

Undergraduate hospitality students' perceptions of careers in the industry: The Ghanaian context

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ABSTRACT: The study examined undergraduate students' perceptions about careers in the hospitality industry in Ghana. Students were sampled from traditional and technical public universities through a stratified random sampling technique. With a sample size of 1 341, exploratory factor analysis, *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance were employed to analyse the data. The findings show that career attractiveness, prestige and mobility and the nature of hospitality careers were the main constructs of students' perceptions about careers in the hospitality industry. Also, undergraduate students were generally indifferent about careers in the industry. Specifically, students perceived careers in the industry to offer opportunities to meet new people, but this was also stressful. Implications for educators and industry practitioners are presented.

KEYWORDS: careers, Ghana, hospitality industry, industry experience, perceptions, undergraduate students

Introduction

The hospitality industry employs 10% of the global work force (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018) and contributes considerably to the gross domestic product (GDP) of many countries. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has dwindled the fortunes of the industry, it has been forecast to recover within the shortest possible time, although operations in the industry will not be the same for some time (Gössling et al., 2020). For the industry to achieve the much-needed bounce back, staff will be a vital component. This is because, like all service industries, human resources are an indispensable agent for success (Lee et al., 2008). For staff to be able to achieve this role of improving the industry, there is a need for these staff members to possess the right knowledge, skills and attitude (Anthony et al., 2019). Higher learning programmes in the hospitality discipline is one of the many avenues through which such knowledge and skills can be acquired.

Very few graduates from hospitality programmes have been reported to pursue careers in the industry after completing the hospitality programmes (Blomme et al., 2009; Richardson & Butler, 2012; Mohammed & Rashid, 2016), even though careers in the industry have been perceived to be readily available (Lu & Adler, 2009). In cases where higher numbers of students have expressed interest in hospitality careers, this has been realised to be an intention rather than reality (Getz, 1994). Varied reasons can be identified for the lack of students' interest in hospitality careers in Ghana, of which unfavourable perception is one such reason (Amissah et al., 2019).

Studies have reported differences in how careers in the hospitality industry have been perceived. Careers in the industry have been perceived to be characterised by high employee turnover, high attrition rates, irregular working hours which affect family life, poor work security, poor progression, low status, and having a high physical demand (Roney & Öztin, 2007; Richardson & Butler, 2012; Wan et al., 2014). Careers in the industry have also been perceived to be interesting, challenging, never boring, offering opportunities to meet new people, always on the move and rewarding (Barron & Maxwell, 1993). These differences in perception about careers in the industry have been said to vary among students based on the students' academic level, status and exposure to industry experience (Chan et al., 2002).

Students' perceptions of hospitality careers could be positive, negative or neutral. For instance, hospitality students have perceived careers negatively in an industry characterised by low wages (Richardson & Butler, 2012; Neequaye & Armoo, 2014), poor work environments, boredom and poor work hours (Selçuk et al., 2013). Students have also endorsed the industry as providing opportunities for career development (Neequaye & Armoo, 2014). When students' perception of the industry is negative, it can negatively affect their choice of hospitality careers, and vice versa.

The hospitality industry in Ghana is rated as performing below its potential capacity (Frimpong-Bonsu, 2015). This may be partly attributed to the unavailability of qualified personnel to render the services required in the industry (Ministry of Tourism, 2013). Also, hospitality graduates often choose careers in industries other than the hospitality industry (Wong & Liu, 2010; Qiu et al.,

2017), and had no intention of choosing careers in the industry (Amissah et al., 2019). However, it is not clear what factors underpin the perceptions that students have about careers in the hospitality industry as well as how Ghanaian hospitality students generally perceive careers in the industry. This study therefore seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. What factors underpin students' perceptions about careers in the industry?
- b. How do students perceive careers in the hospitality industry?
- c. What are the differences in students' perceptions about careers in the industry based on sociodemographic characteristics and industry experience?

Significance of the study

The perceptions of students with regard to careers in the industry for which they are being trained are very important (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Akin Aksu & Deniz Köksal, 2005; Roney & Öztin, 2007). This is because students who have positive perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry are more likely to choose careers in the industry. This is because students will generally want to pursue careers they perceive as good and favourable to their needs. Also, the study will inform both educators and hospitality industry managers about how prospective employees perceive careers in the industry. For educators, those perceptions that are not consistent with the industry may be altered through orientation and classroom discussions. On the part of industry managers, the findings of the study will enable them to understand and manage the myriad perceptions that students have about careers in the industry, thereby reducing the turnover/attrition rates.

Literature review

Students' perceptions of hospitality careers

Differences in perception of students with regard to careers in the hospitality industry have long been documented. For instance, Kelley-Patterson and George (2001) reported differences in the perception of students with industry experience and those without industry experience. Lee (2008) further asserts that students exposed to industry-based learning have a better understanding of and more realistic expectations from the industry. Barron et al. (2007) reported through a qualitative study that students with industry experience perceived careers in the industry as being full of exciting and interesting experiences. However, students with industry experience also generally perceived careers in the hospitality industry to be characterised by a low salary, long working hours which hinder social life and perceived high job insecurity. In a recent study in Turkey, Turanligil and Altıntaş (2018) sampled 204 students in Anadolu University and analysed their perceptions and expectations of the industry. The findings reported, among other things, that there were generally no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of students with industry experience and those without industry experience. It was also evident from the findings that a majority (79.2%) of the students acquired industry experience from hotels.

The perceptions students have of careers in the industry have been reported to differ based on academic level. Generally, first-year students have been reported to have a more positive perception of careers in the industry compared to continuing students. Barron and Maxwell (1993), for instance, reported that

students in their first year have a more positive perception of careers in the industry compared to continuing students and those who have experienced work life in the industry. Getz (1994) conducted a longitudinal study in Scotland and reported that over 14 years students have become more negative in their perceptions of careers in the industry. Earlier, West and Jameson (1990) established the negativity that students studying hospitality develop for the industry through contact with jobs of the industry either as they progress through the academic levels or when employed in the industry.

It is important to note that the perceptions that students have about the industry may be unrealistic (Chen et al., 2000), and this may affect their overall perceptions about careers in the industry. This is because if these unrealistic expectations are not met, students or graduates can become disappointed and, hence, have negative feelings towards careers in the industry. These negative thoughts may be modified or changed through interaction on career issues with educators or career counsellors in the learning environment.

Also, students' perceptions about careers in the hospitality industry can be positive, negative or indifferent. Kuslivan and Kuslivan (2000) reported that students perceived careers in the industry to be stressful, characterised by hours of long work, poor working environments, unfair promotion practices, coupled with low remuneration, among others. Similarly, Birdir (as cited in Roney & Öztin, 2007) also noted the poor salary for careers in the industry. In Malaysia, Richardson and Butler (2012) reported that undergraduate hospitality and tourism students perceived careers in the industry to offer low wages, have poor work-life balance, and poor staff and manager relationships. These negative perceptions made students prefer careers in industries other than the industry they had been trained for. This is due to the belief that other industries offer higher remuneration than they could ever receive in the hospitality industry. The industry is also stigmatised as providing poor professional standards (Gu et al., 2007).

Alanazeh (2014) reported that 82% of students studying hotel management and food and beverage service in the Aqaba Economic Zone of Jordan wished to work in the industry after graduation. This willingness to work in the industry can be attributed to the positive perceptions that these students had about careers in the industry. Lu and Adler (2009) investigated the career goals and expectations of Chinese hospitality students. A description of the background characteristics of the students showed that about 65% of the students ended up pursuing tourism and hospitality programmes because of their low entrance exam grades. However, 68% of the respondents had plans to take up careers in the tourism industry. The most common reason cited by these students for wanting to work in the industry was the readily available opportunities for employment and career development. This means that most students in this study perceived the tourism industry to offer career opportunities and development. However, 32% of these students did not want careers in the hospitality and tourism industry due to a lack of personal interest in such careers.

In another study, Grobelna (2017) surveyed Polish and Spanish students in a study to investigate their perceptions of job-related motivators when choosing careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. In general, the findings showed that tourism and hospitality careers do not provide the factors that these students consider acceptable in a career. The study sampled one

institution from each of the two countries and this was identified by the author as a limitation in the study because such findings cannot be generalised to represent the overall perceptions of students about the industry in both countries. Wen et al. (2018) reported that students in China perceived compensation and promotion opportunities in the industry as being below what they expected in a career.

More so, Selçuk et al. (2013) confirmed that students from Ataturk University in Turkey perceived the industry to offer jobs which are not interesting (63%). Also, students (80%) perceived the industry to have poor working hours which do not conform to a regular lifestyle. For these and other negative reasons, more than half of the student respondents in this study concluded that it is a big mistake to be involved in tourism as a career preference. Again, Selçuk et al. (2013) reported that students perceived careers in the industry to be servile in nature, with an insufficient salary in relation to workload.

Roney and Ötzin's (2007) findings showed that, in general, students were indifferent or neutral in their perception towards the industry in Turkey, although some students perceived that the industry would afford them the opportunity to meet new people and probably be able to network. Although students may have poor expectations from the industry, students found to have willingly chosen the hospitality programme were more willing and therefore wanted to choose careers in the industry after graduation (Akin Aksu & Deniz Köksal, 2005). Again in Turkey, Turanlıgil and Altıntaş (2018) reported negative perceptions among tourism and hotel management students. Poor treatment of these students by the industry players, especially during internships, was identified as a probable cause of this negative perception.

One study of great relevance to the present study was by Neequaye and Armoo (2014), which sought to find out the factors used by Ghanaian students in determining career options in the tourism and hospitality industry. The findings showed that students were not sure that careers in the industry were secure, readily available and with a reasonable workload. However, as revealed by the study, most students strongly perceived the industry to provide personal career development. It was further reported that students perceived salary levels in the hospitality industry to be low, as compared to careers in other industries, although students' perception about the salary was the least of the factors influencing their perception about the industry. This finding is striking because, in a developing country like Ghana, one might expect monetary reward for work done to be of great importance. However, students in Neequaye and Armoo's study may have rated salary the least important factor influencing their choice of career because most of them were being provided for by their parents or guardians and therefore might not acknowledge the importance of remuneration at that stage of their lives.

Another study that has a bearing on the present study is one by Amissah et al. (2019). In that study, the authors sought to explore students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality and tourism industry in Ghana. The study, however, sampled 441 students from the hospitality and tourism department of the University of Cape Coast, which the authors stressed limited the generalisability of the findings from the study across the population of hospitality and tourism students in Ghana. Findings from Amissah et al. (2019) showed that students perceived careers in the industry unfavourably, as only 33% of

these students intended to choose careers in the industry after graduation. The study further reported that female students perceived careers in the hospitality and tourism industry more favourably than their male counterparts, as a significant difference was recorded with gender and perception of careers in the industry. The study also identified a non-significant difference in perceptions of students based on industry work experience.

From the above literature, it is evident that most studies have reported negative perceptions from students with regard to careers in the hospitality industry. The negative perceptions are irrespective of country: China, Malaysia, Scotland, Turkey, or Ghana, among others. Also, the literature highlighted negative perceptions like poor remuneration, promotion practices, work and social life balance, work overload, and staff-manager relationships, among others. However, some studies also reported positive perceptions among students. The positive perceptions had to do with availability of career development, opportunities to meet new people, and readily available jobs. Furthermore, some of the studies have reported neutral (neither positive nor negative) perceptions of students towards careers in the industry. It may be concluded that negative perceptions of hospitality careers may result in low or no interest in careers, while positive perceptions may mean a high interest in and strong choice for hospitality careers.

Research methods

The study was quantitative and descriptive in design. It sought to describe students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry. To arrive at a sample size, a list of all public universities offering hospitality programmes in Ghana was developed. These institutions were then grouped under the three regional zones based on their location (northern, middle and southern). The purposive sampling method was then used to select both traditional and technical universities from each zone. For example, one university was selected from the northern zone, as it was the only public technical university in the area that offered a hospitality programme at the time of data collection. In the middle zone, there were three traditional public universities and two technical universities which offer hospitality management programmes. One traditional and one technical university were purposively selected, each from the two regions that make up the middle zone. In the southern zone, there were five public technical universities and two traditional public universities, all offering hospitality programmes. One traditional university and three other technical universities were selected purposively considering the regional distributions of the universities. The universities selected were those that have offered the hospitality programme for at least five years and have produced graduates who are working in the industry.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select students from each academic level (first to fourth year). Fifty per cent of students in each academic level were randomly sampled using student class lists. The total population was 3 340 students; fifty per cent of students in each level were selected to ensure representativeness. Class lists of students at each level were used. The lottery method was used to randomly select half of the students. The class lists for each class were already numbered. This made it easier for the random selection of respondents, as numbers randomly picked were assigned to the

corresponding student names. The estimated sample size for the study was 1 670.

Survey instrument

A questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers with the help of field assistants. It was divided into two parts. Part A required undergraduate students to show the extent of their agreement to statements on perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The statements on perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry were negatively worded, which means that agreeing to a statement denotes a negative perception. Thus, a low mean denotes positive perception. Some of the statements were reworded to make them simpler for students to understand and also to fit the Ghanaian context.

Part B required respondents to respond to questions on their sociodemographic and university characteristics. The data collection tool was validated by two experts in the area of study and a pre-test of the instrument was done, with undergraduate students at two universities not included in the actual data collection. The pre-testing of the survey instrument also offered the opportunity to rephrase some of the questions. For example, the perception statement "careers in the industry are inflexible, so there is less time for family life" was rephrased to read: "careers in the industry offer less time for family". Also, through the pre-testing, responses about the marital status of the respondents, which included responses about being divorced or widowed, were excluded.

The main field work started in November 2018. Because of the wide geographical space to be covered in this research, field assistants were contacted and recruited from the various university campuses. The field assistants were mainly teaching assistants from the selected universities. In all, seven field assistants were contacted with the help of lecturers at the universities. Permission was sought from the various hospitality departments and lecturers. After data collection, 1 341 of the questionnaires were found to be suitable for quantitative analysis. The usable response rate, therefore, was 80.25%.

Each questionnaire was checked by the researchers to ensure that it was correctly completed and important information provided. The quantitative data collected were coded into Statistical Product for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Descriptive statistics mainly in the form of frequencies, percentages and means were used to describe the background characteristics of students. A *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance (anova) was employed to examine differences in students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry.

Results and discussion

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Respondents were mainly females (92.20%) and were mostly between the ages 20 and 29 years (66.50%). Christians (82.90%) were in the majority and most students (89%) were single. First-year students made up the largest number of respondents (46.40%), while seniors were the least (7.30%). Also, students from the technical universities (79.60%) dominated. This is because there are more technical universities offering the hospitality programmes publically in the country than traditional universities.

Industry experience of respondents

The majority of respondents in this study had some work experience in the hospitality industry. Seventy per cent (70%) of the respondents had had experience in the industry through internships (48.60%) or full-time employment (31%). This implies that internships, as alluded to by Farmaki (2018), are one of the readily available means by which students gain industry experience. Some of the students (31.60%) are working in the hotel sector. Also, as shown in Table 1, about 45% of the students who had had some industry experience had worked for fewer than six months, with those having industry experience of five years or more being the fewest (6.90%).

Students' perceptions of hospitality careers prior to exploratory factor analysis

To measure students' perception about careers in the hospitality industry, 24-item perception statements were used. Using a five-point Likert scale, all perception questions were negatively worded. In this way, a low mean represents a disagreement with the statements describing perceptions about careers in the hospitality industry. This generally means that a low mean denotes a positive perception, while a higher mean implies a negative perception. The scale used was also tested for its reliability. Cronbach's alpha of the scale (0.87) revealed that it was a good one to have effectively measured students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality. Appendix A shows all the 24 perception statements with their respective means and standard deviations.

Dimensions of students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry

Factor analysis was carried out to reduce the 24-item perception statements that students responded to. This analysis also ensured the grouping of the perceptions under strongly correlated constructs. Principal component analysis was employed with varimax rotation, which resulted in the reduction of the 24 items to 15. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sample adequacy was 0.92, with a Bartlett's test of sphericity of 7191.01 ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4 shows the 15 perception items generated from the factor analysis, which were grouped under three constructs. These were career attractiveness, career prestige/mobility, and

TABLE 1: Industry experience background of respondents

Characteristic	n	Frequency	Percentage
Hospitality industry experience	1 341		
Experienced		939	70.00
Inexperienced		402	30.00
Means of experience acquisition	939		
Internship		456	48.50
Full-time employment		291	31.00
Part-time employment		87	9.30
Voluntary work		92	9.80
Other		13	1.40
Duration of experience	939		
Less than 6 months		417	44.40
6 months – less than a year		165	17.60
1–2 years		190	20.20
3–4 years		102	10.90
5 years and more		65	6.90

nature of careers in the hospitality industry. Career attractiveness was measured by the following items with their respective factor loadings: limited opportunity to meet new people (0.72), poor networking opportunities (0.70), uninteresting experiences (0.62), poor career development (0.61), lack of opportunity for

further education (0.54), and limited use of academic knowledge and skills (0.51). Career prestige/mobility consisted of items like difficulty of movement to other careers, career of low intellectual challenge, low entry positions for graduates, and a career that is not prestigious. The factor loadings of these perceptions ranged from 0.50 to 0.69.

Finally, items like low remuneration (0.61), stressful career (0.69), low regard of career by society (0.51), careers that offer less time for family life (0.56), and social life (0.51) were grouped under nature of career. In all, the variables explained 50.32% of students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry. Career attractiveness (Factor I) explained 29.14% of students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry. Career prestige/mobility (Factor II) also explained 12.55%, while nature of career (Factor III) explained 8.63% of students' perceptions of hospitality careers (Table 3).

Under the career attractiveness construct (Factor I), perception of limited opportunity to meet people had the highest factor loading (0.72). This was followed by perception of poor networking opportunity in hospitality careers (0.70). Limited use of academic knowledge and skills had the least factor loading (0.51) under Factor I. Low entry positions for graduates (0.69) and difficulty of movement to other careers (0.63) were the two perceptions that had the highest loading under Factor II (career prestige/mobility). For Factor III, stressful careers (0.69) and low remuneration paid for careers (0.61) in the industry were the perceptions that were highly loaded under the nature of career construct.

Undergraduate students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry

People's perceptions about careers could be influenced by a number of factors. These perceptions may be positive or negative. Perceptions can also change based on exposure to reality or through social interactions. This notwithstanding,

TABLE 2: Dimensions of students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry

Factor	Perception	Loadings	Eigen values	%
1	Career attractiveness			
	Limited opportunity to meet people	0.72	6.87	29.14
	Poor networking opportunity	0.70		
	Offers uninteresting experiences	0.62		
	Lack of opportunity for further education	0.54		
	Poor career development	0.61		
Limited use of academic knowledge and skills	0.51			
2	Career prestige/mobility			
	Difficulty of movement to other careers	0.63	2.81	12.55
	Low intellectual challenge	0.53		
	Low entry positions for graduates	0.69		
Not prestigious	0.50			
3	Nature of career			
	Low remuneration	0.61	1.80	8.63
	Stressful	0.69		
	Low regard by society	0.51		
	Offers less time for family	0.56		
Offers less time for social life	0.51			
Total variance explained				50.32

Keyser-Meyer-Olkin test = 0.922; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: 7191.01; $p < 0.001$

TABLE 3: Respondents' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry

Perception	Strongly disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neutral % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly agree % (n)	Mean	Standard deviation
Career attractiveness							
Limited opportunity to meet people	49.90 (669)	23.70 (318)	10.40 (139)	8.10 (108)	8 (107)	2.01	1.28
Poor networking opportunity	34.60 (464)	28.90 (387)	15.40 (207)	13.90 (186)	7.20 (97)	2.30	1.27
Offers uninteresting experiences	37.20 (499)	28.60 (384)	14.40 (193)	11.70 (157)	8 (107)	2.25	1.29
Lack of opportunity for further education	42.20 (566)	25.60 (343)	12.10 (162)	11.20 (150)	8.90 (120)	2.19	1.33
Poor career development	37.40 (502)	30.10 (403)	16.20 (217)	10.70 (144)	5.60 (75)	2.17	1.20
Limited use of academic knowledge and skills	43.30 (581)	27.00 (362)	11.20 (150)	9.50 (127)	9 (121)	2.14	1.31
Category total	40.77	27.32	13.28	10.85	7.78	2.18	1.28
Prestige/mobility of career							
Difficulty of movement to other careers	25.70 (344)	29.90(401)	20.40(274)	14.90(200)	9.10(122)	2.52	1.27
Low intellectual challenge	19.20 (257)	28.10 (376)	21.30 (285)	20.10 (270)	11.30 (152)	2.76	1.28
Low entry positions for graduates	19.80 (265)	19.10 (256)	18.90 (254)	21.40 (287)	20.80 (279)	3.04	1.42
Not prestigious career	22.30 (299)	24.70 (331)	28.50 (382)	15.10 (202)	9.50 (127)	2.65	1.24
Category total	21.75	25.45	22.28	17.88	12.68	2.74	1.30
Nature of career							
Low remuneration	22.80 (306)	18.20 (244)	17 (228)	20.10 (269)	21.90 (294)	3.00	1.47
Stressful	9.90 (133)	11.20 (150)	17.40 (233)	29.80 (399)	31.80 (426)	3.62	1.30
Low regard by society	26.70 (358)	19.20 (258)	15.60 (209)	19.20 (258)	19.20 (258)	2.85	1.48
Offers less time for family life	15.30 (205)	15.90 (213)	17 (228)	26.40 (354)	25.40 (341)	3.31	1.40
Offers less time for social life	17.70 (237)	21.60 (290)	19.20 (257)	24.50 (328)	17.10 (229)	3.02	1.36
Category total	18.48	17.20	17.22	24	23.08	3.16	1.40
Overall mean total	27.00	23.32	17.59	17.58	14.51	2.69	1.33

perceptions are important in decision-making. Results in Table 3 indicate that undergraduate hospitality students in Ghana were generally indifferent about careers in the hospitality industry, with an overall mean of 2.69 and a standard deviation of 1.33. This implies that the students were neither positive nor negative in their perception about careers in the industry. Similarly, Roney and Ötzin (2007) reported indifferent perceptions of students about careers in the industry in Turkey. On the contrary, Turanlıgil and Altıntaş (2018) and Amissah et al. (2019) found that hospitality and tourism students in Anadolu University and University of Cape Coast in Turkey and Ghana respectively had negative perceptions about careers in the industry. However, Barron et al. (2007) reported positive perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry by students in United Kingdom. It can also be noted that the above studies with contrary findings to this did not represent the general students' perception of careers in the industry in those countries.

Also, students disagreed that careers in the industry are not attractive (category mean = 2.18). Students were of the view that careers in the industry are attractive and offered the opportunity to meet new people (mean = 2.01), apply academic knowledge and skills (mean = 2.14), develop their careers (mean = 2.17), further their education (mean = 2.19), network with others (mean = 2.30), and be exposed to interesting experiences (mean = 2.25).

Moreover, as indicated in Table 3, students were neutral in their responses about the prestige/mobility features of careers in the industry (category mean = 2.74). Students neither agreed nor disagreed that there are difficulties in moving from hospitality careers to other careers (mean = 2.52). Students were also indifferent about the prestige of careers in the industry (mean = 2.65). Meanwhile, careers in the industry have been noted as being about servitude (Selçuk et al., 2013), which makes people feel ashamed of working especially in small establishments. Students were also not sure whether the entry positions for graduates in the industry was low (mean = 3.04).

Furthermore, students were indifferent to most of the items relating to the nature of careers in the hospitality industry (category mean = 3.16). They were neutral in their responses about the remuneration (mean = 3.00), time available for family (mean = 3.31), and social life (mean = 3.02). They, however, agreed that careers in the industry are stressful (mean = 3.62). Similar to this finding, Richardson and Butler (2012), reported negative perceptions among students in Malaysia about the nature of hospitality careers in general. It can be observed from Table 3 that most students disagreed with the assertion that there is limited opportunity to meet new people in the industry, as indicated by a lowest mean of 2.01, while they generally agreed that careers in the industry are stressful in nature (mean = 3.62).

Students were certain that pursuing careers in the industry provided the opportunity to meet new people. Similarly, Roney and Ötzin (2007) reported that students in Turkey perceived careers in the hospitality industry as providing good opportunities to meet new people all the time. Students were, however, convinced that careers in the industry were stressful (mean = 3.62). Studies by Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000), Richardson and Butler (2012), and Selçuk et al. (2013) also showed that students had negative perceptions about the nature of careers in the hospitality industry. Students in this

study, however, were indifferent about the nature of careers in the hospitality industry (category mean = 3.16).

In Table 3, percentages of students' disagreement and agreement to the negatively worded perception statements are also presented. The scale of five is presented. Neutral perceptions were necessary to allow students who neither disagree nor agree to perception statements to select them. About 68% of the students showed disagreement with the negative statements measuring the attractiveness of careers in the industry. This means that more than half of the students perceived careers in the industry to be attractive. Approximately 13% of the students were not sure whether careers in the industry were attractive or not. With regard to the prestige/mobility of careers in the industry, 47% of students perceived careers in the industry to be mobile or prestigious, while a little above 30% of the students were in agreement that careers in the industry are low in prestige or mobility.

Table 3 further indicates that 47% of students perceived careers in the industry to be poor in nature. Forty-two per cent of students were of the view that careers in the industry offer poor salaries, while 41% of the students strongly disagreed or disagreed. Furthermore, most students (61.60%) perceived careers in the industry to be stressful, as compared to 21% of students who thought otherwise. The overall total shows that about 50% of the students perceived careers in the industry positively. A further description of students' agreement/disagreement with each perception statement in percentages and means is presented in Table 3.

Differences in perceptions of hospitality careers among different categories of students

Factors that influence peoples' perceptions are varied. They include biological and social factors, although the social environment has been identified as the most common source of perception formation (Bandura, 1986; Lawer, 2015). Perceptions have been reported to vary extensively among different categories of students. These include differences based on academic level (Barron & Maxwell, 1993), and industry experience (Kelley-Patterson & George, 2001; Kim & Park, 2013), among others.

Differences in students' perceptions of hospitality careers by sociodemographic characteristics

In Table 4, it can be concluded that males and females do not differ in their perceptions about careers in the hospitality industry, although males were generally more indifferent (total mean = 2.72) than females (total mean = 2.69). Specifically, males and females disagreed with the negatively worded statements measuring the attractiveness of careers in the industry. This means that both males and females perceived careers in the industry to be attractive. They were neutral in their responses about the prestige/mobility of careers in the industry (mean = 2.80, 2.74), as well as the nature of careers in the industry (mean = 3.14, 3.16 for males and females respectively).

However, there were significant differences in perceptions about hospitality careers between Christians (total mean = 2.72) and Muslims (total mean = 2.47) at $p \leq 0.05$. As further indicated in Table 5, Muslims generally disagreed (total mean = 2.47) with the negative statements describing careers in the industry, but Christians were indifferent (total mean = 2.72). This means that Muslims had a positive perception about careers in the industry, while Christians were indifferent in their perceptions

TABLE 4: Differences in perceptions of hospitality careers by sociodemographic characteristics

Characteristic	n	Perception of hospitality career			
		Career attractiveness Mean	Career prestige/mobility Mean	Nature of career Mean	Total Mean
Gender					
Male	104	2.24	2.80	3.14	2.72
Female	1 237	2.17	2.74	3.16	2.69
Mean difference		0.07	0.06	0.02	0.03
p-value		0.46	0.48	0.81	0.60
Religion					
Christian	1 112	2.17	2.77	3.22	2.72
Muslim	229	2.19	2.64	2.58	2.47
Mean difference		0.02	0.13	0.64	0.25
p-value		0.75	0.04	<0.001	<0.001
Marital status					
Single	1 202	2.16	2.72	3.14	2.67
Married	139	2.30	2.93	3.36	2.86
Mean difference		0.14	0.21	0.22	0.19
p-value		0.08	0.01	0.01	<0.001
Age (years)					
<30	1 227	2.14	2.71	3.12	2.66
≥30	114	2.57	3.07	3.54	3.06
Mean difference		0.43	0.36	0.42	0.40
p-value		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Academic level					
First year students	622	2.08	2.66	3.07	2.60
Continuing students	719	2.26	2.82	3.24	2.77
Mean difference		0.18	0.16	0.17	0.17
p-value		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Note: Scale: 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree ($p \leq 0.05$)

of careers in the industry. Muslims may have had a positive perception about careers in the industry because, generally, fewer Muslims, especially females, pursue careers in the industry in Ghana. Therefore, those few Muslims who have enrolled in the hospitality programmes should have a positive predisposition towards careers in the industry.

Christian and Muslim students were, however, not different in their perception about the attractiveness of careers in the industry ($p = 0.75$). They were both neutral about the prestige/

mobility and nature of careers in the industry, although the difference in perception was significantly different between the two groups of students ($p = 0.04$ and <0.001 respectively). For example, Christians had a more neutral response to the prestige/mobility (mean = 2.77) and nature of careers in the industry (mean = 3.22) than Muslims (mean = 2.64, 2.58).

Findings from the study further pointed to significant differences in the perceptions of single and married respondents ($p < 0.001$) about careers in the industry. Except for perceptions

TABLE 5: Differences in students' perceptions of careers by industry experience

Category	n	Perception of career by industry experience			
		Career attractiveness Mean	Career prestige/mobility Mean	Nature of career Mean	Total Mean
Industry experience					
Experience	939	2.22	2.71	3.15	2.69
Inexperience	402	2.07	2.73	3.19	2.66
Mean difference		0.15	0.02	0.04	0.03
p-value		<0.001	0.67	0.37	0.20
Means of experience acquisition					
Internship	456	2.31	2.80	3.29	2.80
Appointment	470	2.14	2.71	3.10	2.65
Mean difference		0.17	0.09	0.19	0.15
p-value		<0.001	0.18	<0.001	<0.001
Duration of industry experience					
<1 year	582	2.20	2.75	3.17	2.71
≥1 year	357	2.26	2.75	3.10	2.70
Mean difference		0.06	0.00	0.07	0.01
p-value		0.32	0.94	0.21	0.93

Scale: 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree ($p \leq 0.05$)

about the attractiveness of careers in the industry, all other perceptions among students based on their marital status were significantly different. For instance, students who were married were more neutral in how they perceived careers in the industry (total mean = 2.86), when compared to single students (total mean = 2.67). The nature of careers in the industry (mean diff. = 0.22, $p = 0.01$) had the highest mean difference. Those who were married reported family life conflict issues with careers in the industry (Richardson & Butler, 2012), especially for females (Magableh, 2005), and this is likely to be one of the reasons accounting for the difference among the single and married respondents in this study.

There were variations in perceptions of students from the different age categories with respect to careers in the industry. Respondents were regrouped into two different age categories: those under 30 years old and those 30 years old and over. Respondents were regrouped into these categories because it was evident from the data that students were mostly aged between 20 and 29, while the rest were 30 years and older. It can be observed from Table 4 that there was a significant difference in the perceptions about careers in the industry between the two student groups. Students under 30 years old had a more favourable perception about careers in the industry than those who were 30 years and older ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, students under 30 years disagreed that careers in the industry were not attractive, but students 30 years and older were not sure whether careers in the industry were attractive or not ($p < 0.001$).

Previously, Barron and Maxwell (1993) reported that first-year students have more positive perceptions about careers in the industry than other year groups. Also, Getz (1994) stressed that the longer the time students spend in school and the industry, the less positive their perceptions about the industry becomes. This seems to be the case in this study, as first-years in this study had more favourable perceptions about careers in the industry (total mean = 2.60) than continuing students (total mean = 2.77). Both first-year and continuing students perceived careers in the industry to be attractive (mean = 2.08 and 2.26 respectively). The two categories of students were, however, indifferent in their perceptions about prestige/mobility and the nature of careers in the industry, although the mean differences in their perceptions were significant ($p < 0.001$).

Differences in perceptions of hospitality careers by students with industry experience

Lee (2008) asserted that when people have industry experience, they have a more realistic perception of and expectations from the hospitality industry. In another study by Kim and Park (2013), students were reported to have developed negative perceptions about hospitality careers after experiencing work life in the industry. Previously, Kelley-Patterson and George (2001) had reported differences in perceptions of students who had industry experience and those without industry experience. However, from Table 5, there was, generally, no significant difference in perceptions of students who had experienced careers in the industry and those who had not ($p = 0.20$). This finding is in congruence with a finding by Turanligil and Altıntaş (2018) in Turkey, where both students with industry experience and those without experience generally had similar perceptions of the industry.

Both categories of students only differed significantly in their perceptions about the attractiveness of careers in the industry ($p < 0.001$). Students with industry experience disagreed more with the perception that careers in the industry are unattractive (mean = 2.22), as compared to those without industry experience (mean = 2.07). The two groups of students were neutral in their responses about the prestige/mobility of careers in the industry as well as the nature of careers in the industry.

From the preceding findings, further analysis was conducted to ascertain whether differences exist in the perceptions of students based on the means by which they had gained industry experience. For this purpose, students were placed into two groups: those who gained industry experience through internships, and those who experienced the industry through appointment (employment). Table 5 indicates that except for career prestige/mobility, there were variations in the perceptions of students depending on how they acquired industry experience. In general terms, there was a significant difference in the perception of students based on how they acquired experience in the industry. Specifically, students who had acquired industry experience through internships were more indifferent in their responses (total mean = 2.80) than students who had experienced the industry by appointment (total mean = 2.65).

The more indifferent standpoint of students who had experienced careers in the industry through internships can be attributed to the generally poor treatment meted out to students on internships. Students on internships are generally considered as trainees and are therefore made to do all the odd jobs in the industry. More so, it is generally believed that the longer a phenomenon is experienced, the more realistic the perception that is formed about that phenomenon. If this assertion holds true, it can be concluded that students who had experienced careers in the industry for one year or more had a most realistic perception about careers in the industry. Referring to Table 5, we see that there were no statistically significant differences in students' perception to the duration of industry experience acquisition. Both categories of students were neither positive nor negative in perception about careers in the industry.

Conclusions and recommendations

Three factors emerged as the dimensions of undergraduate students' perceptions of careers in the hospitality industry of Ghana. These are career attractiveness, career prestige/mobility, and the nature of the career. Generally, students were indifferent about careers in the hospitality industry. Sixty-eight per cent of undergraduate students perceived careers in the industry as attractive. About 74% of students perceived careers in the industry to afford the opportunity to meet new people. This implies that there is a need to develop high social skills in students to ensure they make the best out of this opportunity, mainly by managing the relationships formed with the people they meet. On the contrary, 61.60% of the students perceived careers in the industry as stressful. Juxtaposing this perception of students about careers in the industry with the new career concept where employees are concerned about their freedom, personal growth, and interest rather the needs of the organisation (Gössling et al., 2020), it can be said that students with this new career orientation will not want to pursue stressful careers in the hospitality industry in the future.

Also, there were statistically significant differences in perceptions of students about hospitality careers based on their religion, marital status, age, academic level, and the means by which industry experience was acquired. Muslims had a more favourable perception of careers in the industry than Christians. Careers in the industry are characterised by the service of certain foods and alcohol, which the Islamic religion does not accept. This may mean that Muslims in Ghana would not want to choose hospitality programmes and careers. However, the few Muslims who will want to choose the hospitality programme and careers must have very good perceptions about careers in the industry to want to do so.

Although single and married students were indifferent in their perceptions about careers in the industry, career prestige/mobility and the nature of careers were the two perception dimensions that recorded significant variations between these two groups of students. It can be observed from the findings that students who were not married perceived careers in the industry more favourably than those who were married. This is because careers in the industry have been perceived as being inflexible, which affects the time available for family life, especially for women (Richardson & Butler, 2012). Similarly, students 30 years and over had a less favourable perception about careers in the industry than students under 30 years. Perceptions of students aged 30 and over and married students are similar. This is the case because students over 30 years are likely to be married, therefore their poor perception about careers in the industry. It can therefore be concluded that hospitality careers are perceived less favourably by older and married students because careers in the industry are inflexible, which affects time for family life.

Again, first-year students had a more favourable perception about careers in the industry than continuing students. Some studies had reported similar findings (e.g. Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Getz, 1994) and concluded that the longer students stay in the hospitality programme, the less positive their perceptions become about careers in the industry. This could be due to the realities that students encounter about careers in the industry during the period on the programme. Among other things, students who had acquired industry experience by internships had the more indifferent perception about careers in the industry than those who had experienced work life in the industry through other means. Students on internships are likely to be overburdened with all the odd tasks, and this makes them form a poor perception about careers in the industry.

It is recommended that hospitality educators expose students to the unique characteristics of careers in the hospitality industry. Educators can do this by highlighting the positive aspects of careers in the industry to students during classroom interactions. Stronger collaboration between universities and the industry is necessary to ensure students become more exposed to careers in the industry through planned and supervised internships and field trips, among others.

Suggestions for further studies

This study was quantitative in nature, and did not interrogate possible reasons for the marked differences in the perceptions of some categories of students. It is therefore suggested that a qualitative study be conducted to explore the reasons for the differences and similarities in perception among the different categories of students.

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Appendix A

TABLE 1A: Students' perceptions of hospitality careers prior to exploratory factor analysis

Perception of hospitality careers	Mean	Standard deviation	Scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Careers in the industry do not provide high remuneration	3.00	1.47	0.87
Careers in the industry are stressful	3.62	1.30	
Careers in the industry are lowly regarded by the society		1.48	
There are unfair promotional practices in the industry	2.91	1.30	
Careers in the industry offer limited opportunity to meet new people	2.01	1.28	
Careers in the industry do not provide good networking opportunities	2.30	1.27	
Careers in the industry offer less time for family	3.31	1.40	
The industry does not offer interesting experiences	2.25	1.29	
Careers in the industry provide less time for social life	3.02	1.36	
The working environment in the industry is not safe	2.49	1.29	
There is lack of opportunity for further education when working in the industry	2.20	1.33	
Jobs in the industry are not readily available	2.61	1.36	
There is poor opportunity for career development in the hospitality industry	2.17	1.20	
The working relationship between managers and employees is generally poor in the industry	2.76	1.32	
Careers in the industry are not secure	2.79	1.29	
Working in the industry is not intellectually challenging	2.52	1.27	
Careers in the industry are gender discriminatory	2.56	1.36	
Working in the industry provides poor opportunity to use academic knowledge and skills acquired in school	2.14	1.31	
Careers in the industry results in difficulty in movement to other careers	2.76	1.28	
Careers in the industry have low entry positions for graduates	3.04	1.42	
Careers in the industry are characterised by long and odd working hours	2.37	1.30	
Professional standards are poor in the hospitality industry	2.53	1.28	
Careers in the hospitality industry are characterised by excessive workload	3.35	1.69	
Careers in the industry are not prestigious	2.65	1.24	
Total	2.72	1.34	