

# ***Can Academic Performance Predict Training Performance?***

## ***Exploring Why High Performing Students Fail During on the Job Training and Vice Versa***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The vocational education is characterized by the experiential learning element in its curricula. While it is a crucial part to enhance students' knowledge, skill, and attitude, it may not be implemented and evaluated in such a way that help student's development and performance in the job-related competencies. Indeed, research within the area of training or experiential learning has not been conclusive. The vocational education has largely ignored the importance of understanding student's performance both on campus and in the industry. Building on this notion, this study aimed at investigating whether academic performance is similar to training performance and, what could be the underlying reasons. Data were collected using unstructured interview method to 23 students undertook the 6 months on job training program. A qualitative data analysis was employed to answer the research questions. The results of this study revealed that academic performance does not always mean training performance. Some students with good academic performance were failed in the training program. On the other hand, average students demonstrated an outstanding performance during on the job training. The analysis of the study showed that students' performances are attributed to internal and external factors. The internal factor consists of expectation, adaptability, and capability. Whereas, the external factors include supporting facilities, opportunity and empowerment, and working environment. The implication of this study is that hotel school and industry should help students to improve their performance during on the job training program. Further suggestions for training program design and future research are proposed in light of the results.

**Keywords:** *Academic performance, On the job training, Training performance, Vocational education*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Vocational education requires a combination of theoretical and practical elements in its curricula in order to produce ready-to-use graduates. Theoretical and experiential learning is indeed an effective method in vocational education [1]. In fact, the latter is considered an important component particularly at a secondary education level [2], [3], especially within the tourism and hospitality as a consequence of its operating and human resources characteristics [4]. This practical aspect of the vocational education delivery is termed training or internship program.

The training program is expected to enhance students' knowledge, skill, and attitude. It should help students' readiness and confidence to pursue their future hospitality career. Training program gives opportunities for students to become part of the daily operations [5], improve their job-related competencies, and problem solving skills [3]. Moreover, the training program enables students to engage actively in their learning. Indeed, through personal experiences, students construct their understanding toward what is being learned [6].

The training program is critical to the success of vocational education as well as students' decision on future career. As such, it is essential to ensure that the training program runs smoothly and addresses its purposes. Hotel school, hotels, and students play their part in the implementation of the program [5]. Hotel school provides students with prior knowledge, skills, and attitude while hotels or companies should provide empowerment and environment to help students grow in terms of their competencies. Whereas, students should manage their own receptivity as to acquiring the benefits of the program.

Hotel school may have done its best to prepare students before the training program however, the success of the program and students' training performance may not be guaranteed. Besides students' receptivity, the working environment in the hotel plays a considerable role on students' performance during on the job training program. Therefore, students' training performance is an area that is worth investigation. More specifically, a question of whether high performing students perform well during training has not been answered.

While workplace learning constitutes an important component in the training program of vocational education, study within this area has not yet been conclusive [2]. Previous research on vocational education has mainly focused on motivation, satisfaction, and coping strategy [7], [5]. Building on this background, this study sought to contribute to the literature by exploring whether academic performing is similar to training performance. The outcome of this study should provide valuable information for education providers and industry practitioners to help students improve their performance during on the job training program.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research was conducted based on vocational education literature that includes training and student performance.

### ***2.1 Vocational Education***

The continuous changes of external environments such as industrial trends, technological advancement, and market development has forced business practitioners to continuously adapt and become flexible in their operations [5]. The changes in the business operations implies changes in the delivery of vocational education. Universities have restructured their curricula and take a more vocational approach in their program [8].

Vocational education has been said to offer great benefits especially for younger students and make enormous contributions to the economy and their lives [9]. Furthermore, vocational study should ascertain that students acquire skills to meet the requirement of industry. As such, every student should have equal opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge, and industrial competencies. In other words, educational institutions should fulfil the demands of students to be ready for employment, rather than focusing on governments or other party's needs. Moreover, educational institutions should be flexible, efficient, and directly responsive to labor market changes. On the other side, the government should pay more attention to other key roles such as monitoring and evaluation quality [9].

The vocational education is also known as 'school-to-work transition' [10], [11], [12], [13], [14] that provides students with orientation of work-related knowledge and experiences [15]. In fact, most students face difficulties when directly entering workplace and pursuing their professional careers after classroom activities [14]. Therefore, internship programs offer an opportunity to overcome any substantial gaps between college-learned theory and practical reality [10], [12]. This program is crucial in students' transition from college to the work environment [13].

### ***2.2 Training Program***

In the vocational education literature, the work-related experiences in the vocational education is called on the job training program, student work experience, placements, internships, cooperative education, experiential education, or work-integration education. The practice is thought to help students gain hands-on experience, put textbook theories into action, and reflect on their future careers [16]. With real involvement in the daily business operations, students can enhance their skills. Moreover, the industrial practice experiences have become compulsory to complement the traditional classroom learning [5]. Within the hospitality education, this program is conducted in hotels or restaurants.

In undertaking the training program, students may choose the department they are interested in and whether local, national, or international hotels. One of the vital points of international hotel operations is manpower management [17]. It is particularly true as hotel business mainly portrays a heavy interaction of people both as customer and service provider. From the hotel side, the competencies of staff in performing daily tasks are crucial for retaining hotel guest's satisfaction and overall hotel's performance. References [17] put forward that there are five categories of professional competency in the hospitality industry: professional knowledge, professional skills, communication ability, management ability, and service attitude. Ideally, hotel employees demonstrate the five competencies to satisfy their hotel guests. However, not all hotels are able to perform the five competencies in a favorable manner. Besides, there are hospitality students among the employees who are undertaking a job training program and are likely to have insufficient competencies.

In fact, the training program provides opportunities for students to acquire more job-related competencies, although they have been introduced and have been trained on campus, at least on a basic level. During on the job training program, students are exposed to a real life of hotel operations and become part of it. Being inside of the system, students possibly have interactions with senior employees and potentially hotel guests. Moreover, it is possible for students to involve in problem solving situations. During this program, students enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitude. Thus, training programs are vital for vocational education [5] to produce ready-to-use graduates.

### ***2.3 Student Performance***

Vocational education constitutes experiential learning. Thereby, the combination of theoretical and industrial practice is an effective method [1]. On campus, students learn theoretical and practical aspects. However, mostly the practical aspect does not reflect the real

situation of a hotel or hospitality business. Only schools that own a restaurant or hotel will allow students to be part of the real-life operations directly.

In a vocational education, student performance consists of academic and training aspects. The former is conducted by the educational institution, whereas the latter is by hotels or restaurants where students take their training program. Students performance during on the job training is essential to help students gain the job-related competence [18] before becoming the real hotel employee or hotelier. The training program helps students to grow in terms of skills, knowledge, and attitude and need to be continuously evaluated. As a key element of vocational education [2], assessment of student performance during internship or on the job training program is equally important especially in exploring how the academic and training performance differ. Students may perform well during on campus learning, but may fail during the training program. Indeed, students frequently feel anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty when entering an internship program [2]. One of the key characteristics of hospitality operations is that it requires a high level of customer encounter that potentially leads to job stress and burnout [7], [19], which then influence student training performance. However, previous research has largely ignored this niche area of research. Thereby, limited is known about student performance on both academic and training perspectives. Most research has examined the assessment of classroom learning and on the job training assessment separately. Understanding student performance both academic and practical perspective is arguably important to the success of vocational education.

### 3. METHOD

This research employed the descriptive qualitative design in order to understand whether students' academic performance means training performance. The rationale of using qualitative approach in this study was due to the fact that there are limited researches that have looked into the student performance within the hospitality education in this manner. Data were gathered to explore the performance of students in terms of knowledge, skill, and attitude during the job training program. The research participants were 23 students of the Hotel Operations Program who have taken the on the job training program in hotels' food and beverage outlets, housekeeping, front office, and kitchen departments for a minimum of 6 months.

Data were collected using an interview method to allow participants to express their opinion in an open-ended, unstructured format. This data collection method was considered appropriate for this study since it allowed the information to flow without being restricted by the participants; "recognition of implicit needs" [20] or the

recognition of expected responses. The interview was started with a general introductory conversation in order to build rapport with the participants. Then, participants were also asked some clarifying questions or questions that encouraged them to expand upon their initial answers.

Participants were first asked for their consent in their participation in this research. The interview to each participant was conducted for 30-45 minutes. The raw data were then transcribed. Using a grounded theory approach [21], [22], data were open-coded, the transcripts were thoroughly reviewed, and codes that reflected the respondent's actual words were developed [21], [22]. The analysis of the data was begun with the identification of common words, terms, expressions and relevant quotes. These results were further contrasted and compared to identify overall themes for each of the research questions.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The majority of students participating in this study was male, aging from 20 to 22 years old. They had taken the on the job training program for a minimum of 6 months in a hotel business in Bali ranging from 3 to 5 stars. Contradictory to the statement of [2] that on the job training program as a modality of experiential learning, always have a uniform and positive impact on students' development [2], the results of this study showed that there were students who failed and did not enjoy the positive impacts of the training program. In other words, it is not always true that training program has uniform and positive impacts. This study revealed that academic performance does not always match training performance. There were students who have academic ability failed during on the job training program. On the other hand, there were academically average students who performed well and received awards during on the job training program. Interestingly, most of the failing students were male.

The analysis further found that students who perform well on campus seemed to be more reluctant to try something new and to be proactive. Some participants reported that they are afraid to make mistakes and being judged. On the contrary, average students are more likely to be easy going. They feel free to ask anything related to their job or tasks and to try something new. It seems that making mistakes at work is not a burden. These students feel that in hotel operations, people do not care about academic performance. Students are treated the same. In most hotels, if students demonstrate an outstanding performance, they will receive an award. Furthermore, students who perform well during the training period reported that they prefer to learn by doing. Some respondents explained that they have more interest in learning by doing at hotels rather than on campus. In

other words, student's motivations are enhanced through gaining work experiences in hotels [23].

The study also showed that more male students had failed than the female counterpart. Perhaps, girls were better prepared for career progression and adjustment than the boys [2]. Furthermore, female participants reported higher levels of exploration [2], [24]. Moreover, learning experiences in real-work contexts may serve as an interesting opportunity for students to improve their skills and interests, and accordingly in the process of future career decision-making [2].

This study showed that there are 2 major factors that are attributed to training performance. They are internal and external factors. The former includes expectation, adaptability, and capability (skills, knowledge, and attitude). The latter includes supporting facilities, working atmosphere, opportunity and empowerment.

The findings of this research can contribute valuable information to education institution and human resource or training managers in the hospitality industry. Suggestions for the educational institution or hotel school are 1) to treat high versus low performing students equally; 2) to provide enough and more realistic practical information about the industrial working environment that help reduce the gap between student perceptions and the actual working conditions in the hospitality industry; 3) to allow sufficient time for students to prepare themselves prior to the training program; 4) using real example or case study of industrial operations in the classroom learning. On the other side, suggestions for hotel management are 1) to provide opportunity and empowerment to students to perform any given tasks independently; 2) to encourage students to be proactive and happy [6]; 3) to provide a supporting working atmosphere; 4) to provide supporting facilities. 5) to provide hospitality principle reinforcement [23].

The results of this study demonstrate the more relevance of the training performance than the academic performance to the curricula development of vocational education. Moreover, and in agreement with [25] model of work experience, the impact of training experiences on career exploration seems to depend on the qualities found in the working context, such as social support, learning opportunities and supervisor support. These results also highlight the intrinsic nature of the vocational development process in the real working experiences. That is, students improve their skills, knowledge, and professional attitude through significant experiential learning context.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study explored whether academic performance indicates training performance within the context of hospitality education. The results of this study revealed

that students do not always have similar performance of both academic and training. That is, students who have high performance on campus may not necessarily have high performance during on the job training program. On the opposite, students who do not have high performance on campus, do not always have bad performance in the industry. These findings suggest that academic performance does not immediately indicate training performance. There were two main classifications of what lead to training performance, which were internal and external aspects.

Although this study has shed lights in better understanding students' performance, there are some boundaries to acknowledge. The study was conducted within the context of hospitality students in Bali, thus its results may not be ready for generalization to a larger population across Bali or other areas in Indonesia or overseas. In other words, this study is specific to the contexts under study. Furthermore, students who were participating in this study mostly undertake their training in a Front Office, Kitchen, and Food and Beverage Service, and Human Resources. Other departments in a hotel operations were not reflected. Thus, application in terms of scope of research should also be treated with caution.

The richness of the information generated from this study allows for a better understanding of student performance both from the academic and training perspectives. It also explored why highly performing students failed in the job training program and conversely, a standard performing students achieved well. In light of this, hotel school or campus should pay special attention to the quality of the support and the learning opportunities provided during the internship or on the job training program and the necessary preparation before it. Future research may be interested in examining the relationship between academic performances and training performance quantitatively. It is also essential to continue building a better understanding of key factors that determine student performance. Introducing and connecting students with problems that may occur in the hotel operations may help identify appropriate ways to prepare students before undertaking the on the job training program. Finally, future study may conduct a comparative analysis between students in different areas or cultural backgrounds.

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