ANALYSIS OF THE SKILLS GAP IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN KENYA

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Abstract. Most training institutions in Kenya have supply led training instead of demand-driven training thereby creating a supply of graduates whose knowledge and skills in not needed in the industry thereby creating a training gap between the educators and the industry. This paper aims to analyze the skills gap in the tourism and hospitality industry in Kenya. The objectives were to investigate the skills gap between tourism and hospitality graduates and industry expectations, examine the stakeholder's opinion on performance university graduates as compared to graduates from Technical and Vocational Education Training institutes and examine the emerging trends in human labour in tourism and hospitality that educators should anticipate. The sample size was 200 respondents composed of managers and supervisors from 2 stars to 5 stars rating hotels. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. It was found that the training institution applies supply-driven training instead of demand-driven thereby creating a shortage of adequately trained and skilled staff suitable for the tourism job market. The study recommends the involvement of educators and industry practitioners in the training resource persons and enforcement of the National Qualification Framework to ensure standardized curriculum contents in training institutions.

Keyword: *Tourism, Training, Gap, Industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A large number of graduates from the Technical Vocational Education Training Institute (TVET) and different public and private universities graduate each year and expect to be employed in the tourism and hospitality industry in Kenya. However, the industry can only accommodate a few of these graduates since most of them have a mismatch between what they learned from their training institution and the expectation of the industry. Limited studies in Kenya have been conducted to investigate factors that contribute to a widening of this gap. Most training institutions in Kenya have supply led training instead of demand-driven training thereby creating a supply of graduates whose knowledge and skills in not needed in the industry thereby creating a training gap between the educators and the industry. It was found that the training institution applies supply-driven training instead of demand-driven thereby creating a shortage of adequately trained and skilled staff suitable for the tourism job market.

The role of tourism industry stakeholders cannot be overemphasized and different authors have alluded to the need for a mutual relationship between the educators and the employers (Hinchliffe, 2011; McMurray et al., 2016; Helyer, 2014 and Jackson et al., 2017). The Tourism and hospitality industry is rapidly changing and hence there is a need for educators to keep abreast of these dynamics to meet the industry expectations. The tourism industry in Kenya continues to suffer the shortage of adequately trained and skilled staff suitable for the tourism job market.

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This has continued to widen the gap between tourism and hospitality training development and the industry expectations necessitating the need for strategic re-alignment and harmonization of tourism and hospitality curriculum and standards to ones that are sensitive to the market demands. One of the biggest challenges facing both the educators and the employers in the tourism and hospitality industry is matching training with expectations of the employers in the industry (Baum, 1991; Daniel, 2017; Jackson, 2017 and Kabii et al., 2018). One reason why this is difficult is that rarely do educators involve the practitioners in the curriculum developments and reviews.

This challenge is not only in Kenya but all over the world as has been documents by other scholars (Chaman & Lovell 2006; Jauhan, 2006, Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). This study sought to address this gap by analyzing the skill gap in the hospitality and tourism industry in Kenya and suggests how it could be bridged. Some of the gaps are as a result of recent emerging trends in the hospitality industry which has become global and the advancement in technology. This study attempts to establish the skills gaps in the hospitality and tourism industry in Kenya with the aim of informing training institutions and educators on emerging trends. This is to guide in the revision of the curriculum to help meet the industry expectations have graduates who are employable and effective in their roles.

This paper will be organized into four following sections, after this introduction, it will provide a theoretical basis for the issues being discussed, and then explain the research methodology used. Then the next part is the results and discussion, which will be divided into four sections consisting of respondents' profiles, their opinions, skill gaps, solutions, and trend changes. And the last part of this paper is conclusions and recommendations.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a notion that graduates from different training institutions do not meet the industry expectation in Kenya and once such graduates search for employment in the industry a term like 'half-baked' is normally used to express their opinion of such graduates. The same feelings have been documented by other scholars such as (De Villiers, 2010; Yorke, 2004 and Huang, 2016) who have suggested that there is a need for the continuous expansion of training in the field of hospitality and tourism industry that meets the ever-changing consumer desires. Sisson & Adams, (2013) opined that educators should run away from teaching the traditional old curriculum and also include modern customer and demand-driven curriculum that meets the industry expectation. Liza, (2013) suggested that educators should have more emphasis on modern courses such as meetings, events, conventions, festivals, recreation, gaming, cruise management among others. Such courses would meet the demands of modern customers.

A study by Munar & Montano (2009) argued that most educators have focused on supplying hotels, restaurants and related businesses with human labor who in some cases do not meet the employer's expectations. It's worth noting that graduates from any training institution are the end product of the service production system. Hence, hospitality and tourism stakeholders should be involved during the training and internship period. This would ensure that the end results are graduates who meet the industry expectations. It seems that sometimes educator is moving in a parallel to the industry expectations; where the right-hand does not communicate with the left hand a scenario that can be managed by the inclusion of stakeholders in the development and delivery of a curriculum. There is, therefore, a need to harmonize the industry expectations through research and consultation of other stakeholders.

Some hospitality and tourism players suggest that educators should tailor-make their programs to respond to specific job competencies, while others have suggested that students should be prepared for multitasking once employed. Floh, (2005) defines job competency as activities and a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are correlated with performance.

Other scholars have grouped these competencies as hard and soft skills. Hard competencies are considered as a combination of different technical skills while soft competencies take care of personal behavioral attributes, values, communication skills, leadership, interpersonal and teamwork skills (Banupriya, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2010). Possession of the two categories of skills is of paramount importance to college graduates.

Connolly and McGing (2006) in their study have suggested that the hospitality curriculum and courses should consist of both practical skills and people management skills which are sometimes ignored. They observed that this combination may increase the employability of the graduates and enable them to manage various needs of the hospitality and tourism industry. They observed that graduates should have 'soft' human relation skills which include oral and written communication and interpersonal communication which they considered as essential for one to work in the tourism industry. Many other scholars have also emphasized on the importance of soft skills and have added to the list interpersonal skills, professional appearance, customer relations and managing guests' predicament with understanding and sensitivity (Kay and Rosette (2000) and Weing, (2008). However, Guthrie (2009) opined that personal and job competencies should always be appropriately balanced bearing in mind that these competitions are sometimes interrelated and that employers sometimes look for employees who can multi-task. Globalization of the hospitality market, growth of technology and cultural diversity has also influenced the consumer needs which in turn may influence the curriculum content of educators (Whitelaw et al., 2009).

The hospitality industry also requires specific management skills perceived by industry recruiters as important for success in the hospitality industry. According to Wood (2003), leadership is the number one skill that employers think is important for hospitality students to possess, followed by employee relations and problem resolution was ranked third.

Studies conducted by various scholars show that educators and industry have different viewpoints and sometimes do not understand each other's perceptions (Collins, 2002; Petrova & Mason, 2004). Studies by Kang et al. (2005); Petrova and Mason, (2004) have also criticized tourism and hospitality educators for not adequately preparing students for employment in the industry. The same scenario has been noted in Kenya. What educators teach in the classroom sometimes does not march current industry trends and in some cases obstruct employment opportunities for hospitality and tourism graduates (Asirifi et. al., 2013; Airey, 2005 and Dale & Robinson, 2001). This gap needs to be addressed by close collaboration between educators and industry players.

The hospitality and tourism industry is quite dynamic. Just like consumers, industry operator's expectations are also changing as they try to keep pace with changing consumer demands (Mittelman, 2016; Swanson, 2013 and Ahmadi, 2003). It is clear to all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry of the changes in consumer behaviours and hence, the need for educators to keep abreast of the dynamics to meet the visitor's expectations. Apart from conventional courses, contemporary courses are on high demands due to these changing environments. This expansion calls for a willingness from educators to identify and focus on the new areas and consumer patterns. Whitelaw et al. (2009) pointed out that globalization of the market, growth of technology and cultural diversity have will be continued to affect visitors' needs and hospitality graduates must be prepared for these changes as well.

There is a global change in technological development and the tourism industry has not been left behind. Jamali et al. (2019) argued that the future of tourism is an adaptation of technology in gathering and usage of Big data, adaptation, and usage of Internet of Things (IoT) which involves extending internet connectivity to everyday objects, devices and appliances and usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Recognition technology is another important emerging trend where visitor's biometrics is being used for authentications (Jackson, 2009). Fingerprint

and facial recognition technology is being used in some Marriott hotels in China in the checking in and out of the rooms as well as to unlock rooms (Chahal, 2014). Smart technology is now in use in the tourism and hospitality industry. Today we already have Smart devices such as Internet-enabled thermostats, which automatically adjust room temperatures at check-in and check-out times, in response to temperature changes caused by the sun, or by windows being opened are in use today. The same model is being used for lighting, improving energy efficiency by, and reducing light intensity during daylight time. Graduates must now be prepared to adapt to the new trend in the industry.

The future of the tourism and hospitality industry will be driven by technological innovation, which focuses on customer's expectations, needs and wants. Artificial intelligence with robots employees may soon replace some jobs in the hospitality industry as is the case in Henn Na Hotel in Japan (Ghazali, 2019). The human touch in service provision has been what the old generation has been used to millennial customers who have all their live interacted with technology will soon get accustomed to the robotics that can speak multiple languages, multi-task and work 24/7. Services from these robotics will eventually drive down costs, which would translate to cheap labor and costs in a hotel. New graduates must know this and be prepared to compete for the same jobs with these robots. Training institutions must, therefore, research, innovate, and equip graduates with skills and competence to work in the industry with the future in mind.

With this in mind, it is therefore important to agree that the role of assessing training needs should not be left to the educators alone but the industry stakeholders as well. To manage the skills gap, some hospitality and tourism establishments have developed in-house programs that prepare recruits on organizational culture, objectives, and expectations. The hotel and tourism managers are good resources for identifying training needs and providing suggestions on how training can be tailored made to meet the growing and changing dynamics of the industry.

Likewise, there is a need for hospitality and tourism educators to continuously investigate and identify the essential knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes needed by the consumers. This can be achieved through research where new training needs and trends are identified. This information got from the research findings may be used to revise the training curriculum to meet the changing needs and also capture the new trends in the industry.

3. STUDY METHOD

The target population was 200 managers and supervisors from two stars to five stars rating hotels distributed in different regions in Kenya who had gathered in Kenya Utalii College to attend a one-week Management Development Program (MDP). They were purposefully selected and the authors believed that they were in a position to provide in-depth information on important skills needed in the industry. The respondents were also expected to suggest how to bridge gaps that existed. Invitation letters were sent to their association and all applicants who were in the category of departmental or section head, manager or supervisor or any other management position in the hospitality industry were enrolled for the program. It is during these training programs when data was collected.

Due to the diverse nature of their experience, interviews and Delphi research method which put together a panel of experts was also used in collecting qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires. Data was analyzed using descriptive statics and further statistical tests such as chi-square test of goodness of fit, Chi-square test of independence and cross-tabulation of data were used to test the association and independence of variables. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach alpha test of reliability was 0.070 and considered adequate.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Respondent's Profile

A majority of the respondents were males (74%) compared to females (26%). The respondent's level of education was; university degree, (64%), Diploma, (47%), and certificate holders (36%). Nearly all of the respondents (85%) were in a management position in their establishments. There was no substantial difference in the number of years the respondents had worked for the tourism and hospitality industry.

4.2 Respondent's opinion on performance university graduates as compared to graduates from technical colleges

The general observation indicated that graduates from TVET institutions performed better than those from the university. Respondents were requested to rate the performance of university graduates and those from Technical and Vocational Training institutes (TVET) in supervisory skills, management/leadership skills, and technical/operational skills. The respondents rated the skills of Technical and Vocational graduates better than that of university graduates. For instance, a technical and vocational training graduate was rated higher than university graduates in technical skills (64%), supervisory skills (51%), management and leadership skills (36%).This observation was significant at P<0.05 (supervisory $\chi2=82.625$,df =2, p<0.05, Management and leadership skills $\chi2=56.625$,df =2, p<0.05) and Technical or operational skills $\chi2=27.792$,df =2, p<0.05). This means that technical college graduates demonstrated higher proficiency in their jobs than university graduates. The study would recommend further research to investigate why the reasons for such a response (Table 1).

The study found that graduates from TVET institutes had more contact hours in practical sessions that their colleagues in the university. It was also noted that TVET institutes that were managed by the government such as Kenya Utalii College invested more on the technical infrastructure such as laundry facilities, demonstration hotels, kitchen for practical and field trips as compared to the public universities thereby giving the learner a better environment. Although universities had lecturers with higher qualifications, this did not translate to better performance of their graduates. Although most universities trained their graduates on supervision and management competencies, the study noted that most employers expected them to be hands-on and technically perform basic duties such as working in front office desks, restaurants, laundry, bars, and kitchen before doing any supervision or management duties. It was after graduation demonstrated skills and knowledge on these operational duties that were given other supervision and management duties.

Table 1. Comparison of Rating of Performance of University and Technical College Graduates.

Category of the training institution	Rating areas	Rating scale			Test statistics Chi-Square Goodness of Fit
		Good	Average	Poor	
University graduates	Supervisory skills	26%	67%	7%	$\chi^2=82.625$,df =2, p<0.05
Technical colleges	Supervisory skills	51%	45%	3%	$\chi^2=58.625$,df =2, p<0.05
University graduates	Management and leadership skills	23%	63%	15%	$\chi^2=56.625$,df =2, p<0.05
Technical colleges	Management and leadership skills	36%	58%	6%	$\chi^2=57.542$,df =2, p<0.05
University graduates	Technical skills	24%	52%	24%	$\chi^2=27.792$,df =2, p<0.05
Technical colleges	Technical skills	64%	32%	4%	$\chi^2=77.167$,df =2, p<0.05

4.3   Skills Gap in Tourism and Hospitality from Industry Expectation

The second objective of the study sought to find out the areas in which respondents thought graduates from both TVET institutions and universities had skills gaps. Selected competences were given from which the respondents were to give their opinions on whether the graduates from these institutions were inadequately trained to perform duties related to those competencies. The study revealed that 59% of respondents said that graduates they interacted with after graduation from all institutions did not have technical and operations skills required to perform as they were expected in the department they were attached.

The study also noted that majority of graduates did not meet their expectations in following: management/leadership skills (70%), organizational skills (66%), customer service (64%) and communication in foreign language skills (64%), interpersonal skills (62%), cross-cultural skills (61%), business and communication skills (61%) and technological skills in the department where they were attached (59%). This was not unique to Kenya's graduates alone and resonates with previous studies by (Kavanagh, 2008; Sekaran, 2016; and Matteson, 2016) that indicated students are graduating without most of the skills that the tourism and hospitality industry need. Graduates in the hospitality industry are expected to manage international tourists and business travellers from different cultural backgrounds hence the need for training with a global perspective. The responses are as indicated Figure 1 below:
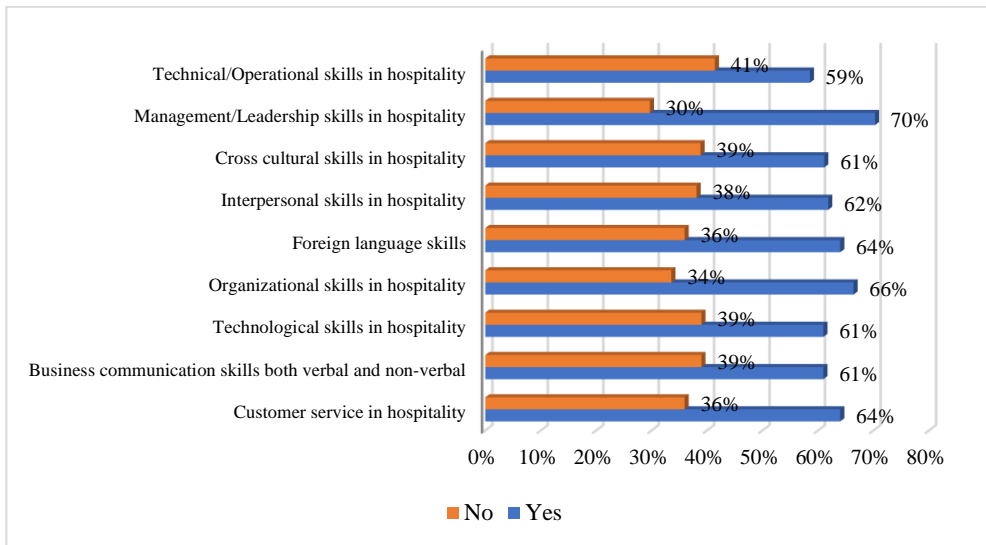

Figure 1 Skills Gaps in Tourism and Hospitality Industry Expectations

Further, the majority of the respondents (81%) suggested that the reason why there exists a skills gap in the tourism and hospitality industry was that the industry has gone global. Finding from this study agrees with finding by another scholar who alluded that several international hotel brands have invested in the different countries in the world and customers expect standardized services in these brands (Jauhari, 2012 and Sangpikul, 2009). For instance, hotel brands such as Marriott, Hilton, Serena, Sarova, and Kempiski have invested in different countries in Africa and would, expect educators to provide them with graduates who would offer standardized services to their customers.

To meet such expectations, it is therefore paramount that training institution upgrades their curriculum to capture new demands and standards applicable not only in Africa but the rest of the world. This remains one of the biggest challenges for educators in Kenya and the rest of Africa where training institution has financial and human resources constraint. Respondents were asked to list some jobs which they have not found a suitable person to fill from graduate applicants. They said that most of them have a challenge in getting suitable persons from the training institutions to work as spa therapists, chefs specialized for different cousins, food and beverage controllers, gym instructors, mixologists in bars, baristas, pastry chefs, and public relations managers. It was noted that most institutions did not offer training in the above areas due to their specialized nature and capital investment required in some courses.

4.4   Solutions to manage the skills gap

As all respondents were stakeholders in the hospitality industry in Kenya, it was necessary to get options from them on the possible solution in managing or mitigating the skills gap. They were asked to recommend solutions. The majority (95%) of them agreed that training institutions should involve the industry stakeholders during the development and review of their curricula. Training institutions should also offer more apprenticeship programs that advance training for respondents (93 %). A big number (90%) said that training institutions should have internship programs where lecturers are also attached to the industry to understand new and emerging trends. Likewise, (86%) said that training institutions should have clearly defined standardized curricula and certification that is recognized and accepted in Africa and the rest of the world where most graduates are absorbed. This is in line with what many authors have alluded to; the need for a mutual relationship between the educators and the employers (Hinchliffe, 2011; McMurray et al., 2016; Helyer, 2014 and Jackson et al., 2017). This way the educators are able to train graduates that are able to meet the expectations of the industry from an informed point of view see Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents opinion on how to manage skill gaps

The Suggested Solution to Manage the Skills Gap	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
The training institutions should involve the respondents in the development and review of their curricula	95%	3%	2%
Training institutions should offer more apprenticeship programs that advance training for respondents	93%	4%	2%
Training institutions should Involve the respondents in the training of hospitality programs	88%	6%	6%
Training institutions should have internship programs where lecturer appreciate new trends in the industry	90%	9%	1%
Kenya should have standardized curricula and certification that are recognized within the region	86%	7%	7%
Training institutions should train respondents at all levels and have career progression to the university level	85%	10%	4%

4.5 Changing trends in the hospitality industry and anticipated challenges

Respondents were requested to predict the future trends of the hospitality industry and the challenges The study noted that most of the management positions in the hospitality industry are taken by an aging generation who will be retiring in the next 10 year since the retirement ages are 60 years. Surprisingly, the majority (56%) of the respondents were not convinced that the youth will occupy most of the jobs they are currently holding despite having a big influx of graduates from the different training institutions. Most of the respondents (85%) agreed that future jobs will require multi-cultural and international experience due to globalization

while 75% of the respondents indicated that college and university graduates will prefer searching for jobs outside Kenya thus losing the best young talents.

They also said that this migration will make it very difficult to fill some technical and operations jobs (62%) that require the vigor and the strength of the youth who may not be having family and financial obligations as compared to the current generation of aging employees. There is, therefore, the need for curriculum internalization to prepare students to think and work global market (Haigh, 2002). Such graduates would be able to work in multicultural organizations (international hotel chains, airlines, tour companies) and with customers from various nationalities and cultures, (Sangpikul, 2009). This, therefore, requires the tourism and hospitality educators to keep up with the emerging new trends in the sector.
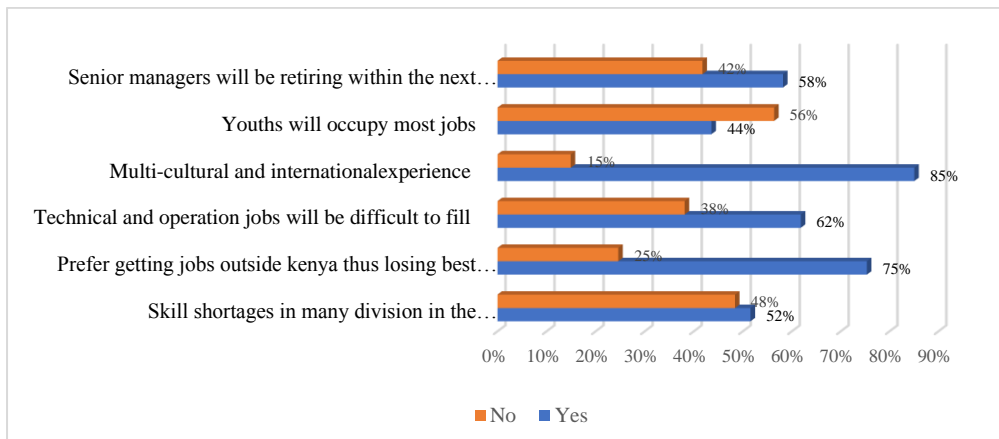

Figure 2 Future Trends and Challenges Anticipated in the Hospitality Industry

Most of the respondents indicated that tourism and hospitality must develop and nurture talents (93%); need for ICT knowledge at the technical, supervisory and management levels; shortage of technical and operational jobs (90%) and prepare young technological generation (85%). The future of the tourism and hospitality industry will be driven by talented personnel and technological innovation which focuses on customers' expectations needs and wants. According to Valenzuela & Quintana (2015 the 'talent' broadly refers to an individual's level of intelligence or capability that enables effortlessly and skillfully to conduct an activity. The talents need to be managed and nurtured because as noted by Khilji, Tarique & Schuler (2015) talented employees play a significant role in companies' outstanding performance that strengthens their competitive advantages. It is worth noting that the future of the tourism and hospitality industry will be driven by technological innovation, which focuses on customer's expectations, needs and wants. Fingerprint and facial recognition technology is being used in some Marriott hotels in China in the checking in and out of the rooms as well as to unlock rooms (Chahal, 2014). Hence, the tourism and hospitality sector requires a long-term solution that is fully adaptable to emerging trends and its impact on skills.

5.   THE STUDY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings it is recommended that training institutions need to research, innovate, and equip graduates with skills and competence to work in the industry with the future in mind. This requires close collaboration between the educators and the industry so as to harmonize the expectations that students leave training institutions knowing industrial

expectations. This will go to have global perspective tourism and hospitality training institutions in Kenya should benchmark with international training institutions so as to improve their curriculum and delivery process. There is a need for regular conferences, seminars, and workshops aimed at exchanging ideas involving students and lecturers. This way, they would gain a lot of theoretical and practical knowledge to bridge the skill gaps. Tertiary institutions should organize regular field trips for students and lecturers to the industry in order to expose them to current industry trends and best practices. Students on internship should spend a substantial period of time covering different sections in order to acquire skills from all departments. Kenya educators should standardize the curricula and certification so that it is recognized internationally and that it meets the tourism and hospitality players expectations.

There should be programs that facilitate Teaching staff in acquiring desired practical skills through internship programs so that they can experience the changing working and technological environment that affect the graduates. Likewise, employees from the industry should have refresher programs where employees likewise attend classes in order to learn from the scholars on new research findings and trends. Exchange programs of lectures and students between institutions were encouraged including joint research between faculty members and students, joint publication and seminars involving local and international training institutions, study abroad programs for students and faculty members, reciprocate scholarship programs were some suggested methods of managing the skills and knowledge gap.

In conclusion, the study indicated that most of the managers and supervisors in tourism and hospitality in Kenya rated graduates from technical colleges higher than those from the university level. Graduates ought to be well equipped in cross-cultural, interpersonal skills and technological skills. The graduates should be prepared to effectively handle global challenges bearing in mind the multicultural environment within which employees in tourism and hospitality operations. Hence, there is a need for educators and industry players to closely collaborate on issues of curriculum, internship, and on standardization of curriculum to meet the expectations of the changing environment. The emerging and future trends brought about by globalization should be taken into consideration.

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