

PERCEPTIONS OF HOSPITALITY STUDENTS ON PROFESSIONAL CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN HOTEL INDUSTRY: NORTHWESTERN PROVINCE, SRI LANKA

W M S P Weerakoon¹, D.A.C Silva²

¹*Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, Kurunegal,
sampathweerakoon26@gmail.com*

²*Department of Economics, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo
drsuranga@econ.cmb.ac.lk*

Abstract

Sri Lanka is a tourist destination majority of the employment opportunities are generated through the hospitality industry. Accordingly, several hospitality industry-based training schools are established and provide quality employees to the hospitality industry. However, it was identified that the perception of the hotel school students has been demotivated and the majority of the students are reluctant to continue their job, which has not been addressed in prior research. This research identifies the perception of hospitality students regarding career advancement in their profession in the North-Western province. The research aims to create a strategic approach to generate more enrolment and continuation of the hospitality industry-based profession.

Accordingly, this research was conducted using the mixed research approach. The questionnaire survey was conducted for a sample of 286 students in the Northwestern province. Then the questionnaire survey outcome is validated through interviews conducted with Human Resource Managers in the hotel sector.

The research reveals that the perception of hotel school students on career advancement is not affected by the nature of the work, promotions, and pay benefits. It is only affected by the social status as identified and validated through the questionnaire survey and interviews. Furthermore, the research reveals that the student's perception of career advancement in relation to other independent variables is not affected by demographic factors such as gender, age, and years of experience in the hotel industry. The research recommends creating a positive mindset, involvement with technology, and managerial responsibilities support to increase the retention of hospitality students and avoid, and lack of perception on career advancement.

Keywords: *Hospitality Industry, Hospitality Students, Career Advancement, Student Perception*

1.0 Introduction

Sri Lanka is known to be a major tourist destination in the South Asian region where the tourism industry has been the best economic stimulator in the country. Premier, enhances social mobility as well as foreign exchange earnings, which is the third-largest foreign exchange income of the country (Kim & Spears, 2021). It is observable that the hospitality industry needs more skillful and qualified employees to provide services to tourists. Sri Lanka is a major tourist destination, and a plethora of career opportunities have developed across the hotels and restaurants for providing the best facilities for tourist arrivals. It is evident that many types of research have been conducted internationally as well as locally regarding the hospitality industry. The tourism industry is not just a field yet a company of other fields too.

It is required to investigate the effectiveness of course contents, and future career prospects in order to retain qualified young men and women in the industry in order to provide services for tourists (Kumara, 2018). In Sri Lanka, there are very few research studies on the effectiveness of hospitality courses and learners' career prospects. As a consequence of that, it is evident that many students depart from continuing their professional careers in the hotel industry. Hence, this research is conducted to fill the gap between the empirical and theoretical research studies on the perception of hospitality students to create more enrolment and continuation of hospital education (Jung & Yoon, 2015). Therefore the research attempts to investigate the factors determining the perception of hospitality students for their professional career advancement of hotel industry in Sri Lanka with special reference to hotel schools in North-western Province and examine the effective strategies that can enhance the positive perception of Hospitality students of continuing their studies in Hospitality Management. Further this research focused on achieving research aim while examining the current opportunities, trends and patterns available for Hospitality students to their professional career advancement in the hotel industry of Sri Lanka, analyzing the factors determining the perception of Hospitality students on their career advancement in the hotel industry of Sri Lanka, and finding out the most effective strategies that can be employed to enhance the positive perception of hospitality students on their career advancement in the hotel industry of Sri Lanka

2.0 Literature Review of the Study

The Tourism and Hospitality industry has become a major field where it provides direct and indirect career opportunities for people around the world. The concept of career can be defined as a stratified enhancement in an organization and there is a vigorous relationship between the career, organization and society. According to Calinaud et al., (2020) in "Career Advancement for Women in the British Hospitality Industry: The Enabling Factors" reveals how female participation in career advancement has been identified in the U.K. Ekanayake & Sasitharan (2016) assert that the industry needs experienced-based tourism skills which is a timely requirement in a local context that depicts the current trends and requirement patterns. According to the tourism and hospitality industry, perception is defined as "an individual interpretation and a particular image for a subject which develops certain opinions, attitudes towards a place or for an organization" (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). According to scholarly articles, it is evident that many undergraduates tend to follow a degree before they enter the

tourism and hospitality field (Roney & Oztin, 2007). Most undergraduates think that they want to be an assistant manager or a supervisor where they expect a good salary and career promotion which highlights their career advancement perceptions and attitudes towards the industry (El-houshy, 2019).

2.1 Expectancy value theory of achievement motivation

As Wigfield (1994) stated that an individual's expectations for success and achieving those needs motivation which is a key determinant of their success. The motivation an individual has determines their performance and the extent of achieving a target. Here, the theory is shaped by the students' beliefs, values and behaviour to achieve their aims and expectancies and this also suggests that their prospects are determined by the cultural milieu the student lives in. Chiang & Jang (2008) assert that the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of employees is associated with payment, the work they are assigned, the hours and the opportunity for promotions, social status, and career challenges in the field. According to this study, the opportunities the students have in career selection and advancement are key determinants to enhance the students' motivation where the educational institutes have a major role in attracting students for the industry by offering valid course contents and appropriate degree programs which accelerate the students' motivation.

Social cognitive career theory

The theory applies to explain the individual's interests in career advancements, their career choices and how it decides the employees' performance. According to Hughes (2020), Bandura asserts Self- efficiency which reveals the individual's ability to perform a task, what they may know and how to accomplish a certain ability according to their beliefs and attitude. Chuang and Dellmann's study (2010) on "Career Decision Making and Intention: a Study of Hospitality Undergraduate Students" describes that their career intentions, outcomes and accomplishments depend on their current employment status, transfer status and internship experience. Therefore, it is evident that Bandura's theory on Social Cognitive Career has an impact on selecting career choices.

The person-organization fit theory

The employees' attitudes and intentions have an influence on the effectiveness of one's career, customer satisfaction and the organization. Therefore, comprehending employee attitudes and perceptions are very much vital to attract skilful and talented personnel to the industry. The person-organization theory plays a major role where it contributes to manifesting the correlation between employee satisfaction and the intention towards a particular organization which can be comprehended through the culture of particular organizations and individual preferences. According to Tepeci (2011), situational and personal factors are significant where one's personality, skills, dispositions, organizational setting, and working environment have an impact on the behaviour of the organization and its employees. According to the above theory, the young personnel's attitudes and perceptions to join a certain organization, its cultural factors and individual intentions are interrelated where employees are attracted to organizations that have similar characteristics to the individual's concerns. Therefore, it is evident that the person-organization fit theory has an impact on the employees' career satisfaction.

The big five personality traits

This theory is the most accepted theory among educators because it provides an overview of individuals' personality traits which describes human behaviour using extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism which means emotional stability. These factors are subject to change with the exposure an individual has, in terms of environmental factors and some factors depend on one's genetic endowment. Soto (2018) asserts that individuals who are extroverts seem to be more open when they have enough social interaction with other people. These students are active and they are confident about their skills and abilities and capable enough to explore careers alone. Children with agreeableness are ready to do social services, and religious work and they tend to help others where it is necessary this assists them to adapt to any career environment which is a positive aspect of this quality. Tekin & Kalkan (2017) state that there is an interrelationship between openness personality traits and the service-oriented approach of hospitality employees in Turkey.

Career construction theory

Savicka's Career Construction theory manifests how individuals' careers are constructed. Rasheed (2017) indicates that this model provides vocational behaviour of employees in diverse career environments, and it explains how career counsellors can guide their career clients in deciding career choices and how to offer a successful career at their working places. The theory discusses differential perspectives that explain what individuals prefer to do in their careers. According to Mooney & Jameson's (2018) research, it is evident that global, societal and personal factors influence construction career identities where his study is based on Career Construction Theory, where the undergraduates have stated that the negative experience they got changed their career decision of selecting tourism industry despite hospitality industry which depicts the difficulty of career adaptation and personality development in the field of hospitality. Career adaptability manifests how an individual should adapt to a career in order to meet its requirements. The factors like exploration, orientation, establishment, disengagement and management are advanced in adapting to a career environment (Bausz, 2019).

Theory of planned behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour was known as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 which describes the individual's willingness to perform a certain behaviour in a specific place and at a time. Lamorte (2019) describes that the theory also says that individuals have the capability to self-control particular behaviours. The above theory is closely related to the career intentions and advancements of an individual which is determined by attitudes, social factors and perceived behaviour control.

Attitudes- This is an important factor that describes the favourable or unfavourable behaviours to a certain question. The attitudes of students or learners have an impact on the career choice where it has outcome. Their positive attitudes influence them to select a career according to their choices and negative attitudes may deviate from the choices earlier they made.

Behavioural intentions- This leads to performing a certain behaviour due to its motivational factors. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors assist to attract an individual to a certain

vocation or the individuals may tend to select their career path due to motivational factors such as wage, responsibility, and social status.

Subjective norms- The above component describes that peers and the most important people in one's life approve or disapprove of a certain behaviour where an individual considers their beliefs to perform a behaviour. In career choice, people tend to believe their peers' and close people's opinion about a certain career that they hope to do at a particular time.

Social norms- The normative or standard norms that people bear for a particular behaviour. The social prestige of a particular career may depend on the social norms that society commonly accepts.

Perceived power- The one's power over the above factors, which empowers them to perform a certain behaviour. Here, the attitudes, and social and subjective norms have a direct impact to perform a behaviour that is powerful and perceived through these factors.

Perceived behavioural control- This provides an idea of how each person's perceptions impact performing a certain behaviour. The perceptions may vary and change with the expectations and attitudes. When selecting the most appropriate career, a person acts according to their perceptions and interests towards a field.

A summary of all the theoretical findings has been blended and developed in an effective manner to deliver a reliable outcome. The theoretical findings demonstrate the combination of all the available knowledge areas to overcome the practical applications and identification of the student's perception of the development of their career.

3.0 Methodology

The nature of work is a complicated term to define. It entails different aspects of the job role such as work durations, shifts, physical environment related to the work process, stakeholders involved in regular work performance, and many more. These aspects can be summarized into a single component the level of ease the nature of work offers. However, it cannot be assumed that with ease of work positive perceptions towards career advancement increase.

Table 3.1 : The list of names of research studies and variables

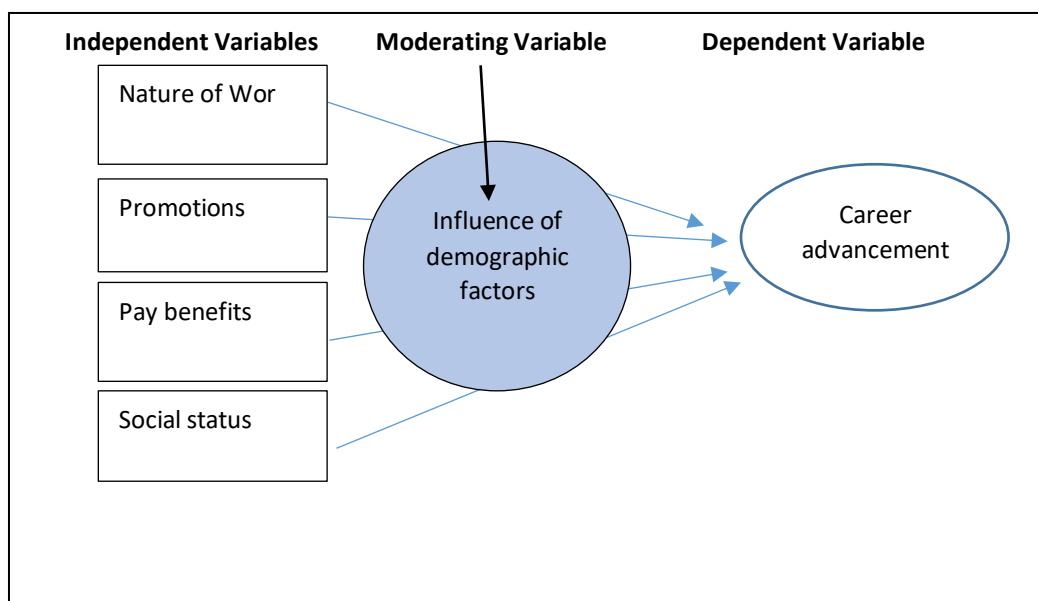
Reference	Variables
Rosyidi M.I.,(2021)	Nature of work, the opportunity for a promotion, salary/benefits, industry-person congeniality and social status
Ibrahim et al., (2020)	Nature of work, social status
El-houshy (2019)	Gender, work experience , Willingness to study
Bausz T. (2019)	Job opportunities, the attractiveness of the industry, promotional opportunities, career development, working with people, the expected time for promotions
Lusby C., (2017)	Nature of work, social status, industry person congeniality, physical working conditions, pay/fringe benefits, promotion, co-workers, managers and commitment to the industry

Richardson S., (2014)	Work experience, nature of work, social status and industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, pay and benefits promotional opportunities, co-workers and managers and commitment to the industry
Richardson S., (2010)	Work experience, nature of work, social status and industry-person congeniality, physical working conditions, pay and benefits promotional opportunities, co-workers and managers and commitment to the industry

According to the table 3.1, it is evident that most of the research is concerned with some common variables like the Nature of work, promotions, social status and pay benefits. The moderating/ fifth factor that is identified in the literature review is the demographic profile of the respondent. With the internal characteristics of the individual and the external background of the individual, his/ her perceptions of career advancements, acceptance of the nature of work, and perception of promotions and pay benefits will differ from one another. Perception of social status is also a combination of the internal characteristics of the individual and the external background of the individual. Therefore, the demographic profile plays a mediating role in the relationship between selected dependent and independent variables as well as directly influencing the dependent variable.

Figure 3.1 describes the conceptual framework of the research. Accordingly, the dependent variable of the research is the perception of career advancement which is directly influenced by perceptions of the nature of the work, promotions, pay benefits, and social status. Although demographic factors affect independent variables, and their relationship with the dependent variable as well as the dependent variable directly, the researcher found including all such effects complicates the research. Therefore, the research assumes the direct effect of demographic factors on the dependent variable and its effect on the relationship between independent and dependent variables is insignificant in comparison to the effect of demographic factors on independent variables.

Figure 3.1 : Conceptual framework for the study



3.1 Data collection tool

The data collection tool will be a questionnaire consisting of several ranking questions. Furthermore, the outcome of the questionnaire survey is given to hotel Human Resources Managers to ensure the validity of the outcome. Moreover, the process includes the obtaining of strategic methods to overcome the issues related to the perception of the career advancement of the students. A key information interview is conducted with the human resource managers selected from five hotels with more than 5 years of hotel industry experience.

The following table demonstrates the key information interview area of the Human Resource Managers along with the measurement units.

Table 3. 1: *Questionable areas of the Key Information Interview*

Questionable Areas	Measurement of Units
How do you feel the trainees' perception?	Manual content analysis
Do they have a positive perception of the career?	Manual content analysis
Are they energetic while performing their responsibilities?	Manual content analysis
Students' perception of the hotel industry is negative. What is your opinion regarding their perception?	Manual content analysis
What are the possible reasons affecting hotel school students' perception of career development?	Manual content analysis
Will their perception affect the future hotel industry development?	Manual content analysis
What are the possible strategies taken by your organisation to overcome these issues?	Manual content analysis

Sampling

The population of this study is the current hospitality students who study in hotel schools in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. However, the population size is not known. As per the convenience, three hotel schools within the area are selected. The sample frame for the research would be the list of current students in these three hotel schools which had 1,000 students altogether. Yamane's formula shown below will be used in calculating the sample size obtained from each hotel school.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where,

- n = Sample size from each hotel school
- N = Number of current students at each school
- e = margin of error (Since confidence level is 95% chances of an error is 5%)

Accordingly, a total of 286 students will be selected randomly from the 1004 students from the existing students within all three hotel schools in consideration.

The Human Resource Managers are selected from hotels based on the purposive sampling technique. Five interviewees are selected to ensure the quality of the outcome. The human resource managers are selected with more than 5 years of hotel industry experience.

3.2 Data Analysis

The ultimate analysis scales of the research would be composite scales formulated by Likert scales. As each item in the Likert scale has 5 responses and each Likert scale involves 5 items, the range of the Likert scales used in the research will be between 5 – 25. The researcher evaluated different analysis possibilities of variables for a meaningful interpretation within this range. Analysis of Likert scale data has created arguments on which type of statistical analysis suits them in terms of parametric and non-parametric analysis methods (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015). In case the parametric methods are used the Likert scale data will be treated as interval scale data. While some scholars view this assumption to be valid and state that both methods used on Likert scale data will provide similar results (Murray, 2013). However, some scholars argue that such an assumption cannot be made as the difference between two Likert scale points cannot be assumed to equal the numeric value of one, and such assumptions lead to erroneous conclusions (Omillo, 2019).

The data analysis for the interviews conducted with the Hotel Human Resources Managers is done with the manual content analysis technique. The outcome of the interview transcript is coded accordingly to ensure the validity of the questionnaire survey outcome and to identify the possible strategies to address the research question.

The researcher weighed opinions on using different analysis techniques and concluded that non-parametric statistics will provide a meaningful interpretation of the data. Ordinal logistic regression, which is associated with probabilities related to an event, was used in analyzing the data.

4.0 Data Presentation

4.1 Relationship between career development among the hotel school students

The summary statistics on each Likert scale are indicated in Table 4.1 The central tendency was measured based on mean, median, and mode. Since these values are different from one another a normal distribution of data cannot be observed by the naked eye. Table 2 indicate statistical evidence that proves data distributions are not normal in an objective manner. The values indicate that most perceptions of the students lie closer to a positive one since mean, median, and mode are closer to the value of 30, the value indicating a completely positive perception.

Table 4.1: Summary statistics on the distribution of variables

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
1. Perception of career advancement	24.06	25.00	30	4.89
2. Perception of payments and other benefits	22.54	23.00	30	5.84
3. Perception on promotions	22.15	22.00	22	4.65
4. Perception of the nature of work	23.77	24.00	30	4.71
5. Perception of the social status of a career in the hotel industry	24.60	25.00	30	5.03

Since the data is not distributed normally, parametric regression cannot be applied to them. Non-parametric regression models are identified as a suitable techniques in such circumstances (Li, Wong, & Lamoureux, 2012). Since the purpose of the research is to identify the influence of different factors on the perception of career advancement, the ordinal regression model, a probability-based relationship model was selected as the appropriate option to analyze data. Table 3 indicates the model fitting values. Accordingly, the model with all the considered variables provides a better explanation of the variability in the perception of career advancement compared to the model with an only interception. The statistics were similar to the model with four independent variables only. In the same manner, the goodness of fit statistics, as well as R-square values, were similar to the previous circumstance.

Table 4.2: Statistics on model fit

Model	-2log likelihood	Chi-square	df	Significance
Intercept only	642.771	642.771	9	0.000
With all the independent variables	0.000			

Table 4.2 indicates the parametric statistics of the model. Accordingly, none of the demographic factors had a significant influence on the perception of career advancement.

Table 4.3: Summary of the research findings

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Significance
1. Perception of payments and other benefits	0.006	0.058	0.010	1	0.921
2. Perceptions on promotions	0.050	0.070	0.508	1	0.476
3. Perceptions of the nature of work	0.041	0.090	0.208	1	0.648
4. Perceptions of social status	1.714	0.193	78.915	1	0.000
5. Age = 20 – 30 years	-0.276	0.499	0.304	1	0.581
6. Age = Above 30 years	-0.005	1.030	0.000	1	0.996
7. Age = Below 20 years	Reference level				
8. Experience = 1 – 12 months	0.582	0.482	1.459	1	0.227
9. Experience = More than 12 months	0.382	0.790	0.234	1	0.628
10. Experience = No experience	Reference level				
11. Gender = Female	0.289	0.450	0.414	1	0.520
12. Gender = Male	Reference level				

The specific relationship between career advancement and other major determinacies

The outcome of the quantitative analysis is that perception of career advancement is significantly influenced by the perception of the social status of a career in the hotel sector. None of the variables related to perceptions of payments and benefits, nature of work, and promotions, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and years of industry exposure did have a significant influence on the perception of career advancement. Discussing it further perception of social status included three dimensions. It asked how an individual feels valued

in his/ her eye in terms of economic, social, and environmental perspectives by engaging in a career in the hotel industry. The second dimension is how an individual felt respected by the immediate social contacts including family, friends, or relatives as well as social contacts in the general society which are personally unknown. The third dimension is the reputation and value attached to the particular hotel brand that the individual works for. These dimensions influence career perception in terms of an individual's satisfaction with the career, positive attitude towards financial and non-financial rewards of the career, and general content with the work environment. More simplistically, an individual's decision to pursue a career in the hotel industry is encouraged by his/her opinion on social status received by it. Thereafter, the individual is concerned with personal gains and a satisfactory work atmosphere. If these perceptions are positive, there is a chance that hotel school students will pursue a long-term career within the hotel industry.

Overview of HR Managers on Hotel School Students in the North-Western Province

As the quantitative analysis indicated, students in the hospitality sector have more positive opinions on their future professions within the hotel industry in terms of career advancement, payments and benefits received, opportunities to be promoted, nature of duties, and the social status of the career offer for him/her. However, for a positive perception of career advancement, the positive perception of social status received by the career should be developed. The managerial staff was also questioned on these student perceptions. Such information can provide an idea of the accuracy of student perceptions and the degree to which managerial opinion and reality deviate from the student perceptions. The demographic background of the respondents at the managerial level has an impact on forming their opinion. Less female representation, comparatively a long-serving period in the field of human resource management, and comparatively younger ages of around 30 years were the key highlight of the demography of managerial staff. The female representation among HR managers was only 20%. All of them seem to have a considerable level of experience starting from 8 years of experience to 20 years of experience.

5.0 Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

Career advancement is a key factor in any industry. The influence on the understanding of career advancement and development uplifts job satisfaction. This research analysed the perception of hospitality students on professional career advancement in the hotel industry with reference to ABC hotel schools in Northwestern province. The outcome of the research was addressed in relation to three objectives the identification of current opportunities, trends and patterns in career advancement, analyzing the factors determining the perception of career advancement and identifying the best strategies to implement positive perception on the hotel school students on career advancement.

The expanding largest employment sector world over would be the hospitality tourism sector. It contributes a large chunk to the economic growth and development of a nation. Tourism is a

bright and potential future, offering a variety of career opportunities. If this industry needs to live through the pandemic and retain the existing employees, qualified labour with experience and training for students wanting to explore the hospitality sector is required together with career-enhancing programs for managerial and other positions. The tourism and hospitality industry changes according to the needs and demands created. Employing a number of young and casual employees where work can be hectic and demanding to some and to others satisfying with greener opportunities than being home-based in their homelands.

Economic, social and environmental perspectives influence career ratings in an individual's career, bringing positive outcomes towards financial and non-financial career rewards. It is evident that for an individual to continue working in a hotel atmosphere that person's opinion of his/her social status becomes a deciding factor. An individual looks for the hotel brand where he/she wants to work, a satisfactory work environment, personal gains in the future, and the respect of family and friends when selecting a hotel to work for. This positive perception will help hotel school students to choose a long-term based career in the hotel sector.

Students of the hospitality industry have strong opinions on their professions as hoteliers – pay benefits, nature of duties and promotions. The managerial staff were also asked and their answers varied from the students' perceptions. Female employers are relatively low in the hotel sector, totalling 20% of HR Managers. Despite the COVID-19 setback, tourism is a booming network in Sri Lanka, currently overdeveloped but due to the lacking of trained workers and professionals in the industry, hospitality is facing a few hiccups. Hotel school graduates as observed by the Managers are lazy, irresponsible, having high reward expectations.

Government hotel school A produce students that cooperate with industry expectations and are courteous, willing and dedicated. Government Institutions such as Government hotel school B and National Apprentice Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) have no appealing adaptable graduates who will think of out-of-the-box concepts.

The research findings derive the following recommendations for the hospitality sector in the Sri Lankan context, for its development. Therefore, the recommendations are categorised as an industry based, hotel school based and hotel school student based recommendations.

Hospitality school students are undergraduate students in the hospitality and tourism program who require practical on the job training to work in five-star hotel groups and even on the outskirts of a resort as an internship or apprenticeship. Provide training that opens up thoughts of young and potential talent, skill and creativity thinking. Students must familiarize themselves with the digital world as media auditing and blogging. Development of professionalism and human qualities among the hotel school students to develop their career advancement in the professional career that ultimately increases the perception of career advancement. Students must be able to build a coherent approach to the assets of the organization and gain opportunities to effectively practice the business in the hospitality industry. Unbiased opinions and recommendations from peers improved working conditions and standards.

Team leaders and those in managerial positions in the hospitality industry in Sri Lanka must be open to innovation and fresh ideas from these youngsters and not treat them as trainees. Hospitality is affected by social trends, staying ahead of the curve, learning new online skills, like social media content, and data analytics and managing customer service feedback will give an added advantage when seeking employment. Strategic planning and understanding the requirements will bring the nation desirable effects and productivity. Develop a master plan in the hospitality industry for its development.

Hotel schools must use social status as a marketing tool to develop positive attitudes among the students. Social status can be used as a tool to reduce employee turnover and increase productivity among students. Increase the professionalism and soft skills among the hotel school students. Focus more on the quality of the study program and training. Enjoying cultural exchanges, and opting for a career in tourist management must be the international campaign enhanced by universities when marketing themselves in other countries. Providing feasible economical programs and sometimes even offering in-house accommodation if they are travelling from afar for interested students.

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