Tertiary tourism graduate employees and tourism employers' perceptions on tourism skills and competencies relevant for providing quality tourism services in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to identify skills and competencies perceived relevant by tourism graduate employees and tourism employers for providing quality tourism services in Kenya.

Keywords Relevant tourism skills and competencies, Quality tourism services in Kenya, Tertiary tourism graduate employees, Tourism employers

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Tourism has been a key driver of the Kenyan economy and has been among the top foreign exchange earners for decades. According to Government of Kenya (GoK) (2018), tourism contributes about 11% of Kenya's GDP and about 12% to the employment in Kenya. A critical element of tourism industry is service quality Perman and Mikinac (2014) which can then contribute to perceived destination competitiveness. As Sheldon *et al.* (2011) pointed out, tourism is a labour-intensive industry, and is in constant need of a skilled workforce that fosters a great sense of skills, aptitudes and knowledge. According to Mayaka and King (2002), Mei (2017) asserts that improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce can boost destination competitiveness and help establish and maintain a viable industry. This is because good service is akin to human resources Zeithaml *et al.* (2006) and that human capital is the core of the tourism industry (Christian *et al.*, 2011).

Johnson and Bartlett (2013) points out that a critical input to the tourism value system is human resources in terms of education, training and service culture. Quality is an important factor that determines the success of the tourism industry (Atilgan *et al.*, 2003). Tourism

quality is a complex concept, and it is like a jigsaw puzzle with many parts that must fit together perfectly to satisfy the tourist. Moreover, despite the challenges in the industry, satisfying tourism customer is the key factor not only because of the positive results such as word-of-mouth recommendation and repeat customer purchase but dissatisfaction will lead to complaints and solving them can be expensive, time-consuming and injurious to the reputation of a destination (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2005). Tourism industry requires well-trained and skillful workforce for it to prosper (UNWTO, 2015) and to achieve a comparative advantage in the highly volatile and competitive global tourism industry (Mayaka and Akama, 2007). The study therefore sought to find out the perception of tertiary tourism graduate employees and tourism employers on tourism skills and competencies relevant for providing quality tourism services in Kenya.

2. Literature review

According to Zehrer *et al.* (2006), the challenges in the tourism industry have a direct impact on the expectations of the industry regarding specific knowledge and competencies of managers and employees. The tourism industry seeks practical and transferable skills in employable graduates (Shakeela *et al.*, 2012). Employers also seek talent from those with relevant qualification and relevant experiences from industry (Hobson, 2010). This was supported by Leiper *et al.* (2007) who assert that hospitality and tourism managers prefer trained graduates, competent in work-related skills and with the right attitudes. This can be achieved when tourism educators collaborate with tourism stakeholders in developing curricula that prepare well qualified students for the industry (Dopson and Tas, 2004; Lewis, 2005).

Tourism is a strong professional practice. Practitioners must therefore have strong knowledge, practical and observation skills (Mao and Zeping, 2010). This will enable them take up the role and assume responsibilities within a short period. Though in some instances depth of skills required in tourism industry will be dependent on the employer, some are not required to show acquired skills prior to employment [World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2015]. In such situations, the ability to do the work will be established during on-the-job training (Stacey, 2015). There are four main categories related to the specific technical competencies that are required in the tourism industry. These include hard skills (e.g. airline pilot), digital skills (e.g. passenger check-in), soft skills (e.g. language, customer service) and the general business skills (e.g. problem solving, team player) [Asia – Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Working Group, 2017].

A detailed study of travel agency managers was conducted by Tsai (2017) regarding the perception of tourism industry employability. Delphi method was used by the author to conduct the research and the findings indicated that the key attributes of graduate employment are generic skills, disciplinary skills, professional attitude and career planning skills. As per the author, travel agency managers consider generic skills and professional attitude as the two essential employability criteria (Tsai, 2017).

World Tourism Organization (WTO) (1997) carried out a comprehensive and integrated approach in the Tourism Education and Quality (TEDQUAL) pilot at the George Washington University. Three dimensions were considered in the study: the geographical, professional or occupational level and industry sectors in mapping the repertoire of skills and knowledge required by tourism professionals. The study involved 100 experts representing twelve tourism sectors and six tourism regions worldwide. The objective of the study was to determine the skills and knowledge considered most necessary for tourism industry employees [World Tourism Organization (WTO), 1997]. TEDQUAL methodology resulted in three categories of skills: basic training (knowing), technical training (knowing

how to do) and personal skills (knowing how to behave). Basic training consists of general skills which are transferable between different business environments (e.g. marketing, legal knowledge, strategic planning). Technical training consist of skills that are more specific skills required for each job (e.g. foreign languages, computing) while personal skills include attitudes and personal characteristics that facilitate quality interpersonal relationships on the job (e.g. courteous and friendly behaviour, ability to solve problems and flexibility) [World Tourism Organization (WTO), 1997]. According to the TEDQUAL methodology, the degree to which employers are satisfied with the skills and knowledge of their employees should be almost the same measure of the extent to which the education and training system is responding correctly to the prior expectations of the employers (Mayaka and King, 2002).

Kenya's formal education is referred to as 8.4.4 system. It consists of primary school cycle of 8 years and four years of secondary and university each (GoK, 2006). Secondary school leavers who fail to attend university directly may choose to join TVET institutions for two-year Craft or three-year Diploma courses. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is all forms and levels of education process involving the general knowledge of the study, technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, know-how, attitudes and understanding factors that are related to occupation in economic and social life sectors (UNESCO, 2013). In Kenya, the philosophy of TVET focuses on providing skills that meet the needs of the workplace as well as self-employment (GoK, 2006).

Tourism services in Kenya are largely offered by graduates holding certificates and diplomas from recognized tertiary institutions. A number of tertiary institutions in Kenya offer tourism as a course at Certificate and Diploma levels. With this in mind, we expect to have many graduates with high quality skills and competencies for the tourism industry. According to GoK (2014), capacity weaknesses in tourism exists in the human capital at institutional and sector level, especially when matched against international standards yet an efficient and effective human capital with the right attitude and skills is required for any meaningful tourism implementation. Therefore, service quality in tourism being a direct result of the quality of labour must be addressed in Kenya for it to remain regionally and globally competitive.

According to Jauhari (2006), competencies is a combination of observable and applied knowledge, skills and behaviours that create a competitive advantage for an organization. It consists of a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Hoskins and Fredriksson, 2008 as cited in Su, 2015) that are required to effectively perform in an organization. Competency holds both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions (Rychen and Salganik, 2003 as cited in Su, 2015). The content of different competencies may be developed depending on whether a person is "learning to know", "learning to do" or "learning to develop attitudes" (LopezBonilla and Lopez-Bonilla, 2012 as cited in Su, 2015). Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009) summarized skills and competencies into four: professional skills and competencies; methodological skills and competencies; social skills and competencies; and leadership skills and competencies.

2.1 Professional skills and competencies

According to Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009), competence is an underlying characteristic of a person, which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job for competence to be that effective, it must be a blend of motives, traits, and skills, aspects of one's self-image or social role or body of knowledge by an individual (Silver, 1991). Professional competencies comprise skills, abilities and knowledge necessary to meet the challenges and tasks of one's profession (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009).Kunwar (2018) asserts that

competency is a combination of observable and applied knowledge, skills and behaviours that create a competitive advantage for an organization.

The term competency has been used to mean very different things to the extent of creating confusion (Mau, 2017). Four schools are identified in the literature in relation to the use of the term: One school views the competency as representing specific expertise or accomplishment while another school conceives it as the capacity of an organization. It is also taken to mean specific behaviours contributing to excellence; and finally, there are those who view competency as a minimal level of job proficiency (Mau, 2017). According to Boyatzis (1982), competencies are those underlying characteristics which are causally related to effective or superior job performance.

Hjalger (2003) as cited in Malihah *et al.* (2014) pointed out that, to achieve professionalism of the entire sector and improve the knowledge base, innovation and to be economically capable, a closer link between stakeholders and educational institutions should be the first step. This is because knowledge has become more important for organizations than financial resources, market position, technology or any other company asset (Marquardt, 2002). This was strengthened by Johnson *et al.* (2006) that stated that professionalism can be realized through education.

2.2 Methodological skills and competencies
Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009) methodological competencies comprises the universal problem-solving and decision-making competencies, which may be applied to one's job but also in one's personal surroundings. Employees should be proactive which involves taking the initiative to address problems in one's service domain and commitment to excellence in one's domain of expertise (Sheldon and Fesenmaier, 2015).

2.3 Social skills and competencies
Social competencies are abilities that enable someone to act in the social surroundings. They include cooperating with other people, interacting with them, and building effective relationships (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). There are rapid changes in employment structure in the tourism industry, employers are not only looking at technical skills of employees (Lather *et al.*, 2008). They are also seeking employees with personal characteristics that enable them interact spontaneously and perform effectively to tourists (Nickson *et al.*, 2005). Employees with the right personality and right appearance are accorded greater worth by employers in the recruitment and selection especially the front-line staff compared to qualifications as they are the key players in providing quality service in tourism organization (Jackson *et al.*, 2002; Nickson *et al.*, 2005).

2.4 Leadership skills and competencies
Rigii (2017) propose that leadership is the ability to inspire people to work together as a team to achieve common objectives and that its effectiveness is shown in quality results evidenced in outputs such as products and services. A good leader ensures that he or she gets results through coordination of the human element (Ulrich *et al.*, 2013). The leader must possess certain traits, skills and adopt suitable management styles for him or her to achieve the desired results (Riggi, 2017). Katz (1974) as cited in Riggi (2017) identified three broad skills, namely, technical skills, conceptual skills and human skills that make up leadership skills to be effective in any given responsibility. Technical skill has to do with specialized knowledge and analytical tools within a particular specialty and facility when it comes to use of the tools and techniques of the specific discipline. Human skill has to do with interpersonal skills that are needed to be an effective team builder and team member, while

conceptual skill is the ability to take unrelated information and organize it in comprehensive, orderly ways (Kearns *et al.*, 2015).

According to Riggi (2017), transformational leaders should be motivators, as they have the ability to share a vision of future possibilities that inspires fellow employees to place the needs of the group above their own individual interests. The author, further states that these transformational leaders are inspirational, providing scope for intellectual and creative development, which values individual roles in achieving a shared vision as opposed to transactional leadership (traditional management techniques) where a leader comes up with organizational goals and enters a contractual arrangement with subordinates based on reward and punishment. Therefore, leadership competence can be concluded as an individual's abilities to show inspiration for a shared vision, to enable others to act, or to encourage them (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009) and also create an environment that allows workers to increase knowledge and act on it' (Marquardt, 2002). Yu (2009) together with Zhang *et al.* (2012) identified other leadership skills required by a leader, namely, personal mastery, self-reflexivity, motivational skills such as inspiring, trustworthy, social skills such as willing to trust, a good listener, able to build and maintain mutual trust. To distinguish between effective leaders from those who are merely adequate, interpersonal skills, good judgment and character are qualities that can be applied (Bennis, 2003).

Rekha and Reddy (2013) pointed out that a human resource development has become a major factor in determining competitive advantage for tourism industry. This is because a tourist can only receive the right service in the hands of a trained human resource. Therefore, tourism organization has to create a resource made of skilled, trained employees for service provision in the tourism industry and an employee with an understanding in the human resource management functions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and study population

The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design in which data was collected and analyzed quantitatively. The study was conducted in Kenya targeting both tertiary tourism graduate employees and supervisors and managers (employers) in the tourism industry. Tourism organizations, companies and enterprises considered for the study included tour operations, travel agencies, museums and national parks and reserves in Kenya. There is a total of 538 registered tourism institutions in Kenya as depicted by Table 1.

Cochran (1977) formula was used to draw 385 tourism graduate employees and 385 tourism managers and supervisors as shown:

$$n_0 = Z^2 \times p \times q/e^2$$

where:

n_o = Sample Size;

Targeted institutions/organizations	No. in Kenya	Graduate employees	Managers/supervisors
KATO Members (Tour Companies)	314	225	225
KATA Members (Travel Agents)	166	119	119
KWS (Parks and Reserves)	37	27	27
Museums in Kenya	21	16	16
	538	387	387

Table 1.
Sample size and sample distribution

$Z = Z$ value which is 1.96 (for 95% level of confidence);
p = estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population which is 0.5;
$q = 1 - p$; and
e = desired level of precision (Confidence interval) which in this case will be 0.05.

$$n_0 = 1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5/0.05e^2$$

$$n_0 = 384.16$$

The sample size of tertiary tourism graduate employees was therefore 385, while that of both tourism managers and supervisors was also 385.

Multistage sampling consisting of stratification, proportionate and simple random sampling was used to draw the sample for the study. Stratification was based on the type of tourism institution and combined stratification and proportionate sampling resulted in sample increase from 385 to 387 as shown in the Table 1. Simple random sampling was then used to draw the sample resulting to 387 tertiary graduate employees and 387 tourism managers and supervisors.

4. Data collection
After pretesting the questionnaire with an additional 10% of the sample size the final versions of the questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents to fill. The respondents were required to provide demographic information about themselves. They were then required to indicate on a five-point Likert scale how 32 tourism skills and competencies were important in delivery of quality tourism service. The scale ranged from 1 – *Not at all important to* 5 – *Very important* with a value of 5 assigned the greatest weight. Scores above three were considered relevant while scores below three were considered irrelevant. Data collection was conducted for a period of six months. A total of 387 questionnaires were collected back from the tourism graduate employees out of which two were incomplete hence were excluded from the analysis. On a similar note, 385 complete questionnaires were collected back from both the tourism managers and supervisors. Attempts to get the remaining two did not yield any fruits hence were excluded from the analysis.

5. Results and discussions
Once the data were entered into SPSS, the data was examined for any missing values and outliers by generating frequencies and boxplots, respectively. The reliability of the measures was established by testing for consistency and stability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability results show that all the 32 items were reliable in measuring their respective construct given that the Cronbach's alpha for the construct was >0.7. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients registered in the pre-test study and in the main survey were $\alpha = 0.97$ and $\alpha = 0.95$, respectively. No cases of missing data or outliers were also detected. Normality of distribution were assessed using skewness and kurtosis in SPSS. This study used skewness and kurtosis threshold values of -2 and $+2$ to prove normality of distribution (George and Mallery, 2010; Gravetter and Wallnau, 2014). Homogeneity of variance was tested using Levene's test for equality of variance (Field, 2009). Homogeneity of variance is assumed when the Levene's test for equality of variance is not significant (i.e. $p > 0.05$), otherwise the variances are considered significantly different in different groups (Field, 2009). In situations where homogeneity of variance is violated ($p < 0.05$), the violation can be corrected using separate variances and the WelchSatterthwaite corrections (Hayes and Cai, 2007; Ruxton, 2006).

5.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

5.1.1 Graduate tourism employee. The demographic characteristics of tourism graduate employees are summarized in Table 2. The table shows that majority, 262 (68.1%), of the tourism graduate employees were male participants. The sample also consisted of mainly young respondents 160 (41.6%) who were between 18 and 25 years. The least, 34 (8.8%) of the respondents were above 40 years. Majority, 128 (33.2%), of the respondents had studied things to do with travel operations, while the least 24 (6.2%) had studied aspects of language translation. The sample was mainly comprised certificate holders at 197 (51.2%) with 8.8% having obtained advanced diploma. Up to 90 (23.4%) were working in travel agency followed by 69 (17.9%) in tour operations. Most of the respondents 155 (40.3%) had three years or less since their graduation, while only 38 (9.9%) had more than 15 years since their graduation from college. Majority 136 (35.3%) had spent less than a year in their current job position. Only 1 (0.3%) had spent over 20 years in their current job position.

5.1.2 Tourism employers and tourism institutions. The demographic characteristics of tourism employers and the institutions they work are summarized in Table 3. The table shows that all the respondent managers were above 25 years with the majority, (36.9%) of the respondents being aged between 35 and 44 years. The smallest number of the respondents were aged above 55 years (15.6%). Majority of the respondents 239 (62.1%) were male. Majority of the respondents 223 (57.9%) were from tour companies, followed by travel agencies 119 (30.9%) and the least 16 (4.2%) being drawn from museums. Most of the respondents 180 (46.8%) were drawn from companies that had been in operation for ten or less years.

5.2 Skills and competencies perceived relevant for providing quality tourism services between tertiary tourism employees and tourism employers

Table 4 indicates that all the 32 tourism skills and competencies attributes were perceived by tertiary tourism graduate employees and tourism employers (managers and supervisors) to be relevant in providing quality tourism services. The top three perceived important knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry according to the ranking of the tourism graduates and the tourism industry respondents which recorded high mean values. The most relevant skills and competencies identified by the graduate employees was DS27: Ability to handle equipment while tourism employer identified DS15: IT and Digitization industry. Second for graduate employees was DS25: Initiative and Proactiveness whereas for Tourism employers were DS26: Critical thinking. In third place, graduate employee DS15: IT and Digitization industry and tourism employers was DS20: Multi-tasking skill. The results were not congruent with the findings obtained from Wang (2008) who identified communication, management of relationships, and work ethic as the three most relevant skills in the tourism employers and oral communication, critical thinking and written communication for graduate employee. The results were also not consistent with the findings of Theron *et al.* (2018) who ranked ethical conduct at work, customer service/awareness and verbal communication as the relevant for graduate employees and for tourism employers were customer service awareness, ethical conduct at work and verbal communication. Dogramadjieva *et al.* (2016) found out the most relevant skills and competencies for tourism graduate were language skill, organization skill and communication skills, whereas for tourism employers identified language skill, communication skill and sales skill/customer skill which was not consistent with the findings of this study. According to Donina and Luka (2014), different geographical regions and occupation areas regarding employers' needs and graduates' skills show marked differences between them. The lowest ranked item among tertiary graduate employees was

Variables	Freq	(%)
Age		
18–25 years	160	41.6
26–30 years	99	25.7
31–35 years	47	12.2
36–40 years	45	11.7
Above 41 years	34	8.8
Total	385	100.0
Area of study		
Travel operation	128	33.2
Tour operation	70	18.2
Tourism management	50	13.0
Travel and tour operation	39	10.1
Driver guide	74	19.2
Language translator	24	6.2
Total	385	100.0
Academic qualification		
Certificate	197	51.2
Advance certificate	72	18.7
Diploma	82	21.3
Advance diploma	34	8.8
Total	385	100.0
Years since graduation		
0–3	155	40.3
4–6	98	25.5
7–10	50	13.0
11–15	44	11.4
Above 16	38	9.9
Total	385	100.0
Current job position		
Travel Agent	90	23.4
Tour Operator	69	17.9
Tour Manager	35	9.1
Excursion Agent	32	8.3
Tour Escort	28	7.3
Tour Guide	44	11.4
Marketing Officer	8	2.1
Tour Reservationist	25	6.5
Receptionist	13	3.4
Customer Relations	13	3.4
Driver	20	5.2
Others	8	2.1
Total	385	100.0
Years in current post		
Less than 1 year	136	35.3
1–5 years	112	29.1
6–10 years	58	15.1
11–15 years	41	10.6
16–20 years	37	9.6
Above 21 years	1	0.3
Total	385	100.0
Gender		
Male	262	68.1
Female	123	31.9
Total	385	100.0

Table 2.
Demographic profile
of graduate tourism
employee

Variables	Freq.	(%)
Respondent's age		
Below 25	0	0
26–34 years	82	21.3
35–44 years	142	36.9
45–54 years	101	26.2
Above 55 years	60	15.6
Total	385	100.0
Company's age		
0–10 years	180	46.8
11–20 years	89	23.1
21–30 years	51	13.2
31–40 years	45	11.7
41–50 years	7	1.8
Over 51 years	13	3.4
Total	385	100.0
Type of institution		
Tour companies	223	57.9
Travel agencies	119	30.9
National parks and reserves	27	7.0
Museums	16	4.2
Total	385	100.0
Gender		
Male	239	62.1
Female	146	37.9
Total	385	100.0

Table 3.
Demographic profile
of tourism employers
and tourism
institutions

DS07: "Time management skills" ($M = 3.57$, SD = 1.19), while the least ranked item among tourism employers (managers and supervisors) was DS31: "Networking skills" ($M = 3.15$, SD = 1.01).

Table 5 also shows that there was no significant mean difference in perceived relevance of seven tourism competencies and skills (DS15: IT and digitalization skills, DS19: Marketing skills, DS22: Analytical skills, DS26: Critical thinking and innovative spirit, DS29: Self-respect and respect to others, DS01: Ability to persuade, encourage and motivate others and DS07: Time management skills) by tourism graduate employees and tourism employers. For example, although "DS15: IT and digitalization skills" was perceived to be more relevant among tertiary tourism graduate employees ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.85$) than tourism employers (M = 3.99, $SD = 0.96$), it had no statistically significant mean difference, $M = 0.08$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.20], $t(757.52) = 1.15$, $p = 0.25$. This implies that, although they are relevant aspects of tourism competencies and skills, both tertiary tourism graduate employees and tourism employers did not differ significantly on the perceived relevance of DS15: IT and digitalization skills to quality tourism services. The same can be said of the other six competencies and skills that registered non-significant mean differences.

The results largely indicate that relevant perception of tourism skills and competencies attributes was high among the tertiary tourism graduate employees (means ranging from 3.57 to 4.10) than among tourism managers and supervisors (means ranging from 3.15 to 3.99). The results were corresponding with the findings of Wang (2008), Theron *et al.* (2018);

Code	Variables	Tertiary graduate employees (N =385)			Tourism managers/ supervisors (N = 385)		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
DS27	Ability to handle equipment	4.10	0.81	1	3.82	0.96	8
DS25	Initiative and proactiveness	4.09	0.82	2	3.89	1.01	6
DS15	IT and digitization skills	4.07	0.85	3	3.99	0.96	1
DS20	Multi-tasking skills	4.06	0.85	4	3.92	0.99	3
DS16	Interpersonal skills	4.05	0.97	5	3.57	1.01	15
DS22	Analytical skills	4.04	0.86	6	3.92	1.03	4
DS14	Artistic skills	4.01	0.99	7	3.38	1.12	28
DS05	Maintaining professional and ethical standards in the work environment	3.99	1.07	8	3.40	1.04	27
DS09	Persuasion skills	3.98	0.98	9	3.61	0.96	11
DS11	Responding creatively to needs and gaps	3.98	1.06	10	3.40	1.10	25
DS26	Critical thinking and innovative spirit	3.98	0.89	11	3.93	1.02	2
DS29	Self-respect to others	3.97	0.88	12	3.92	1.03	5
DS19	Marketing skills	3.97	0.91	13	3.89	0.98	7
DS12	Developing positive customer relations	3.97	0.99	14	3.58	0.97	14
DS28	Negotiation skills	3.97	0.98	15	3.16	1.04	31
DS24	Intercultural and adaptability skills	3.96	0.99	16	3.61	1.01	9
DS31	Networking skills	3.97	1.03	17	3.15	1.01	32
DS30	Managing the guest problems with understanding and sensitivity	3.96	1.01	18	3.43	1.10	24
DS08	Demonstrating poise and a professional appearance	3.95	1.07	19	3.37	1.14	29
DS18	Teamwork or group work	3.94	1.01	20	3.59	0.98	12
DS23	Demonstrating personal mastery	3.94	1.01	21	3.46	1.06	19
DS03	Social networking skills	3.91	1.03	22	3.54	0.96	16
DS04	Knowledge of tourism industry	3.90	1.12	23	3.43	1.08	23
DS21	Active listening	3.90	1.04	24	3.61	0.97	10
DS06	Proactive communication skills	3.86	1.07	25	3.58	1.00	13
DS10	Decision-making skills	3.83	1.00	26	3.34	0.98	30
DS13	Organization skills	3.79	0.95	27	3.40	0.99	26
DS02	Flexibility and adaptability at handling skills	3.78	1.00	28	3.44	1.00	22
DS32	Assessing clients' needs	3.65	1.02	29	3.45	1.06	21
DS17	Planning and coordination	3.61	1.01	30	3.45	0.98	20
DS01	Ability to persuade, encourage and motivate others	3.59	1.07	31	3.51	1.00	17
DS07	Time management skills	3.57	1.19	32	3.50	0.99	18

Notes: SD – Standard Deviation $Scale$: 1 = Not at all important; 2 = Not important;3 = Neutral; 4 = Important; 5 = Very Important

Table 4.
Mean ranking

Variables	t	df	t-test for equality of means			
			Sig.	MD	SED	95% CID
DS03: Social networking skills	5.15	768.00	0.00	0.37	0.07	[0.23, 0.51]
DS06: Proactive communication skills	3.80	768.00	0.00	0.28	0.07	[0.14, 0.43]
DS09: Persuasion skills	5.41	768.00	0.00	0.38	0.07	[0.24, 0.52]
DS12: Developing positive customer relations	5.53	768.00	0.00	0.39	0.07	[0.25, 0.53]
DS16: Interpersonal skills	6.81	766.81	0.00	0.49	0.07	[0.35, 0.63]
DS18: Team work or group work	4.82	768.00	0.00	0.35	0.07	[0.20, 0.49]
DS21: Active listening	4.05	768.00	0.00	0.29	0.07	[0.15, 0.44]
DS24: Intercultural and adaptability skills	4.87	768.00	0.00	0.35	0.07	[0.21, 0.49]
DS28: Negotiation skills	11.01	765.47	0.00	0.81	0.07	[0.66, 0.95]
DS31: Networking skills	11.07	768.00	0.00	0.82	0.07	[0.67, 0.96]
DS04: Knowledge of tourism industry	5.93	768.00	0.00	0.47	0.08	[0.31, 0.63]
DS05: Maintaining professional and ethical standards in the work environment	7.80	768.00	0.00	0.59	0.08	[0.44, 0.74]
DS08: Demonstrating poise and a professional appearance	7.20	765.16	0.00	0.57	0.08	[0.42, 0.73]
DS11: Responding creatively to needs and gaps	7.39	768.00	0.00	0.58	0.08	[0.42, 0.73]
DS14: Artistic skills	8.23	756.39	0.00	0.63	0.08	[0.48, 0.78]
DS23: Demonstrating personal mastery	6.35	766.05	0.00	0.47	0.07	[0.33, 0.62]
DS30: Managing guest problems with understanding and sensitivity	6.97	761.67	0.00	0.53	0.08	[0.38, 0.68]
DS15: IT and digitalization skills	1.15	757.52	0.25	0.08	0.07	[−0.05, 0.20]
DS19: Marketing skills	1.18	768.00	0.24	0.08	0.07	[−0.05, 0.21]
DS20: Multi-tasking skills	2.03	751.53	0.04	0.14	0.07	[0.00, 0.27]
DS22: Analytical skills	1.86	743.19	0.06	0.13	0.07	[−0.01, 0.26]
DS25: Initiative and proactiveness	2.91	737.98	0.00	0.19	0.07	[0.06, 0.32]
DS26: Critical thinking and innovative spirit	0.60	768.00	0.55	0.04	0.07	[−0.09, 0.18]
DS27: Ability to handle Equipment	4.39	746.85	0.00	0.28	0.06	[0.16, 0.41]
DS29: Self-respect and respect to others	0.90	768.00	0.37	0.06	0.07	[−0.07, 0.20]
DS01: Ability to persuade, encourage and motivate others	1.05	768.00	0.30	0.08	0.07	[−0.07, 0.22]
DS02: Flexibility and adaptability in handling issues	4.85	768.00	0.00	0.35	0.07	[0.21, 0.49]
DS07: Time management skills	0.92	743.06	0.36	0.07	0.08	[−0.08, 0.23]
DS10: Decision-making skills	6.89	768.00	0.00	0.49	0.07	[0.35, 0.63]
DS13: Organization skills	5.64	768.00	0.00	0.39	0.07	[0.26, 0.53]
DS17: Planning and coordination skills	2.10	768.00	0.04	0.15	0.07	[0.01, 0.29]
DS32: Assessing clients' needs	2.64	768.00	0.01	0.20	0.07	[0.05, 0.34]

Notes: MD – Mean Difference; SED – Standard Error of Mean Difference; Sig. – Significance; CID – Confidence Interval of the Difference

Table 5.
Independent sample
test

Dogramadjieva *et al.* (2016) and Donina and Luka (2014). The results can be attributed to the fact that tertiary tourism graduates have gone through the tertiary tourism education system; thus, they are better informed when it comes to the skills and competencies relevant to the provision of service quality in the tourism industry. According to Mayaka and King (2002) and Mei (2017), tourism education is relevant to improve the skills and knowledge as well as the competency base of the tourism workforce and to maintain a viable industry. Atef (2018) comments that tourism and hospitality education is focused on providing the industry with well educated, adequately trained and committed workforce. There is therefore need to provide tourism education which the industry considers relevant (Perman and Mikinac, 2014). This is because, if the curriculum was designed mainly from the academic viewpoint disregarding the industry dynamic environment, this would lead to a disagreement between industry affiliates and academics on subjects taught to students (Zhang *et al.*, 2001; Li and Li, 2013).

Responses from tertiary tourism graduates and tourism managers/supervisors were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using SPSS. The factor analysis results indicated that the sample was adequate for conducting factor analysis given the KMO value of 0.92. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value recorded for all the variable sets was highly significant (i.e. $p < 0.01$) an indication that the R-matrices obtained were not identical. On subjecting the 32 items to principal axis factoring (PAF), a four-factor solution explaining for 76.67% of the total variance resulted. Communalities for all the 32 items were > 0.50 an indication that all the items loaded significantly on their respective factors. The first factor which was named "Social Skills/Competencies" accounted for 23.77% of the variance explained. A total of ten items loaded on this factor with all the loadings being > 0.50. The second factor, "Methodological Skills/Competencies", accounted for 18.42% of the variance explained. Eight items loaded highly on this factor. The third factor which was named "Professional Skills/Competencies" had seven items loading highly, and it accounted for 17.57% of the variance explained. The fourth factor accounted for 16.91% of the variance explained. Seven items also loaded on this factor and the factor was named "Leadership Skills/Competencies". Andrades and Dimanche (2019) study on destination competitiveness in Russia employees came up with five factors on 29 items: Tourism sector inner skills; Individual/Personal employee skills; Managerial skills; Marketing skills and Human Resource Management skills Factor loading for the above mentioned factors were similar to those of the study. Professional skills and competencies (Tourism sector inner skills and Marketing skills), Social skills and competencies (Individual/Personal employee skills), Methodological skills and competencies (Managerial skills) and Leadership skills and competencies (HRM skills).

Lertwannawit *et al.* (2009) carried out a study on career competencies and career success of Thai Tourism and Hospitality employees. Four factors on subjecting to 22 items were identified. The first factor was Computer and Language skills, second factor was work spirit and Ethics, third factor was Team working and Leadership and the fourth factor was Tourism and Hospitality knowledge and skills. Some of the factor loading was similar to those of the study. For example, those of Tourism and Hospitality knowledge were similar to those of professional skills and competencies while third factor (Team working and Leadership) were similar to Leadership skills and competencies.

5.2.1 Social skills and competencies. Social Skills and Competencies was the first factor with 23.77% of the variance in relevant tourism skills and competencies for providing quality tourism services in Kenya. Social skills and competence are important in determining the relevant skills and competencies for providing quality services. Cooperating with other people, interacting with them and building effective relationships in a social

surrounding is a social skill that tourism employees must possess (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). According to Ricci and Kaufman (2007), professionals give more importance to interpersonal skills as they believe it is one of the strongest competency indicators. Other desired competencies in the tourism industry include teamwork, communication skills, guest service skills, pride in oneself and working with people (Tesone and Ricci, 2005).

5.2.2 Methodological skills and competencies. Results from factor analysis, showed that methodological skills and competencies accounted for 18.42% of the variance in the second position in relevant tourism skills and competencies for providing quality tourism services. Methodological skills and competencies are critical in determining the relevant skills and competencies for proving quality services, as they are related to universal problem-solving and decision-making aspects, which may be applied to one's job but also in one's personal surroundings. The findings were consistent with Andrades and Dimanche (2019) results who found managerial skills (Methodological skills and competencies) as the second most important skill for proving quality service. They are the technical aspects of accomplishing one's job (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). Students who are going to enter the tourism industry need different skills, aptitudes and knowledge to face the challenges of the industry, and this requires tourism educational system to change to meet this need (Sheldon *et al.*, 2008).

5.2.3 Professional skills and competencies. The factor analysis results indicated that professional skills and competencies was explained as the third factor (17.57%) of the variance in relevant tourism skills and competencies for providing quality tourism services. Professional skills and competencies play a big role in determining the relevant skills and competencies for proving quality services in Kenya. The results were not congruent with the findings of Andrades and Dimanche (2019) who pointed out those marketing skills which in the study is professional skills and competencies are the most important providing quality service. According to Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009), professional skills and competencies are necessary to meet the challenges and tasks of one's profession, that is, tourism service. In a situation where graduates from tourism education are unable to apply their skills and knowledge to meet tourism management practice, and if the tourism management graduates are unable to meet and satisfy the needs of the tourism industry, then tourism education is truly wasted (Wang, 2008). Irwin (2005) opined that after graduation, graduates are well aware of the job knowledge, but they lack the necessary job skills.

5.2.4 Leadership skills and competencies. Leadership skills and competencies entail the abilities to show inspiration for a shared vision, to enable others to act, or to encourage them (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). Results from factor analysis indicated that leadership skills and competencies showed least variance of 16.91 in relevant tourism skills and competencies for providing quality tourism services in Kenya. What is critical in determining the relevant skills and competencies for proving quality services is the leadership skills and competencies. The tourism industry looks for quality human resources who can respond positively to the planning of strategic or corporate businesses, expanding business, cost effective ways of operating business and meeting new and demanding needs of tourists (Singh, 2005). The skills required by the employer will depend on the type of job to be carried out in the organization, for example, graduate employees for management positions must have the key managerial skills, namely, sound decision-making, problem-solving, troubleshooting and conflict resolutions (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005).

6. Conclusions

Tourism industry requires more than one skill and competencies to meet and exceed customers' needs. Thus, a graduate employee who has successfully undergone tertiary tourism education is perceived to have acquired the right skills and competencies to work in tourism industry. Both tourism graduate employees and managers perceived skills and competencies as relevant to provision of quality tourism services since the scores were above three which considered relevant and vice versa. Though found to be higher among tertiary tourism employees than among tourism managers. The results were corresponding with the findings of Wang (2008), Theron *et al.* (2018); Dogramadjieva *et al.* (2016); and Donina and Luka (2014). The most relevant skills and competencies among Kenyan tertiary graduate employees were ability to handle equipment; initiative and proactiveness; and IT and digitization while for tourism managers/supervisors, IT and digitization; critical thinking and multi-tasking were the top three most relevant skills and competencies required for providing quality tourism services in Kenya. Responses from tertiary tourism graduates and tourism managers/supervisors when subjected to exploratory factor analysis using SPSS, a four-factor solution explaining 76.67% of the total variance resulted. The first factor named social skills and competencies (23.77%), second factor named professional skills and competencies (18.42%), third factor named methodological skills and competencies (17.57%) and fourth factor named leadership skills and competencies (16.91%).

Kenya as a tourist destination should ensure tertiary tourism institutions produces graduates that possess the right skills and competencies (social, professional, methodological and leadership) for it to be competitive and viable. This is because competitiveness of a region is closely connected to the level of higher education thus an increase in cooperation between educational institutions and the tourism industry will maintain and boost the competitiveness in the region or destination (European Commission, 2015). Consequently, it is believed that educated personnel present both the first and the last link in the chain of competitiveness and business success (Perman and Mikinac, 2014). This is because the tourism institutions have been blamed for not providing sufficient training skills and competencies for tourism industry (Airey, 2005; Nickson *et al.*, 2005; Lather *et al.*, 2008). Yet, improving the skills and competencies of the workforce can assist a destination to develop its competitive advantage and to establish and maintain a sustainable industry. This is because good service is akin to human resource (Mayaka and King, 2002; Mei, 2017; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2006).

6.1 Recommendations for institutions offering tourism education and tourism practitioners

Tourism industry is in constant need of employees with the right skills and competencies to offer quality service in the industry. Tertiary tourism education and tourism practitioners in Kenya should have a closer collaboration in ensuring that tourism education is tailored to meet the needs of the tourism industry in terms of skills and competencies. This because competitiveness of a tourism destination depends on sufficient and highly educated employees at all levels.

6.2 Future research suggestions

The study being descriptive in nature and adopting cross-sectional research design in evaluating the perception of tertiary tourism workforce and tourism managers/supervisors regarding relevance of tertiary tourism education in Kenya. The same study can use comparative study on graduate employees with Degree, Diploma and Certificate

qualification in tourism education using longitudinal research design and to evaluate its generalization.

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