.80	1.02		0.947
Competition with my peers to achieve good results motivates me to learn harder.			4.27	0.44		0.973
My institution cares about my safety and security.			2.99	1.34		0.915
The library resources at my institution are adequate enough to support my learning process.			2.98	1.32		0.982
If given another chance I will enroll with this institution again.			2.96	1.31		0.937
Peer pressure distracts me in my learning process at my institution.			3.09	1.23		0.929
If given a second chance I will enroll in the same programme (Hospitality management) again.			3.02	0.72		0.814
The support staffs at my institution (Admissions, Management Information Systems, Assessments, Technical, and			2.84	0.74		0.914

**Hospitality Students in Select Institutions in.....**

Library) are always available and helpful.						
The student services department effectively deals with my welfare/problems .			2.63	0.66		0.837
My institution is clean and promotes health awareness.			3.60	1.01		0.977
There are tuck-shops within the university where I can buy food.			3.17	0.63		0.851
There are extra-curricular activities that help students to refresh.			3.78	0.64		0.994
There are adequate sporting facilities in the institution.			3.79	0.88		0.881
There are adequate health facilities for students who may fall sick in my institution.			3.86	0.43		0.984

Table 1 above indicates that the role of the learning environment contributed for 72.57% on average in explaining learner motivation of hospitality students at the selected institution. The KMO of the construct is 0.59, which exceeds the cut-off value of 0.5, and all the fourteen factor loadings in this construct are statistically significant at the 0.01 level and have values above the 0.5 threshold where learners emphasised that extracurricular activities helped them to refresh (0.997). The standard loadings range from 0.814 - 0.994, thus averaging 0.924. Therefore, the learning environment questions display reliable and valid constructs and are significant for factor analysis.

The results in Table 1 show that learners preferred small classes more than big ones (mean=1.80, n=128). The level of variability is 1.02 which is low showing that values are not far from the mean. This implies that the teacher-learner ratio at the institution covered in this study was contrary to what the learners preferred. The students indicated that the sizes of classes at the institution were fairly big and this may have acted as a source of demotivation.

The results in Table 1 show that the selected institution's level of learner safety and security was low (mean=2.99, n=1.34). Learners may have found it difficult to focus on learning when they were concerned about their security and safety as well as that of their property. The learners would not even want to stay late to make use of library and internet facilities in the school as well as reading space in the classrooms because of security concerns. This implies that learner motivation may have been low as the findings reveal that the respondents were more concerned about their surroundings. They felt that they were exposed to danger together with their property while on campus which is not good for learning hence this may have been a source of low motivation.

The results in Table 1 indicate that the library resources were not adequate (mean=2.98). This may mean that studying could have been a challenge for students due to inadequate resources and reading facilities. The results show that learners did not want to enroll with the institution if they were to be given another chance (mean=2.96). This may have increased the level of attrition for students as they were not happy with the learning environment at the time of the study.

Table 1 also showed that the respondents were of the view that there was inadequate support from non-academic departments (mean=2.84). Lack of support from support staff in a learning institution has implications on the level of motivation since students may fail to have access to learning facilities and infrastructure that is established for them. This may negate the effort put by the academic departments in ensuring quality delivery. This scenario may have been

worsened by the respondents' sentiments that support on welfare issues was also inadequate (mean= 2.63). These findings confirm the literature reviewed in Section 2: Usher et al (2012) highlighted that the classroom size, the institution infrastructure and the institution size can negatively or positively impact on the learners' commitment to the learning process. This is important in the context of this study since learners were not satisfied with the class sizes.

The learners' feeling of being insecure, as highlighted in this study, contradicts the research of Usher & Kober (2012) who revealed that the learning environment should make students feel safe. The lack of adequate library resources contradicts the research of Tokan and Imakulata (2019) which confirms the library's importance in supporting quality learning. The results in Table 1, however, indicate that an average number of the respondents were happy with their programme of study (mean=3.02).

On a positive note, Table 1 shows that extra-curricular activities were available at the institution covered in this study and they helped students to refresh (mean=3.78). There were adequate sporting facilities in the institution (mean=3.79) and there were adequate health facilities for students who may fall sick (mean=3.86). The highest mean value of 4.27 indicates that learners preferred competing with others as a source of their motivation.

These findings indicate that students were satisfied with the quantity and quality of the amenities available at the institution which enhanced student health which motivates learners. These findings resonate with the results of previous studies. For example, some authors argue that the learners' interaction with peers in a learning environment can contribute to the enhancement of learner motivation (Furrer et al, 2014). The effect of social amenities on learner motivation is consistent with the research of Tokan and Imakulata (2019) which revealed that these facilities play a significant role in the learning process hence learner motivation.

Some respondents attempted the open-ended questions where they were requested to state measures that they felt their institution could have implemented to make the learning environment more conducive for learning. The dominant measures that were indicated by the respondents included improving internet connectivity, provision of more reading resources in the library, extension of the library operating hours, providing more computers, providing classrooms for reading when learners do not have lessons, reviewing lesson times to reduce the insecurity caused by finishing classes late at night, establishing cafeterias for students, proper maintenance of the toilets and providing toiletries and improving air conditioning in the classrooms.

In order to establish the association between the learning environment and learner motivation, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Correlation between the learning environment and learner motivation

		Correlations			
		MHPTT	LENTT	TEABT	PEDST
MHPTT	Pearson Correlation	1	.823**	.853**	.648**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	128	128	128	128
LENTT	Pearson Correlation	.823**	1	.872**	.370**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	128	128	128	128

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Hospitality Students in Select Institutions in.....**

The results in Table 2 above show that there is a positive and significant correlation between the learning environment and learner motivation ( $r = 0.823$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This shows that the two variables move in the same direction. The value of the coefficient is above 0.7 which is satisfactory. The results indicate that a conducive learning environment stimulates high levels of learner motivation. The positive association between these variables is supported by previous studies (Furrer, et al, 2014).

However, the positive correlation indicated above may not have meant causation hence regression analysis was carried out to further examine the weakness or strength of the relationship between the learning environment and learner motivation. Table 3 below indicates the results of the regression analysis.

**Table 3: Regression analysis: The role of the learning environment on learner motivation**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>												
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Part	Part	Tolerance	VIF
	1 (Constant)	-8.466	3.661				-2.312	.022	-15.713	1.219		
LENTT	.306	.067	.318	4.564	.000	.173	.439	.823	.379	.156	.239	4.178

a. Dependent Variable: MHPTT

The findings in Table 3 above indicate that the learning environment has a positive and significant effect on learner motivation ( $\beta = 0.318$ ,  $t = 4.564$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This shows that an increase in the learning environment by 1 unit would result in a rise in learner motivation by 0.306 units. Furthermore, the multicollinearity diagnostics, the



tolerance value is less than 1 (0.239) and the VIF is greater than 1 (4.178). This indicates that the multicollinearity assumptions are not violated in the hypothesised relationship. Therefore, the learning environment has a direct association with learner motivation. Thus, the findings support the hypothesised relationship hence the conclusion that the learning environment is significantly and positively related to learner motivation.

### **Conclusion**

The study investigated the relationship between the learning environment and the motivation of hospitality management learners at a selected higher education institution in Botswana from the learner perspective. The study has shown that the learning environment had a significant and positive influence on learner motivation at the higher education institution covered in this study. This means that a positive learning environment where elements that constitute this variable such as the school infrastructure, class size, sense of belonging, security and learners' support systems are appropriately handled results in the enhancement of learner motivation and vice versa. The study has revealed that the learning environment at the selected institution was largely not conducive for learning although there were some few areas that were positive. This has implications for policy making. The study revealed that an improvement in the learning environment would result in a substantial increase in learner motivation.

The methodology of this study was quantitative. The validity of the study could be improved by employing a mixed methods approach resulting in the triangulation of research results with qualitative findings corroborating quantitative findings. Furthermore, generalisation of the research results could be enhanced by enlarging the sample size and including students from other programmes as well as similar institutions. Relying on the results from a study based on one academic institution may not be good for suggesting policy modification with far reaching consequences.

The study has implications for future research. The study could be extended by looking at the effect of learner motivation on academic achievement in the context of both private and public education institutions. Motivation of students can be affected by financial, family, student characteristics and social factors. This provides opportunities for further research. The study relied mainly on descriptive analysis which may not have adequately explained some important attributes of the relationships between variables. Future studies may consider the use of advanced models, for example, logit regression models, which examine the probabilities of one being motivated.

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