

# Evaluating the Training Needs of Front Office Personnel in Some Selected Lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi

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**Abstract:** Training is usually referred to as the methods used to give new or present employees the skills needed to perform specific jobs and to be able to provide that level of training there are several activities that must take place within an organization . “The first step in training is to determine what training, if any, is required”. Before any training can take place, there is the need to analyse what needs to be included, the evaluation of what skills are needed to perform a job and also the assessment of the skills employees already have. The gap that exists between the two becomes the subject of training. An employee is the biggest asset in almost every service industry. By showing a clear career growth path to an employee, and training him to achieve those meaningful goals, supplemented by monetary compensation and job satisfaction always goes a long way to retain them. In today’s world of commerce, training techniques have metamorphosed. The emphasis leans towards improving holistic behavioural trends and technical skills, given more exposure at an early stage. To supplement this, several mode of transferring training programmes such as corporate trainers, role-playing, case studies, practical drills, situational handling skills, etc come into play . Hospitality sector is growing at a very fast rate in Sekondi/Takoradi, Ghana and managers require huge range of competencies such as, people management, viable skills, business insights, analytic skills, succession planning, and resource development in order to get success in this sector. Furthermore, employees are not enough trained on business etiquettes, courtesy, and business communication. Generally hospitality is all about handling people, so an employee coming into contact with all categories of people must have right attitude, tolerance, and listening skills in order to move up the hierarchy as an employee as well as move the company. For effective and sustainability of performance there is the need for training in empowering the workforce to be creative and innovative. When employees are properly trained, it aids in the productivity, profitability or survival of businesses in the present competitive business environment. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the training needs of front office personnel in some selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi. The objectives identified the training needs of front office personnel, found out the importance of these training programs, assessed the challenges of the training programs and evaluated the effect training programs had on staff performance. The study was a non-experimental and the targeted population was front office personnel, supervisors and guests of some selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi with a sample size of forty respondents. Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2013. The study found that almost half of the lodges that organized training for their staff do not evaluate it, though it has been realized as a useful exercise. The study recommends that hoteliers should ensure that their training programme benefit most if not all stakeholders in order to influence their performance with the training programme.

**Keywords:** Training, Performance, Management, Employee.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today’s hotel business, it is mostly about competence in people (Thomas, 2008), especially the employee qualities and the level of service quality depends on the qualities of employees and these qualities are knowledge, skills and thoughts which lead to a hotel’s survival and development (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). Therefore, staff training is essential in many

ways; it increases productivity while employees are armed with professional knowledge, experienced skills and valid knowledge about that skill (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013). Staff training also motivates and inspires workers by providing employees all needed information in work as well as helps them to recognize how important their jobs are. Training can also be seen as a key instrument in the implementation of Human Resource Management practices, policies and successful hotels always include staff training as their important development strategy (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013; Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994).

The discovery of oil in Ghana has led to the emergence of hospitality industry in Western Region and these small scale hospitalities sector is growing at a very fast rate in Sekondi/Takoradi, Ghana. Per the Ghana Tourism Authority, this sector can be classified into hotel industry, travel and tourism, restaurants, pubs, clubs and bars, contract catering, and aviation (Bécherel & Vellas, 1999). Aside these, opportunities, also exist in universities, sporting venues, exhibition centres and smaller events management companies that find themselves within the hospitality industries. As it is common in every human institution, the major challenge of this sector is shortage of qualified employees as well as challenge of attrition rate. To manage these hospitalities effectively, managers require huge range of competencies such as, people management, viable skills, business insights, analytic skills, succession planning (Bowen & Lawler, 1995), and resource development in order to get success in this sector. In addition to that, employees are not enough trained on business etiquettes, courtesy, and business communication (Robles, 2012). Hospitality is all about handling people so an employee must have right attitude, tolerance, and listening skills in order to move up the hierarchy (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). There is still a long way to go to inculcate good public relation and interpersonal skills in hospitality staff especially those in the lodges.

In every business, independently of the activity, human resources are the most precious capital and in terms of global competition and rapid change, personnel training are essential (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2002). According to Amirtharaj, Cross, and Vembar (2011), one of the most important aspects in contemporary hotel industry is getting to know the new methods and techniques through training. Consider the popular and often repeated quotation, "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a person to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" (McClelland et al., 2007). In order to improve employee performance, their skills, better use, specialization in their work and staff training is very important. Application of an efficient training process has an important impact in increasing employee performance.

Technological changes, especially in information technology, the growing complexity and environment uncertainty require knowledge and several skills (McClelland et al., 2007). As a result of mass production and diversity of products and services, consumers today are aware and above all very selective on purchasing goods and services. The growing demands of consumers require new solutions and broad knowledge. Due to an increasing competition, the organization needs to constantly revise production and services in order to fulfill the needs and demands of the consumers, by applying managerial methods to increase productivity. To McClelland et al. (2007), modern conditions, dynamic competition, sophisticated information technology, economic knowledge, market globalization, have changed regarding importance of human resources in the organization. These conditions actualize and favor human capital as a strategic source for the organization. Differences in organizations exist only because of the differences between human resources, methods of management and development (Wright et al., 1994).

In a global environment, ever more complex and obscure, knowledge and skills are the sole sources that create competing advantages. And for this reason, training is often considered a tool to achieve organizational objectives. Thus employee training is becoming an optimal response to complex challenges of business (Driscoll & Driscoll, 2005). After selecting the employees from management, workers should be trained according to their job, orientation should be organized before their work and other kinds of training be held later. Regarding the growing quality of service, hotel workers play an important role therefore developing employees by giving them continuous training in relevant fields is necessary (Driscoll & Driscoll, 2005; Kim, 2007). Employee training helps the organization to achieve its goal while in the same time enables workers to do a better job.

Training is a process which grants the workers information, skills and enables them to understand the organization and its objectives (Bharadwaj, 2000). In particular, training is designed to help the worker keep giving positive contribution in the form of the best performance (Wentling, 2004).

Every organization has need for trained and experienced people in order to effectively perform their activities. Tasks on today's organizations have become complex, and the importance of educating employees has grown. Personnel

training is a necessary part of the HRM activities and many organizations have understood how important it is to hold a training in a ever changing and complex work environment. (Obeidat, 2012)

Recently, training has become an investment in human being since it is considered the main path way to form adequate human resources in terms of quality and quantity. Hence, it aims at providing individuals with information and administrative technical skills required to carry out their work in efficiency and effectiveness. Subsequently, this will positively influence organization work and its performance (Salunke, 2011).

While budgets for training may have increased steadily as the industry has grown (Douangphichit, 2015), the needs of employees are not becoming less, but become more broad-based. The needs of employees entering into the workplace are becoming so varied that, human trainers attempting to train groups of individuals with a variety of needs could not communicate as effectively as a computerized training system designed to do so (Ferrari, Banerjea, & Zhang, 1994). The use of video, still and animated graphics, still photography, audio, and text can be included in training and are highly effective in improving communication (Kinzie & Delcourt, 1991). The use of multimedia systems, or computerized systems that access a variety of media and can be designed to offer training management to both the user and the facilitator of training have been recognized as one of the most effective training tools. As employers become more responsible for educating employees, it is evident that the training challenge is growing in complexity (Hashim, 2001). Training programs relying upon traditional techniques and the skills of human trainers to communicate to the variety of learning needs will limit the effectiveness of an organization's performance. As noted by (Knowles, 1984), a principal developer and advocate of adult learning theories, traditional training approaches cannot keep up with the rapid demand for new skills and knowledge.

To evaluate the utility of a training program, a number of variables need to be considered (Knowles, 1984) (Cascio, 1991) the greater the difference in job performance between trained and untrained employees, the greater the utility of the training program. Every training program has costs, and as the cost of the training program goes up, the utility goes down (Juran, 2003). Most employers in the hotel industry always count the cost training will add to their budget without thinking about the significance of the training for both the worker and the employer (Flamholtz, 2012). Employers have the idea that, after the employee has been trained, they will leave their employment for another or they may ask for increase in pay after they have acquired the training.

This notwithstanding, training has a lot of **benefit to the employer, employee and the organization as a whole**. Sommerville (2007) attest that staff training enhances the capabilities of employees and strengthens their competitive advantage. Effective training will improve the personal characters and professional abilities (Katz, 2009). Not only employees, management and organization would benefit from staff training, customers and guests benefit as well, because of the received quality products and services. (Katz, 2009); Sommerville (2007) further listed these benefit as follows: To the employee it increases job satisfaction and recognition, encourages self-development and self confidence, moves employee closer to personal goals, helps the employee become an effective problem solver and allows the employee to become productive more quickly.

To the management; it aids in evaluating employee performance, aids in sustaining systems and standards, and helps identify employees for promotions or transfers.

To the organization, it leads to improved profitability, reduces accidents and safety violations, aids in organizational development, reduces wastage and costly employee turnover.

With regards to performance, Amirtharaj et al. (2011) posit that there are many benefits of staff training on employee performance and these are listed below;

- Training enables the individuals' development and growth and create positive attitudes and behavior in them.
- Training given to employees keep staff highly motivated as new skills and knowledge gained helps reduce boredom and keeps the employees right on their toes as they know they are valuable enough for the employer to invest in their training.
- Company gains competitive advantage over it competitors when employees are trained and to stay ahead of the competition in this continuously changing world as there is increase in innovation which is exhibited in their strategies and products.

- Due to the training given to employees, it helps organization save the money as the employees become more efficient and effective, working diligently to increase the company's productivity resulting in financial gain. It also helps to increase the capacity to adopt new technologies.
- Training gives a feeling of personal satisfaction and achievement, and broadens opportunities for career progression.

Basically the benefit to the employer, employee and the organization has been summarized as the diagram below, (Author's own design)



**Figure 1: Benefit to the Employer, Employee and Organization Summarized**

Tepeci (1999) is also of the view that, there is no denying fact that a quality training program assures that employees have the tools they need to succeed in the job they do. Every company has processes and challenges unique to their organization, and that means that whether an employee is new or seasoned, quality, customized training can be elusive and faced some challenges (Katz, 2009). Some difficulties facing a training program include: time constraints, high rate of turnover, overwhelming employees with too much information, inexperienced employees, and the uniqueness of each employee. When businesses “make do” with well-intentioned employees, training is not always effective or repeatable. In-house training might be reliant on one particular person instructing or facilitating the training sessions (Morrison, Ross, Kemp, & Kalman, 2010). That one person retires or leaves for another opportunity and all of sudden, the training program falls apart (Tepeci, 1999).

One of the main obstacles which occur in the workplace is the lack of training and development. This gives the foundation of the research study which has not yet been conducted in the front office of lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi. Many research works have been conducted in Ghana and outside Sekondi-Takoradi on employee training but a huge gap exists in Sekondi-Takoradi. This study seeks to assess the training need of front office staff of some selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi.

The researcher observed in a lecturer vacation industrial attachment program that front office personnel were given induction and orientation but not proper training. This resulted in bad impression of guests in the front office leading to loss of guests, and also leaking the hotels information to unauthorized people including guests which is a bad attribute of a receptionist. It is in this regard that the researcher seeks to evaluate the training needs of front office personnel in some selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi.

The following research questions served as a guide to the study

- i. What are the training needs of front office personnel?
- ii. How effective are the training programs?

- iii. What are the challenges of the training programs?
- iv. What effect has training programs on staff performance

The study was carried out on some selected ten (10) lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi which includes; Sammar Lodge, Trust Lodge, Mercy Lodge, Excess Lodge, Cath’s Lodge, Peace Lodge, Caasi Lodge, Pacso Lodge, Honeymoon Lodge and Paco’s Lodge.

According to (Cole, 2002), if an organization has to justify its training expenditure, it must surely do so on the basis of organizational needs and based on the organizational analysis, the organization can assess the level of growth over a defined period of time and then determine the shortfalls and problems in order to help determine the required training programs. Also in identifying the training needs from the employees’ perspective, the organization can measure the performances of individual employees. This can be measured by analyzing the efficiency of the individual employees against the required standards set by the organization through frequent performance appraisals.

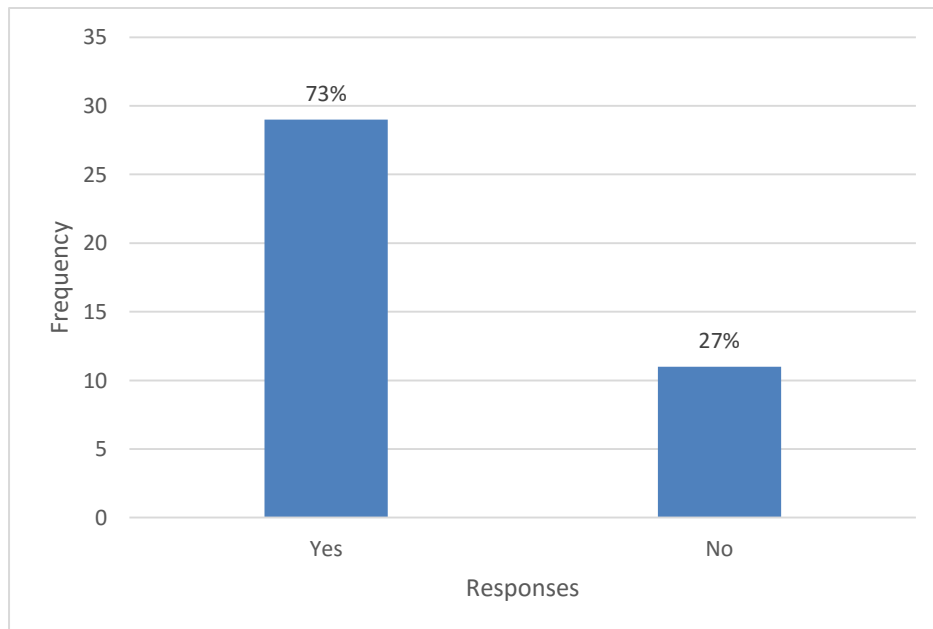
## 2. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

**Table 1** Position of Respondents in their Lodges

Position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Receptionist	20	50
Supervisors	10	25
Guests	10	25
Total	40	100

Source: Field Work May, 2015

From Table 1 it can be seen that most (50%) of respondents were receptionist. This is followed by those in supervisory positions (25%) and the guests’ category represented (25%) proportion of the respondents for the study.



**Figure 2** Staff response on training before commencement of work with the lodge

Source: Field Work May, 2015

The result in figure 2 shows that 73% of the selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi train their new employees before they commence work in their new positions. McClelland et al. (2007) stated that staff training is an essential and indispensable part of Human Resource Management, “the importance and value of staff training has long been recognized. (Cole, 2002) also attest that, training is a learning activity which is directed towards the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for the purpose of an occupation or task.

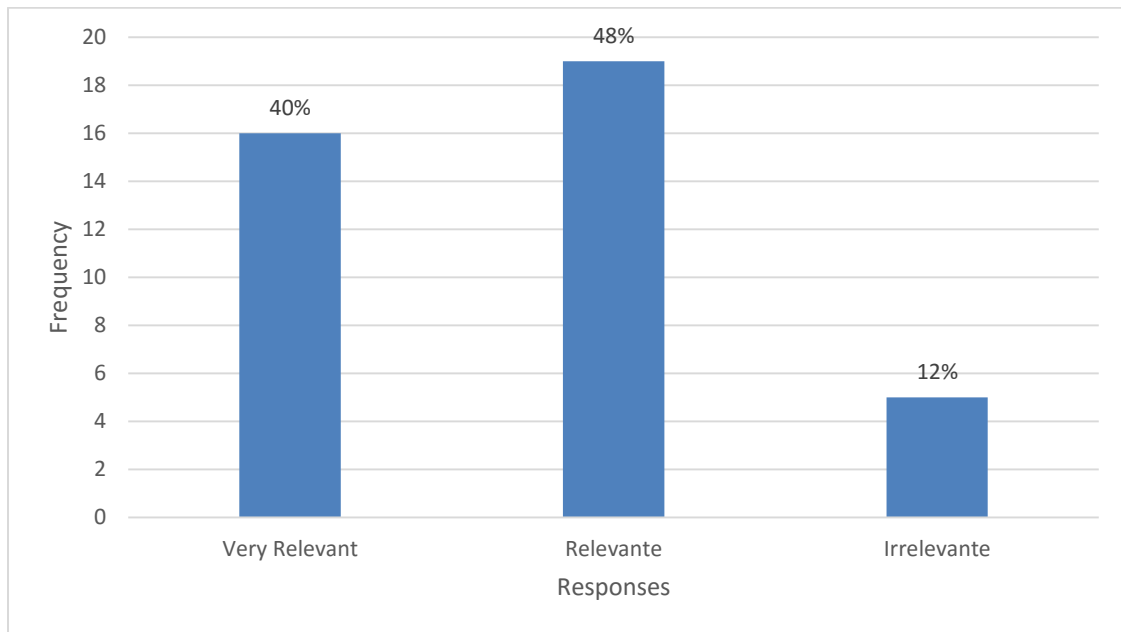


Figure 3 Staff response on quality of first training with the lodges

Source: Field Work May, 2015

Figure 3 showed an assessment of the quality of the first training received by employees. The results indicates that majority (88%) of the respondents found their first training prior to commencement of work was relevant, while the remaining (12%) found it immaterial. Of the 88% that acknowledged that the training was useful to the work associated with their new positions most (48%) found it relevant, while the rest (40%) noted that it was very relevant to their work. However, the proportion that finds the first training to be irrelevant or worse is about one-fifth and thus significant. For this reason measures should be put in place first to identify what makes the training irrelevant and second to find out which strategies can be devised to deal with the situation (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013) and finally how these devised strategies can be implemented effectively. McClelland et al. (2007) said that the importance of training can only be appreciated with a clear understanding of its direct impact on employee performance. He added that, an improvement in employee performance also leads to an improvement in the company's performance.

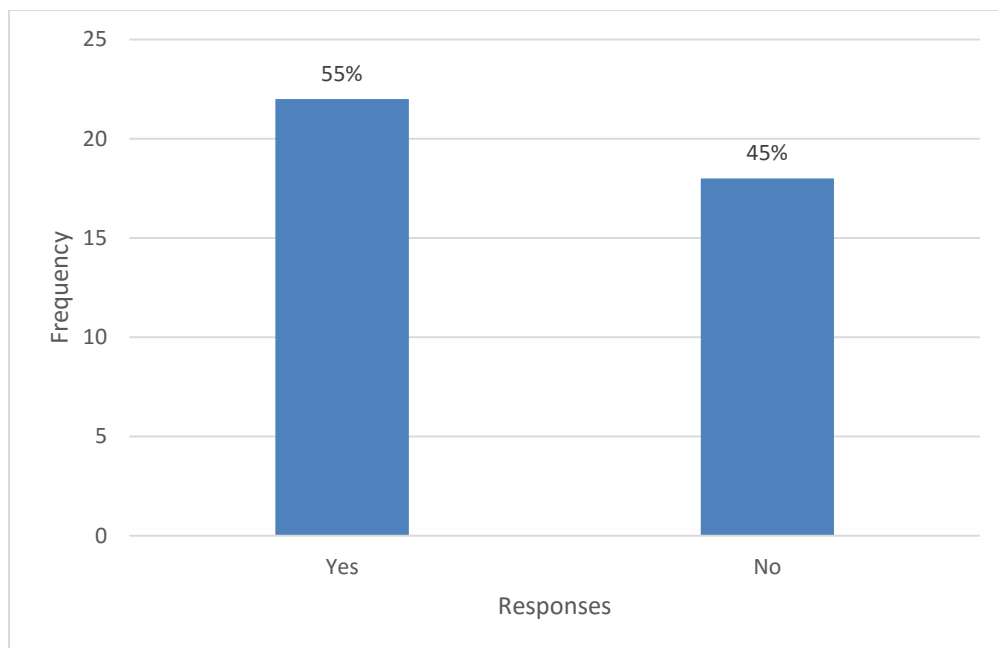


Figure 4 Response on Evaluation of training in the lodges

Source: Field Work May, 2015

Figure 4 shows the evaluation of personnel training. The majority (55 %) of the respondents said that the training programme organized by their lodges for them were evaluated. Those who said that training programme were not evaluated come next (45%). According to (Khan & Ramsey, 2013) behaviour change brought about by the training function can be change of skill, change of knowledge and change of attitude. Therefore; evaluation is the way of measuring the effectiveness of a training program. The first stage of evaluation is done during and at the end of the training. The purpose of evaluation is to ensure the training achieves its objective. It identifies what effect training has on the individual and to (J. J. Phillips, 1997) training evaluation can be done in several ways. That is at longer term and wider impact of the training, which could be a few weeks, some months or even longer.

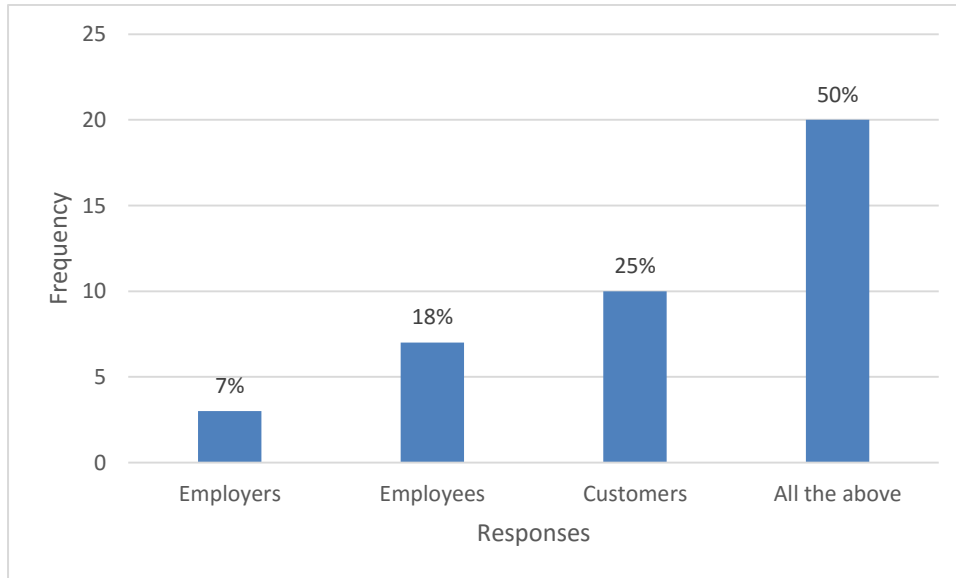


Figure.5 Response on beneficiaries of training in the Hotel

Source: Field Work May, 2015

Regarding the beneficiaries of training, which is represented by figure 5, it was noted that a good number (50%) of the respondents opted for all of the above, followed by (25%) those who went for customers, whereas those who went for employees accounted for 18%. Those who went for employers were the least (7 %) represented. According to (J. J. Phillips, 1997) training is a key element for improved organizational performance through the increasing level of individual competences. This means that training will help employees to master knowledge, skills, behaviors, sense of self-worth and confidence upon which they are able to perform efficiently to improve on the performance of the organization.

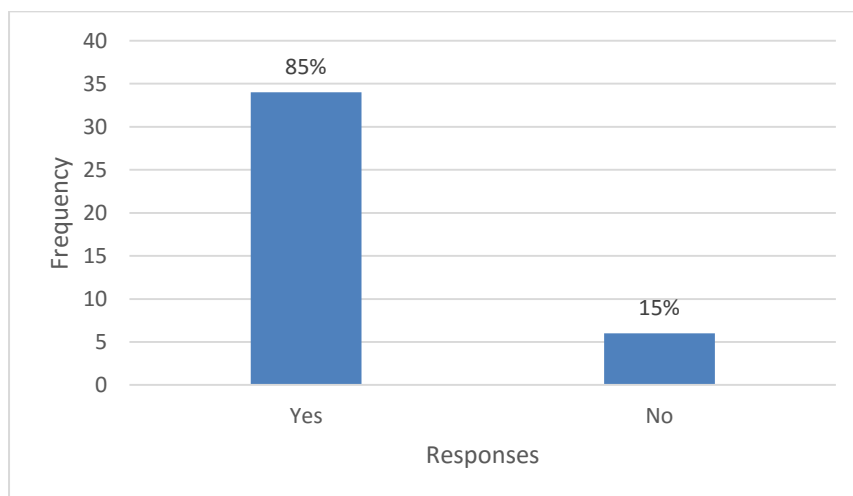


Figure 6 Response Impact of training on employee performance in the lodges

Source: Field Work May, 2015



Figure 6 is on the impact of training on performance among lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi. The chart shows that staff training affects performance positively in most (85%) of the lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi. However, there are lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi where training of staff has no effect on performance though that represents a small (12%) fraction of lodges. According to (Cole, 2002) training helps in the individuals' development and growth as well as creating positive attitudes and behavior in them. Organizations instill in their employees the attitudes and behavior expected from them which in the long run boost the company's image.

On the motion to find out how work has imparted on the performance of employees, respondents stated that, work is done in organized manner therefore fatigue do not interfere their daily activities. Training has helped their mind on the job; it has improved the flow of work, and has improved work efficiency were responses from other respondents.

**Table 2 Staff Opinion on hotel's training system**

Description	Frequency	Percent
VERY GOOD	13	33
GOOD	23	58
FAIR	3	7
BAD	1	2
Total	40	100

Source: Field Work May, 2015

Table 2 shows the opinion of the staff on the lodges' training system. The table point out that most (91%) of the staff of the selected lodges in Sekondi-Takoradi think that their lodges' training system is good. A small (7%) fraction of the total number of respondents however think that the systems are only fair, with an insignificant (2%) proportion saying that they are bad.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In order to remain competitive and to ensure excellent staff are attracted to and remain within the organisation, hospitalities need to ensure that the training of all employees is an issue which is taken seriously. By investing in the training of the people who are the face of the business, hospitalities can get ahead of the competition and excel in what they do. One of the most important aspects of managing people lies in helping employees become more effective at their jobs and being able to adapt to that job or another job as he/she matures within the organisation. This requires a high level of co-ordination between employee training and the range of other personnel functions, such as recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, reward systems and employee relations. The Training function is increasingly considered to be a key player in helping the organisation to achieve its goals through its people as it is becoming more generally accepted that there is a strong correlation between organisational success and investment in training. There is now a growing awareness of the importance of a planned approach to training and development as a tool for competitive advantage, staff recruitment, selection, retention and motivation.

The whole Training function has increasingly acquired status as the instrument for breaking new ground and bringing about change through its developmental activities. Training managers must provide expert advice to top level management, usually about the value to the organisation of a particular kind of training. The training must take place within a framework of partnership between the trainer, employer and employee. This relationship must be characterised by trust between all stakeholders so that training does not simply reflect the views of the employer. This commonality of interest must be identified and worked towards. Training is about making a difference to the bottom line, both in terms of how people feel about their jobs as well as in the area of performance and productivity. Ultimately, it is about adding real value to the organisation and those who comprise it. Training is an essential management tool, it has many benefits, such as shortens the study time, increases work effectiveness, helps employees and the company itself to compete in the fast changing environment, reduces damages and wastage. Staff training is a way of motivating employees, upgrading their skills, expanding their knowledge and preparing employees for self-development.



#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the main findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Young employees are not very stable and thus hospitality operators should weave career development plans into the human resource management plan in order to ensure high employee retention.
- ii. Hoteliers should devise a way of rewarding their loyal employees as a means of reinforcing that behaviour to their advantage.
- iii. Hotelier should ensure that their training programme benefit most if not all stakeholders in order to influence their performance with the training programme.
- iv. Though the knowledge that is gained through the training programme are used and shared or vice versa, this is to be complimented with storing that acquired knowledge so that in the event of labour turnover, new staff can easily be trained using the stored knowledge in other to be abreast with operations.
- v. Hoteliers who want their training to affect their performance positively should ensure that they have a good training system and base their staff training on needs assessment.

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