



# Effectiveness of Student Training Employment Program (STEP) for Students Career in Hotel Industry

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## ABSTRACT

This research looks into the expectation of students towards the training employment program towards their future career in hotel industry. It will examine the positive and negative comment from graduates of the program after they joined and completed the STEP. The possibility of improvement towards the program also stated from the respondents for more effective results. The main goal of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of student training employment program towards students' future career in hotel industry with three measure elements that is salary, job position and knowledge.

This research is important for the hotel industry because this study analyze the hospitality management opinion graduates about the program that helps them in their future career. This research is a good finding for references of hotel industry that need professional staff that overcome labor shortages problem caused by high turnover rates in hotel industry and other incompetent employee. Therefore, this research helps not only the hotel industry but also the universities of hospitality management to see the development of a training employment program.

**Keywords:** Training, Hospitality, Career, Student, Step program, Malaysia.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Theme of Research

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century people travel around the world more than ever, whether for leisure purpose or for business; as hotel industry plays an important role to help the Malaysian government develop sustainable tourism (Mohamad, 2008). The number of tourist arrivals increased from 10.2 million in 2000 to 20.9 million in 2007. Within seven years, the receipts from tourism-related activities rose from MYR17.3 billion to MYR46.0 billion (Tourism Malaysia Corporate Website, 2008).

New hotels keep opening up to meet the needs of the traveler, which make people aware of the job opportunities in the hospitality industry. However, hotel industry knew that it was hard maintaining the quality of the employees because of some challenges that the hotel face. Language is one of the big issues that the hotel industry in Malaysia face because employee in the hotel did not use English as their first language, when the number one international language that people speak is English. Unlike in other English speaking country, they do not have to suffer from this problem.

Studies have done that shown soft skill includes language skills in the workers in Malaysia is one of the most important skill that contribute to the employment decision (Hariati, 2007). Malaysian government survey state the people in Malaysia mostly speak poor English (The Star Malaysia, 2005) and it resulted 30,000 local graduates have no fixed job (New Strait Times, 2005). It causes hotel industry need good employees especially youth workers with high education level. That is the reason of tourism and hospitality school are growing fast especially in Asia Pacific (Leading Hospitality Programs for Students in Asia, 2013). They provide education in hospitality industry to develop student skill on their

knowledge and practical on service. The numbers of people who graduate from hospitality background every year keep increasing to meet the needs of the job vacancies in the hotel.

Hotels are experiencing another often-occurred problems that are caused by high turnover (Lee and Chon, 2000). This high turnover problem are often arise and discuss by many researchers (e.g., (Karatepe, 2013; Ahmad and Scott, 2014; Hwang *et al.*, 2014)). However, although there are a lot of job vacancies available in the hotel industry, a study (Blomme *et al.*, 2009) indicated seventy percent of the graduates did not have intention to work in the hospitality industry.

Hotel industry also recognized that there are increasing numbers in hospitality management graduates from high-ranking universities, but few of graduates are dedicated to the industry and committed to their jobs (Song and Wang, 2008). This lead to a bigger problem because now the demand of working in hotel industry is not that high. Studies have been conducted that examine the image of working life in the hospitality and tourism industry. In the study, (Barron, 2007) identified that impressions of working life in the industry changed from being wholly positive to wholly negative as consequence of the period of industrial experience that was core to the students' program of studies. Demand of Industrial hotel employee in USA is bigger than the urgency of the students who willing to work with them, it cause the inbalance and unhealthy competitive in the social because it is no more industry who do the choosing but the graduates are (Ng and Burke, 2006).

Most of the expectations of the students towards working life in hotel industry are above the reality. As mention in the study (Blomme *et al.*, 2009) interventions should then be extended to the school system, where student's pre-entry expectations are developed. (Cheuk, 2005) his study conclude that current education system do not have connection with hotel industry that made the gap between the industry needs and students expectation unfilled. Further, he suggests hospitality program should strengthen by cooperation with the industry. Hospitality program in the universities prepare the students to develop sustainable practice that provide impact and demonstrate leadership in the future hospitality career (Murray and Ayoun, 2011). Involvement of the industry in the program will help potential students to understand the expectation and their beliefs in working in hotel industry (Blomme *et al.*, 2009).

Hospitality recruitment and retention strategies are being refocused in the direction of promotion from within to combat quality labor issues, many top hospitality organizations, known for their efforts and excellence in employee relations, are implementing development programs (Kline and Harris, 2008). Which in this study there is a program that called STEP that defined as Taylor's University Student Employment Program that train and contribute in the students internship program. (Tse, 2010) also find that the student who did internship program concerned about the relevance of their study with their work experience because students are aware of how study and placement can support each other. (Gunlu and Usta, 2009) Internship is important for students because they assume that internship is a turning point in their professional life. Further, he explains that internship process may lead students to the right places in their future and it is a path for self-development.

This study will look deeper on the STEP effectiveness. STEP is a unique program that allows selected student pursuing the Bachelor of International Hospitality Management (Hons) program a 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity to study while preparing themselves for a career with a leading hospitality group. Under the STEP partnership, the hotel group adopts a class where both Taylor's and the organization carefully select the students.

The STEP classes also offer specially designed training sessions, workshops and seminars created by STEP hotel partner, while pursuing the degree programs. The program also provides opportunities for students to attend four to six months of industrial training in one of the hotel properties and ultimately a job offer subject to meeting the required recruitment criteria (Information about STEP [Brochure], 2012).

As such, this study is designed to measure the effectiveness of STEP in student future career in hotel industry that answered the gap between the expectation from both hospitality students and hotel industry. Three variables are used in this study to measure its effectiveness of the program are increase in salary, better job position, and development in knowledge. If the program to beneficial to the students, it is expected that students would enrich the understanding about hotel industry.

## **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Know the expectation of students towards STEP, before and after they join the program
2. Identify the positive and negative effect of the program towards students future career in hospitality industry.
3. Assess the effect of the program if there are any differences that students get from the program towards their employment in their future career.

4. By fulfilling objectives 1, 2 and 3 above, this study contributes to broadening the existing knowledge on career development for hospitality industry and helps hotel group have more talented and knowledgeable graduates to overcome the labor shortage.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. What are students' expectations and perceptions toward STEP before and after they join the program?
2. What are the positive and negative effects of the program towards students future career in hospitality industry?
3. Is there any difference in salary, job positions and knowledge after joining the STEP?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. STEP

Taylor's University in Malaysia held a partnership with leading hotel group to make a student employment program (STEP). It was established back in 2010 with an aim to enhance the opportunities available to students in meeting the highest standards set by leading hotel chains and gain employment opportunities. Since its launch, Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts Malaysia, Hilton Worldwide, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group had come on board to work together with TCHT (Taylor's School of Culinary Arts, Hospitality and Tourism) to offer STEP to a selected group of students. Both TCHT and the hotels' representatives take part in this development program handpick the qualified second year Bachelor Degree students at TCHT through rigorous interviews. Selected students attend specially designed classes and workshops to enhance their industry exposures, as well as undergo internships with the hotel group (Taylor's University Websites, 2014).

It is a unique program that allows selected students pursuing the Bachelor International Hospitality Management (Hons) program at Taylor's, an opportunity to join Asia's leading hotel chain even before they graduate. This program fuses combination of "teaching + training + practice" needed by the industry development, as well as cultivation target international hospitality management talents. The steps to join STEP, students went through five steps of selection:

1. Application
  2. Shortlisting candidates
  3. Interview
  4. Selection of candidate
  5. Issuance of appointment letter
- (Information about STEP [Brochure], 2012)

There is application form that students need to fill for applying STEP. Students need to fill up information about: profile, working experiences and skill and 'Why they want to join STEP?' After students submit their application form, the shortlisted candidates screened by the lecturers in charge. The criteria of the selecting process was the cumulative grade point average value (CGPA) result from overall semester is minimum score 3.00 out of 4.00 and what the lecturer think about that particular student behavior in class.

This method ensures that STEP students are not only good academically and theory but also have good communication and social skills. There are some advantages that STEP students get when they are in the program; students grouped into an elite STEP class, they got minimum three trainings / workshops under the guidance of collaborate Hotel each semester, Secured industrial placement, in one of many hotel properties. Participants also gain experience working on projects, campaigns and presentations organized by hotel they attach with. Upon graduation and by fulfilling hotel recruitment criteria, STEP students were offered a middle management position / management trainee program at one of the hotel properties (Information about STEP [Brochure], 2012).

Other than STEP, there are several other similar employment-training program such as Supervisory development program (SDP), established in Cape Town, South Africa. It is a program that aims to create a pool of competent supervisors who will address the company's current and future staff needs for critical positions. The participants of SDP program were current supervisors within the organization (inclusive the recently appointed from outside) and employees not yet in supervisory positions (Buys and Louw, 2012). SDP is different from STEP because of its participant; SDP caters to improve the supervisor in the organization and STEP caters to prepare students to be ready to work in the industry. The study from Li

and Li (2013) about student career-oriented perspective of hospitality education in China analyzes the SCUT mode.

South China of Technology’s new talent cultivation mode (SCUT) is a part of plan in hospitality education under the government authority. This mode is rooted in the formulated curriculum for research-based universities, and integrates key elements from teaching modules from both universities and hospitality training programmes. SCUT aims to solve several key issues that both university and hospitality industry facing (i.e. shortage of labor and high turnover), and focuses on the very real future career development of hospitality students (job positions). The main purpose of SCUT mode is to provide professional graduates for hospitality industry.

**Table-1.1.** Students completing Student training employment program (STEP) between 2013 and 2014.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Students completing STEP</b>
2013 (BH 1 with Shang ri-La Hotel)	17
2013 (BH 2 with Hilton Hotel)	9
2014 (BH 3 with Shang ri-La Hotel)	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>
BH, bachelor of hospitality	

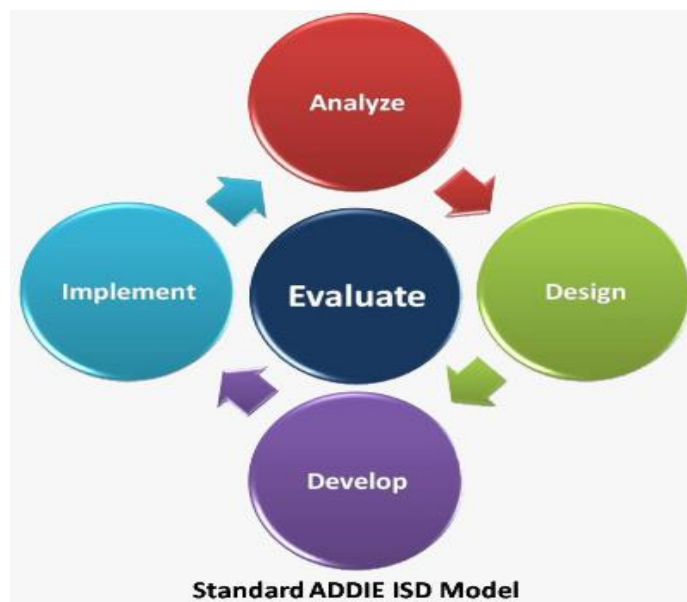
## **2.2. Training**

Mabey and Finch-Lees (2008) defined training as acquisition of concrete and job specific skills, whilst development is a longer-term learning process, which cuts across jobs. Training is giving current or new employee skills they need to perform their tasks. Having high potential employees does not guarantee that they will be success, they need to know what and how to do the right things (Dessler, 2013).

Employee development program is a long-term personal and professional growth of individuals in an organization (Tansky and Cohen, 2001). McMahan, (1993) & Zuboff, (1988), increased organizational commitment and other important outcomes may likely be the result of training programs. Training involves providing employees with the basic knowledge and skills they need to perform their duties to the company’s standards (Wanda & John, 2011). Training has an impressive record of influencing performance. It scores higher than appraisal and feedback and just below goal setting in its effect on productivity (Dessler, 2013).

Several studies about training have been conducted to upgrade the skills and knowledge of hospitality employee (Buys and Louw, 2012). Most of the training sessions are design to provide employees in the hotel with information they need to perform their current jobs to the company’s standards (Maureu, 2001), but less study has been conducted to see the effect of an employment program on undergraduate students. This is the reason of the further study it what had been conducted to know the impact of the training program that held for the undergraduates to prepare them before they become employees on the hotel industry.

To make a good training program there are process model used for years named ADDIE. ADDIE training process model consist of analysis, design, develop, implement, evaluate. Analyze is the first phases to make an effective training program, it identifies the goals and objectives, learning problems, participants’ need, and other relevant characteristics (NCS: Tactical Data Link Training Experts, 2008). Second phase is design, meaning a systematic process of specifying learning objectives. In the design phase, content and strategies for individual is identified. Develop is the third phase that build course structure, build content, assignments, assessments based on design phase. In the forth phase which is implementation, is actually training the targeted participant. The last phase is evaluation, where it evaluates the effectiveness of the program (NCS: Tactical Data Link Training Experts, 2008).



(NCS: Tactical Data Link Training Expert, 2008)

STEP students were trained with the hotel learning and development department that in charge of the STEP, for at least three times in every semester. The materials of the training were uniquely customized for the STEP students. Training or workshop location conducted not only in university area but also in the hotel itself, so that students get better idea of the hotel working environment and staff. The hotel trainer made the training materials according to hotel vision and mission to prepare STEP students fit their hotel culture. Some of the training topic that STEP students received were; managerial and leadership skills training, communication skills, directing and motivating skills, etc. While the organization is responsible for providing opportunities for development needs and progress, the students are responsible for fully committing themselves to participate in the development activities and achieving the desired outcomes (Maurer *et al.*, 2002).

Second internship is a minimum 15 weeks of training program. Students will have opportunities to propose a specific department where they interested in future working department. Subject to position availability, students will work in that department until they finish their internship. In this way, students can learn to enhance their practical skills in area where they had most interest in.

### 2.3. Effectiveness of STEP

There are four basic categories to measure the training effects that examine by Dessler (2013):

1. *Reaction*. It is the reaction from the participants toward the program. How they think about the program after they joined in? Did they like the program? Did they think it worthwhile?
2. *Learning*. Ask the participant whether they learned the skills and gained necessary knowledge that they supposed to learn.
3. *Behavior*. Ask whether the participants' on-the-job behavior change because of the training program. For example their decision to work in Hotel industry after gone through on-the-job training (internship program) with the industry.
4. *Results*. Reactions, learning, and behavior are important but if the training program does not produce measureable results, then it has not achieved its goals.

In the STEP process students were trained and did their internship with the hotel that they were engage which benefit the students because they met with new organization culture and improved their job-related skills. Not only students benefited by this program but also the hotel group get the chance to meet talented and enthusiastic potential candidates, have new young labor force at minimum expense and raised the quality of the service by the help of qualified individuals. All these benefits were supported by various studies (Anakwe and Greenhaus, 2000; Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002; Marmueda *et al.*, 2004). Taylor's University also takes pride in consistently producing high qualified, industry-ready graduates who can deliver excellent performance in their workplace. From this program Taylor's as a university will get a good reputation because it opens up an opportunity for Taylor's student to get a better job.

Three variables that used in this study are differences in salary, job position, and knowledge value. Those three variables were adopted from other researches that ranked; advancement opportunities &

salary were the most influence factor of student expectation towards their decision of work in hospitality industry (Blumenfeld *et al.*, 1987; Demonte and Vaden, 1987; McClearly and Weaver, 1988; Sciarini, 1997). Gillian, et al. (2010) analyze that there are top five long term of undergraduate students career aspirations towards hotel industry: (1) achieving upward promotion, (2) receiving good pay, (3) Having Job security, (4) being determined to success, (5) opportunities for self-development. Further, they explained that most graduates expecting promotions within two years of graduation that means graduates pay close attention to advancement opportunities in the industry that may lead them to get higher position. Morton (2002), found that Generation Y tend to seek jobs that provide training, fair compensation, and a positive company culture.

STEP will be considered as an effective program if the outcome of this study showed positive difference in the variable, meaning that there are more salary given to the STEP students while working or doing internship with the hotel industry, there are bigger opportunity for STEP students to get a better job position in the hotel chain, the STEP students gain more knowledge and important skill that help their careers in hospitality area. However, this program considered not effective if outcome of this study showed negative difference in the variable, meaning that STEP students did not get any difference in salary as the other students who did not join the program, STEP students have no difference in opportunities to get higher position and have to start from the subordinates, do not learn new things about hotel management and do not develop new skills other than what they obtained in Taylor's Universities.

#### **2.4. Career in Hotel Industry**

Some definitions of "career" include: "pattern of work related experiences that span the course of a person's life" (Robbins *et al.*, 2006); and "career is a series of job arranged over time" (Riley and Lankin, 1994). Centre on a sequence of job related events for the individual, for example; sequence of job positions, roles, activities that are meaningful to individual and add value to the organization in which the individual participates (Arnold, 1997). And for Barruch (2004), a career is individually sequential in that it involves the individual's progress and development process at work.

Barron *et al.* (2007) stated that important change in career sequencing occurred in the early 1990s. Further explained that instead of individuals having series of moves within a company, cross-company, boundary less career moves generally became more commonplace (Arthur, 1994). McCabe (2001) also emphasize the evidence of mobility within different sector of tourism and hospitality. In hospitality careers, loyalty and commitment to one or a few employers has given way to more short-term, mutually beneficial employee-employer relationships (Barruch, 2004). Employees may expect to only stay with an employer for two to three years, reflecting the common time frame of job moves for hotel managers, according to McCabe (2001).

There are issues that hospitality industry vulnerable with: the explosive growth in the service sector, the increasingly global nature of hotel operation competition, and hotel industry's traditional inability to keep the best and brightest hospitality graduates (Sturnam, 2001) make research into student preferences in relationship to employer desirability both critical and timely. As study made by Ng and Burke (2006) there are more industrial demand of good quality of employee rather than students urgency of job, this supply/demand imbalance will provide graduates with multiple offers and the students, not the companies, will do the choosing. However studies have been done and some researches found to anticipate this issue (Cheuk, 2005). It is important for educators or academics to work closely with the private industry in order to train the graduates to be competent in accordance with industry needs (Jennifer, 2011). Blomme *et al.* (2009) industry recruiters can help the hotel schools with the provision of the right information and help the hotel schools with the admission of the students who are really interested in a career in hospitality.

The current trend of career in hospitality industry challenges individuals to try out their best to perform and guiding their future career. As mentioned by (Weaver, 2011) that employees must have a drive in acting as a free agents, developing and marketing their personal skills that match to the nature of hotel industry. Further, he explained that individuals need to have sense of responsibility in directing their careers, by consistently; look around, look ahead, and look somewhere that means to focus actively to seek for opportunity. However as mentioned before, numbers of researchers have examined how the students view their careers in hotel industry (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000; Walsh and Taylor, 2007; Richardson, 2008) have shown that job seeking behavior in this industry is scarce.

#### **2.5. Salary**

Salary Survey in Malaysia in Food /Hospitality / Tourism / Catering (2014) stated the average monthly salary in Malaysia for all segment of job was 7,000 MYR, and for average salary in Malaysia in

food/hospitality/tourism/catering industry was 6,000 MYR. From the statement above shown that there are about 1,000 MYR more from non-hospitality industry. However, it also stated that different type of job position in the hotel industry also shown different amount of payment (e.g. waiter RM 1500, restaurant manager RM 3150, hotel manager RM 13,183.). The amount of the salary will also vary by the different type, brand, and other elements of different hotel industry.

Money is one of the effective motivator for work, not only in the hospitality industry but also in other industries. (Gunlu and Usta, 2009) Interns prefer being paid and provided insurance, they think compensation is one of important thing that hotel need to provide. Furthe study also said that Interns think they deserve an amount of payment in return of their efforts. As mentioned above that the participants of this study were Y Generation, Oliver (2006) states that Generation Y are seen to have much higher expectation of job than previous generations, including high expectations of pay. (Morton, 2002) stated that Generation Y show tendency towards valuing equity in the workplace and they seek positions that offer reasonable wages and good opportunities for training.

## 2.6. Job Position

A job title can describe the responsibilities of the position, the level of the job, or both. For example, job titles that include the terms executive, manager, director, chief, supervisor, etc. typically are used for management position job titles. Other job titles reflect what the person does on the job e.g. chef, accountant, housekeeper, social media specialist, programr, editorial manager, guest services coordinator, mechanic, etc. (Job, 2012).

The importance of job positions explains in different way by Dessler (2013), it is included job redesign, job enlargement, and job rotation and job enrichment. Early economist wrote that doing a repetition of work were more efficient as practice makes perfect, but physiologist Frederick Herzberg argued that the best method to motivate people to work is through job enrichment. It means redesigning job in a way that increases the opportunities for people to experience feeling of responsibility, achievement, growth, and recognition. This method of job enrichment is a match with the characteristic of Y Generation people who look for more responsibility, achievement, growth and recognition while doing their job.

The flow of the promotion in the hotel industry is not fast it explains in the consideration of hotel management of the existing staff who already work and loyal with them for several work experience. To compete with the existing staff which have more experience and already adaptable with the hotel culture is not easy. So this is also one of the factor that influence students aiming higher position level. This study will identify if there are higher chance for student to get higher job position and more responsibility in the workplace if they join this employment program. (Gunlu and Usta, 2009) students believe that if more delegation is given they may feel themselves more self-confident.

Weaver (2011) stated in his research that for individual to obtain certain level of job position, his accomplishments must be seen and heard about so that he can be recognized. Creating a positive impression in organizations of one's own abilities is one example of impression management (Gardner, 1992). Some degree of self-promotion is deemed to be helpful if one wishes to move successfully along a career path (Gardner, 1992; Singh *et al.*, 2002). Individual need to work hard to obtain accomplishment that can be seen by others and recognized so it gives positive impressions that leads to promotions of a higher job position.

## 2.7. Knowledge Acquisition

Hospitality graduates have enough knowledge in the hospitality aspect that they consider themselves can handle bigger responsibility. Students view their degrees as having higher value than do the industry managers, and students have a strong belief in the impact holding a degree will have on their future careers (Harkinson, Paulston, & Kim, 2011). However, students-despite their expectations-are not fully qualified to be promoted to management position because they lack of essential practical skills, and do not have a positive attitude toward service (Li, 2012). This study will find out if there are any positive contributions of the program that help students enhance their skill for their future career.

Nolan *et al.* (2010) investigated the existence of essential areas of managerial competency that comprised of professional knowledge/operational skills; interpersonal, communication, information technology, human resources, finance, sales, and marketing. It essential competencies the hospitality graduate should have effective communication skills, positive attitude, ability to maintain professional and ethical standards in the work environment, and leadership (Li, 2012).

Taylor's University has its own formulated graduate capabilities that called Taylor's Graduate Capabilities (TGC), created in 2007 to enhance university-level education to meet the ever-changing demands of industry, community and globalization. TGC outlines the core knowledge, skills, abilities and qualities that students will develop at Taylor's University regardless of their program of study. The teaching and learning approach at Taylor's University is focused on ensuring that each student is able to acquire and demonstrate discipline-specific knowledge, cognitive capabilities and soft skills (graduate capabilities, 2007). There are eight Taylor's graduate capabilities as shown in table; (1) discipline specific knowledge, (2) lifelong learning, (3) thinking problem solving skills, (4) communication skills, (5) interpersonal skills, (6) intrapersonal skills, (7) citizenship and global perspectives, (8) digital literacy (Taylor's University websites, 2014). However, this study looks more in-depth about what STEP students get in the STEP process besides the knowledge and capabilities that they have owned while studying in Taylor's University.

STEP is also responsible for embedding Taylor's graduate capabilities in training and learning activities. In the training process, students are given new knowledge of the hotel industry theoretically and practically in their internship program. It shows that by going through training, students can understand professional practice within the hotel flows and put theory that they learn in to practices when STEP students went through internship program. The entire examples prove that students gain their discipline specific knowledge. In the training class students were asked several questions that required their critical thinking awareness skills in the answers. Other than that, students were also being grouped and asked to present their answers. Through this system, students need to have *lifelong learning* by learning independently to improve their *intrapersonal skills*, and managed himself to be self-reliant, and have *thinking and problem solving skills* by effectively find answers to the questions.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Approach**

The study employed qualitative methods to answer the evaluation questions. The research was qualitative because the study intended to understand in-depth phenomena for a certain group, taking consideration all relevant factors. Qualitative method is the best approach to allow students to express their perceptions and opinion in their own terms.

After the collection and gathering data from the respondents the researcher analyze and interpret in the future. The data was transcribed and presented using narrative coding method (Saldana, 2009). To analyze any data, first, understand about the information is really an important step to do. It can be done by re-read the text or if it is a recording it needs to be listen to it several times. After that select the important and useful data by writing down the theme and important key points. Second, review the purpose of the evaluation and identify the key points of the interview. Third, categorize the data with coding method; meanings identify themes or patterns such as ideas, concept and behavior of the respondents. Coding also involves organizing the data into coherent categories that summarize and bring meaning to the text. Forth, identify patterns and connections within and between the categories. The last one is interpretation that uses themes and connections to explain the findings (Powell and Renner, 2003).

#### **3.2. Profile of Respondents**

The study population was the list of STEP students who had graduated from STEP. The population of the STEP who had graduated was 43 students. This study proposes 10 students to be interviewed, 5 of them are male and 5 of them are female. There are 3 males and 2 females graduates interviewed for each hotel brand that the program collaborated with (Hilton Hotel and Shang ri-La Hotel). STEP graduates whose contact number were known and agreed to participate were interviewed. In this study it examined more detail of students that attach with two leading hotel that is Shang ri-La Hotel and Hilton Hotel.

#### **3.3. Sampling Method**

Purposive sampling method used, because all the participants belong to a specific group of study and the data get will be related because it focused on the relevant participant. This research used random sampling method to choose any participant that graduated from the STEP. Followed by snowball effect where from that particular participant found another respondents. Snowball sampling can be placed within a wider set of methodologies that takes advantage of the social networks of identified respondents, which can be used to provide a researcher with an escalating set of potential contacts (Rowland and John, 2013). From one respondent successfully recruited suggests others known to them who might similarly be



eligible. It is useful for particular types of sample that would otherwise be difficult to recruit, such as participants in a minority interest (Skillzone, 2013)

### 3.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand STEP students' perceptions towards STEP effectiveness, focusing on three factors: salary, job position and knowledge. Also, to know perspective about how these program affects them before and after the training. Finally, it intended to evaluate what improvement can be made.

### 3.5. Evaluation Questions

Carefully formulated evaluation question served to focus and structure an evaluation in order to provide useful answer. Those questions were asked to get the objectives of this study.

*Expectations:*

1. What do you think about STEP before you join the program?
2. What do you think about STEP after you join the program?
3. What is the reason of you join STEP?

*Results in joining STEP:*

4. How you think your ingenuity and skill development after you join STEP?
5. What job position they offered you after you complete the program?
6. Is there any difference in salary that you get in the workplace after you join STEP? Why?
7. What are the most significant things that you gain after join STEP?
8. How do you think that join STEP can affect your future career in hotel industry?
9. What do you think of STEP effectiveness?

*Future improvement:*

10. What should be done for the improvement of the program?

## 4. Findings

The results of the evaluation will be presented in terms of the specific evaluation questions:

### 4.1. Expectations

#### 4.1.1. What do you Think about STEP before you Join the Program?

There are similar points that being answered tailored to the questions that show positive view and expectation of students towards STEP. Both STEP from Hilton Hotel and Shang ri-La Hotel mentions that they see opportunities in their future career if they join the program. They see that if they join STEP they will get more opportunity in their future career by gaining more experiences and knowledge than other graduates.

#### a. Hilton STEP

"I thought it was an opportunity for me to be able to learn more about the industry because I heard that it was including practical in the industry besides having extra theory classes with them." (Male respondent 2).

#### b. Shang Ri-La STEP

"Before I join STEP, I thought it is an outstanding program for me to excel in the future as it promise quite a good job opportunity and it will provide me an excellent experience as it would let us (The STEP Students) to take charge in various kind of events. STEP students are also seen as a role model to most of the lecturer and students." (Male respondent 1).

STEP graduates have similar opinion and expectations towards the program at the first encounter. Most of them think that STEP is a good program that will enhance their skills both in theory and practically that will help them in their future career in hotel industry. Not only that, they also expect that this program is a good opportunity to be better graduates that had relations and better opportunity in getting start with their future employer with leading five stars hotel group. Trough this program they believe they will get better recognitions as a fresh graduated that has potentials. Graduates expect higher chance of joining the hotel industry and get higher job positions that may lead them to be a success people in the leading hotel group. They see opportunity to compete with most of the graduates who graduated from all over the world and proof that they had something more to be accepted to hold such a positions.

#### **4.1.2. What do you Think about STEP after you Join the Program?**

Even though students have indicated that they had good impression in the beginning of the program there are two opposite answer they had after they completed STEP.

##### **A. Hilton STEP**

“The program itself is good and I received more training and exposure from Hilton, moreover, the staff that has been trained me during my internship period were still keep in contact with me and help me to find another position, whether in Hilton or the other Hotel.” (Male respondent 1).

However, STEP graduates who did their program attach with Hilton Hotel tends to give negative perceptions towards it:

During internship we were told that the department heads knew we were STEP students however I felt that training given to us was the same as any intern. We did nt get any specialized training or guidance or even opportunity to do something great. In fact, most department heads were unsure of what STEP program was about also.” (Male respondent 2).

##### **B. Shang Ri-La STEP**

“After being selected to join the program, it was an interesting journey as aligned with what was advertised, we were exposed to the industry in a different manner and the trainings were intense. What we found though was a different story as the criteria for getting chosen showed that with 17 big personalities, aligning our goals as STEP students was difficult from the get go.” (Male respondent 4).

Even though there are a lot of good opinion about STEP, but there are some comment from Shang ri-La graduates that stated their disappointment towards the program:

“Disappointed with the program as it did not really help the students.” (Female respondent 3).

Based on this comparison it became clear that the STEP students have two contradictive opinions towards the program. There is an interesting finding where most of the students who mention positive things about STEP will also state negative things and their disappointment. They agreed that they were trained and gotten knowledge and necessary skills to be a professional people to work in the industry however, graduates think that all of the information given do not reflect their expectation to be excelled in the managerial position.

#### **4.1.3. What is the Reason of you Join STEP?**

Students’ show hope and high expectation how the program can help them in the future career in hospitality industry. They list down different reasons of why they decided to try and challenge themselves to become STEP students.

- To build my career in easier way
- To improve myself.
- To received more knowledge
- To have a privilege to enter leading hotel group as my career path.
- To excel in this industry.
- To find out my strong points in the field.
- To be educated by the well-known leaders in the hotel industry.
- To challenge myself in the first place.
- To experience more and be different from what other students' may experience.

“It is a really well establishment program that is why I am very interested join in and it also help me in employment. If I can get in and work there it will be very good for my future career starts and I love to challenge myself. I expect for better job better positions at least I will not start from bottom.” (Shang ri-La female respondent 5).

### **4.2. Results in Joining STEP**

#### **4.2.1. How you Think your Ingenuity and Skill Development after you Join STEP?**

##### **a. Hilton STEP**

“I would say the internship helped developed my skills as an independent and more task focused, also being more opened to strangers as a person. However I think that without this STEP program I would be able to develop this as well. Reason being is that the internship given was the same as any other internship I have been through” (Male respondent 2).

There are positive responds from the participant towards their development in knowledge and skills. However Hilton STEP students also said that their development is not only from the STEP training f, but also mainly develop because of the educations that they received in Taylor's University. For example they developed their skills in operations and management mostly during their internship with the hotel industry; however it will be the same thing with students that not joined STEP because they had the same internship program. Those finding match with the study of the internship influence the perceptions of students towards the willingness to work with hotel industry by Blomme *et al.* (2009).

### **b. Shang Ri-La STEP**

“Looking back, the skills most refined during the entirety of the program are my interpersonal skills, my ability to work in a team as well as managerial skills. In terms of ingenuity, I think the STEP program provided me with a new way to manage crisis as it provided me with knowledge of what affects or causes issues in the hospitality industry which we probably would not have learnt in our other modules.” (Male respondent 4).

#### **4.2.2. What Job Position they Offered you after you Complete the Program?**

Most of the students were not given any offer from the hotel industry it is because the hotel industry had a barrier in getting work visa for the international graduates. To get the work visa for international students, graduates need to have specifics level of higher job positions in the organization for example managerial positions. Even though STEP students were qualified to hold that positions, graduates need to go through managerial training or development program with the particular hotel industry to had better leadership skills considering the hotel culture and history. STEP graduates who are not Malaysian shows disappointment towards the government policy because they had no chance to work with the industry that they had attached with.

“Executive position. This is, a job that actually offered directly by my ex-department manager, but since I am a foreigner, HR cannot proceed with this application”. (Hilton Male respondent 3).

“Yes, they actually offer me few jobs such as guest relations associate and guest relations officers because I was concentrating in front office and food and beverage department. They offer me not from the lower rank positions but can start from the middle rank positions.” (Hilton Female respondent 5).

#### **4.2.3. Is There any Different amount of Salary that you get in the Workplace after you Join STEP? Why?**

This questions is mostly unrelated to the graduates whom not working with the hotel industry that they attached with. However, there are differences by Hilton Hotel and Shang ri-La Hotel in this section because graduates who are working in Hilton Hotels have no difference in salary with other people who were not from STEP. In Shang ri-La Hotel, graduates were hinted that they will get a better offer from the company to show appreciation of different skills and knowledge that they achieve while doing the STEP with education they got from Taylor's University.

“The salary will be different; they hinted that there would be different amount. However, STEP students get better opportunity and recognitions especially from people from higher job position people like manager will look into students' performance and if they see any available positions they will prioritize that particular student.” (Female respondent 5).

Most of the graduates mentions that they have no intentions to work with the hotel industry that they attach with while doing the program because they experienced disappointments towards their expectations. One of the important supports for them to work is money, however this was not offered to the graduates. This gap becomes one of the reasons that made them loose interest to work in hotel industry.

#### **4.2.4. What are the Most Significant Things that you Gain after Join STEP?**

Graduates mentioned that the most significant thing that they gained is the understanding of the company in terms of history and property around the world. As they have gone through trainings on how the hotels run even before graduates did their internship with the company.

Knowledge, skill sets and social networking are the benefit that they developed and gained during the program will help them in their future career. Being part of the program itself, beneficial for STEP graduates to differentiate them from other hospitality graduates. It proves that STEP graduates have that quality and knowledgege about the industry not only within the company but it will make the graduates recognize by other hotel company.

#### **4.2.5. How do you Think that Join STEP can affect your Future Career in Hotel Industry?**

STEP Hilton graduates believe that joining this program will help them secure a job in the hotel industry easier however it will not provide any fast track in the industry. Knowledge and skills sets are not something that pops up in matters of seconds. Both are achieved through process and experience. STEP can affect graduates' future career in hotel industry by showing that they were the selected person in this program. If they were not working under the hotel that affiliated with their STEP program anymore, other chain hotels will also look at them differently since they were undergoing STEP program before.

“By the process, there are a lot of things that can be learnt. It affects the future career as when you put the name of that program in your CV, your future employer will be impressed because even before you are graduating from the university, you have prove yourself that you are worthy enough for the hotel brand to be educated” (Hilton female respondent 4).

“STEP is like a key to enter the first stage of my career. If you have done well, you will gain a good recognition. It is easier and gives us a higher chance to step further in hotel industry.” (Shang ri-La male respondent 2).

#### **4.2.6. What do you Think of STEP Effectiveness?**

Participant showed different opinion regarding the effectiveness of the program, numbers of graduates said it is effective because it helps them in many ways but some of them said that STEP is an ineffective program that they might not want to be part of it. However, graduates agree that the effectiveness of the program was measured by individual's perceptions towards the program.

##### **a. Positive Comment**

“STEP is an effective program since I been prepared with a lot of possible case scenarios that will happen during my working life. It also gave me solution for those scenarios.” (Hilton male respondent 3). “STEP training considered effective because most of the theory can actually be applied in the work place.” (Shang ri-La female respondent 5).

It actually depends on the individual itself, by knowing that STEP is not the so-called 'direct employment' from the hotel. Individuals still have to prove him/herself to the hotel in order to have that chance to be recruited. Yes, selection is the first step but after that, from the classroom trainings and the internships, the students will be assessed based on their credibility.

“This program supposedly is very good and effective, the class training is also very good to broaden the knowledge about hospitality industry further, but I do not know why in the end the result is not what I am expected and somewhat, disappointing.” (Hilton male respondent 1).

The effectiveness of STEP can be measure by fifty-fifty percent, because most of the STEP graduates were not work in the hotel industry mainly because they experience hardship in the internship. It is not because the STEP fault but because the graduates mentality unprepared for it.

#### **4.2.7. What should be Done for the Improvement of the Program?**

Overall, the program needs to be developed in many ways by restructure the program using the IDDIE method and plan it based on the students needs and goals. Future improvements need to be made by both Taylor's University and the hotel industry to cater the students' need and importance. Graduates agree that STEP need more in-depth planning on standardizes the training material. These developments need to focus on avoiding the students' disappointment feeling while they joined STEP. To solve it, the roots of the problem need to be identified by knowing students' expectations and needs. Restructure the entire benefit that offer to the potential STEP students and make sure that every of the points mentions fulfilled.

Other suggestions from STEP graduates; the program need to focus more on learning about individual's strength and weaknesses and focus on building their character towards that. And this means having proper mentors from the industry to really guide them all the way.

“I think the program they set up is pretty good as a whole. What needs to be done though is choosing the correct mentor for each individual group according to the nature of the students within the group. The mentor then would have to stay involved and spark interest as well as create hype throughout the entirety of the program.” (Shang ri-La male respondent 4).

“The structure of the program (classroom trainings, internships, future career) has to be planned and ironed out before the selection of the students itself. This gives at least the alignment of thoughts among Taylor's, hotel and the students.” (Hilton female respondent 4).

The one thing I truly regret was they were unable to put me in the area or department where I think I would have excelled. I understand that quota is the reason, but if the program was planned accordingly, it would not be an issue.“ (Hilton female respondent 4).

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1. Summary of Findings**

It is clear that STEP has been a program that not as effective as it wanted to be, because of the perceptions of graduates that change gradually after they join the program.

Students have positive expectations towards STEP, because this program provides students development in knowledge and skills that will help students trained by leading hotel industry. After they join STEP, students give contradiction perceptions about the program. However this study find that students who give their positive opinion also state negative perceptions about the program. Graduates join the program because of various reasons but mainly aim for a better opportunity in the future career employment.

There are significant knowledge and skills improvement that students get from STEP. However different hotel STEP graduates gave different opinion towards it. Hilton STEP graduates said that their knowledge and skill need improved however it is not mainly because of the training program but mostly because the course they received was from Taylor's University. Different from Shangri-La STEP graduates who said that they gain the important skills from the SUPLEX module that created by the hotel management. In that module students learn more about interpersonal skills that important for their future career.

Unfortunately, only few students are employed at the hotel they attached to during the program. They were offered to certain middle positions, however graduates also mention that they were offered that positions not only because of the program but mainly because of the internship program where they showed their skills. Salary affected them generally is the same as other new employees. Graduates feel that what they gained most from the program were better understanding of the hotel industry and their vision mission.

Overall effectiveness if measured by those criteria, graduates showed two different answers which is effective and ineffective. This answer showed that the effectiveness of the program depends on the individuals. In the recommendations graduates stated two major things that need to be improved, they are; first, students believe STEP needs to have different mentors to train different individuals with different needs. Second, graduates also believe that internship program is important for students' future career. That is why during the internship, graduates want to explore the department they want to excel in, however students demand the availability of positions in that particular department.

### **5.2. Answers to Research Questions**

#### **1. What are Students' Expectations and Perceptions toward STEP before and after they Join the Program?**

Before students join STEP their expectations towards the program are positive however after they join the STEP they tend to give negative feedback.

#### **2. What are the Positive and Negative effects of the Program towards Students Future Career in Hospitality Industry?**

The positive effect of the STEP is graduates obtained training with the hotel industry and knew more about hotel culture and work force. It enhances their personality and ability to work in the hotel industry. The negative effect of STEP they cannot choose hotel they want to work with for their internship other than the hotel brand they attach with.

#### **3. Is there any Difference in Salary, Job Positions and Knowledge after Join the STEP?**

In terms of salary most of the students has no difference in salary between STEP graduates and other graduates. International students has no chance to work with the company in Malaysia because of the visa restriction, it causes most of the graduates cannot work and has certain level of job positions in Malaysia hotel company. Even though both job positions and salary have no significant difference for the STEP graduates, graduates have improved their skills and knowledge significantly after they join the program. Mainly improve in their knowledge of the background, vision, mission of the hotel and also interpersonal skills and management skills.

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